

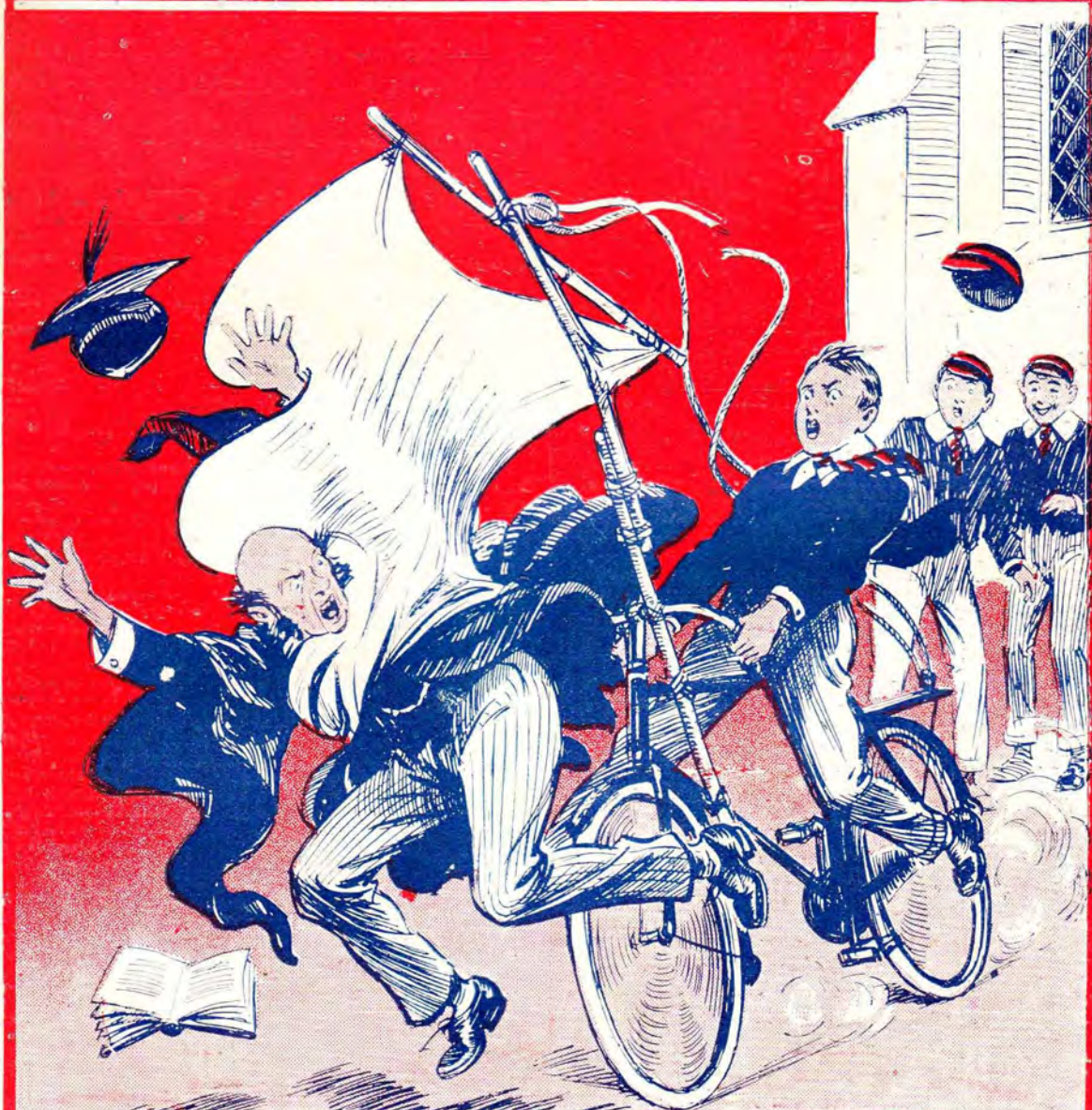
Great New Serial by Arthur S. Hardy *Starts Inside!*

EVERY WEDNESDAY

The GEM 2^d

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No. 996.
Vol. XXXI.
March 1916.
1927.



Breakers Ahead For Grundy's New Craft!

Mr. Ratcliff arrives at an unfortunate moment. (See the Grand School Story of Tom Merry & Co., inside.)

FIRST PRIZE FIFTY POUNDS! That's the useful award Mr. Glyn is offering for the best invention put forward by a Shell or Fourth Form junior at St. Jim's, and needless to say everybody feels the urge to invent something. And not the least weird and wonderful of the "patents" that come to light is George Alfred Grundy's "sailing bicycle!"



RIVAL INVENTORS!

A Stirring New Long Complete Tale of Schoolboy Fun and Adventure, featuring Tom Merry & Co., the Chums of St. Jim's.

By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1. Grundy At It Again!

"LOOK out, Gussy!"
"Bai Jove! What—"
"Out of the way, ass!"
"I uttably wefuse— Yawoooh!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, gave vent to a fiendish yell, and leapt about three feet into the air. Only by a supreme effort did he succeed in maintaining his balance.

"Jolly good, Gussy!" said Blake, from the doorway of the School House. "I never knew you could move so quickly. We're always learning things."

"Weally, Blake—"

"The neatest thing I've seen this week," remarked Herries.

"You fwiughtful ass, Hewwies—"

"So unnecessary, too," went on Blake, grinning. "Grundy was a clear two yards away from you, Gussy, so you've had all that gymnastic exercise for nothing!"

The swell of St. Jim's screwed his eyeglass into his eye and gazed wrathfully across the quad.

"So that wass idiot was Gwunday!" he exclaimed. "Bai Jove! I shall give Gwunday a piece of my mind when he comes back!"

Blake shook his head.

"You can't spare it, Gussy," he said solemnly.

"Weally, Blake—"

"All the same, Grundy ought to be spoken to," continued Blake. "It's like his nerve to dash about the quad on that freak jigger of his. Redfern's bad enough with his giddy saloon bicycle, but Grundy's a positive peril!"

"Yaas, wathah! I quite agree with you, Blake," said Arthur Augustus, nodding his noble head. "I weally considah that Gwunday should be supressed as a public dangah."

"Well, here he comes," said Digby. "Let him have it hot, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

George Alfred Grundy, of the Shell, came skimming along on his latest invention. Wilkins and Gunn, his henchmen of Study No. 3, were trailing behind, red in the face, perspiring, and out of breath.

"It's a triumph!" said Grundy, as he dismounted.

"Oh, rather!" agreed Wilkins, with a touch of bitterness.

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in his voice. "You've surprised the natives this time, Grundy, old man."

"I meant to!" said Grundy.

"But I don't know where you'd have been if Gunn and I hadn't hung on to the back, keeping the giddy thing under control," added Wilkins.

"Eh?"

"Weally, Gwunday, I considah that Wilkins is quite wight," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with dignity. "I twemble to think what would happen if you cawered across the quad alone. There is quite a hweeze, an' I am sure you would be cawwied away."

The lofty Grundy glared.

"You'll be carried away, Gussy, if I have any more of your rot!" he said aggressively. "You'll be carried away unconscious!"

"Weally, Gwunday—"

"This invention of mine is the most marvellous thing that's ever been thought of!" continued Grundy, with all his usual modesty. "Naturally, the first prize in the Inventions Competition will come to me. That goes without saying!"

"You seem to be saying it, though!" chuckled Blake.

St. Jim's had caught the invention craze with a vengeance, for Mr. Glyn, Bernard Glyn's pater, had offered a first prize of fifty pounds for the best invention, a second prize of twenty-five pounds, and a third prize of ten. These were useful sums of money to earn, apart from any other consideration, and the St. Jim's juniors had donned their thinking caps forthwith, and many were the weird and wonderful patents that had sprung into existence—none more weird and wonderful than George Alfred Grundy's.

"This is my sailing bicycle," continued the great George Alfred. "It completely does away with pedalling, and it makes cycling a greater thrill than flying. No engine to bother with, no petrol to buy, no work to do. You just sit in the saddle, and take things easily."

"It sounds good," agreed Blake. "But aren't there one or two snags?"

"What do you mean—snags?" demanded Grundy.

"Well, that sail might be difficult to manage—"

"Easiest thing in the world!" interrupted the Shell fellow. "The sail is controlled from the handlebar, and—"

"Hallo! What have we here?" came the cheery voice of Tom Merry.

"Looks as if somebody's ship has come home!" remarked Monty Lowther dryly.

The Terrible Three of the Shell came out of the School House, and joined the little group. They inspected Grundy's latest production with solemn interest. Tom Merry even winked at his companions, although Grundy failed to observe this.

"Wonderful!" said Tom. "And does it float?"
 "Float?" roared Grundy. "What do you think it is—a boat?"

"Isn't it a boat?" asked Tom Merry, in surprise.

"You silly idiot, it's my sailing bicycle!"

"Oh, sorry!" said Tom. "My mistake!"

They all looked at Grundy's great invention. They couldn't quite see why Grundy should make such a fuss about it, but he was the inventor, and he probably appreciated the merits of it more than anybody else. But it was really only an ordinary bicycle, with a clumsy sort of sailing attachment tied to it. The sail was suspiciously like a bed-sheet, and the mast consisted of two broomsticks, spliced together, and attached to the head of the machine. There was a long spar, made from a bamboo curtain-pole, and this was controlled by means of a rope and a pulley. The latter was attached to the carrier. The whole contrivance looked decidedly temporary.

"Of course," said Grundy, "this is only an experimental model, you understand. When I produce the real article, it will knock spots off creation."

"But wasn't your patent suitcase bed going to do that?" asked Monty Lowther politely.

Grundy turned red.

"Ahem! As a matter of fact, I've shelved the suitcase bed," he said hastily. "This bike is much more serviceable, and it's bound to win the first prize. If Glyn's pater has any judgment at all, he'll award me the fifty pounds without a second thought."

"Then we might as well give up hope," said Lowther sadly.

"Weally, Lowthah, I hardly considah that this fwake—"

"Freak?" interrupted Lowther, shocked. "How can you say such a thing, Gussy? Can't you see the brains behind the thing? Can't you see that there's no chance for anybody else in the competition? Grundy has walked off with the first prize already, and all we can do is to grin and bear it."

Grundy nodded.

"Well, I'm glad to see that you appreciate the value of my invention, Lowther," he said importantly. "If you like, I'll give you a demonstration."

"Here, chuck it!" protested Gunn. "Wilkins and I are fagged enough as it is—"

"Ass!" snapped Grundy. "I don't want you with me this time! You're more trouble than you're worth!"

Strictly speaking, Grundy hadn't really tested his triumph yet. He had been across the quad once or twice on it, but Wilkins and Gunn had tagged behind in close attendance.

"A demonstration in the quad won't be satisfactory," said Blake, shaking his head.

"Why not?" asked Grundy.

"Too much space here," replied Blake.

"You mean not enough," remarked Monty Lowther.

"You poor idiots!" said Grundy, with contempt. "This machine of mine is designed for the open road. It's so easily controlled that I shall be able to get through the thickest traffic without any trouble."

"What if the wind dies down when you're in the middle of a jam—in the Strand, or Piccadilly, for example?" asked Lowther, with interest. "And what if you want to turn back suddenly the other way? I suppose you'll do a bit of tacking?"

"Of course!"

"Oh, well, it's just as well to know," said Lowther. "I expect you've got some patent device for overcoming the difficulties of one-way streets, and all that sort of thing?"

Grundy failed to detect Monty's dryness.

"Of course, there may be one or two difficulties at first," he admitted grudgingly. "You can't expect to have all plain sailing during the first hour. All new inventions are a bit awkward to begin with."

"This one will probably come up to the mark, then," said Blake solemnly.

"I weally think you should take a few pwecautions before doin' anythin' wash, Gwunday," remarked Arthur Augustus. "With this bweeze you are quite likely to come a fwightful cwoppah!"

"Rats!" said Grundy. "I've had one or two practice spins, and I know exactly how to control the thing by now."

"Go ahead!" said Tom Merry.

And the great George Alfred proceeded to go ahead.

CHAPTER 2.

Rough on Ratty!

GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY was full of enthusiasm, and all the other fellows were full of hope and expectancy.

If Grundy ran true to form, this demonstration spin should not only prove entertaining, but highly diverting. Grundy seldom attempted anything without making a hopeless mess of it.

Tom Merry & Co. felt that he deserved to be taken down a peg or two. He was so full of bombastic talk regarding his precious invention that it would be very fitting if he came a cropper. They weren't leading him on at all, really. Grundy wasn't the kind of fellow who needed any leading on. He was only too eager to go headlong to disaster.

His assertions that his sailing bicycle was a masterpiece were true to his customary egotism. The machine was not only a freak, but there was nothing novel about it at all.

And to ride it would probably be a very hazardous undertaking. Grundy had made one or two trial spins already with considerable success. He failed to realise that Wilkins and Gunn had acted as stabilisers. It would be a different proposition if he went off unattended.

"You're sure you'll be safe?" asked Tom Merry.

"Of course I'm sure, ass!" retorted Grundy.

"Why ask unnecessary questions?" put in Monty Lowther. "Don't we know our own little Grundy? As reliable as Big Ben! He can always be trusted to give us full value for money!"

"But this is going to be a free show!" grinned Blake.

Arthur Augustus was looking troubled.

"Weally, Blake, I must pwotest!" he said firmly.

"Gwunday is wathah a chump, an' I am sewiously annoyed with him for havin' made me jump a little while ago. At the same time, two w'ongs don't make a wight, an' I think it is only playin' the game to warn him—"

"Dry up, you ass!" roared Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Don't talk so much, Gussy—you ruin everything!"

"Weally, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus warmly, "I considah that Gwunday should be warned—"

"Gag him!" said Manners.

"I uttahly wefuse to be gagged!" said D'Arcy.

"Gwunday, it is my duty to tell you that your leg is bein' pulled. These fellows are only advisin' you to wide that jiggah because they're hopin' to see you come a cwoppah!"

"You—you crass dummy!" roared Blake.

Arthur Augustus looked defiant.

"I disappwove of leadin' Gwunday on," he said, with dignity. "I do not wegard it as playin' the game, Blake. I am surprised at you for bein' a party to such a wuffianly twick!"

Grundy snorted.

"Oh, so you've been pulling my leg, have you?" he said disdainfully.

"Yaas, wathah, Gwunday!"

"All right, you funny fatheads!" sneered Grundy. "Do you think I didn't know it? You were getting ready to laugh at me, weren't you? Gussy thinks he was very clever in warning me, but I didn't need any warning."

"Bai Jove!"

"I've a good mind to biff you on the nose, Gussy, for creditin' me with such a little sense!" went on Grundy. "You're jolly lucky to escape!"

Arthur Augustus went pink.

"Weally, Gwunday—"

"That's enough!" said Grundy curtly.

"I wegard you as an uttah ass!" said D'Arcy hotly. "Good gwacious! I go out of my way to warn you of this twickewy, an' you weward my good offices by woundin' on me! I shall be fwightfully glad if you uttahly w'eck your ridiculous bicycle, an' wuin your clothes."

"You've upset Gussy properly this time, Grundy," said Monty Lowther, shaking his head. "When Gussy takes a pleasure in seeing a chap ruin his clothes, you can be sure that he's been hurt to the quick!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think Gwunday is an ungwateful boundah!" said D'Arcy, with dignity.

"Not that it matters," said Lowther. "We can always rely on old Grundy to carry on, even after he's been warned. It makes it more friendly when we all understand one another. Go ahead, Grundy! We're waiting to see you improve on Nature!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Grundy.

"We're waiting to see you make a bigger ass of yourself than you are at present," explained Lowther blandly. "Jump on to the Saucy Sally, and let's see you take a cruise round the harbour."

"Do you call that funny?" sneered Grundy.

"I'm too modest!" said Monty, shaking his head.

"Idiot!" snapped Grundy. "Nobody's laughing, anyhow!"

"No; they'll do all the laughing later—when you do your star turn," replied Monty. "But we can't wait all day, Grundy, old man. Go ahead with the good work!"

The others were all grinning. George Alfred Grundy had such a big idea of his own importance that he took no notice of D'Arcy's kindly warning. He was so certain

that he could triumphantly ride his bicycle that he was more eager than ever to commence the exhibition.

He had plenty of willing helpers.

Blake and Herries and Digby bundled him into the saddle, while Wilkins and Gunn held the bicycle. The Terrible Three stood by, ready to lend a hand if called upon. Levison, Cardew, Lumley-Lumley, and a number of other School House fellows had collected round in the meantime, highly entertained.

"Go it, Grundy!"

"Let's see what you can do, old scout!"

"Mind you don't knock the New House over!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy looked round, red in the face.

"All right, you can jeer!" he panted. "I know what I'm doing, and I'll make you all jolly small before I've finished! My plan is to cruise round the quad and give you an example of tacking. This bike-sailing is the greatest thrill that was ever invented!"

"Good old Grundy!" said Blake. "Always the optimist!"

"Mind that sail!" said Wilkins anxiously. "Better go easy, Grundy, old man! The breeze seems to be strengthening."

"All the better!" said Grundy promptly. "I want plenty of breeze!"

"You're asking for it, that's all!" growled Gunn. "Don't say you haven't been warned, Grundy. You'll never manage this crazy thing—"

"Ring off!" roared Grundy.

Wilkins and Gunn made no further attempts to save him. They gave him a good send-off, and Study No. 6 assisted. The bicycle, with Grundy in the saddle, was sent careering off.

"Whoa!" sang out Lowther. "Starboard your helm, skipper!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy was wobbling rather perilously. The sail filled out as a heavy gust of wind caught it, and swung round so suddenly that Grundy was nearly bowled over before he was fairly started.

But, by a manoeuvre that was more instinctive than deliberate, he just managed to keep his equilibrium.

"He's off now!"

"Not yet!" said Lowther. "He'll be off presently!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The wind was filling the sail splendidly, and Grundy was gaining speed with every yard. Pedalling was quite unnecessary. Indeed, he was gaining pace so rapidly that he required his brakes far more than his pedals.

He dropped his controlling-rope and grabbed for the brakes. He jammed them on, with no result. The front brake, of course, was out of commission—there was generally something wrong with Grundy's bicycle. And the back brake failed because the sail-controlling rope had fouled the rod.

"Great pip!" gasped Grundy, appalled.

He had very little time to think, and no time at all to give to the brake problem. All his attention was concentrated upon keeping his balance. Mercifully, he had a wide open space in front of him, and for the time being all was well.

But the quad, after all, had its limits, and Grundy was fairly shooting along now towards the New House. Woe betide any unwary fellow who got in his way, for Grundy had completely lost control—at least, so far as direction went. He was concerning himself solely about keeping going. He felt that a crash would be painful.

He knew, moreover, that the spectators were waiting to laugh, and a desperate determination filled him.

He would veer round, in spite of the wind, and once he had negotiated the turn all would be well.

But veering round was not such an easy matter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Grundy—you're doing fine!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Grundy heard these shouts with mixed feelings. The sail was held in check by the rope, but the wind, by some spite of misfortune, was blowing with a forcefulness which showed no signs of diminishing.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Grundy, in despair.

He tried to turn, but the pull of the sail defeated him. It was as though some unseen hand was dragging him along. With brakes useless, and with all control forsaken, George Alfred Grundy was not giving the masterly exhibition which he had intended.

And then Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, came walking round an angle of the building, reading a book.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Hi! Look out, Grundy!"

"Cave, you chaps!"

Grundy caught sight of Mr. Ratcliff just ahead, and his blood seemed to freeze. He was going straight for the

irascible Housemaster, and he gave a wild, frantic tug at the handle-bars.

The bicycle swerved, the control-rope snapped, and the sail slewed out full in the grip of the breeze. Grundy's swerve would have saved the situation, but the breaking of that rope caused him to swerve back again.

"Hi!" he howled frantically.

Mr. Ratcliff started and looked up from his book.

"Good gracious! What on earth—"

He paused, and his eyes grew wide. A fearsome-looking thing was practically upon him. Mr. Ratcliff failed to recognise the rider, for the simple reason that Grundy was mercifully concealed by the billowing sail.

