

THE GEM 2d

EVERY
WEDNESDAY.

SAIL
NOW
ON

"BAGGY'S
BARGAIN
SALE!"

(See the fine complete school story of Tom Merry & Co., at St. Jim's—inside.)

FUN, THRILLS AND DRAMA ARE ALL CONTAINED IN THIS FINE—

BAGGY'S BARGAIN SALE!

By
MARTIN
CLIFFORD.



... And as Baggy Trimble, his eyes gleaming greedily, drew out the sack from its hiding-place, an evil, scowling face, scarcely half-a-dozen yards away, watched his every movement!

CHAPTER 1. Vengeance!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY came along the Fourth Form passage at St. Jim's with determined, resolute stride. On his aristocratic features was a deep, dark frown; behind his glimmering eyeglass his noble eye gleamed with a war-like gleam.

Though Arthur Augustus carried a shining silk hat in his hand, he looked anything but his usual elegant self. His face was quite grimy and his collar very much soiled; his jacket was rumpled and covered with dirt; his trousers were likewise creased and simply caked with dried mud, while his shoes and socks were, to put it mildly, in a disgraceful condition.

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The swell of the Fourth looked as if he had been doing his best to turn himself into a scarecrow.

In the passage he met Levison, of the Fourth, and Levison chuckled deeply.

"Got back, then, Gussy?" he inquired. "Any luck with your giddy treasure-hunt, old chap?"

"Wats!"

Evidently Arthur Augustus was not in the mood to stay to answer that innocent question. He marched on with heightening colour. A little farther along the passage he met Dick Julian, and that youth smiled broadly as he sighted him.

"Well, you've got back, then, Gussy?" he remarked, with a chuckle. "I hear you found some treasure; is it true?"

"Wats!"

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—STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO., THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S!



Untold wealth, unlimited tuck! That's the vision conjured up by Baggy Trimble with his discovery of a store of hidden treasure. But as things turn out, it's not long before the fat and fatuous Baggy is wishing from the bottom of his heart that he'd never set eyes on his lucky find!

It was a snarl this time—or as near a snarl as the good-natured Arthur Augustus could possibly get. Obviously the swell of the Fourth was in a terrific wax.

He reached the door of Study No. 6 and kicked it open. The room was empty.

"Oh, bothah!" snapped Gussy. "Howevah, it is Lowthah I want!"

He reflected a moment, and then he went along to Study No. 10, on the Shell passage. Long before he reached it he knew that its celebrated occupants were at home. From the study came the sound of voices and laughter.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus wrathfully, his face crimsoning. "The—the feahful wascals are laughin' about Gwunday and me, I suppose. The—the wottahs!"

He tapped and kicked open the door.

The laughter suddenly ceased as he appeared framed in the doorway. Six grinning faces met Gussy's irate glare. They belonged to the Terrible Three and their guests, Blake, Herries and Digby, of the Fourth.

"Hallo!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Here's Gussy!"

"Home at last!" said Lowther. "Come in, old fellow! Don't trouble to wipe the mud off your hoofs—it's good, honest soil, gained by good, honest toil!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus entered the study, closed the door and placed his back to it.

He was fairly trembling with wrath.

"You—you utter, outrageous wuffians!" he articulated. "Dear me!" murmured Lowther. "Gussy seems to be waxy! I wonder why?"

"You are well awaah why!" shouted Arthur Augustus, glowering at Monty Lowther furiously. "You are a wascal, Lowthah—a wascally pwactical jokah, bai Jove! I have come heah for the expwess purpose of administewin' a feahful thwashin' to you!"

"Oh, Gussy!"

"You are a fwihtful spoofoah, Lowthah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "You have hoaxed and twicked Gwunday, Skimpole, Mellish, Tompkins, and myself; you have given us endless twouble, and held us up to contempt and widicule."

"Bow-wow!"

"Go it!" said Lowther encouragingly.

Arthur Augustus went it, so to speak.

"That w'etched treasure chart that Gwunday found in the pages of that book on the Histowy of St. Jim's was dwawn by you, Lowthah!" he shouted.

"Guilty, me lord!" smiled Lowther. "Alone I did it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you wottah!" gasped Gussy. "You dwew that spoofo chart solely to twick us, bai Jove!"

"Not at all," said Lowther. "I drew it to trick dear old Grundy; Grundy was determined to find some treasure. I did it so he shouldn't be disappointed. I didn't ask you to join Grundy's giddy treasure-hunting combine, did I?"

"None the less, you allowed me to join, and did not warn me!" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"My dear man, we all warned you, more or less," complained Lowther. "We said the chart Grundy found couldn't be genuine, but you refused to listen; you knew better, Gussy! What more could we do—I ask you?"