"Good heavens!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

Too late he realised that he was in the way. He gave a wild leap, and never before had the St. Jim's fellows seen "old Ratty" give such a gymnastic display. He gave a sideways and upward jump which ought to have had better success.

But Grundy swerved still more, and Mr. Ratcliff's great effort was wasted.

Crash!

"Whooooop!" howled Mr. Ratcliff wildly.

The sail, broadside on, caught him in the middle, wrapped itself round him, and sent him hurtling to the ground. There was a rending crack, and both the mast and the spar parted company from the bicycle.

By a miracle, Grundy kept the saddle, and the bicycle swept on.

CHAPTER 3.

Grundy in Luck!

"B AI Jove!"

"Old Ratty caught it that time!"

"Yes, rather!"

The School House fellows had seen everything, and they were momentarily dazed by the surprising outcome of the collision.

Grundy's very speed had saved Mr. Ratcliff from injury. The flimsy mast and spar had snapped like twigs, leaving the unfortunate master entangled amid the folds of the sail.

And George Alfred Grundy, freed from that encumbrance, swept down the quad, shot round the angle of the New House, and vanished. The whole thing was over in a matter of seconds.

"Cave!" warned Monty Lowther urgently.

"Yes, scoot, you chaps!"

"I wathah think we should wally wound an' go to Mr. Watchliff's assistance," said Arthur Augustus. "If you will come, Blake—"

"Ass!" said Blake shortly.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Brrrrr!"

Arthur Augustus was seized on either side and whirled into the School House. Mr. Ratcliff's temper was notorious, and the fellows decided that this was one of those occasions when it would be good policy to get safely out of the way before Mr. Ratcliff could spot them. There was really no sense in asking for trouble.

And the unhappy Horace Ratcliff floundered on the ground, enveloped in the sail. Of all the masters at St. Jim's, Mr. Ratcliff was the most unpopular. He was famed for his short temper. More often than not Mr. Ratcliff was ratty, and the Fifth Form, which he personally conducted, had gained quite a name for its long-suffering qualities.

But it was an open secret that many of the Fifth-Formers were only biding their time. Many of those exasperated seniors had frequently vowed solemn vows that they would come back to St. Jim's in the distant future, when they were Old Boys, and give Horace Ratcliff the hiding of his life.

But these expressions of feeling were, after all, but transient. In all probability the Fifth-Formers would laugh heartily at their experiences with old Ratty when they did actually become Old Boys. Many of them, no doubt, would confess that they had done much to deserve Mr. Ratcliff's spleen.

And just at the moment the New House master was more like a human tornado than a sedate member of society.

He fought with that sail madly. And the more he tried to get out of it the worse he became entangled. All this was very much to Grundy's advantage, since he succeeded in getting far out of sight and well clear of the danger zone before Mr. Ratcliff had even come up for air, so to speak.

At last the Housemaster found an opening.

"Good heavens!" he panted frantically.

He emerged a mere wreck.

His gown was torn and tattered, his collar had sprung off its stud, his necktie was dangling down forlornly on one side, and his scanty hair was tousled and gritty. Mr. Ratcliff's thin lips were set in a hard, vicious line.

"You—your wretched young scoundrel!" he gasped fiercely.



"I intend to find the culprit!" thundered the enraged Mr. Ratcliff. "I shall punish him with the utmost severity!" The Housemaster stalked off, but he failed to realise that a portion of his torn gown had become wrapped round his feet by the breeze. He took one forceful stride, tripped, and went down with an awful crash. "Wow!" he gasped. "Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Figgins. (See Chapter 3.)

"I'll have you thrashed for this! I'll have you flogged before the whole school! I'll have— What? What? Good gracious!"

Mr. Ratcliff stared round dazedly.

He was alone.

The quad was deserted from end to end. There was not even a fallen bicycle and a bruised rider. Until this moment Mr. Ratcliff had believed that the junior who had run into him was quite near-by, entangled in the wreckage.

But there was nobody!

Merely that sail, a piece of bamboo, a couple of smashed broomsticks, and some rope. Nothing, in fact, that could be remotely identified as belonging to any particular boy. The bicycle itself would have been a positive clue, but this tangle of rubbish was utterly worthless.

"Where—where are you?" panted Mr. Ratcliff wildly.

Figgins & Co. came out of the New House at that moment, unconscious of the danger zone which existed in such close proximity. Fatty Wynn was wearing an anxious, expectant look.

"Isn't it time we heard something about dinner?" he asked complainingly. "We shall have to stir old Ratty up—"

"Cave!" gasped Kerr suddenly.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Figgins.

The three New House Fourth-Formers stood rooted to the spot, suddenly aware of Mr. Ratcliff's predicament. He was their Housemaster, and they knew him of old. It was one of his favourite habits to jump on anybody within sight, whether they were guilty of any misdemeanour or not. And it was too late to retreat now.

Mr. Ratcliff was just emerging from the folds of the sail. And Figgins & Co. had no time to retreat.

"Figgins!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff furiously.

"Sir?"

"Come here, Figgins!"

George Figgins gave his chums a hopeless look and went.

"Who—who did this?" raved Mr. Ratcliff.

"Which, sir?"

"Which!" Ratty nearly choked. "You—you young idiot!"

Can't you see that I have been grossly assaulted? Who is the boy who collided with me on his—his preposterous bicycle?"

Figgins opened his eyes.

"Bicycle, sir?" he repeated, looking at the wreckage.

"Yes, sir—bicycle!" snarled Mr. Ratcliff.

"But—but this isn't a bike, sir!"

Mr. Ratcliff made fearsome noises in his throat.

"I know it isn't a bicycle!" he shrieked. "The bicycle has gone—and the boy with it! The young rascal was using this—this ridiculous sail as a means of propulsion!"

Figgins saw daylight.

"Oh, and he ran you down, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, you young idiot!" raved the Housemaster.

Figgins had no idea who the unknown culprit was, but he mentally approved of him. Anybody who could get old Ratty into a mess like this and escape unrecognised was worthy of the highest esteem.

"It's no good asking me, sir," said Figgins, shaking his head. "I don't know anybody who owns a bike with a sail on it. Must be one of these new inventions, sir—"

"Bah!" exploded Mr. Ratcliff, with a terrific outburst of wrath. "Inventions! Inventions! I am sick and tired of these crazy inventions! I had enough trouble with those idiotic pneumatic boots of yours last week, Figgins!"

"Not last week, sir," said Figgins. "I've been re-making them since then, and they're greatly improved—"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff. "I intend to find out who owns that bicycle, and I shall punish him with the utmost severity!"

"Perhaps he's a School House chap, sir."

"In that case, Figgins, I shall report him to Mr. Railton—indeed, to the headmaster himself!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

And Mr. Horace Ratcliff stalked off, but failed to realise that a portion of his torn gown had become wrapped round his feet by the breeze. Mr. Ratcliff took one forceful stride, tripped, and went down with an awful crash.

"Wow!" he gasped.

Figgins watched appreciatively.

CHAPTER 4.

Ratty on the Warpath!

WHEN Mr. Ratcliff picked himself up, for the second time on this disastrous morning, Figgins had very wisely made himself scarce. A faint sound of cackling came from the distance, but Mr. Ratcliff glared round in vain. He could see no culprits. He tramped off in a temper which could only be described as fiendish.

He went through the School House like a raging tornado. He stormed into Mr. Raiton's study, and refused to be cooled down. Mr. Raiton could do nothing with him.

Happily, only a few fellows had seen Grundy and his famous bicycle, and all these could be relied upon to keep quiet. Baggy Trimble, by some mischance, had been elsewhere at the time. Otherwise, he would probably have given old Grundy away.

Even after dinner Mr. Ratcliff still went on the warpath. He put half his own juniors through a rigid cross-examination, and made their lives a misery. He went to the School House again, and even paid a visit to the bicycle-shed.

Every machine was examined closely.

But Grundy had taken time by the forelock, and he had successfully removed all traces of his sailing apparatus. Grundy was several kinds of an ass, but he had no desire to have Mr. Ratcliff's wrath poured upon his head.

And so, when the bell rang for afternoon lessons, Mr. Ratcliff was in one of his very worst tempers. He had failed utterly. All his inquiries had come to naught.

Nobody seemed to know anything about a bicycle with a sail on it, and the more he pressed his investigations the greater grew his rage. It was only duty which compelled him to go into the Fifth Form-room. Being the master of the Fifth, he could not very well neglect his task. But he was determined to obtain satisfaction later.

"Look out for squalls this afternoon, you fellows," said Lefevre, the captain of the Fifth, as he entered the Form-room. "Old Ratty is in no end of a bait."

"Yes; and we shall have to suffer for it!" said Cutts sourly. "Some of those beastly kids have been gettin' his rag out, haven't they?"

"Had a spill in the quad," yawned Poynings.

"Well, he'd better not start on us!" said Gilmore.

Nearly all the members of the Fifth were in their places, and everybody had heard, of course, of Mr. Ratcliff's recent activities.

"We shall have to treat him gently this afternoon," remarked St. Leger. "The old scout had better not come any of his nonsense with us, though."

"Cave!" murmured Prye. "He's coming!"

Mr. Ratcliff swept into the Form-room, and one glance at his face was sufficient to tell the Fifth that Mr. Ratcliff was in no sweet humour. The Fifth felt somewhat aggrieved. They had done nothing to get their Form master's rag out, and he was hard enough to stand at the best of times.

"One moment—one moment!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff, as he glared at his Form. "Does anybody here know of a boy who has constructed a bicycle with a sail on it?"

Silence.

"I shall not rest until I discover his name!" continued Mr. Ratcliff viciously. "It is the duty of any member of this Form to tell me at once if he has the slightest suspicion."

"Sorry, sir; but we don't take enough interest in the doings of the fags," drawled Gerald Cutts. "But we sympathise, sir. You must be feelin' pretty sore."

Mr. Ratcliff frowned.

"I did not ask you for any comments, Cutts!" he snapped. "It is my duty to discover the identity of this boy, and to punish him for his criminal recklessness!"

"I was only sympathisin', sir," said Cutts.

"I want no sympathy!" roared Mr. Ratcliff.

He stalked to his chair, and sat down with a violent thud.

Crash!

There seemed to be no end to Mr. Ratcliff's misfortunes. True, it was entirely his own fault on this occasion. His chair was an excellent one, but, in his exasperation, he had omitted to remember that the off-side front leg was slightly on the wobbly side.

And it protested strongly against Mr. Ratcliff's present treatment.

In fact, it gave way altogether, and Mr. Ratcliff sprawled on the floor, the chair toppling on top of him, and giving him a hard crack on the back of his head.

"Good heavens!" he gasped faintly.

Only by a supreme effort did the Fifth remain silent.

Mr. Ratcliff rose to his feet, raving. He was, indeed, babbling, and practically foaming at the mouth.

"Lefevre," he screamed, "get me another chair!"

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"A chair, sir?" said Lefevre, looking round.

"A chair, boy—a chair!" hooted Mr. Ratcliff. "Don't you know what a chair is?"

"But there isn't one in the room, sir."

"Then go and fetch one!" howled the Form master.

The fact that he had deliberately asked for this fresh disaster did nothing to improve his temper. He knew quite well that his own violence was the root cause of his present undignified appearance.

He wanted the Form to laugh—not because he liked to be laughed at, but because it would give him an excuse to vent his spite on the Fifth.

But the Fifth knew him, and the Fifth remained dumb.

In fact, the Fifth looked demurely disinterested. Every one of those seniors knew old Ratty so well that they held their real feelings in check. Nobody wanted to bring Mr. Ratcliff's wrath down upon his own particular head.

"Get on with your work!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff, panting hard. "If I catch any of you smiling at me, or—"

He broke off, and swallowed hard. He would only make things worse by talking like that. In a situation of this kind, the best thing to do was to pass on to another subject, and let the matter drop.

Lefevre, in the meantime, had gone out in search of a chair.

He didn't quite know where to find one. He couldn't very well borrow Mr. Linton's, from the Shell Form-room; or Mr. Lathom's, from the Fourth Form-room. And Lefevre was afraid that if he took an ordinary kind of chair to Mr. Ratcliff, he would hear a few unpleasant comments.

"Hallo! Anything wrong?"

Darrell of the Sixth was passing.

"Nothing much," grinned Lefevre. "Old Ratty sat down so hard just now that he smashed his chair, and biffed himself on the floor. I'm scouring round for another chair."

Darrell stared.

"Ratty seems to be in the wars to-day," he remarked. "That's the second time he's been over, isn't it?"

"Yes. Somebody barged into him in the quad."

"I fancy I know who that somebody is, and I am quite sure that lots of Shell fellows do," said Darrell, with a twinkle in his eye. "But it's none of my business, and Mr. Ratcliff isn't my Housemaster, anyhow."

"Quite right," said Lefevre. "Let him amuse himself in his own simple way. You don't happen to know where I can find a chair?"

Darrell chuckled.

"You can't throw this responsibility on to me, old man," he replied, shaking his head. "You go and find your own chairs."

He passed on, and Lefevre hesitated for a moment, thinking. If he was too long, Ratty would jump on him, and if he didn't return with a chair at all, Ratty was quite liable to slaughter him on the spot. It was necessary for Lefevre to do some quick thinking.

Just then the door of the Fourth Form-room opened, and Lefevre blinked.

A chair came out—just the very kind of chair he was looking for. A comfortable wooden chair, with strong arms and a good back. Behind the chair came Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth.

Lumley-Lumley was looking somewhat aggrieved.

"Make way for a chap!" he complained, as Lefevre stood in his path.

"I want that chair!" said Lefevre firmly.

"Rats!"

"None of your sauce!" said the captain of the Fifth, as he grasped the prize. "Old Ratty has broken his own chair, and I want this without any nonsense!"

"Yes, but—"

"But nothing!" said Lefevre. "Let go!"

"You crass idiot, it's my chair!" roared Lumley-Lumley. "Mr. Lathom just told me to take it out of the Form-room, and—"

"Good!" said Lefevre. "If Mr. Lathom doesn't want it in his Form-room, then Mr. Ratcliff wants it in his! What the thump does it matter to you, anyhow?"

"I tell you—"

"Oh, not so much talk!" interrupted Lefevre.

He wrenched at the chair, and hauled it out of Lumley-Lumley's grasp. Then he swung round, and was entering the doorway of the Fifth Form-room almost before the junior could recover his breath.

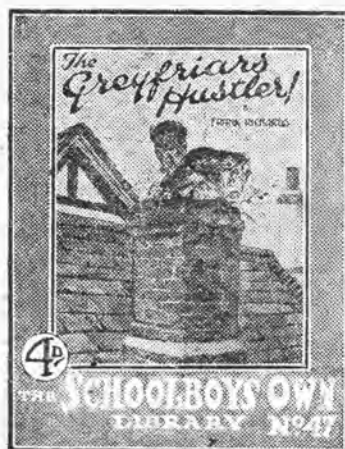
"Hi! Wait a minute!" gasped Lumley-Lumley.

Slam!

The door of the Fifth Form-room closed, and Mr. Ratcliff, who was standing by his desk, looked round sharply. He frowned. He had been vaguely hoping that Lefevre would come back empty-handed. But it seemed that he was to have no opportunity to pounce on anybody that afternoon!

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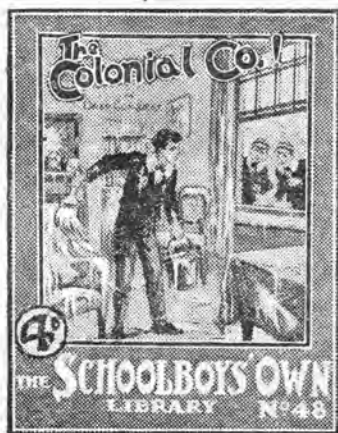
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CHAPTER 5.

More Misadventures of Ratty!

"**W**HERE shall I put it, sir?" asked Lefevre.
"Here, of course—here?" retorted Mr. Ratcliff.
"Where else, Lefevre? Why do you ask these ridiculous questions? Place the chair here—against my desk!"

Lefevre did so, and then went to his place.

Work proceeded in the Fifth. Mr. Ratcliff sat down in the chair, and for some fifteen minutes the Fifth had a comparatively quiet spell. Mr. Ratcliff was trying to recover his composure, to say nothing of his dignity. No Form master can fall out of his chair in front of all his boys without losing a certain amount of prestige.

Mr. Ratcliff brooded.

He was presumably interested in his own Livy, but this was only a pretence. He brooded over his troubles. At the moment Titus Livius had no appeal to him whatever. The Fifth, of course, was occupied in very much the same way. No sane member of the Fifth would really display an interest in Livy unless the Form master's eye was upon him.

Mr. Ratcliff was wondering how he could get on the track of that wretched boy who had deliberately knocked him over in the quad. For by this time, Mr. Ratcliff had fully convinced himself that the affair had been deliberate. The theory that the cyclist had accidentally struck him had long since been dismissed from Mr. Ratcliff's mind.

He leaned back in his chair, and then he started.

"Good heavens!" he muttered.

He hadn't leaned back very forcibly, but it had seemed to him that the back had shifted slightly. And Mr. Ratcliff was suspicious of chairs now. He turned round in his seat, grasped the back of the chair, and shook it. Curiously enough, it seemed perfectly firm.

"Anythin' wrong, sir?" asked Prye.

"No, Prye, there is not!" retorted Mr. Ratcliff.
"You will kindly get on with your work. When I want you to speak I will address you!"

Prye turned pink.

"I was only wonderin'—" he began.

"It is not your place to wonder now, Prye!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "You are here to work, not to wonder!"

"Pig!" muttered Prye under his breath.

The rest of the Fifth listened with interest, and felt rather disappointed when the argument petered out. They were hoping for some fireworks from old Ratty, for these were always entertaining, provided they did not affect the Fifth's liberty. But an argument with Prye would not give Mr. Ratcliff an excuse, however much he wanted it, for detaining the whole Form.

Mr. Ratcliff leaned back in his chair again, and this time he grabbed the arms with a sudden yelp of dismay. The back was shifting again!

"What on earth—"

Click!

Unconsciously Mr. Ratcliff gripped the arms of the chair, and it seemed to him that the whole thing jumped. There was certainly a loud metallic click, and Mr. Ratcliff gave a sudden start.

"Good gracious!" he gasped. "What, in the name of— Whooop! Oh dear! What— Help! Help!"

Mr. Ratcliff had no time to think, or to ponder over this fresh disaster. But that chair had not only jumped, but it had taken wheels unto itself!

And as the exasperated Form master half leapt up he caused things to happen. The mysterious chair skidded forward along the smooth floor, and Mr. Ratcliff's legs went up. All his weight was suddenly thrown upon the chair-back.

Snap!

The chair-back hinged over, and Mr. Ratcliff went over on his back, like a freshly landed fish. And the chair increased its momentum and fairly shot across the Form-room. The Fifth sat dazed, dumbfounded.

In addition, of course, the Fifth was highly entertained by this diverting and welcome interruption of afternoon lessons. Nobody had hoped for such a piece of luck as this.

"Help! Help!" screamed Mr. Ratcliff.

"Look out, sir!" yelled a dozen voices.

The advice was well meant, but it was not tactful. Mr. Ratcliff was hardly in a position to look out. He was floundering on his back, his legs were kicking in the air, and the next second he turned a complete back somersault. It was really the most artistic movement.

Crash! Thud!

"Yow!" howled Mr. Ratcliff desperately.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fifth simply couldn't help it. Mr. Ratcliff, scotching across the Form-room on that chair, had been diverting enough. But Mr. Ratcliff turning a back somersault was the biggest scream of the term.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Lefevre, as a sudden suspicion entered his mind.

"Somethin' troublin' you?" asked Cutts.

"That chair!" breathed Lefevre. "I believe it's a trick one!"

"Good gad!" grinned Prye. "Then I'm glad I'm not in your shoes, old man! There's a packet of trouble comin' your way!"

Lefevre turned pale.

"But—but I didn't know—" he began.

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He paused, startled by the very prospect. He had brought that chair into the Form-room! His only hope was that Mr. Ratcliff would be too weak to make any inquiries.

But Mr. Ratcliff didn't seem very weak.

He was just getting to his feet again, and he seemed more like a raging rhinoceros than a human being. He leapt to his feet, with his gown clouding over him like a cloak, and he was dancing madly.

"Help me!" he bellowed. "You idiots! You grinning young rascals! Help me!"

Several Fifth-Formers rushed to the Form master's aid.

They pulled his gown down, they dusted him, and Mr. Ratcliff gradually assumed an aspect that was less terrifying. But he still resembled a Prussian Hun.

"Lefevre!" he shouted hoarsely.

"Sir?"

"You—you unprincipled young rascal!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff. "I am amazed—staggered—that you should perpetrate such an outrageous practical joke upon me!"

"Practical joke, sir?" gasped Lefevre.

"Yes, sir!" hooted Ratty. "Don't dare to deny it! Good heavens! I have never been so insulted in my life! This will mean a public flogging, Lefevre!"

"But—"

"And very possibly expulsion from the school!" raved Mr. Ratcliff.

"But—but I've done nothing, sir!" shouted Lefevre indignantly.

"Done nothing!" said Mr. Ratcliff, his voice cracking. "You—you audacious scamp! That chair is a trick contrivance, and you brought it into this room so that I should—"

"I didn't, sir!" interrupted Lefevre, aghast. "I'd no idea that the chair was unusual. I'm awfully sorry, sir. I'll take it away—"

"Do so!" said Mr. Ratcliff acidly. "Take it away at once, Lefevre. Where did you obtain it?"

"I met one of the juniors in the passage, sir, and he was carrying it away from the Fourth Form-room," said Lefevre. "Naturally, I thought the chair was sound enough— Well, I'm jittered!"

He broke off abruptly, staring at the chair.

"What is the meaning of that ridiculous expression, Lefevre?" demanded Mr. Ratcliff harshly. "Take the chair away, and bring me—"

"It's funny, sir," interrupted Cutts. "The chair's all right now."

"What do you mean—all right?"

"Sound as a bell, sir," said Cutts, shaking it.

"That's what I noticed," said Lefevre. "This back is solid, sir. I—I don't seem to get the hang of—"

"Nonsense!" roared Mr. Ratcliff. "The chair is dangerous!"

"Well, it seems all right, sir—"

"Arrant nonsense!" shouted the master. "Move aside, Cutts! In fact, get back to your place! Who told you to crowd out here, in front of the Form?"

"Why, you did, yourself, sir," said Cutts mildly.

"I did nothing of the kind!"

"You shouted for help, sir, and we came to the rescue," explained Cutts.

"Ahem! Well, perhaps— Very well, Cutts!" growled Mr. Ratcliff. "Well, what about this chair? Upon my word, I am bruised in every limb! It is only by the greatest fortitude that I compel myself to carry on. A less determined man would have collapsed!"

He seized the back of the chair, and pulled it. But it didn't move away from the rest of the article. It seemed perfectly solid.

"Dear me!" muttered Mr. Ratcliff. "Extraordinary!"

"The chair doesn't move easily, either, sir," said Frye.

"Good gracious, no!"

Mr. Ratcliff started. He wondered, in a vague sort of way, if he had imagined the disaster. He knew, of course, that he had fallen out of the chair; but perhaps he had merely tipped over, in quite an ordinary way. The chair bore no signs of having been faked.

"Tell me, Cutts!" breathed Mr. Ratcliff. "Did—did this chair suddenly commence skidding across the floor?"

Cutts raised his lofty eyebrows.

"Skidding across the floor?" he asked incredulously.

"Great gad, what do you mean, sir?"

"And did—did the back of the chair hinge away, and thus cause me to fall?" asked Mr. Ratcliff. "I know, of course, that this is actually so, but in face of the chair's sound appearance, I—I—"

"Really, sir!" protested Cutts.

He was looking at Mr. Ratcliff in a curious manner.

"Well, Cutts?"

"I think you must be mistaken, sir," said Cutts coldly.

His expression was disdainful and accusing—just as

though he suspected Mr. Ratcliff of having indulged in something stronger than water at dinner-time. And Mr. Ratcliff himself passed a hand over his brow, and vaguely asked himself if he was awake.

CHAPTER 6.

No Clue!

THE Fifth had enjoyed itself immensely.

Mr. Ratcliff turning back somersaults was a cheering spectacle, particularly in view of his earlier mishap. Anything violent that happened to Mr. Ratcliff was approved by the Fifth.

"The chair's as sound as a bell, sir," said Lefevre, puzzled. "This back is strong enough. Look, sir!"

He sat down in the chair, and reclined back with all his force. There was no sign of anything giving way. Lefevre was as puzzled as any of the others.

"Most remarkable!" said Mr. Ratcliff, coming to himself, with a start. "It is impossible that I could have imagined the whole thing! I can swear that this chair whirled across the room, as though on wheels!"

"Oh, sir!" said Cutts, in protest.

Mr. Ratcliff suddenly had an idea.

"Turn that thing up!" he commanded. "Turn it upside down!"

Lefevre and Frye obeyed, and Mr. Ratcliff gave a shout of triumph and relief.

"I knew it!" he shrilled. "See! Invisible castors! Look at them! Sunk into the very legs! And what is that beneath the arm? A button, surely? Good gracious!"

Mr. Ratcliff saw it all.

"A trick chair!" he shouted fiercely. "Press that button, Lefevre, and see what happens!"

The Fifth Form skipper righted the chair, and pressed the button. The back still remained in position, but the slightest push caused it to give. Coiled springs mysteriously appeared.

"Ha!" said Mr. Ratcliff triumphantly.

"Well, I'm blowed!" ejaculated Lefevre.

"Now we are getting to it!" continued Mr. Ratcliff. "Upon my soul! Of all the outrageous practical jokes! The boy who perpetrated this outrage shall suffer—"

"But—but I don't think anything like that was intended, sir!" protested Lefevre. "This chair is evidently one of the inventions—"

Mr. Ratcliff jumped a foot into the air.

"Inventions!" he yelled. "Good heavens! Are we never to be free from this—this blight?"

"The Inventions Competition was approved by the Head, sir," remarked Cutts.

"It was! And I am amazed that Dr. Holmes should have so forgotten himself— Ahem!" Mr. Ratcliff paused, realising that it would be unwise to voice his private opinions to the Fifth. "The boy who contrived this wretched chair shall answer for it! This is no legitimate invention!"

"Mr. Glyn didn't make any stipulations, sir," said Lefevre doubtfully. "The competition is open to all the juniors, and they can enter any old patent they like—"

"Bah!" snarled Mr. Ratcliff. "I am afraid Mr. Glyn was very unwise when he mooted this preposterous competition. However, that is not my concern. Lefevre, where did you obtain this chair?"

"Out in the passage, sir."

"Ah! From whom?"

"One of the juniors, sir."

"Which junior?" asked Mr. Ratcliff sharply.

Lefevre did some rapid thinking. He guessed at once that Jerrold Lumley-Lumley was the inventor, and he now realised why Lumley-Lumley had protested so strongly. But he saw no reason why he should give the junior's name. Lumley-Lumley had had no intention of victimising Mr. Ratcliff. But Lefevre knew well enough that Mr. Ratcliff would make haste to victimise Lumley-Lumley.

"Well, Lefevre? I am waiting!"

"Now, which junior was it, sir?" said Lefevre, wrinkling his brow. "That's strange, sir! I grabbed this chair from somebody, but I can't quite— If'm! Wasn't a Shell fellow, either," he went on musingly. "A Fourth-Former, perhaps. Funny, sir!"

"Are you telling me, Lefevre, that you do not know from whom you obtained this chair?"

"I got it from one of the juniors, sir."

"Confound you, boy!" roared Mr. Ratcliff. "Which junior?"

Lefevre turned red.

"There's no need to shout like that, sir," he protested stiffly. "I'm not a kid in the Third! I can't tell you where



As the exasperated Form master half leapt up, he caused things to happen. The mysterious chair skidded along the smooth floor, and Mr. Ratcliff's legs went up. All his weight was suddenly thrown upon the chair back. Snap! The back hinged over, and Mr. Ratcliff turned a complete somersault. "Yow!" he howled desperately. (See Chapter 5.)

I got the chair from!" he added obstinately. "In any case, it was quite an accident, sir. Nobody tried to play a trick on you!"

"Go to your place, Lefevre!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff tartly. "I will deal with this matter again after lessons are over. The chair, of course, will be utterly destroyed!"

"You can't destroy it, sir!" protested Lefevre. "It belongs to one of the juniors, and—"

"Silence!" barked Mr. Ratcliff.

The work proceeded, and the Fifth had a very trying time of it for the rest of the afternoon. It seemed to Mr. Ratcliff that he was suffering more than anybody else from the effects of the great inventions' craze at St. Jim's. Ever since that ridiculous project had been instituted there had been trouble, and Mr. Ratcliff had received most of it.

St. Jim's was taking quite a different view, however. The juniors hailed the "Inventions" Competition as a brain-wave, and Bernard Glyn's father was looked upon as a public benefactor. Inventions were springing up daily, the majority of them being of the most weird and wonderful type. Lumley-Lumley's chair seemed to be a fair sample of the style of thing that was most popularly favoured.

The Fifth Form was released a little earlier than the Fourth. But Lumley-Lumley, nevertheless, was waiting outside the door when the seniors came trooping out.

"Where's my chair?" he asked, as Lefevre appeared.

"Shut up, you young ass!" muttered Lefevre. "I haven't given your name away, and Mr. Ratcliff doesn't know—"

"What's this?" demanded Mr. Ratcliff, pushing his way out.

"Ah, Lumley-Lumley! What are you doing here?"

"I came to fetch my chair, sir," replied Lumley-Lumley.

Lefevre glared at him, but it couldn't be helped.

"Oh! So you are the owner of that atrocity," barked Mr. Ratcliff. "Very well, Lumley-Lumley—very well! We shall see what the headmaster has to say about it!"

"Yes, sir," said Lumley-Lumley. "The Head's going to be one of the judges, I believe."

"Good gracious! Do you assume for a moment that you will be allowed to enter that dangerous article in this—this competition?" shouted Mr. Ratcliff. "I shall not only have the chair destroyed, Lumley-Lumley, but I shall report you to your Housemaster for perpetrating an outrage upon me!"

"You'll have my chair destroyed, sir?" gasped the junior. "Most certainly!"

"Just a minute, sir!" said Lumley-Lumley, with a grim note in his voice. "Lefevre took that chair from me without knowing what it was—"

"All this is of no interest to me!"

"But it is to me, sir!" said Lumley-Lumley gruffly. "Lefevre took that chair, thinking it was just an ordinary one, and if you had any mishap with it it was a pure accident. As a fair man, sir, you can't possibly have that chair destroyed because of a mischance. I spent a lot of time on it, and over thirty shillings of my pocket-money. I shall go straight to Mr. Railton and tell him what has happened."

Mr. Ratcliff's thin lips were compressed. He didn't want the matter to go before Mr. Railton. He knew, in his own heart, that he had overstepped the mark. This competition had been approved by the headmaster, and Dr. Holmes might have something caustic to say if he learned that he—Mr. Ratcliff—was ordering the destruction of the inventions.

"Ahem! One moment, Lumley-Lumley!" said Mr. Ratcliff hastily.

Lumley-Lumley was turning away, but he looked back.

"Yes, sir?"

"Take your chair!" said Mr. Ratcliff in a suppressed voice. "I will be lenient. Take the thing, and never let me see it again! These—these wretched contrivances are enough to drive a man out of his mind! Take your chair and go!"

"Thank you, sir!"

Lumley-Lumley took his chair and went. And Mr. Ratcliff stalked across to the New House, painfully conscious of the fact that he had allowed his temper to make him look ridiculous in the eyes of his Form.

He was bruised, too, and he shut himself up in his study and resolved to obtain some little measure of compensation by a prow round the junior studies later on. If he caught any of his boys overstepping the mark with regard to their constructional efforts he would drop on them like a cart-load of bricks.

In the meantime, the School House was roaring over an account of Mr. Ratcliff's misadventures in the Fifth Form.

room. Lumley-Lumley's patent chair was much sought after, but he had succeeded in hiding it safely away.

"Let's have a look at it, Jerrold, old man," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Trot it out, Lumley!"

"Rats! The chair isn't finished yet, and nobody ought to have known anything about it," replied Lumley-Lumley. "It's my special patent. A perfectly rigid chair ordinarily, but when you touch a button under the arm the back sags smoothly back and allows you to take your ease."

"Yes, that's what happened to old Ratty, we hear," said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The springs are too weak at present," grinned Lumley-Lumley. "You see, I've been experimenting, and I haven't quite got the hang of it yet. Another catch allows the invisible wheels to come into operation, and you can shift the chair to any part of the room without even troubling to get up."

"Old Ratty shifted it, but he got down!" grinned Lowther. "I wathah think you should do the wight thing, Lumlay, an' trot out the chair for our inspection," said Arthur Augustus. "Any device which has put it across old Watty is naturally of interest."

But Lumley-Lumley refused to be drawn, and the juniors were obliged to bottle up their curiosity.

CHAPTER 7.

Skimmy Is Very Kind!

"BLAKE, my dear fellow—"

"Eh?"

"If you can spare just a brief period—"

"Sorry, Skimmy, old man, but there's nothing doing," said Jack Blake firmly. "I'm in a hurry. I've got to be in the Common-room in half an hour at the outside!"

Skimpole of the Shell blinked.

"In that case, my dear Blake, I fail to comprehend your statement to the effect that you're in a hurry," he said mildly. "The Common-room is but a minute's walk, and if you have half an hour at your disposal—"

"Just about!" said Blake. "But what's the good of half an hour to you, Skimmy? Once you get started you can make a whole evening look like twopence-halfpenny. Hours pass, and they go like minutes. Sorry, and all that, but—"

"I assure you, Blake, I shall only detain you for a mere matter of minutes," urged Skimpole. "I have made a few adjustments to my thought-reading machine, and I am anxious to test the results."

"That's all right, old man. You can be as anxious as you like," said Blake. "But try somebody else! Choose another victim!"

"Really, my dear fellow, I must protest against your choice of words!" said Skimpole. "I am desirous of choosing no victim, I merely require the assistance for a short period of— Blake, dear me! I trust you are not becoming deaf, Blake?"

Blake apparently was, for he walked down the Fourth Form passage as though he hadn't heard. Herbert Skimpole shook his head and turned. Monty Lowther was just coming round the corner.

"Splendid!" said Skimpole. "My dear Lowther, this is very fortunate!"

"Don't you believe it!" said Monty Lowther. "I don't want your old thought-reading machine in a case like this. I can read your thoughts without any machinery! You want me to undergo a test—eh?"

"Precisely!" beamed Skimpole. "I am exceedingly glad, my dear fellow, that your perspicacity is so acute!"

"Oh, rather!" said Lowther. "I've always been famous for my acute perspicacity. One of my family trade-marks. By the way," he added, "what is perspicacity?"

"You will, of course, have your little joke!" said Skimpole, smiling. "You do not need telling, my dear Lowther, that your mental condition is supernaturally acute. As a fellow of great discernment, you will realise that I urgently need your services."

"But I've tested your old machine once!" protested Lowther. "What more do you want, Skimmy?"

"I have recently made some wonderful adjustments," said Skimpole eagerly. "I feel that the apparatus will now be far more sensitive. Indeed, I am hoping that we shall obtain concrete proof of the fact that the human cranium is penetrable by certain rays—"

"I agree!" said Monty Lowther firmly. "Your cranium, Skimmy, is concrete through and through!"

"My dear Lowther, I did not mean—"

"Reinforced!" said the humorist of the Shell, with conviction. "I've thought it for months, but I'm glad to realise

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that you have come to the same conclusion. Good man! So that's settled—eh?"

"But, really—"

"And we're both happy!" smiled Lowther kindly.

He passed on, leaving Skimpole rather at a loss for words—an extraordinary condition for the genius of the Shell to be in.

Baggy Trimble came rolling along the passage.

"Are you trying to get somebody to help you, Skimmy?" he asked eagerly.

"That is my endeavour," replied Skimpole coldly. "But if you are contemplating proffering your services, Trimble, allow me to obviate the necessity of further emphasis. I shall decline your magnanimity with unconditional finality!"

"My hat!" said Trimble. "What's that?"

"I have painful recollections of your former conduct, Trimble!" said Skimpole accusingly. "I shall not give you any further opportunities of swindling me!"

Trimble did not take offence. He was hearing these sort of accusations every hour. On a previous celebrated occasion he had taken half-a-crown off Skimpole to assist the latter in his experiments, but he had taken fright at the crucial moment, leaving the unfortunate Skimmy in the lurch. Since then he had learned that the thought-reading machine was harmless, and his services were consequently for sale.

"I'm a generous chap, Skimmy," said Trimble. "I believe in letting bygones be bygones."

"Quite possibly, my dear Trimble—quite possibly," said Skimpole, blinking. "Indeed, I can well understand that such a policy is extremely beneficial to one of your peculiar characteristics. No doubt you are only too glad when people allow bygones to be bygones!"

"If you're going to insult me, Skimmy—"

"I have told you that such a thing is impossible!" interrupted Skimpole mildly. "It has even been said, my dear Trimble, that your skin is tantamount to an elephant's hide! A peculiar condition, no doubt, but I am not inclined to test the theory. I would like you to understand that I have no desire to enlist your services!"

And Skimpole walked off, very frigid.

"Dotty lunatic!" roared Trimble, in disappointed disgust.

"Yah, loony! Poor old skatty Skimpole!"

"Dear me!" murmured Skimpole, pained. "The wretched youth has actually become abusive! I was well advised to abolish all thought of utilising his services! Good gracious! The wretched boy might have seriously harmed my great invention!"

This thought so unnerved him that he was looking slightly pale when he wandered into the Common-room in search of a possible assistant. It was one of Herbert Skimpole's grievances that he could never find anybody willing to listen to him, let alone help him. For some extraordinary reason his Form-fellows treated him with a kind of benevolent toleration.

"Ah, my dear Talbot! The very fellow I have been looking for!" said Skimpole gladly.

"That's funny!" said Talbot. "The very fellow I've been trying to avoid!"

"Really, my dear Talbot, I see no reason why you should attempt to avoid me!" said Skimpole plaintively. "After all, we are both occupants of Study No. 9, and it so happens that I desire your assistance."

"Why not try Gore?" said Talbot hastily. "He's in the study, too, Skimmy, and—"

"I am very much afraid that Gore is a rough fellow!" interrupted Skimpole. "He has, no doubt, many excellent qualities, but he appears to be lamentably indifferent when I moot the subject of entomology, and—"

"Gore's a sensible chap!" said Talbot, nodding. "Sorry, Skimmy, but I've got an important appointment with Tom Merry! I've got to see him about next week's paper-chase!"

"But, my dear fellow, pray wait—"

Talbot escaped, and Skimpole despondently sat down in a corner of the Common-room and polished his spectacles. He was forced to the conclusion that Talbot had prevaricated, or if he hadn't actually prevaricated, he had resorted to a deliberate excuse.

Tom Merry was settling down to a game of chess with Manners on the other side of the Common-room. Racke and Mellish, the black sheep of St. Jim's, were lounging near by, and Racke gave his companion a languid wink.

"Heard the latest?" he asked casually.

Mellish stared.

"What's the idea?" he asked, suspecting something.

"About old Ratty," said Aubrey Racke, with another wink. "I hear that he's awfully interested in these inventions. He even said that he'd like to see Skimmy's idiotic thought-reading machine."

Mellish, with his back to Skimpole, grinned.

"Oh, rather!" he said, taking his cue. "I heard that, too. Funny how these Housemasters get such cranky ideas!"

So old Ratty wants to see Skimpy's thought-reading machine, does he?"

Racke yawned.

"Simply dyin' to see it!" he replied.

They pretended not to know that Skimpole was within hearing. It appealed to their perverted sense of humour to rag the genius of the Shell in this manner. Skimpole had already taken the bait, and was, indeed, listening intently.

"Why doesn't he ask old Skimpy about it, then?" said Mellish.

"My dear man!" protested Racke.

"Eh?"