"It was a wotten twick, nevaltheless!" shouted

Gussy. "You caused us to spend hours diggin' a wotten hole on Colonel Bland's lawn and anothah in the wuins."

"The first one was Grundy's own fault," objected Lowther, with a soft chuckle. "He would have it that the clue meant near the tower in the colonel's garden. I myself told him it must be the tower on Abbey Island where I meant you to dig. That wasn't my fault, old top!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is nothin' to laugh at!" gasped Arthur Augustus, glaring at the hilarious juniors. "The w'etched colonel was feahfully waxy, and chased us off, while Gwunday had to jump into the wivah to escape him."

"Well, what could you expect? Did you expect the giddy colonel to ask you to tea after digging up his lawn?"

"It was your fault for forgin' that wotten clue!" stormed Arthur Augustus, nearly dancing with rage. "When, at last, we found the spot on Abbey Island that was indicated in the clue, what did we find buwied there?" asked Gussy, almost bursting with indignation.

Lowther pretended to consider.

"Lemme see," he murmured. "There was your missing best topper, wasn't there? And there was Grundy's missing cake; Skimmy's missing volume of Professor Balmyscrummet's latest work on Determinism; Mellish's Latin Grammar, and something belonging to dear old Tompkins. Well, wasn't there something for each of the combine, Gussy?"

"You—you—"

"Some people are never satisfied!" sighed Lowther. "After all the trouble we've taken to bury treasure for them! I suppose you expected to find doubloons and real treasure in that box, Gussy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus fairly spluttered with wrath. And really it was little wonder. To spend hours digging and searching for a treasure-chest; to find that chest at last, only to discover in it one's own best silk-hat, would hardly be likely to improve anyone's temper.

Arthur Augustus certainly was boiling over with righteous anger. Apparently he had been reminding Lowther of his crimes to prepare him for the fearful thrashing to come. But he wasted no more words now.

Without troubling to turn back his cuffs, he hurriedly jammed his eyeglass into his waistcoat pocket, and then he went for the practical joker of the School House—with a rush.

CHAPTER 2. Owning Up!

"LOOK out!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Crash!

There was a loud yell as Lowther jumped up from the table in alarm, upsetting milk, tea and cups. Then Gussy's determined rush sent Lowther sprawling backwards over his chair.

"Gussy, you ass—"

"Look out! Oh, my hat!"

"Mind the—"

Crash, crash, crash!

The warning came too late.

In his headlong, vengeful rush, Arthur Augustus caught the tablecloth, dragging that and most of the things with it on to the study floor.

There was a resounding clatter and crash of falling crockery, and yells of wrath and alarm from the onlookers—from all, in fact, save Arthur Augustus and Lowther.

Those two worthies—japer and japed—were rolling over and over amid the ruins of tea, locked in a fierce embrace, and certainly much too busy to heed any warning.

Hot tea splashed on both, but they disregarded it. Bumps and bangs likewise passed unheeded save for sundry yelps and howls.

Then, at the height of the disturbance, the door flew open and a figure appeared framed in the doorway—a burly figure almost covered in soil and mud.

It was George Alfred Grundy, the originator and organiser of the Treasure-hunting Combine.

Like Arthur Augustus, Grundy's eye gleamed with a warlike gleam, and his face wore a terrific frown.

Unlike Gussy, however, he did not waste time in words. He sighted Lowther on the floor, and he went for him with a rush and a roar of rage.

Busy as he was, Monty Lowther found he simply had to take notice of George Alfred.

The next moment the practical joker of the School House had his hands full—more than full. He yelled frantically for aid. But Tom Merry and the rest were too helpless with laughter to render any at the moment. Annoying as the upsetting of tea and breaking of the crockery was, they could not help their laughter.

Lowther had had his little joke—a joke in which they themselves had helped—and now he was paying for it.

Bump, bump, bump!

"Yaroooooh! Help!" shrieked Monty Lowther. "Help, you laughing—Yoooooop!"

"I'll teach you to make a fool of me!" George Alfred was yelling at the top of his voice. "I'll show you! Jape me, would you?"

Thump, thump, thump!

"Yaooooooooooooop!" wailed Lowther.

He howled.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry, wiping his eyes. "Oh, my hat! Better rescue Lowther, or they'll put him in hospital!"

But help was not needed as it happened. The door suddenly opened and a figure in cap and gown appeared. It was Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House.