"Where's your sense of proportion?" asked Racke. "It wouldn't be fittin' for a master to approach a Shell chap on a subject like that. Naturally, Mr. Ratcliff is consumin' his curiosity, an' Skimpy won't do anythin' in the matter because he doesn't know that Ratty is interested."

"Pity!" said Mellish. "We ought to give Skimpy the tip."

"Hang Skimpy!" drawled Racke indifferently. "Skimpy's nothing to us, an' if he hasn't enough sense to take his bally invention to old Ratty—"

"You think old Ratty would welcome him?"

"With open arms!" declared Racke. "Skimpy's only got to go into Ratty's study with that machine of his, an' Ratty will fairly embrace him. The man's simply dyin' to test that apparatus. Positively gaspin', you know. Well, let's change the subject."

They lounged off, and a moment later Skimpole hurried out of the Common-room, his face glowing, his eyes gleaming.

"I rather think that Skimpy will get a pretty nasty jolt when he barges into old Ratty's study with that dotty machine of his," grinned Racke ill-humouredly. "By gad, I'd give somethin' to see old Ratty's face when that fool shoves his nose through the doorway."

Mellish grinned.

"Yes, Ratty is just about fed-up to the neck with inventions, isn't he?" he chuckled.

"Fed-up to the eyebrows," replied Racke. "Let's hope he takes the idiot's machine, an' chuck it in the dustbin!"

And, having performed their worst, the black sheep of St. Jim's sauntered off to Racke's study to indulge in a cigarette.

CHAPTER 8.

The Order of the Boot!

SKIMPOLE was excited.

So Mr. Ratcliff wanted to see his wonderful invention! This was great news—stupendous news—and Skimpole was thrilled to the marrow. Plainly, obviously, it was his bounden duty to hasten to Mr. Ratcliff's side at once, and to permit the New House master to test the thought-reading machine for himself.

"I GOT IT THROUGH FIGHTING."

"Proper black eye, isn't it! Gosh, but you ought to have seen it this morning! Talk about a beauty! There was about five different colours in it, including yellow an' sky-blue-pink! You see, there was only one copy of the paper left, and another bloke got there the same time as I did. He lashed out at me, and I lashed out at him. I got the black eye, and the front half o' the paper. It was the 'Boys' Realm' we were after, o' course. My bit had got the yarn about Jack, Sam, and Pete in it, and wasn't it good! When I'd read it I found out where this chap lived, an' we swopped halves. We got real matey after a bit, an' he's going to join my footer club. But the 'Realm' is always worth a black eye—comes out on Wednesdays, you know, and only costs twopence!"



The Boys'
REALM
OF SPORT & ADVENTURE

EVERY
WEDNESDAY
Price
Twopence.

Skimpole was a very innocent youth. He was so wrapped up in his scientific studies that he had no time for observing and noting the characteristics of his Form-fellows. He instinctively knew that Mellish and Racke were a good-for-nothing pair, but he had no reason to doubt the authenticity of the "information" which they had "unconsciously" imparted.

Skimpy really believed that the two juniors had been unaware of his presence, and that he had overheard those words by pure chance.

And, after all, why shouldn't Mr. Ratcliff be deeply interested in his great invention? It merely proved Mr. Ratcliff's good sense.

Skimpole hastened to his study. Since it was infra dig. for Mr. Ratcliff to come to a Shell fellow, the Shell fellow must go to Mr. Ratcliff. It was another case of Mahomet and the mountain.

It only took Skimpole a few minutes to get his machine ready for its journey. The apparatus consisted mainly of a magic lantern, sections of a microscope, and one or two wireless valves. Skimpole laboured under the astonishing delusion that this weird conglomeration was capable of sending forth a ray which would compel one to speak one's thoughts aloud. Indeed, the machine had already been tested, and had proved amazingly successful.

Skimpole had no idea that Monty Lowther, out of the kindness of his heart, had spoofed him. Monty took the genial view that Skimpy might as well have a little pleasure as well as anybody else.

The whole thing was mounted upon a wooden base, so Skimpole grasped it in his arms and marched off.

He met Blake & Co. near the outer door.

"Hallo!" said Blake. "Good man, Skimpy!"

"I beg your pardon!" said Skimpole, pausing.

"At last!" said Blake heartily.

"Really, I quite fail to comprehend the trend of your remark, my dear Blake."

"Why, aren't you going to throw your machine on the dust-heap?" asked Blake, in surprise. "I naturally assumed—"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "With all due respects, Skimpy, I must remark that it is high time you destroyed your frightful bag of tricks! It is becomin' quite a bothah in the House!"

"A sort of general nuisance," agreed Robert Arthur Digby.

"In fact, a menace," said Herries.

Skimpole regarded them coldly.

"I have no intention of destroying my great invention," he said, in a frigid voice. "The world will acclaim me as one of the greatest inventors of the age in due course. At the moment, I am about to take my machine to Mr. Ratcliff—"

"What?" gasped Blake.

"Bai Jove!"

"As I was saying, I am about—"

"You fwabjous dummay!" broke in D'Arcy. "If you take that wotten contivance to old Watty, he will give you a feahful thwashin'. Good gwacious! You cannot be weally sewious, Skimpy!"

But Skimpole had passed out into the quad, loftily refusing to have any further parley with these unappreciative scoffers. They watched his figure as it vanished into the dusk.

"Mad!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Clean loony!" said Herries.

"Poor chap, he ought to have a keeper!" remarked Digby.

"I am inclined to agree with you, Dig," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "In fact, I think we ought to wally wound, an' wesuee poor Skimpy befoah old Watty skins him alive! I gweatly feah that some young wascal has been pullin' Skimpy's leg!"

"That leg was made to be pulled," said Blake, shaking his head. "It's too late for us to go over now, anyhow."

"As a mattah of humane bwotherliness, Blake, I think we—"

"You shouldn't think, Gussy; it strains you too much."

"Weally, Blake—"

"If we go over to the New House now, we shall probably run into Figgins and his crowd," went on Blake. "And that would only lead to a House row. Skimpy isn't worth it. If he likes to ask for trouble, why should we bother ourselves?"

And Study No. 6 passed on, leaving Skimpole to his fate.

The genius of the Shell had, indeed, reached Mr. Ratcliff's study by this time, and he tapped on the door. Luckily—or, perhaps, unluckily—none of the New House juniors had encountered him in the passages.

Skimpole was feeling highly gratified. It was really delightful to know that a master—and particularly a master

like Mr. Ratcliff—should be so interested in his great discovery.

"Come in!" came Mr. Ratcliff's voice. "Come in!" Skimpole did not notice the asperity of the tone. He was far too engrossed in his subject for that. He managed to open the door by resting his burden against a frame, and he then pushed the door open with his foot.

"Good gracious! What on earth—"

Mr. Ratcliff paused, open-mouthed.

In the doorway stood Skimpole, his arms full of weird-looking machinery. Skimpole was beaming, and he advanced into the room, and set his thought-reading machine down upon Mr. Ratcliff's desk.

"What—what is this?" asked Mr. Ratcliff, in a dangerous voice.

"My dear sir, pray allow me to explain," said Skimpole contentedly. "I understand that you are greatly interested in—"

"Good heavens!" broke in Mr. Ratcliff. "Have you no more sense than to bother me at this hour of the evening? Who told you to come here, Skimpole? What right have you in this House?"

Skimpole blinked.

"It was merely my intention, my dear sir—"

"Don't address me as your dear sir!" roared Mr. Ratcliff.

"Really, my dear sir—I—I mean—"

"Take—take this child's toy away!" roared the Housemaster.

Skimpole jumped.

"Toy!" he said faintly. "Really, I—I fail to understand your disapproval, sir! Perhaps I have come at an inopportune moment, and, if so, I can only apologise and withdraw until a more auspicious occasion presents itself."

"Good gracious!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

He was not so accustomed to Skimpole's mode of speech as Skimmy's own Housemaster, and he looked at the boy in amazement. He was totally at a loss to understand Skimpole's extraordinary advent.

At the moment Mr. Ratcliff was wrestling with his household accounts, and he was in no mood to be interrupted. Horace Ratcliff was a man who liked to get his figures exact, and he was intensely worried by an elusive two-and-three-pence-halfpenny which refused to be accounted for. He had been going over his accounts in a vain search for the error, which must inevitably be somewhere discoverable, but which remained undiscovered.

"Skimpole, I am well aware that you are a peculiar boy, and I am ready to excuse you upon that account," said Mr. Ratcliff tensely. "Take this—this ridiculous toy away, and I will take no further action. But I positively forbid you to—"

"But, my dear sir, pray let me explain!" broke in Skimpole. "I have been led to understand that you are deeply interested—indeed, filled with the greatest curiosity—regarding my invention."

Mr. Ratcliff leapt out of his chair.

"Your what?" he fairly shrieked.

"Really, I—I— My invention, sir," said Skimpole, blinking in astonishment. "You see, I—"

"Get out of this study!" said Mr. Ratcliff thickly.

"But, my dear—"

"In one moment, Skimpole, I will thrash you within an inch of your life!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff. "I may not be your Housemaster, but I am willing to take the responsibility. Good heavens! This is nothing more nor less than a deliberate affront!"

"I assure you, sir—"

"I am amazed that you should have the audacity!" panted Mr. Ratcliff. "Go, Skimpole! Go before I lose control of myself!"

He gave a wild look at the thought-reading machine, and gave such a leap round the table that Skimpole backed away in alarm. With a fiendish cry, Mr. Ratcliff seized the apparatus, whirled it across the room, and thrust it into a cupboard. Then he slammed the door and locked it.

"Now!" he panted viciously.

"My dear sir!" gasped Skimpole. "What are you doing? My—my invention! You surely cannot mean to confiscate my—"

"Exactly!" rapped out Mr. Ratcliff. "That is precisely what I have done. I will teach you to come here with your gross impertinence—"

"No, sir!" interrupted Skimpole. "I assure you that my intention was a laudable one. I desired to gratify your curiosity—"

He broke off as Mr. Ratcliff leapt at him.

"Yaroooooh!" howled Skimmy.

Mr. Ratcliff was pulling him to the door by his ear.

"Really, sir!" bleated Skimpole. "I must protest—Yow! I must beg of you—Ow-ow! This is altogether unexpected, sir! I really have no idea why—Whooooop!"

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The unfortunate Skimpole was whirled down the passage. "This way!" said Mr. Ratcliff harshly.

Tramp, tramp!

Down the passage, down the stairs, to the outer doorway. At last Skimpole's ear, red and inflamed, was released.

"Now go!" said Mr. Ratcliff thickly.

"My dear sir, you must allow me to explain—"

"If you come back you will be flogged!" roared Mr. Ratcliff.

"But my invention, sir!" gasped Skimpole, dumbfounded. "I brought it to your study with the intention of explaining—"

"And it will remain in my study, Skimpole!" shouted the irate Housemaster. "Good heavens! Do you think you can do as you please with me? This—this preposterous invention of yours will remain in my possession until further notice."

"But I am experimenting—"

"Go, sir!"

Mr. Ratcliff turned on his heel and vanished. And the unfortunate Skimpole wandered distractedly down the New House steps, and paused at the bottom in a complete daze.

CHAPTER 9.

Dirty Work!

IF Herbert Skimpole was startled by Mr. Ratcliff's loudly-voiced pronouncement, so were two other people.

They were invisible at the moment—being, in fact, just beyond the school wall, lurking there in the shadow of the dusk.

"Did you hear that, Martin?" said one of them, in dismay.

"Just our luck!" groaned the second form. "The kid must have taken his invention to that master for some reason, and now he's taken possession of it."

"And won't give it up!"

The two men staggered.

This was not the first time they had prowled about the old school. In fact, Mr. Twist and Mr. Martin were persistent visitors, and they came again, in spite of rebuffs. Only the previous week Mr. Twist had been caught in Reginald Talbot's patent burglar-catcher, and he had only escaped at the last moment.

Since then the precious pair had been lying low.

They were really after Bernard Glyn's carburettor—the clever invention which had originally decided Mr. Glyn to announce a general competition. Mr. Glyn had felt that there must be plenty of other inventors at St. Jim's, in addition to his own son, and the competition had been mooted in order to bring them out.

Glyn's carburettor was a novelty—a very intricate device which would, if ultimately successful, solve the problem of vaporising crude oil for use in motor-car and aeroplane engines.

Owing to a misunderstanding, Messrs. Twist and Martin believed that Skimpole was the inventor, and they had made repeated attempts to enter Skimmy's study and to steal the precious invention. They felt that they could make a fortune out of this great idea.

It was too good to be wasted on a mere schoolboy!

They knew well enough that the thing was unregistered—unpatented—and if only they could get the designs of it now—or, better still, seize Glyn's own experimental model—they would be on velvet.

But as they believed that Skimpole was the inventor, Mr. Ratcliff's announcement had knocked them all of a heap. The Housemaster's voice had come to them very clearly. For Ratty, when angered, was not in the habit of whispering.

"That's done it!" said Mr. Martin mournfully. "We're dished now, old man—we're dished proper!"

"Hang the interferin' old curmudgeon!" muttered Mr. Twist savagely. "It's one thing to get into a schoolboy's study, and it's another to burgle the school! An' that's what it'll mean, Martin, if we're to get that thing out of the master's study!"

"Confound him!" growled Martin.

Mr. Twist grunted and pulled his thin, wiry form to the top of the wall. He hung there, looking over. The unhappy Skimpole was just wandering away from the New House steps.

He was in a kind of dream.

He had gone to Mr. Ratcliff's study with the best intentions in the world, and he was dumbfounded by the treatment which had been meted out to him. Even now, Skimpole's innocent mind did not suspect the truth. It never occurred to him that Mr. Ratcliff could fail to be interested in his machine.

"Oh dear!" he murmured. "This is a most distressing business! My only course, I fear, is to return—H'm! But that, possibly, will be a highly dangerous course!"

He pondered, pale and worried.

He hadn't quite realised, yet, that his precious invention had passed out of human ken until it pleased Mr. Ratcliff to hand it back. Skimpole didn't understand the real nature of Mr. Ratcliff's obstinate temper once it had taken possession of him. He had a vague sort of idea that his invention would be returned to him that same evening.

And he was reluctant to leave the vicinity of the New House.

Over the school wall Mr. Twist had gently lowered himself until he was standing beside his companion again.

"We've got to do something—and quick!" he said. "The boy is still here—looking a bit scatty."

"That's his natural look," said the other.

"Maybe," growled Mr. Twist. "But he's worse than ever now. That interferin' master has pinched his apparatus, and the kid's taken it to heart. We've got to move, Martin."

"Yes; but we can't get it now!"

"We can get the boy!"

"Eh?"

"That experimental carburettor is out of our reach now, but the boy isn't," said Mr. Twist cunningly. "Unless we act now we may never get another chance! I suggest we grab the boy and take him along to one of those old farm buildings up the road. Then we can make him give us his plans."

Mr. Martin hesitated.

"I don't like it," he said dubiously.

"Why not?"

"It'll be kidnapping, and that's a risky game!"

"Bah!" muttered the other man. "There's no risk in it! We'll only keep the boy for an hour or two, and he'll be so scared that he'll give us the designs in no time. He can't prove anything, either. We've got the car, and we can clear away during the night. You wait here."

CAMEOS OF SCHOOL LIFE.

THE HOUSE DAME!

I SING of Mrs. Martha Mimms,
Whose plump and portly figure
Is quite a landmark at St. Jim's:
She works with tireless vigour.
The school domestic staff she rules
As boss and supervisor:
And you may search a hundred
schools,
You'll never find a wiser!

The House Dame, whom we all
respect,
Is fair and fat and forty:
In such a post, you'd not expect
A damsel young and "sporty."
But Mrs. Mimms, though somewhat
staid,
And prim, precise, and proper,
Is voted by the lag brigade
A "good sort" and a "topper"!

She rises early, with the lark,
(Not later, with the linnet!)
Straight to the kitchen she'll em-
bark,
She's punctual to the minute.
Three hundred breakfasts are pre-
pared
Beneath her supervision;
No under-cook has ever dared
To question her decision!

Rashers are carved, and eggs are
fried,
It is a breathless "scramble"!
For hungry boys won't be denied;
But they may safely gamble
That on the tick of eight o'clock
The breakfast-gong will thunder:
Into the dining-hall they'll flock
With eagerness and wonder!

A bustling Dame is Mrs. Mimms,
Not one of your slow coaches;
Young Toby stirs his lazy limbs
Whenever she approaches,
And if he isn't swift enough
Her attitude is fright'ning;
She deals him a terrific cuff,
And Toby streaks like lightning!

Here's health to you, most worthy
dame,
To whom I pen this lyric!
I hope your cheeks with wrath won't
flame
To read my panegyric.
Rather, I hope you'll send for me,
Your keenest of supporters,
And treat me to a topping tea
Within the kitchen quarters!



Mr. Martin looked startled.
"You can move if you like, but I'm clearing off!" he said firmly. "If you think that I'm going to burgle the school, you'd better think again, Twist. Not me!"

"You agreed to help—"

"Very likely; but I thought we was just dealing with a schoolboy," said Mr. Martin. "It's a different thing when you're up against a house-breaking job! I've never done anything of that sort, Twist, and I never will! It's too risky."

"Listen to me—"

"I won't!" snapped Mr. Martin. "You can let yourself in for a five-years' stretch if you like, but I'd rather let that blamed carburettor go to pot. The best thing we can do is to clear out of this neighbourhood and forget all about it."

"You yellow cur!" snorted Mr. Twist. "There's a fortune in this carburettor—"

"Just a minute, Twist—"

"I'm fed-up with hanging about," said Mr. Twist. "No, you'd better not wait," he added. "You go along and get the car. Have it all ready in a couple of minutes."

"But—"

Mr. Twist waited for no more objections. He pulled himself over the wall and dropped lightly into the quad. A glance told him that the coast was still clear. Skimpole was still wandering about near the New House, and the lights from the school windows looked cheery and comforting. There appeared to be nobody else in view. True, there was a kind of dim shadow over the School House, but Mr. Twist did not notice this.

He whistled softly.

Skimpole took no notice.

"Hey, sonny, just a minute!" called Mr. Twist.

Skimpole was still in his dream.

"Say, Skimpole, I want you!" said Mr. Twist cautiously.

"Eh? I beg your pardon?"

At last Skimpole gave a start, and realised that somebody was speaking. He looked round in mild astonishment, and found that he was apparently alone. The quad was empty.

"Dear me!" murmured Skimpole. "Very strange!"

"Half a minute, sonny, I want a word with you."

Skimpole looked round, more mystified than ever.

"A most peculiar occurrence!" he said to himself. "I have made a very skimpy study of spiritualism, and supernatural phenomena in general, but this undoubtedly appears to be a genuine case of occult manifestation! Dear me! How extremely interesting!"

Skimpole's scientific mind jumped at once to the theoretical viewpoint. He was in no way frightened. Indeed, a ghost would probably have filled him with intense satisfaction.

A figure loomed up out of the gloom.

"Quick, young 'un—this way!" it said.

"Upon my word!" murmured Skimpole, with a shade of disappointment in his voice. "Then I was mistaken! There is somebody here, after all! Really, my dear sir, I do not recall—"

"You're wanted outside!" said Mr. Twist, bustling Skimpole over towards the wall. "It's very urgent, and I can't waste time."

"Oh dear!" panted Skimpole. "I believe you are one of those rascals who attempted to purchase my invention a week or so ago— Really, I—I must protest— Groooh!"

Skimpole was fairly whirled off his feet, and pushed over the top of the school wall. Mr. Twist was a tall man, and he was strong. It was not necessary for him to find the convenient place where an overhanging branch made the journey easy. This, of course, was a favourite spot among the juniors.

Mr. Twist chose the direct method, and sent Skimpole hurtling over. He followed, and was still unaware of that form near the School House—that patch of blackness which was a little blacker than the surrounding gloom.

CHAPTER 10.

Not Quite the Same Thing!

SKIMPOLE was in a whirl.

Having picked himself up from the lane, he had no opportunity of making any inquiries. Hands reached out to him, and the next moment he was pushed forcibly into a motor-car and held there. Mr. Twist sprang into the driver's seat, depressed the accelerator, and the quietly ticking engine sprang into life.

Zurrrrrh! The gears engaged, and the car went gliding off—not towards Rylcombe, but in the opposite direction.

Skimpole was more dazed than ever.

This sort of thing was new in his humdrum life. Skimpole was a quiet fellow, and for the better part of the term he was content to bury himself in his books and his problems. Games had no attraction for him at all. Of late he had had some excitement owing to his invention, but all that was nothing compared to this startling occurrence.

"What is the meaning of this strange proceeding?" he asked breathlessly. "Really, my dear sir, I wish you would not hold me so tightly. You are hurting my arm, and I am sure that my jacket is being torn. I have no desire whatever to take this journey—"

"Shut up, kid!" said Mr. Martin curtly.

"I see no reason why I should gratify your unreasonable demand for silence," replied Skimpole. "I am convinced there is an error. You have mistaken me for somebody else. Dear me! We are proceeding at quite a speed, I perceive! This is an extraordinary—"

"You'd best be quiet, young 'un!" snapped Mr. Martin.

The man was very uneasy.

It was all very well for Twist to take these chances, but Mr. Martin was not constructed of very stern material. He was a firm believer in easy game, and until just recently he had believed that this schoolboy would prove easy. But events were taking a turn which did not please him.

Mr. Twist, at the wheel, was driving rapidly. Not that the journey was destined to be long. Within two or three minutes the car slowed down, having travelled perhaps a little over a mile.

Then it turned into a rutty side lane, and came to a halt between high hedges. Mr. Twist switched the lights out, and the deep dusk of the dying evening enshrouded the car. Over in the west there was a faint trace of the sunset, but elsewhere the sky was dark.

"Out with him!" said Mr. Twist briefly.

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"I am at a total loss to understand this bizarre and un-called-for behaviour," said Skimpole, with dignity. "I must request you to convey me back at once. Dear me! Now that I come to realise it, I am actually breaking bounds!"

The thought startled him greatly.

"I have no permit to be out after locking-up," he protested anxiously. "Really, my dear sirs, you must take me back without the loss of a minute! If Mr. Railton should discover my absence, I am not merely liable to an imposition, but it might even result in a flogging."

The men made no answer. Skimpole was rather too much for them. If they paused here to argue with him, they might remain for five minutes. And they were rather too near the public highway.



"You're wanted outside!" said Mr. Twist, bustling Skimpole over the wall. He fairly whirled Skimpole off his feet, and sent him hurtling over the wall.

Mr. Twist led the way up the tiny lane until they came to a gateway. He opened the gate, and they passed through into a meadow. A moment later they were within the dark walls of the small thatched barn which stood there. They were well out of earshot of the road, and there was not one chance in a thousand of anybody disturbing them here.

"Now, young 'un, we want a straight little business talk," said Mr. Twist firmly. "We happened to hear a few words that your master was saying. He's locked your invention up in his study, hasn't he?"

"Your assumption that Mr. Ratcliff is my master is totally erroneous," replied Skimpole coldly. "I have always understood that Mr. Ratcliff is a most un congenial individual, and now I am convinced of the fact. My opinion of Mr. Ratcliff is—"

"Never mind your opinion!" said Mr. Twist. "And it doesn't matter whether he's your master, or whether he isn't."

"I must disagree with you on that point—"

"Confound your tongue!" growled Mr. Twist. "Has that master locked up your invention?"

"Most decidedly he has!" said Skimpole indignantly.

"An unwarrantable act of commandeering! I took my invention to Mr. Ratcliff in the good faith that he would appreciate my intentions. Possibly he was worried over some trivial matter of examinations, or such like. Be that as it may, he used the most violent voice, and not only locked my invention in his cupboard, but he thereupon seized my ear, and—"



towards the wall. "It's very urgent, and I can't waste time." hurdling over the school wall: (See Chapter 9.)

"Well, the thing's locked away, and that's all we want to know," said Mr. Twist. "Now, young 'un, I'll put it to you straight. We're willing to do a deal."

"A deal?"

"Yes, a deal."

"But I don't gather—"

"We're open for business, and if you'll sell, we'll buy," said Mr. Twist. "We want this thing to be open and above-board. Nothing tricky or dishonest, see? But if you won't sell—well, then we shall have to use force. So you can choose."

Skimpole blinked at the two dim forms in front of him.

"Sell?" he said, the true meaning of the word penetrating his confused mind. "Dear me! Are you suggesting that I should sell my invention?"

"We'll give you ten pounds—"

"Good gracious!" gasped Skimpole. "Have you the utter audacity to repeat that outrageous offer? Of course—of course! You are the uncouth individuals who approached me before on the subject! Dear me! I cannot allow—"

"Things are different now!" broke in Mr. Twist. "You're not within reach of your schoolfellows, remember! And when I say a thing, I mean it!"

"Naturally, I decline this offer with the contempt it deserves," said Skimpole loftily. "I would have you understand, my dear sir, that my machine is destined to startle the entire civilised world. Quite apart from the fact that I have no intention whatever of disposing of it, I would remind you that Mr. Ratcliff has seized the apparatus, and it is, therefore, out of reach."

Mr. Twist was losing his patience.

"You—you long-winded young idiot!" he said thickly. "It doesn't matter about that experimental model. It's the plans we want—just the plans. We'll give you ten pounds for them—"

"This repeated reference to money affronts me," said Skimpole coldly. "It will clear the air, no doubt, if I make it quite clear that I am not disposed to sell my machine. Indeed, one hundred pounds would not compensate me. Nor, indeed, would one thousand pounds. So I hope you will appreciate the futility of further discussion."

"The boy's mad!" said Martin.

"If he isn't mad, he's the crankiest kid I ever came across!" said Mr. Twist, taking a deep breath. "All right, young 'un! All right! If you won't sell for ten pounds, we'll have those plans for nothing! See? We've tried to act on the square, but you're too obstinate for us. You'll tell us exactly what the design is—"

"But I have no design," protested Skimpole.

"Nonsense! You must know how your carburettor is made!" snapped Mr. Twist impatiently. "You can't fool us with this innocent air, my lad! You've got to tell us exactly what principle you have followed in designing your carburettor."

"I beg your pardon?" said Skimpole mildly. "Did you say 'carburettor'?"

"Confound you—"

"I may be wrong, of course, but I have a faint impression that a carburettor is a motor-car attachment," proceeded Skimpole. "Something, I believe, connected with the gearbox—or is it with the ignition? I fear I am somewhat ignorant when it comes to matters mechanical."

Mr. Twist took this as a deliberate evasion.

"Look here, young man, that's enough!" he said, seizing Skimpole by the shoulders and slinging him round. "I'm just about fed-up with your tommy-rot! Any more of it, and I'll give you a clout across the head! How is that carburettor of yours made?"

The unhappy Skimpole was in hopeless confusion.

"My dear sir, pray let us straighten this tangle out," he said plaintively. "I am convinced that there is some unaccountable misapprehension. I know nothing of any carburettor—unless, of course, you are referring to Glyn's remarkable apparatus. Dear me, yes! That, of course, must be the explanation! How absurd! My thought-reading machine—"

"Your what?" shouted Mr. Twist.

"My thought-reading machine—"

"Clout him!" advised Mr. Martin savagely.

Mr. Twist clouted him.

Crack!

"Ow! Whooooop!" gasped Skimpole, staggering back.

"You—you outrageous ruffian! Oh dear! What is the reason for this violence? I have already told you that—"

"I've had enough of your foolery!" snarled Twist. "What the thunder do you mean by your thought-reading machine? If you think you can put me off by that nonsense—"

"But it is perfectly true!" protested Skimpole indignantly. "I object to this castigation! I am telling you that there has been a mistake. My invention is a thought-reading machine—a most remarkable apparatus which is capable of—"

"By glory!" breathed Mr. Twist. "This kid beats me!"

A vague, dim suspicion was beginning to creep into his mind. Was it possible that Skimpole was telling the truth? Swiftly the man reviewed the happenings of the past week or so.

There was nothing to actually connect Skimpole with the carburettor. And, now that Mr. Twist came to think of it, the boy was such an obvious crank that it seemed unlikely that he could really have invented such a serviceable article. And Mr. Ratcliff's rage had been significant, too.

The master would not have acted in that way, surely, if

Skimpole had taken him a carburettor for his inspection? But a thought-reading machine—

"Martin, I believe the kid's right!" gasped Mr. Twist. "We've got the wrong pig by the ear! We've been after this boy all the time, and he's not the one we want!"

"Crikey!" said Mr. Martin, startled.

CHAPTER 11.

From Information Received.

SKIMPOLE wrrenched himself free.

"I strongly object to being referred to as a pig!" he said, with dignity. "I am doing my utmost to clear up this unfortunate error, and I receive nothing but opprobrious vituperation. Not content with this, you add insult to injury by—"

"Look here, young shaver, I believe you!" said Mr. Twist, convinced at last. "What's this thought-reading machine of yours like?"

"It is a wonderful apparatus, constructed, of course, with crude materials. But you will understand that it is purely an experimental model. Later, of course, I shall employ only the most exclusive components—"

"What are these crude materials, anyway?"

"Well, I must acknowledge that the basis is merely an unpretentious magic-lantern," said Skimpole apologetically. "To this inadequate foundation I have welded certain portions of my microscope. And by incorporating two bright-emitter wireless valves—"

"That's enough!" interrupted Mr. Twist. "Just as I thought, Martin. We've backed the wrong horse! No wonder that master locked the fool thing up in his cupboard! This boy's as crazy as they make 'em! He's only invented a freak contrivance—"

"My dear sir, I cannot allow this uncalled-for disparagement," said Skimpole hotly. "I would have you know that my apparatus has been thoroughly tested, and has proved a great success."

"All right—all right!" said Mr. Twist. "Have it your own way. Arguing with you is like starting a gramophone. We want to hear about that carburettor."

"That, of course, is a different matter," said Skimpole.

"What do you know about this carburettor?"

"Very little, I am afraid," replied the genius of the Shell.

"But we heard you giving a full account of its principles in Wayland High Street," said Mr. Martin suspiciously.

"It is quite conceivable that I did so," admitted Skimpole. "Indeed, now you remind me of the fact, I remember that Glyn put me in possession of the elementary principles. I may have gained a rudimentary smattering of the actual working of the apparatus, but the matter has long since passed out of my mind. I have been engaged on my thought-reading machine—"

"Never mind that blamed machine, young shaver!" said Mr. Twist curtly. "So this carburettor was invented by a fellow named Glyn, eh? The boy who was on that motor-bike with you, I suppose?"

"Precisely," said Skimpole. "Glyn is the son of a very rich man who lives in the neighbourhood. Indeed, we are not a very great distance from Glyn House at this very moment. Which reminds me that Glyn has received a pass for the evening, together with Clifton Dane and Harry Noble. They are Glyn's chums, you understand. I fancy they have all gone to Glyn House for the evening."

"And what about that carburettor?"

"It is doubtless in Glyn's study—No. 11 in the Shell passage," replied Skimpole. "It is hardly conceivable that Glyn would be foolish enough to take that oily apparatus home with him."

In his simple innocence Skimpole was imparting the very information which Mr. Twist most wanted to know.

Skimpole, after all, was very innocuous, and anything in the nature of subterfuge was quite foreign to this youth. He allowed things to escape him without even realising that they might cause mischief.

"So Glyn is not at the school, eh?" said Mr. Twist, with a sudden intentness. "He has gone out for the evening?"

"To the best of my belief, that is the fact," said Skimpole.

"His two friends with him, eh?"

"Precisely!"

"And his study, I take it, is empty?"

"Such would naturally be the case."

"Locked?"

"I hardly think so," replied Skimpole. "At least, I have never known Glyn to lock his study. Why should a study be locked? I quite fail to understand the reason for all this questioning. I really must be getting back, my dear sir. I may find myself in very serious trouble, and I am sure you would not willingly—"

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"Martin," interrupted Mr. Twist. "we've got to act!"

"Seems like we've been acting all the time—acting the fool!" said Martin bitterly. "Bust me! The way we've chased this kid for that carburettor, and he ain't the right one!"

"Yes, but Glyn is!" said Mr. Twist. "And Glyn is away, and we shall find his room empty. We've got to go back to the school at once!"

"And break in?" gasped Martin.

"No; walk in."

"But think of the risk—"

"Risk be hanged!" said Twist. "They can't prove anything against us, and we can walk in if we want to, I suppose? Any excuse will do. We've got to get that carburettor."

Skimpole started.

"Good gracious!" he said, his voice swelling with indignation. "Am I to understand, you unprincipled rascal, that you are contemplating the annexation of Glyn's patent? Dear me! I cannot, of course, allow any such contravention of honest principles. It is possible, of course, that Glyn will sell his absurd production, but I doubt it. He believes that he may win the fifty pounds in the competition. The simple fellow does not realise that the prize will naturally be awarded to my thought-reading machine. Not, however, that I have the slightest interest in the money—beyond the fact that it will provide me with the wherewithal to obtain the necessary material for—"

"This kid's getting on my nerves!" said Mr. Twist fiercely. "Run out, Martin, and get those straps off the car. Bring that thick rug, too."

Martin gave a scared kind of exclamation.

"What are you going to do?" he asked blankly.

"Never you mind! Get those things!"

Twist was obviously the director, and Mr. Martin made no further attempt to thwart him. He went off. Skimpole made a move for the door, too, but he was held in check.

"Not just yet, my lad!" said Mr. Twist gently. "I'm afraid you're not going back to the school for a bit!"

"I insist upon going!" said Skimpole coldly. "It will be supper-time before long, and unless I am in Hall with the others, there will be comments—"

"Supper-time!" muttered Twist. "Gosh! I've got to put some speed on!"

The other man returned with the straps and the rug.

"Look here, Twist, you'd best go easy—" he began.

"Rubbish!" interrupted Twist. "We're going to strap this boy up and leave him here!"

"Indeed, you will do nothing of the sort!" said Skimpole indignantly. "I shall not consent to remain! I have suffered enough indignity without the added—"

"Lay him flat, and roll him in the rug!" said Mr. Twist curtly. "Once we've got these straps round him, he'll be as helpless as a trussed pig! That's the way! Both together, now!"

Bump!

The startled Skimpole went over.

"Grooooh!" he gasped. "Really, I must register a strong protest against this unnecessary—"

The rug half smothered him. He was rolled in it, and Mr. Twist held him down while the other man secured the ropes. Within three minutes the genius of the Shell was tied up so securely that there was no possibility of his freeing himself. He was bundled into a corner of the barn and left there.

"Now we'll make a move," said Mr. Twist. "We won't use the car; we'll run back along the road. We don't want to attract any attention, and it'll only take us ten minutes at a good trot. There's that short cut, too, across the footpath—"

"Hold on!" said the other man. "I don't like it, Twist! When we started this thing, we didn't mean to go as far as this! Our plan was to buy the thing and to do the job on the square!"

"That can't be helped now!" said Twist savagely. "We've gone too far to back out! We may never get another opportunity!"

"And supposing we're collared in the school?"

"I'm not supposing anything—"

"Well, I am!" said Mr. Martin obstinately. "We've done a few risky things, old man, but I don't believe in running my head into a prison-cell! And if it comes out that we took this boy, and made him a prisoner—"

"Pah! We're going to quarrel, Martin, if there's any more of this talk!" snarled Twist. "Are you in with me? Do you want to go shares in this deal?"

"Well, of course I do!"

"Then you'll go shares in the risk!" snapped the other. "Either that, or we part now! You can take your infernal car, and I'll do this thing on my own! Better make up your mind!"

"No need to get shirty, old boy!"

"Well, what's it going to be?"



"Skimmy!" called Tom Merry. "My dear Merry, I am delighted to hear your welcome voice!" came a relieved voice out of the darkness of the barn. "I am in need of assistance!" Scratch, scratch! Matches were struck, and there was no difficulty in locating the unfortunate Herbert Skimpole. (See Chapter 14.)

"I'm game, of course!" said Martin sullenly. "Only it seems a bit risky, that's all!"
 "You leave it to me, and there'll be no risk at all!" said Mr. Twist, with confidence. "Come on!"
 They went out, and became merged in the night.

CHAPTER 12.

Trimble Knows Something!

"I SAY, Tom Merry—"

Baggy Trimble rolled into the junior Common-room in the School House, an expression of flushed excitement on his podgy face.

He was breathless, and his shoes were covered in grit and gravel, as though he had been out in the lane. There had been a shower during the evening, and the roads were gritty.

"I say, Tom Merry!" said Baggy. "Just a minute—"

"Clear off, Trimble!" said Manners, glaring round. "It's your move, Tom. I'll have you checkmate in three more overs unless—"

"Rats!" grinned Tom Merry. "I'm just preparing to pinch your queen, old scout! I've got an eye on your king's knight, too!"

"Fathead!" said Manners witheringly.

"I say, Tom Merry—"

"Will somebody please take that interrupting chump and drown him?" asked Tom Merry. "Clear off, Trimble! Why the thump do you want to come bothering—"

"Something's happened to Skimmy!" said Trimble eagerly.

"Good!"

"Eh?"

"It's about time something happened to Skimpole!" said Tom.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Buck up with your move, Tom!" interrupted Manners. "How the merry dickens can we play chess with these cackling idiots barging in? If you don't clear off, Trimble, I'll—"

"But I've got some big news!" roared Trimble.

"Rats!"

"I think you all ought to know—"

"Bunk, you fat idiot!" said Monty Lowther, turning from the table and frowning. "We don't want your disturbing influence—"

"Skimmy's been kidnapped!" yelled Trimble.

"What?"

"Which?"

"Kidnapped!" repeated Baggy.

He had hoped to defer this startling announcement for some little while. Trimble believed in the sensational. But the conditions in the Common-room were such that any prolonged delay in imparting the news might have its own perils. However, Trimble was gratified by the general stare in his direction.

"Kidnapped?" repeated Tom Merry sharply.

"Yes!"

"Who did this kindly act?" inquired Lowther. "We're interested to know the name of the public benefactor, Trimble! Anybody who kidnaps Skimpole is naturally a hero! As long as we've got nicely rid of him we're on the safe side! Go ahead, Tom! I'm waiting to see you make that fatal move! You're practically cornered!"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "This queen of mine—"

"Mine, you mean!" said Manners. "I'm going to pinch it next move!"

"Rats!"

Trimble was disappointed. His announcement about Skimpole had caused no stir whatever.

"You—you silly idiots!" he roared. "Can't you understand that Skimmy is in the hands of crooks?"

"My goodness! Is that fat barrel still here?" asked Tom Merry, looking round. "Trimble, we'll give you five seconds—"

"Yaroooooh!" howled Trimble, backing away. "Don't you touch me, you rotters! I'll go straight to Mr. Railton unless you listen to me! Skimmy's been kidnapped, and it's your duty, Tom Merry, as captain of the Form, to rescue him! He was carried off in a motor-car!"

Tom Merry got up from the chess-table.

"Here, don't mess the game up—," began Manners.

"Just a minute," said Tom. "Now, Trimble, what's this idiotic yarn? Unless you can tell it pretty quickly, I'll run you out of the Common-room on your neck!"

"That's a nice way to talk to me when I come here with some important news!" complained Trimble. "I'm giving you a chance to do the right thing, Tom Merry, and you turn round and threaten me!"

"It'll get beyond the threatening stage soon!" said Tom grimly. "I don't believe a word of this tale, anyhow. Skimmy is probably in his study—"

"He isn't!" said Trimble. "He took his thought-reading machine over to Mr. Ratcliff—"

"What!"

"Fact!" said Trimble. "Racke and Mellish spoofed the poor idiot that old Ratty wanted to see his invention!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I happened to be near when they were telling him," went on Trimble.

"Tying your shoelace, I suppose?" asked Lowther.

"I wasn't!" roared Trimble. "I was sitting in here reading a book. I've got as much right in the Common-room as any of you other fellows! Well, Skimmy swallowed the bait, and took his machine over to old Ratty."

"Great Scott!" said Lowther. "He actually took it!"

"Yes!"

"Then he hasn't been kidnapped—he's been murdered!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rot!" growled Manners. "I don't believe a word!"

"Of course, not!"

"Bump the fat idiot, and chuck him out!"

"It's true!" hooted Trimble. "I tell you, Skimmy took his thought-reading machine over to old Ratcliff—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake & Co. came in, and Arthur Augustus found everybody looking at him.

"Twimble is quite wight," said the swell of St. Jim's. "I don't know how he is managin' to tell the twuth for once, but I can cowwobowate his stowry. Skimmy was foot-lin' enough to take his fwithful invention to old Watty."

"We saw him going," nodded Blake.

"Didn't you wait to see him come back?" asked Tom Merry.

"Our feelings were too delicate," replied Blake. "We didn't want to see the mangled remains hurled forth."

"The remains of Skimmy, or the machine?" asked Lowther.

"Both!"

"Ah, well, perhaps you were wise," said Monty, nodding. "I'm not too squeamish, but the thought of Skimmy going to old Ratcliff with that freak contraption of his—"

"Hold on!" interrupted Tom Merry. "We're straying away from the point—"

"To say nothing of straying away from the game," said Manners gruffly.

"You say that Skimmy was kidnapped, Trimble?" went on Tom.

"Yes, he was!"

"Bai Jove! I wathah think—"

"We're not interested in what you rather think, Gussy," said Tom dryly.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"What happened to Skimpole after he went into the New House?" said the Shell captain. "You were naturally on the watch, Baggy, because you like to see people in misfortune."

"Oh, really, Merry!" protested Trimble indignantly. "I—I just happened to be out there by chance. Old Ratty brought Skimpole to the door, and told him to clear off."

"Didn't he hurl him forth with violence?" asked Lowther, in surprise.

"No. He just told him to go," said Trimble, with a touch of disappointment in his voice. "I think he's pinched old Skimmy's machine, though, and Skimmy wandered about in the quad in a sort of daze."

"Like a mother who has just lost her child!" nodded Monty. "I can understand the poor chap's tortured mind. Let's hope he hasn't wandered off and thrown himself into the Rhyl!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"He was kidnapped!" said Trimble. "My hat! Don't I keep telling you—"

"Weally, Twimble, you cannot expect us to believe a fwithfully impwobable tale like that!" interrupted Arthur Augustus. "There is no weason why Skimmy should be spiwited away—"

"I don't know anything about the reason, but some man called Skimmy to the wall, and suddenly grabbed him, and bundled him over," said Trimble eagerly. "By the time I managed to get up, a motor-car was driving off, and Skimpole was in the back, a prisoner."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't you believe it?" hooted Trimble.

"No, we don't!"

"Wathah not!"

"But—but I went over the wall, and followed the tracks of the car!" yelled Trimble. "But after a bit I got puffed, so I came back! I thought I'd tell you about it, Tom Merry."

"Very kind of you, I'm sure," said Tom, "but I don't appreciate it. You've been dreaming, my son!"

"It sounds more like a nightmare," remarked Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Trimble fairly boiled. Quite frequently he had made the fellows believe his lies—that is, when they were in an unwary mood—and it was a bit thick to come up against this blank wall of derision when he actually had a story to tell.

"All right!" he shouted. "I'll go straight to Mr. Railton!"

"Good! We shall get rid of you like that!"

The door opened, and Talbot came in.

"Anybody seen Skimmy?" he asked.

"Eh?"

"I've looked everywhere for him," said Talbot. "He's not in the study, and I hear that he left the New House half an hour ago. I believe he's borrowed another of my wireless valves, and I'm on his track. The poor idiot seems to have vanished into thin air!"

CHAPTER 13.

Tom Merry & Co. on the Track!

BAGGY TRIMBLE swelled with triumph. "There you are!" he shouted. "What did I tell you?"

Nobody spoke for a moment. Reginald Talbot's corroboration of Baggy's story had been quite unconscious, and was much more effective for that very reason.

"What's wrong?" asked Talbot, looking round. "Why are you all staring at me? I'm not a ghost!"

"Skimmy's been kidnapped, and these chaps won't believe it!" roared Trimble. "But you'll believe it, won't you, Talbot?"

"No!" said Talbot.

"What?"

"Of course I don't believe it!" said Talbot. "Don't talk rot, Trimble! Who the thump would kidnap an idiot like Skimpole?"

"All the same, it's a bit queer," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Don't forget that man who broke into the school last week—and he went for Skimmy's study, too."

"Bai Jove! The wottah we suspected of twyin' to pinch Glyn's ingenious carbuwettah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps there is still some confusion, an' Skimmy has been collahed in place of Glyn!"

"My hat!" said Blake. "That's possible! I didn't know that Gussy could put two and two together like that!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"We needn't imagine all sorts of melodramatic situations, of course, but I think we ought to look into the thing," said Tom Merry briskly. "Come on, Trimble. Show us the place where Skimmy was bunked over the wall."

"What about this game?" demanded Manners aggressively.

"That can wait!"

"Just when I've got you into a knot!" snorted Manners.

"Rats! Your queen—"

"You fathead! I'd nearly got you checkmate—"

"Oh, leave it alone for a bit!" said Blake, with a grin. "I'll admit that chess is more important than Skimmy, but we might as well have a look for the poor chap."

They all went out. Many of them were still sceptical—knowing full well that Baggy Trimble's yarns were generally unreliable. However, Tom Merry was looking rather grim when he found a number of footprints near the school wall. There were some scratches on the wall itself, too.

Clear evidence that Trimble's story was substantially correct!

"Just a minute!" said Tom briskly. "Give me a leg-up, you chaps. I'm going over to have a look at the road. Don't you come. I shall be back in a minute."

Tom Merry dropped lightly over; and after he had struck

one or two matches he whistled softly to himself. The recent shower of rain was proving useful. The tracks of the car were plainly visible, too. Tom was soon back in the quad.

"We're going out!" he declared. "Trimble was right about the car; the tracks are out there—"

"There you are!" shouted Trimble. "Didn't I tell you that—"

"But those tracks might have been made by any car," protested Blake. "This isn't a deserted road, and—"

"No; but this car has been standing for a bit," said Tom shrewdly. "In fact, it stood here while that shower happened. There's a square, dry patch near the grass. It's clear enough that the car didn't leave until after the shower. We'd better investigate."

"Bai Jove! I twust you are not suggestin', Tom Mewwy, that we should wush over the countyside chasin' a motah-cab!"

"Well, not exactly," said Tom; "but I think we ought to follow the tracks for a bit, anyhow. It's not likely that those men would take Skinny far, and we might be able to rescue him."

"It's worth trying!" said Blake.

"But how about getting out?" asked Herries dubiously. "It's after locking-up, and old Taggles won't let us out without a pass."

"We'll get our bikes, anyhow," said Tom Merry.

They hurried off, and were soon back at the gates with their bicycles. Taggles, who probably sensed that something was wrong, came out of his lodge and watched the proceedings with suspicion.

"Open the gates, Taggles; we want to go out!" said Tom Merry.

"Which I ain't goin' to open 'em!" said Taggles.

"But it's important!" urged Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Let's 'ave a look at your passes, young gents, an' I'll open the gates," said Taggles.

"I ain't allowed—"

"We haven't any passes," interrupted Tom Merry. "Something's happened to Skimpole, and we want to look for him."

"Which you ain't goin' out until I get my horders," said Taggles obstinately.

"In the cires, Taggles, I wathah think you should make this an exception to the wule," said Arthur Augustus. "Poor old Skimmay is in twouble, an' evewy minute is of importance."

"Which I wasn't born yesterday!" said Taggles sourly.

Tom Merry looked round and he caught sight of Kildare as the latter crossed from the New House, where he had been visiting Monteith.

"I say, Kildare!" said Tom Merry, running up. "Will you give us a pass to go out for half an hour?"

"The captain of St. Jim's stared.

"All of you?" he asked.

"Yes, we—"

"Can't be done!" said Kildare, shaking his head. "It's like your nerve to ask for it! It'll be supper-time before long—"

"But this is special!" said Tom earnestly. "We've got an idea that Skimpole has got into trouble. Nothing disgraceful, of course; but he might need rescuing. We don't want to say anything to Mr. Railton unless the thing's serious."

Kildare hesitated.

"You'll be back within half an hour?" he asked.

"Promise!" nodded Tom Merry.

Kildare did not want to make too many inquiries, and he knew that he could take Tom Merry's word. He went over to Taggles.

"Let these seven fellows out, Taggles," he said. "I've given them permission to be absent for half an hour."

"Which I'll report 'em if they ain't back on time, Mr. Kildare!" said Taggles firmly.

"What about me?" asked Baggy Trimble indignantly. "You ought to have said eight, Kildare."

"You're not going," replied the prefect.

Hallo, You Chaps! Billy Bunter Speaking!

Billy Bunter, the
Fattest and
Funniest School-
boy in the World,
is calling you,
chums!



"I say, I've just nipped into Quelchy's—he's the master of the Remove at Greyfriars—study and bagged his 'phone. I want to meet all you Gemites and give you a good time. What about introducing ourselves in this week's

'MAGNET' Library.

You'll find me there every Monday. I—Oh, crumbs! I can hear that beast Quelchy coming back! Cheerio, see you later—"

"Oh, I say! I gave the warning—"

Kildare walked off, and Trimble boiled with indignation. The others grinned as they passed out, and as Taggles closed the gates in Trimble's face.

"It's a swindle!" roared Baggy. "I've got more right to—"

His voice diminished as they cycled along the lane, and they forgot all about him. Trimble had done his share, and he wasn't wanted.

The Terrible Three led the way, and their powerful acetylene lamps illuminated the road clearly. The marks of the recently driven motor-car were plainly visible. There had been no other traffic, and the very fact that the tracks hugged the left side of the road proved that the schoolboy sleuths were going in the right direction.

"We sha'n't be able to go far," said Manners. "We've got to be back in half an hour, and that means we must turn back after another ten minutes. This car has probably taken a roundabout course, and is beyond Abbotsford by this time."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "It seems an uttah waste of time to wide off like this. It would be bettah to telephone the police—"

"We'll telephone the police if we're compelled to, Gussy," said Blake. "But there's no sense in making a sensation if we can handle the affair on our own. I've got an idea that Skimpy isn't far off. It stands to reason he wouldn't be taken far afield."

They continued on their way.
 "Hallo! Pull up!" sang out Tom Merry suddenly.
 He jumped off his machine, and the others followed suit.
 "What's wrong?" asked Digby.
 "No more tracks," said Tom, looking down at the road.
 "Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "Isn't that wathah wemakable, deah boys? There is no othah woad heah, so the car must have taken to the fields!"
 "Ass!" said Blake.
 "Weally, Blake—"
 "There's a little cart-track here!" said Tom Merry, as he looked back. "The car must have turned in— Yes! Look at the tracks! By Jove! And there's the car itself!"
 "My only aunt!"
 "Shush!" murmured Blake. "We'd better go easy!"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "Too late for that now!" said Tom Merry grimly. "If there are any men with this car they'll have heard us, so we might as well act boldly! Come on!"
 "Hurrah!"
 "School House to the rescue!"
 They flung their bicycles against the hedge, and ran up the little track. But the car was quite deserted, and there was no sign of human presence.
 "Funny!" said Tom, frowning. "The radiator is hot, proving that the car's been recently used. What's the idea?"
 "Skimmy!" roared Blake at the top of his voice.
 "Bai Jove! That's wathah a good ideah—"
 "Dry up, fathead, and listen!"
 "Weally, Blake—"
 "Let's all shout together, and then listen," said Blake. They raised their voices:
 "Skimmy!"
 And a faint, subdued voice came out of the night:
 "Help!"

CHAPTER 14. Getting Exciting!

"**B**AI JOVE!"
 "That was old Skimmy's voice!" said Manners excitedly.
 "Come on!" rapped out Tom Merry. "I recognise this place now. There's a barn in this meadow, a few yards farther on. Ten to one we'll find Skimpole there!"
 They poured through the gateway into the meadow and rushed into the dark barn. They hardly knew whether to expect an attack or not, but they were too thrilled to care.
 "Skimmy!" called Tom Merry.
 "My dear Merry, I am delighted to hear your welcome voice!" came a relieved voice out of the darkness. "I am in need of assistance! Unaccountably enough, a pair of dastardly ruffians have bound me—"
 "Gweat Scott!"
 "Scratch, scratch!"
 Three or four matches were struck and held aloft, and there was no difficulty in locating the unfortunate Herbert Skimpole. He was over against the other wall of the barn, looking more like a bundle of rags than a human being.
 Within a minute the straps were unbuckled, the heavy rug was unrolled, and Skimpole was assisted to his feet.
 "My dear fellows, I am exceedingly gratified!" he said breathlessly. "Let me congratulate you upon your wonderful—"
 "You can leave congratulations out of it, Skimmy!" said Tom Merry. "How did you get here? And what's happened? Tell us exactly—in half a dozen words!"
 "You might as well expect the moon to drop through the roof!" said Monty Lowther.
 "It is a most trying experience," said Skimpole. "Two ruffianly characters seized me in the vicinity of the quad and forced me against my vehemently expressed inclinations to enter a motor-car. I was conveyed to this building—"
 "We know all that!" said Tom Merry. "Who collared you?"

"From various conversations I was compelled to overhear, I gathered that the men are respectively named Mr. Twist and Mr. Martin," said Skimpole. "It appears that they kidnapped me in order to obtain possession of my great invention—"
 "What!"
 "They are, however, labouring under a preposterous misapprehension," continued Skimpole mildly. "For some reason which I am at present unable to account for, they believed that I was the inventor of Glyn's ridiculous carburettor. An unpardonable blunder, as you will agree—"
 "And where are these men now?" asked Tom sharply.
 "My dear Merry, how should I know?" asked Skimpole.
 "They left me bound up like a trussed pig. That simile, I would remind you, is theirs, and not mine. A perfectly

gratuitous insult— Ah, but one moment!" added Skimmy, with a start. "Dear me! Of course! These reprehensible miscreants have gone back to St. Jim's!"

"Bai Jove!"
 "Exactly!" said Skimpole. "Discovering that I was not in possession of the carburettor, they decided to return to the school in order to gain possession of the apparatus, although why they should exhibit such an interest in the thing is incomprehensible!"

"They've gone back to St. Jim's!" gasped Blake. "But we didn't pass them! And they left their car—"

"I expect they went across the meadows!" interrupted Tom shrewdly. "By Jove! And Glyn & Co. are out this evening!" he added. "They've gone off to Glyn House, and Study No. 11's empty!"

"Precisely!" said Skimpole. "That is one of the reasons why they decided to return. The idea, I gathered, was to annex the apparatus from Glyn's study while the coast was clear."

"My only hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "Did you tell them that Glyn & Co. were out, Skimmy?"

"I may have inadvertently allowed the information to slip out during the course of—"

"You uttah ass!" broke in Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove, Skimmy, I wegard you as a cwass idiot!"

"Really, my dear D'Arcy—"

"He can't help it, Gussy. He may be in the Shell, but he's got the mind of a child!" said Blake gruffly. "He's told those rotters that Glyn & Co. are out, and goodness knows what's happening now!"

"We oughtn't to have left the school!" said Manners.

"Come on! Let's rush back!" snapped Tom Merry.

"Dig, be a sport, and let Skimmy ride on your step!"

"Then I shall be late!" objected Digby.

"Weally, Dig, I twust you are not goin' to waise widiculous objections in a cwiss like this?" asked Arthur Augustus. "It is necessawy that Skimmy should be escorted. As a mattah of fact, he weally wequiah a keepah day an' night!"

Digby didn't like it, but he agreed. And the other six tore off towards the school at top speed.

In the meantime, Messrs. Twist and Martin were losing no time.

They had arrived at the school, and they took a bold course. True, they refrained from disturbing Taggles, deeming it more expedient to drop cautiously over the wall into the quad. But once there they made a bee-line for the School House.

Mr. Martin was in a blue funk; but he had agreed to carry on, and he was keeping his word. Mr. Twist was made of sterner stuff, and he felt certain that this was the only reasonable chance of success.

It was the safest way, too.

Even if they were caught, they could not be given in charge for attempted burglary. They were just walking into the school, looking for somebody, and the chances were that they would not be questioned. Mr. Twist was a great believer in the game of bluff. Experience had taught him that the most astounding things could be performed purely by the aid of bluff.

"We'll march straight in!" he muttered, as they neared the steps. "If anyone stops us, we'll say we're looking for Glyn and brush past. Leave everything to me, old man!"

They tramped in, without realising their luck.

For Baggy Trimble had failed to spot them! It was an extraordinary lapse on Baggy's part. He had only gone into the Fourth Form passage for a minute, in search of some biscuits in Study No. 6. Baggy believed in improving the shining hour. Blake & Co. were safely out of the way, and this was a golden opportunity to raid the cupboard.

The two men were even more lucky.

They arrived at the Shell passage without meeting a soul. They knew their bearings exactly, for they had been near the old school for some weeks, and had taken good care to become acquainted with the school indoor geography. Mr. Twist was a man of thorough methods.

They would probably have created no comment, even if they had been seen, for they were respectably dressed, and had the superficial appearance of gentlemen.

But they reached Study No. 11 in perfect safety. The School House might just as well have been empty, for all the signs of humanity they saw.

They opened the door and slipped in.

"By gosh!" breathed Mr. Martin, as they closed the door.

"Didn't I tell you it would be easy?" said the other exultantly. "In two minutes we'll have the thing, and be away. We'd better not light the gas. My torch will be enough."

He switched on a flashlight, and the beam cut through the darkness of the study, and illuminated the mantelpiece.

Mr. Twist turned the light round.

"Ah!" he murmured tensely.



As Harry Noble walked into the darkened study, a hand grasped his shoulder and swung him round. "Hi!" he gasped. "What the— Yowp!" Glyn and Dane, rushing in, found themselves fighting desperately, for mysterious fists were lunging at them. "My hat!" yelled Glyn. "Raiders!" (See Chapter 14.)

There, on Bernard Glyn's special work-bench, stood the carburettor! There was a small petrol engine near by, clamped to the bench. But the carburettor was detached, and ready to be taken away—just as though Glyn had purposely left it handy!

"Sure it's the right gadget?" asked Martin.

"Didn't we see it on the bike?" said Twist. "This is the carb. all right. Glory, what luck!"

Mr. Twist picked up the carburettor

"Yes, this is the little beauty!" he breathed. "A bit crude, but that doesn't matter a hang. Didn't I tell you it would be easy? Hand over that newspaper on the table. We'll wrap the thing up, and walk out as boldly as we came in. There's nothing like bluff!"

"Listen!" gasped Mr. Martin. "Voices!"

They both stood perfectly still.

"That's nothing!" said Twist. "The boys are always running up and down these passages. We'll wait until they've passed."

But the next few moments promised to be exciting, for those voices belonged to Bernard Glyn & Co.!

The three Shell fellows had just got in, and were coming along to their study for a few minutes before supper. Bernard Glyn was looking very happy, for his father had been paying him some nice compliments about his invention.

"It's a good thing we arranged with old Lathom about to-night's prep," said Kangaroo, as he put his hand on the door of Study No. 11. "No fear of being jumped on to-morrow—"

But it seemed that there was every certainty of being jumped on at the moment. For as Harry Noble spoke, he walked into the study, getting a match ready to strike. A hand grasped his shoulder, and swung him round.

"Hi!" he gasped. "What the— Yowp!"

Kangaroo went hurtling forward. Glyn and Dane, rushing in to see what had happened, found themselves fighting desperately. Mysterious fists were lunging out at them.

"My hat!" yelled Glyn. "Raiders!"

"Figgins & Co.!" gasped Clifton Dane. "Chuck it, Figgy! It's a bit thick— Grooooh!"

The Canadian junior reeled back, and sat down with a violent bump. A fist had struck him which had knocked him half silly.

"Pax!" yelled Bernard Glyn. "Stop it, you idiots!"

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

In utter darkness, they swayed all over the study, still under the impression that they were merely dealing with New House raiders!

CHAPTER 15.

Not Exactly a Triumph!

THUMP!

"Yaroooh!"

Crash!

The fight continued, and the two intruders found themselves against the door at last. Mr. Twist had done nothing to reveal the fact that he and his companion were no ordinary schoolboy practical jokers. The arrival of Glyn & Co. had upset all his plans, but he hadn't given up hope. There was still a chance of getting away—and he had that precious carburettor under his arm all the time.

He felt the door handle within his grasp, but he reached lower, and seized the key. He extracted it, and felt Mr. Martin close behind him.

"Now!" he muttered.

Glyn & Co. made a rush at them at the same moment.

Thud! Thump! Biff!

A rapid exchange of blows, and the rightful owners of the study were sent reeling back. Before they could recover, the door flew open and closed again. They had no time to see who it was who shot out.

Click!

The key turned in the lock. Swift footsteps sounded, and they rapidly receded. Nobody else seemed to be about, for there were no shouts, and silence fell.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Glyn, sitting up near the fender. "I'm hurt!"

"So am I!" mumbled Kangaroo. "One of those rotters biffed me on the jaw with a sledge-hammer, I believe! How many were there?"

"About two dozen!" groaned Dane.

"Not more than two or three, you ass!" said Bernard Glyn, as he rose to his feet, and struck a match. "We shall have to get even for this. The trouble is, we don't know who the dickens did it!"

He lit the gas, and looked round the study in some surprise.

"Well, this is a relief, anyhow," he said. "I half-expected to find the place wrecked! What's the idea of japing a study, and not dismantling it?"

"If Figgins is at the bottom of this, he's losing his ingenuity," said Noble. "Not that old Figgy would do any deliberate damage, of course. But he's a masterpiece for turning things upside down, and putting everything in disorder."

"I expect we came along before they could get started," said Clifton Dane. "Oh, well, we shall have to make some investigations—Hullo!"

He broke off, staring at the bench.

"By Jove!" said Glyn, with a start.

"So you've seen it, too, eh?" said Dane.

"No; I don't see it!" replied Glyn. "That's just the point!"

"Your carburettor has been pinched!" gasped Kangaroo. "My hat! They've had the nerve to bone your carburettor, Glyn!"

Glyn began to look thoughtful.

"I say!" he said, in a strange voice. "I don't believe they were New House raiders at all. They were men!"

"Men!"

"Two of them!" continued the schoolboy inventor. "That's why their fists felt so beastly heavy! They came here to steal that carburettor, and they got away with it!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"What the dickens shall we do?"

Glyn wasted no time.

He turned and thumped on the door with all his strength. This was an occasion when no time should be lost.

Bang, bang, bang!

Only a few seconds elapsed before Racke turned the key in the lock, and flung the door open. He looked astonished as Glyn & Co. came rushing out.

"What's the merry idea?" asked Aubrey Racke, staring.

"Thanks!" gasped Glyn. "Have you come up?"

"Yes."

"Did you see anybody going out?"

"Not to speak of," replied Racke.

"We were locked in this study by some rotters, and we believe they've bolted," said Glyn. "We thought you might have seen—"

"Sorry, an' all that, but I'm not interested in your little worries," yawned Racke. "Glad to have been of service, but I don't know anythin' about the bizney."

He went along to his own study, and Glyn & Co. hastened downstairs. They were more and more convinced that this affair was no mere jape, but a deliberate burglary.

Tom Merry & Co. were in the quad at that moment, too. They had poured through the gateway, irritated by Taggles' slowness in getting his keys out. The porter was rather disappointed. He had been rather hoping that the juniors would be late, so that he could have the pleasure of admonishing them. But there they were, back nearly ten minutes before their time limit had expired.

"Come on!" said Tom Merry, rushing for the School House.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Then Tom pulled up abruptly. He caught sight of two lurking figures on the other side of the quad.

"They're here!" he yelled. "This way!"

They altered their course, and swerved under the elms, into a far corner of the quad. They caught sight of the two figures again, speeding off towards Little Side. But

after another two minutes Tom Merry checked himself. The mysterious figures had completely vanished in the gloom of the night.

"It's no good!" he panted. "They're gone!"

"Bai Jove, what an uttah fwyot!"

"It's like looking for a needle in a haystack," continued Tom Merry. "It's no good chasing across the playing-fields—we can never hope to find the beggars now."

"Hadh't we better get our bikes again, and rush back to the car?" asked Blake. "We can get there first, and be ready to greet them when they arrive!"

"By Jove, yes!" said Manners. "That's a good idea!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus excitedly. "You are weally impwoyin', Blake!"

"Brrrr!"

"It's a chance, anyhow," said Tom Merry. "But I doubt if we can do it. There'll be a fuss with Taggles, and a lot of delay. Those men have got a good start, and they're half way there by now. There's not much chance of getting to the place before the car leaves."

They hurried back into the quad, and were just in time to meet Glyn & Co. as the latter trio came hurrying out.

"Hullo!" shouted Glyn. "Did you see two men—"

"What!" roared the others.

"We surprised them in our study," said Glyn. "The rotters lashed out at us in the dark and escaped."

"Bai Jove!"

"Then they locked us in, and we had to get Racke to let us out," put in Dane. "Have you seen the rotters?"

"We didn't exactly see them, but we spotted a couple of dim forms bunking towards the playing-fields," said Tom Merry. "We thought about going out on our bikes, to cut them off, but it's not necessary now. If you surprised them, they must have failed—"

"Failed!" shouted Kangaroo. "They got it!"

"The carburettor?" yelled Blake.

"Yes! They scooted with it!"

"Gweat Scott!"

There were many shouts of consternation.

"We'd better make a rush for it!" said Blake breathlessly. "There's just a chance, even now. These men have got a car up the road, Glyn, and if we can only get there first—"

"Oh, don't trouble!" said Bernard Glyn.

"Eh?"

"We needn't bother about it!"

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Gussy. "Am I to undahstand, Glyn, that you are expressin' a desiah to let these wascals go?"

"Too much trouble to chase them," said Glyn coolly.

"But they pinched your carburettor!"

"Yes, I know, and I'm pleased—"

"Pleased!" echoed a dozen voices.

"Well, it proves that the thing is worth something if these men risk their liberty to burgle my study," replied Bernard Glyn. "I've always said that my carburettor was worth—"

"You—you hopeless crank!" shouted Tom Merry.

"You're nearly as bad as old Skimmy!"

"Not quite!" chuckled Bernard Glyn. "You see, that carburettor wasn't complete."

"Eh?"

"The vital section of it—the vaporising apparatus—isn't there," grinned the schoolboy inventor. "Of course, they couldn't tell that by a cursory examination. They've only got the shell, so to speak. The real works have been dismantled. Those chaps are quite welcome to the brass and tin they've carried off!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Then—then they haven't really pinched your carburettor at all?"

"That thing on the bench was only my original experimental model—minus the vaporiser," said Glyn coolly.

"The real model—that is, the one I intend to enter for the prize—is at Glyn House."

"Well, I'm blessed!"

"So I fancy those rascals will get a bit of a shock when they examine their spoils," said Glyn. "Why trouble to chase them? Let them have a little satisfaction for an hour or two."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. were relieved. And when Skimpole turned up, a few minutes later, with Digby, everything was all right. It was generally felt that there would be no need to report any of these happenings to Mr. Railton.

Messrs. Twist and Martin had had their trouble for nothing, and they would soon learn that their efforts did not exactly constitute a triumph.

THE END.

(Has the last been seen of Messrs. Twist and Martin or will they make another attempt to bag Glyn's patent? See next Wednesday's grand story—"THE BOGUS INVENTOR!" and be prepared for a big surprise.)

ANSWERS

Every Saturday...PRICE 2d

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Address all letters: The Editor, The "Gem" Library,
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Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

HE FUNKS THE DENTIST'S CHAIR!

GEMITE," of Liverpool, writes and tells me that his teeth have been giving him a lot of trouble of late, and although the pain, to quote his own words, is "simply awful!" he hasn't enough courage to visit the local dentist and have these troublesome teeth seen to. Now, I think "Gemite" is frightening himself unnecessarily. The dentists of to-day, generally speaking, are very clever people, and they don't, as so many schoolboys imagine, draw teeth for the sheer love of giving folks a sample of the tortures of the old Inquisition. That idea is all wrong; obviously so. The dentist, like most of us, has his work to do in order to justify his existence, and the better he does his work the greater is his success. To cause people unnecessary pain is not going to bring him success. On the contrary, it would soon place him in a position where he would have to look round for another means of livelihood. Therefore, my Liverpool chum would do well to visit his dentist without delay. If my correspondent's teeth are really bad, a timely visit to the dentist may save him a heap of trouble, time, and money, to say nothing of the pain from which he must now be suffering. Pluck up your courage, "Gemite," and get busy. It's a form of cowardice to funk the dentist's chair like this, and really you don't seem to be the chap who funks anything, if one can judge from your letter. Rather would I say that you are highly strung and a trifle imaginative. Write me again.

WHO WILL WIN THE F.A. CUP?

A keen reader of this paper does me the honour of thinking that I can tell him at this stage the ultimate winner of the Football Association Cup. I wish I could. I have had occasion before to tell GEM readers what a bad prophet I am in the weather line, and honestly, I am just as hopeless in this matter of the F.A. Cup. At the time of writing there are eight teams left in this stirring footer battle, and on Cup form they are fairly evenly matched. It must be remembered, too, the best of prophets are apt to lose their reputations in the footer business, for Cupties have a happy knack of upsetting all calculations on form. But let us hope that the best team will win. That's sporting, anyway!

"THE HANDY 'BLOKE'!"

That's what they call a reader who lives in Hants, because he's capable of darned his own socks, cooking his own "grub," making his own bed, and so on. Well, personally, I think "Handy Bloke" is a chap who is going to get on in the world. He's evidently mighty independent, and that spirit gets people a long way, providing other qualities react to it in proportion. Yet despite the busy life this "Bloke" leads, he tells me that he still finds time to read the GEM every week. What is more, he saves his copies and binds them every six months. Very handy, indeed! This is a tip for you other "blokes."

THE ARTFUL OWL!

What do you think of a fellow who orders a vast quantity of tuck in the name of his Form master, and then expects to get away with it? You would say, methinks, that that optimistic fellow is fairly asking for it. All the same for that, you'd be keen to see how he managed to work this wheeze, whether it met with success or not, I'd wager. And such a wheeze forms the basis of this week's ripping story in our Companion Paper, the "Magnet." Those of you who make a practice of reading this paper will at once have jumped to the conclusion that Billy Bunter is the Johnny responsible for this stunt, and you are right. The fat Owl of the Remove will dare anything for a good feed.

Read for yourselves in this week's bumper issue of the "Magnet" exactly how he goes to work. The title of the yarn is "Bunter's Brain Storm!" That'll make you curious, I know!

THE BOAT RACE!

Here's a letter from a reader signing himself "Todmorden Tim," in which I am asked a pack of questions about the earliest aquatic races on the Thames. I am afraid I cannot do much about it until the Boat Race is over. It is the first item to be considered, and a grand scene it will be all the way from Putney to Mortlake with crowds of fellows shouting like mad, and everybody out for a holiday. Of course there were races on the Thames in the bygone. They say that Julius Caesar lost his whiskers near Brentford in a set-to; it was a close shave and no error! But in the past the business of racing on the Thames was no joke! This was because the river, like some practical jokers, did not know how far it was decent to carry a joke. For my part, hating carrying packages, I would drop the beastly thing in the first ditch. But as regards the Thames in the muddy old times, it flooded the country pretty generously. You would start from Putney and, maybe, find yourself heading for the coast, just because the river had taken the wrong turning. Luckily, the struggle between the rowers of the Isis and the Cam, can take place under the best possible conditions. And another cheery fact is that the Boat Race is the start of the river season. All the little tubs which have been laid up during the winter, turn up again fresh as paint.

HE DOESN'T WANT TO SMOKE!

A GEM reader of the age of sixteen writes and tells me that his pals chip him no end because he won't smoke cigarettes. This correspondent declares that he has no fancy for tobacco smoke, not because he's a "goody-goody," but simply because it doesn't appeal to him. Should he, in view of all this chipping that goes on, force himself to smoke? Certainly not! That would be tantamount to hoisting the white flag. The longer my chum can manage to hold out against the fascinations of tobacco, the better it will be for his health. After all, he hasn't finished growing yet, and there's plenty of time to take up smoking when he's passed out of his teens. Stick it, my chum; chipping won't hurt you. Besides, these pals of yours will grow tired of pulling your leg if you don't appear to take any notice of it.

A HOOKED NOSE:

"F. B.," of Bristol, seems frightfully worried because his nose is hook-shaped instead of being aquiline. He wants to know if there is any "medicine" that will turn this troublesome hooked nose into a "straight" one. I'm afraid there isn't, "F. B." But why worry? There is nothing to be ashamed of in possessing a nose that isn't straight. It isn't the straightness of the nose that counts in life, it's the "straightness" of the owner. Savvy?

NEXT WEDNESDAY'S PROGRAMME:

"THE BOGUS INVENTOR!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

This sparkling yarn winds up the special "invention" series. In it you will learn the names of the fortunate winners of the handsome money prizes Mr. Glyn has offered; also you will read of the shady scheming of a junior whose greed of gold proves too strong for him. Don't miss this yarn, chums.

"BEYOND THE SILVER GLACIER!"

By ARTHUR S. HARDY.

Look out, too, for another grand instalment of this amazing adventure serial; also for the next jolly poem from our Rhymester. Chin, chin, chums!

Your Editor.

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BEGIN THIS GRAND NEW ADVENTURE SERIAL NOW. CHUMS!

THE EXPEDITION SETS OUT! Knowing nothing of the hidden perils that beset their path, Adam and his pal Harry set out to find the former's father and sister, who are held captive somewhere in the African interior by a race of unknown people!



A Grand Story of Peril and Adventure in Unknown Lands.

By **ARTHUR S. HARDY.**

(Introduction on page 25.)

Beavan is Grateful!

"**B**AAS! The death bird!" muttered Giba, shaking at the knees.

Beavan, for pure devilment, stepped into the hut and came out with a blank cartridge, which he set in his rifle and took aim.

"Shall I bring this death bird down, Giba?" he mocked.

"Why, yes! The Great White Baas is a sure shot."

The speck was large now, coming up on the wind at an amazing pace.

Beavan had never seen an aeroplane before, but he knew all about them, for modern newspapers reached him regularly even in that out of the way spot.

The speed of this thing amazed him, as also did its great size. He could tell in a flash by the movements of the aeroplane that it intended to make a landing there. And so, as the great machine flew overhead, he fired his blank.

Then to native eyes a miracle occurred.

With a deafening roar the aeroplane swept overhead. Then, having passed the clearing, it circled round again and again, coming lower and ever lower. And, finally vanishing beyond the tops of the trees, it disappeared. Only for a moment! Then its whirring was heard again, and it came into view once more, flying so low as almost to brush the tree-tops.

Then down it came nosing towards the earth, to land and run on even wheels, taxiing grandly until it moved no more.

With frightened screams the natives dived for cover. As the propeller of the aeroplane ceased to whirl they peeped round posts and under floors to look. Giba, who had tumbled head over heels in amazed ecstasy, rose and, with the dust covering him, waved aloft his arms.

"Wow!" he yelled. "See, the Great White Baas has slain the big bird. The death tube has never failed. Great is the name of the White Baas, he who never misses!"

And then, as the belly of the great white bird seemed to open and a helmeted white man, with skin tanned to coffee-brown, stepped out to alight upon the ground below him with the grace of a ballet dancer, Giba ceased his shouting and, fleeing for the nearest hut, dived beneath its floorboards like a diving expert into a water tank.

Right and left the natives scattered. In horror those who could not flee looked to see yet another white man appear.

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Each of these dropped safely to the ground, and then they walked up to Beavan.

"Walter Beavan, I presume," said a fair-haired, blue-eyed, bright-looking boy, who wore full length boots, suit of linen, sun-helmet, and the rest.

"At your service, sir," returned Beavan, bowing politely, and there was that in his cultured tone that made the strangers stare at him in amazement.

"We evidently judged our reckoning well," remarked the boy, smiling brightly. "We were given our bearings, and flew straight to them. My name is Adam Byrne, son of George Willis Byrne, the explorer. I have come to make personal inquiries about that message which was brought to Baruda, and which, I believe, you received, Mr. Beavan."

"And which I still hold," remarked the black-bearded settler, as he stretched out a hand with fingers of iron.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Byrne. I am sorry to have bad news to greet you with—"

"Not that—"

"No. As far as we know your father and your sister are still alive. But the expedition which started out from here to try and find trace of them has returned. Two of the natives were killed by wild beasts—being carried off from camp at night, despite the fires—one of the white men, a Boer, and three more natives, were drowned while fording the Liambi river. Fever weakened the rest. They penetrated to parts hitherto unexplored, but found no trace, and heard no news of your father from any of the natives they encountered. A remnant of the returning force left here only two days ago."

Adam frowned.

"I am disappointed," he said. "And yet I am not surprised. We came here from England with all possible speed. We have saved weeks of travel by flying. I have another plane on the way. It will arrive here in due course. Mr. Beavan, my friend, Harry Franklin, who is going to help me to try and find my father."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Franklin."

The older man and the younger one looked hard at each other. Beavan seemed to like both the visitors.

They were not quite so sure about him. There was something defiant and at the same time furtive and even repellent about Beavan, the settler, who had come into their lives so strangely. They had heard that he was a strange

man who shunned white men, preferring to live among natives.

Beavan ruled as a king in Baruda. Only once or twice had he been known to march south and mix with men of his own race, and even then it had been to barter and sell. He killed big game, sold skins and trophies. He occasionally sold ivory. He had even been known to bring in precious stones of considerable value, which he sold at a mere song—comparatively. And yet it was a common secret that had Beavan chosen to go back to England whence he had come, he would take a fortune with him. Yet it seemed he preferred to live on the fringe of the great Baruda forest, leaving it at times to roam in fever-infested swamps and places in search of game or plunder.

The boys and Beavan chatted for a while, and as they chatted natives showed themselves timidly, emerging from their hiding-places one by one to stare at the white strangers and then to creep stealthily and in terror nearer and nearer to the great aeroplane.

Then at last, when familiarity had bred contempt for it—since it had no tusks or teeth and did not show fight, and since they could not find the Baas' bullet-hole, they began to climb on to its fuselage and hang on to its propeller.

"I suppose," said Beavan wistfully, turning his strange, restless eyes upon his visitors, "you have brought stores with you? I am tired of sun-dried meat and tinned bully."

"You shall have a feast fit for a king," laughed Adam. "But it will be mainly a tinned feast, all the same, Beavan."

They walked back to the aeroplane from which Beavan sent the natives scuttling with a harsh command. Adam climbed into it, tossed down out of it a pound tin of tobacco and a pipe and some matches.

Then followed tin after tin of eatables—coffee, sugar, condensed milk, and finally, a bottle of whisky.

These things were conveyed to the log cabin, which was open to the fresh, clean wind and air.

Then Beavan began to tell them at once about the coming of the messenger and showed them the note which Adam's father had sent.

Adam, who had memorised every word of that fateful broadcast message, took the paper in a hand that shook. His eyes flamed as he looked at it. There were notebooks at home in his father's desk now which contained identically the same paper as this sheet he recognised. And one glance at the writing was enough.

"It is my father's hand!" he declared. "Harry, I think it is proof beyond doubt that my father and Rosa are alive."

And then he asked about the messenger. What was he like? Whence had he come, did Beavan think? Of what race was he?

Beavan led them out into the clearing and across it towards the forest. There, set amid the trees was an earth mound, over which heavy stones had been set to prevent roaming wild beasts from raking out the dead flesh that lay at its last rest there.

"Here we buried him, Byrne," said the settler gruffly. "He was almost dead when he stumbled to my hut in the cool of evening just after the moon had risen, and my dogs' barking aroused me. Next morning he died. He spoke two words of English only. The rest of his gabbling was in a language I have never heard before. I had never seen such a man before. His eyes were starting from his head with fever. He was bare to the bones. He had been sorely wounded, and his flesh was not of one hue—"

"What's that?" cried Harry Franklin, startled.

"He was of a copper-brown, and evidently the men of his race are tall and well-built, judging from the size of his frame. But there were great patches of his body which were of a colour varying from the natural flesh tint of the Englishman to a deeper, proper pink. At first I believed that the change had been wrought by the illness from which the man was dying. But after he was dead and I looked more critically and closely, I found that the colouring was natural. He was a man of an unknown race."

"Of a native race which are half brown and half flesh-coloured or pink?" asked Adam incredulously.

"That is what I would suggest. The face of the man was little more than a skull when he tottered to my hut. But the features would be regular, I should imagine, with the flesh on 'em, and quite good-looking for a native."

"Have you ever heard of such a race of people?" "Never. I have made exhaustive inquiries since. I have trekked far afield in search of news. I have spoken to men who, like myself, have lived in and penetrated the wilds. I have questioned natives. Some say they have heard of such a people, but never seen them. They seem a mythical race. In listening to the ravings of the dying man I tried to find a clue. Often he struck his breast as he stared at me and muttered, 'Hokahula,' which might be his own name, or the name of his race, or, on the other hand, might not."

"And you mean to tell me the man was piebald, or skewbald?" cried Harry Franklin in amazement.

"Absolutely. That describes him exactly. There was more brown than pink in his skin, and his hair was dark, and did not curl so closely to the scalp as that of the ordinary negro."

They turned away from the grave, and as they returned to the hut or cabin, Beavan smoking the fresh tobacco and pipe with absolute relish, the man told the rest of the astonishing story.

They were still talking about it over dinner, which was made up of the half a dozen things Adam had provided, and washed down by the most fragrant coffee.

Afterwards Beavan tackled the whisky, which he swallowed greedily.

"And tell me," asked Adam eagerly, "have you any theory as to where the message came from, and where we are to fly to?"

Beavan shrugged.

"You put a difficult question," he answered.

"If you look at a large scale map of Baruda territory you will see names set down there as thick as flies in summer. You would imagine, if you did not know and live here, that it was an easy journey from place to place. Instead of which there are hundreds of miles between each and all, and most of the places are merely a name. Some white man has been there. He has stuck down a post, and said, 'This is Kisuba, or this is Delbarco,' to state a case. And so, when a map is made, in go the names, and who should ever find them who sought? Fly north-west of here and you strike the Congo Free State. Go north-east, and you may hit what was once called German East Africa, or go on till you reach the British East. You might fly to Portuguese West Africa, if you were lucky enough to last as long. South you would not go, for no skewbald race lives there."

The black-bearded settler, filling his pipe and smoking like a chimney, drew out the precious note once more.

"See what George Byrne says!" he cried. "'In the city of Barcoomba, north of the Silver Glacier, beneath the Mountain of the Hidden Crest, for which steer! Where is this Silver Glacier? Where is this Mountain of the Hidden Crest? I have seen and heard of neither, nor has anyone else that I have ever met. But northward somewhere must surely be the way to go!' Here he pointed dramatically at the star-spangled sky. Never had Adam or Harry seen such a sky. In the great sweep of black the stars twinkled like illuminated brilliants of gigantic size."

Among them all shone the small but piercing eye of the North Star—the Polar Star to which Beavan's finger pointed.

"If you could fly at night," he said, "I'd say let that be your guide."

"We can make the north either by night or day," smiled Harry.

Adam turned his head. Through the chinks in the palisade he could see native eyes blinking at him. Out there in the open, well in view, rested the giant aeroplane.

WHO'S WHO!

GEORGE WILLIS BYRNE, big-game hunter and explorer, who left England four years ago with his daughter,

ROSA, to explore Africa's unknown lands, and who, after wandering into the wild country north-west of Pocatello, were lost, their party of natives being murdered to a man.

GEORGINA and ADAM, Willis Byrne's wife and son respectively.

HARRY FRANKLIN, Adam's old school chum, and

WALTER BEAVAN, a settler in Baruda.

Long weary years had passed—but still no news of the missing ones—and now on the fourth anniversary, just to cheer his mother up, Adam takes her to Manor Court, where the Franklins, old friends of the Byrnes like to spend the evening there. The little party is listening to the wireless music when news is suddenly broadcast to the effect that the famous explorer, Byrne, and his daughter are still alive, although prisoners in the hands of a

strange people in a city called Barcoomba, north of the Silver Glacier, and beneath the mountain of the Hidden Crest.

Elated at such gladdening news, and with the possibilities of rescue running through his mind, Adam at once begs his mother's sanction to go forth and search for his father and sister. Mrs. Byrne gives her consent, and not to be outdone, Harry Franklin declares that he will accompany Adam. Accordingly hasty preparations are made, and in due course the expedition leaves England.

A few weeks later, Beavan, who had been responsible for the white man's message reaching England, is sitting by his hut when Giba, his native servant, informs him that a great white bird has been sighted in the distance.

"Be hanged, you're right!" groans Beavan, gaping skywards, and recognising an aeroplane.

(Now read on.)

Beyond he could see the black outline of the forest whose trees were stirred by the moaning wind.

How strange it all seemed! So far away from the Grange at Studley and his mother, and yet so near.

The first part of the great task he had set himself was done. He and the first of his aeroplanes had arrived in Baruda. Soon the other would come, with its sturdy natives, and those whom he had engaged to help.

And then, when all was ready, they would rise up into the skies and fly northward, in the hope that they might find the Mountain of the Hidden Crest.

That done, the rest, Adam told himself, would be easy. Though he was only cheating himself, trying to make believe, he knew.

Perhaps he and Harry would leave their bones to rot in some untrodden place. Perhaps they would be forced to alight, only to find themselves at the mercy of natives who would kill them after they had made their first big fight with the rifles, the Mills' bombs, and the machine-gun, and other weapons they had brought with them.

But, even so, what then? They would have tried, and have failed; but at least they would have tried, and no more can be expected of any man.

The Storm!

ADAM BYRNE and Harry Franklin remained in Baruda the better part of three weeks, and during all this time they were busy preparing for the great flight.

Two days after their arrival the second plane arrived, having followed directions to a nicety, and coming down in the great clearing, which the pilot could well have missed, for it looked no bigger than a pocket-handkerchief from the sky, but for the presence of the aeroplane at rest upon the ground, and the flag Beavan had run up to the top of a high pole—a great, but tattered and somewhat faded, Union Jack.

When this second great plane came down, the natives rushed to see, and an amazing sight presented itself, for out of its interior—which carried a big store of material and foods, weapons, ammunition, and huge petrol and oil supplies—came two white men, an air pilot and an engineer, and six powerful and grinning natives, each of whom was armed.

The air pilot was a man named Sandy McTavish—oh, yes, a Scotsman, and a very capable and likeable one at that; his engineer, or mechanic, was a Cockney named Brown—one of the great family of Browns—Christian name James or Jimmy.

Gifts were made to the villagers of Baruda and to Walter Beavan.

And then the final preparations were made and the last counsel held.

By a process of elimination it was decided—Beavan cordially agreeing—to fly north by east, for in that direction the biggest mountains that were known existed, and it was possible, in that unknown region, that they might come upon the Mountain of the Hidden Crest, beneath which was the Silver Glacier, over which, presumably—since the dead skewbald native had been unable to inform them better—they would have to make their way in order to reach the unknown country of the Hokahulas—if such were the name of the people—whose capital was Barcoomba.

They were busy days. Stores being examined and checked, weapons and ammunition gone over, petrol and oil stores calculated, and the machines tuned up to the highest pitch of perfection.

And, during the period of their stay, Adam saw Walter Beavan, the black-bearded, morose, and lonely settler, transformed into a gay and likeable man.

Chief of the presents which Adam was going to leave behind was a gramophone and fifty records, with needles enough to last a lifetime.

The gramophone—one of the latest and best—ground out its music day and night to the intense delight of the natives, who danced and sang to the lil of the tunes—some of these being airs from "No No Nanette," some dances from the Savoy dance bands—so small is this world of ours!

Beavan appreciated it. It made him feel a boy again. It brought back memories, too, which filled his eyes with tears and softened his hard face.

In one brief moment of confidence Beavan spoke about himself—but only once.

"Mr. Byrne," he said, in a voice charged with emotion, "you'll never know what this coming of yours has meant to me. You and your friend Harry Franklin have showed

me that I'm not all beast. I came here to live my life through and die my own way in this place back of beyond—never mind why. You have talked about places I have known and loved. You have mentioned people whom I have met. And I, too, was educated at—well, never mind where. When you depart, you'll take my blessings with you. In this tinkling instrument"—and he pointed to the gramophone—"you will have given me something which will keep me civilised. Whenever the black thoughts come I can turn the handle, play a tune, and drive the devil away."

He laughed and spread wide his arms. "And some day," he went on, raising his shaggy head so that he looked upwards at the sky, "a call may come which will take me back to England. I sha'n't go to meet it. I shall wait for it here. If it doesn't come—well, they can bury me as I buried the skewbald Hokahula, and plant the stones upon me to keep the wild beasts from me. What's the odds?"

He shrugged his shoulders, looked at them, seemed as if he meant to say more, then turned his back upon them, with shoulders bent, and walked moodily away.

The next day the next phase of the great adventure began. Adam and Harry Franklin in the one plane—and each had done his share of flying at home—Sandy McTavish, Brown, and the six natives in the other, and each machine heavily laden with its miscellaneous cargo, started from the clearing—which was the settlement or town of Baruda. The pilots had taken their places. The engines were purring merrily. Arrayed in the form of a square, facing inwards, and surrounding the clearing, were some fifteen hundred to two thousand natives, who had come from miles around to see the expedition make its move.

Tom-toms and weird string instruments played a dirge. At the masthead fluttered the British flag, emblem of freedom and of fair play.

Having warmed their engines, power was shut off. Adam, leaving his pilot's seat, stared over the side of the great plane at Beavan, who stood, an imposing, black-bearded figure just below.

"Good-bye and good luck, Beavan!" called Harry, waving his hand.

Beavan doffed his worn and dirty broad-brimmed felt.

"And good luck go with you, Byrne lad," he said. "May you find your way with ease, and return in safety. And if ill-luck befall, and you should fail, maybe Walter Beavan will follow and save you; and if you're not alive he'll find you dead and bring your bones back for honourable burial!"

He turned away, waved the natives ahead further back. Then he raised his gun and fired a signal.

As the shot echoed upon the air Adam started his engine again, and a second or so later the machine began to move.

Soon the wheels were turning rapidly. Then, with a rush, the great aeroplane left the ground and rose above the heads of the cowering blacks.

Up and up into the blue—with the second machine following less than a minute behind.

Harry, glancing back, saw the clearing vanish. For a while the fluttering Union Jack could be seen amid the green of the trees. Then that, too, was left behind, and they flew onwards at a great speed, heading for north-by-east. The great flight had begun!

They flew all that day, and towards sundown alighted in open grassland, where the stunted growth was burnt almost brown, and which, to their delight, afforded a perfect landing.

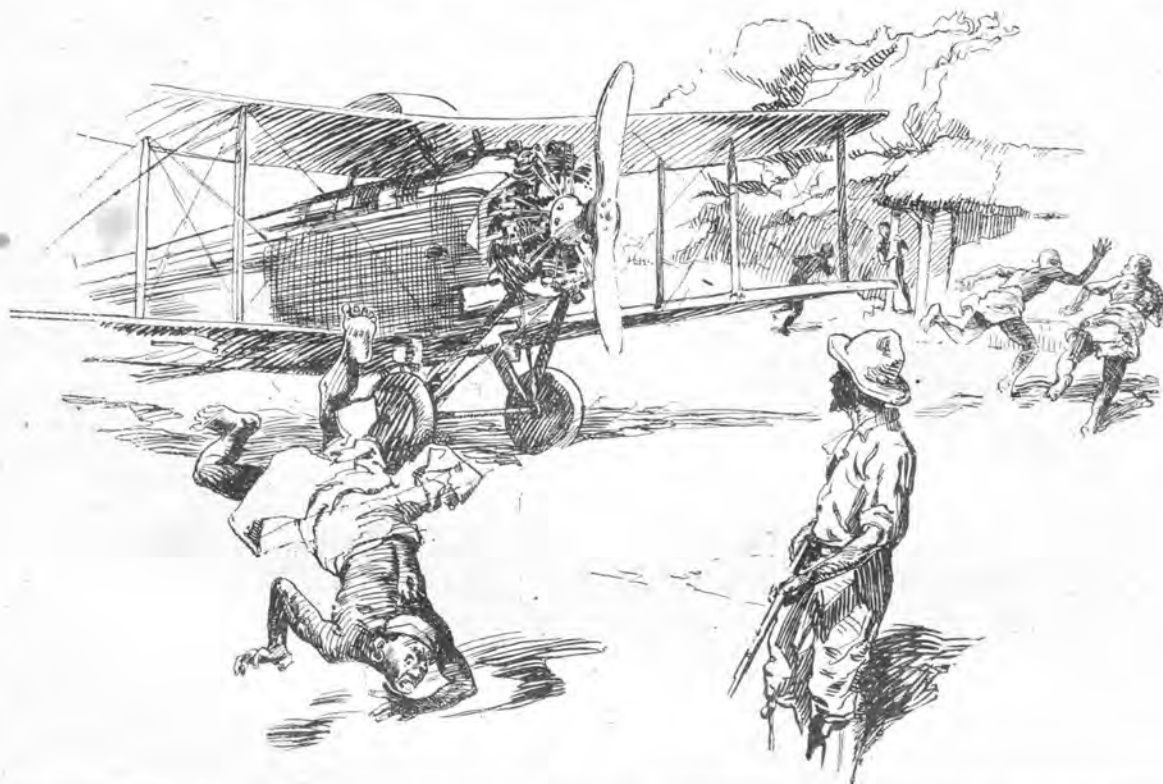
They stretched their legs to ease themselves, afterwards ate, then slept, whilst strange beasts walked round the machines, making weird noises and uttering wild cries.

When the sun was well up and they had breakfasted and cleaned themselves, the journey was resumed.

They passed over dense forests, then over swamps and burnt-up, impoverished-looking land. They came to hills and small mountains, over which they flew. At times they would see a horde of natives standing below, staring at them, waving, flashing their arms. There were occasions when they saw wild beasts of a hundred different varieties, it seemed, most of them horned like antelopes or antlered like great stags, some of them striped, some of them patched of skin. And these also looked up and stared.

Once they flew above a dense wood where the trees were burning, the wind blowing the smoke-cloud in a fog which stretched for miles.

But no sign of a Mountain with a Hidden Crest did they esp. They passed over swamp and river and arid land;



As the plane came to a standstill the natives dived for cover. Giba, in his anxiety to get clear of the fearsome monster, tumbled head over heels. "Wow!" he yelled. "The Great White Baas has slain the big bird!" (See Page 24.)

and then as they sped onwards above closely-growing trees again, the sky suddenly darkened, and, without warning, save that they had seen the blackness closing in on them, and had not known how to avoid it, they drove right into the heart of a storm such as Adam had never seen or dreamt of.

The other plane was within half a mile of them, they knew. But when Harry looked back—Adam was steering—he lost sight of the big plane in the mist of rain and cloud. They had seen flashes of lightning sweeping in around them long ago, but could not descend because of the trees below. Now they had to ride on through the storm or perish. The day had gone. It was night—black night! The lightning cut down in broad flashes which seemed to expand and strike them.

The weight of the thunder crashes in itself was enough to beat them down, it seemed. Whither were they going? Harry had no means of telling. There were times when he felt as if he must let all go.

The deluge was of tropical violence. Water poured in at the watertight covering of the plane. It ran in a rising tide about their feet.

The beat of it on the outside and wings of the plane was terrifying to listen to.

Zip-zip-zip-zag! flashed the lightning, and then came the crashing din of the thunder-clap.

Harry, creeping close behind Adam, crouched. Ahead of them blackness; each side of them blackness! Below—what?

"Adam—Adam, is this the end?" asked Harry, controlling his voice somehow.

Adam just heard and shouted his answer in the roar of the storm:

"I can't think so, Harry. I dare not think so. We will find dad and Rosa first."

On they flew, losing count of time. On and on, amid the ever-increasing violence of the terrifying storm which had not reached its limit yet.

The rain poured down as water over a fall.

On and on, until of a moment the sky seemed to open in a great flare of vivid light as wide as the ocean. Then something struck the aeroplane, and they went down, down, down!

"Good-bye!" cried Harry, gripping Adam's shoulder. "God bless you, Adam—"

"And you, Harry!" Harry choked as he loosened his safety-belt.

He stood erect. But only for a moment, for the machine was nose-diving, and he was flung forward and outward into space just at the moment the aeroplane crashed into branches that tore—and the engine burst into flames!

The machine caught in the sagging boughs that held as a spider's web holds a fly, and stayed. Thrown clear of it, for the covering had been rent and torn, Adam fell sheer down. But leafy branches caught him, checked the violence of the drop, until, bruised and breathless, he found himself hanging among the leaves, with the flare of the burning plane above.

The rain tore down from the leaden sky. The burning petrol set fire to the tree. Like magic the fire ran. And Adam, afraid, but left with life, scrambled, somehow—he knew not how—to the saturated earth below.

He leaned against a near-by tree, badly shaken, and staring up at the leaping flames in horror. And as he looked something moved in the forest. Leafy branches of the thick undergrowth were set aside by a pair of enormous hands, and then as Adam, gasping, felt for his automatic, a huge, misshapen man, staggering towards him, dropped upon his knees, and, grovelling, bowed his head upon the ground.

"Mercy, O white master, flyer of the air!" he moaned. "Save me from those who would kill!"

And then, as he raised his head and looked upward, out of terror-stricken eyes, Adam saw that there was a great gaping wound in the strange creature's side, from which the lifeblood ran out red.

Friend or Foe?

STILL stunned by the shock of the accident, and overawed by the fearful violence of the storm, Adam stood rigid, his back against the tree, the automatic in his hand, staring at the man who knelt before him.

The whole thing was like part of a fantastic dream. In the momentary lulls between the thunder crashes Adam fancied he heard the snap of tree limbs, and in the light of the burning aeroplane he saw torn leaves fly by like snowflakes, tossing and swirling before the drive of the storm. The sizzle and crack of the lightning as it tore down was frightening. And then the rain, the beat of the deluge, which came down like a sheet, blinding him.

Adam's right hand wavered. His index finger pressed against the trigger. But hearing the strange-looking apparition, which he supposed must be a man, speak understandable English, he turned the barrel of the weapon aside.

"Who are you?" he asked, when he could make his voice heard. He found it a relief to speak.

"Save me! They would kill me! They would kill me!" muttered the prostrate native.

"Who would kill you?"

"The Hekebus—the white bone men," answered the misshapen negro, looking upward with a ghost of a smile broadening his thick lips.

"And you are a friend?"

"Your slave, oh white flyer of the air."

"You speak good English," said Adam, shouting to make his voice carry above the storm. "Where did you learn?"

"From my white masters, oh new baas."

Adam smiled grimly. Strange, it seemed, that even out here in the unknown forest he should come upon a coloured man in these amazing circumstances who spoke the English tongue.

Adam's brain began to clear. He was recovering from the numbing effects of the crash and his tumble from the burning plane. But the result was only to increase and not to diminish his alarm. To be alone in such a place, in the deep and perhaps almost impenetrable forest, where trails and tracks would soon be lost, even if they existed, and surrounded, no doubt, by wild beasts and men who would kill, was not exactly an enviable situation. Also what of Harry Franklin? And what about the other aeroplane which had followed them so closely, and which had been swallowed up, like their own, by the storm?

The rain began to diminish in violence now, the flashes of lightning, although constant, did not come with that terrifying frequency, and the crash of the thunder was now farthest away—things to be thankful for. Adam saw wild beasts speed by in the glare of the fire up above.

Adam would have moved, but the crouching native,

entwining his arms about his legs, held him fast. The wounded man began to moan.

Then something crashed from above. It fell near Adam's feet, and he could see in the yellowish glare that it was a rifle. Another fell. Then other articles followed.

"What the dickens!" exclaimed Adam, turning his eyes upwards. Then he laughed, for he saw Harry leaning over the side of the slanting plane, which had assumed a perilous position eighty feet above, and heaving out everything that he could lay his hands on.

"Never mind those things. Come out of it, Harry!" yelled Adam. "You'll be burned to a cinder!"

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