"What—what—Grundy—D'Arcy—Lowther! What—stop that! You hear me—stop at once!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

It was enough! Mr. Railton's voice was more than enough, in fact. Like magic the battle ceased—if battle it could be called. Grundy and Gussy released Lowther and sat back, panting and gasping. Lowther lay sprawled there, likewise panting and gasping, and also groaning.

The Housemaster looked them over, his brow thunderous.

"What does this mean?" he demanded. "Lowther—"

"Ow! Yow! Ow-ow-ow!"

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "Merry, can you explain this disgraceful disturbance?"

Tom Merry could, but he did not choose to in the circumstances. It was not for him to explain.

"I will not go into this matter now!" said Mr. Railton at last, frowning sternly. "But you will each take three hundred lines for fighting in this study!"

"Ow! Ow, ow!" gurgled Lowther.

"I wish to see you on a much more serious matter, Grundy," went on the Housemaster sternly. "I was about to visit your study when I heard this commotion. You will come with me at once to my study, sir. You also, D'Arcy, will accompany me!"

"Ow! Oh, yaas, sir!"

Grundy and Arthur Augustus scrambled up, both of them looking red and dirty and dishevelled. Lowther remained where he was, groaning; he did not feel equal to rising yet awhile.

"One moment!" said the Housemaster, pausing when about to walk out. "The matter I wish to speak to Grundy and D'Arcy about is in respect to an outrage committed last evening in the grounds of Rylcombe Grange."

"Oh!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Did any boy other than Grundy and D'Arcy trespass on Colonel Bland's property last evening?" demanded Mr. Railton.

There was no answer—nobody else in the study had, though all had witnessed the affair from the river.

"Very well!" said the Housemaster, nodding grimly. "Come with me, both of you!"

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Grundy and Arthur Augustus, looking woeful sights, followed the Housemaster out.

Tom Merry and the others looked at each other in dismay. "Just what I feared!" gasped Tom Merry. "I knew the old colonel couldn't possibly overlook a thing like that! Lowther, you awful ass!"

"Ow, owl Yow!" gurgled Lowther. "Not my fault!"

"Well, we all had a hand in it, more or less!" grinned Jack Blake. "We backed Lowther up just to teach that high-handed ass, Grundy, a lesson, and we helped to plant the giddy treasure for Grundy to find. But—but we can't see those chaps get it in the neck. What's to be done?"

Again the japers looked at each other.

"I'm doing nothing!" groaned Monty Lowther, hugging a streaming nose. "I've had enough! Grundy fairly begged to have his leg pulled, and it serves him right for being such an ass!"

"But it's hardly the thing to let Grundy and Gussy get it from the beaks!" said Tom, shaking his head. "We led the awful idiots into it, after all. I vote we own up—Lowther needn't come, as he's had his whack already. You fellows game?"

"I am!" said Blake, rather dismally.

The others nodded—excepting Lowther, who was too busy nursing his damaged nose.

"Come on, then!" said Tom. "Take it smiling. All in the game. We've had a good laugh, anyway."

"Yes, rather!"

And, having come to that decision, Tom led his chums from the study. A moment later he was tapping on the Housemaster's study door. Within, Mr. Railton's voice was plainly audible.

"Treasure!" he was thundering. "What nonsense! Are you out of your senses, Grundy, you foolish boy?"

"Well, I—we can't explain, sir!" Grundy answered sullenly. "But we were digging for treasure—at least, we thought we were!"

Having heard that much, Tom gave Blake rather a rueful grin and marched into the study with the rest of the conspirators at his heels.

The Housemaster glared at them.

"Well, what is it, Merry?" he snapped.

"It—it's about this affair, sir," stammered Tom, rather unhappily. "It—it was all our fault really, sir."

"What?"

"Just a little joke, sir—on Grundy," said Tom meekly.

"Grundy had been reading the 'History of St. James' Monastery,' sir, and got the idea into his head that there was treasure buried somewhere around St. Jim's. So—so we played a trick on him! We got an old sheet of paper and drew a map on it, pretending to show where the treasure was."

"Bless my soul!"

"On the next clue, sir," murmured Tom, "Low—that is, we wrote that the spot was a hundred paces from the old round tower on Abbey Island, and buried some things belonging to Grundy and D'Arcy there. But Grundy made a mistake; he thought it meant the round tower in Colonel Bland's garden. So—so he went and dug there!"

"G-good gracious!" gasped Mr. Railton. "So—so that explains—"

"Y-yes, sir. Only a little joke, sir!" mumbled Tom. "It was a pity Grundy went and dug up the colonel's lawn, and we're awfully sorry. But—but it was more our fault than Grundy's or D'Arcy's."

Mr. Railton set his mouth hard—possibly to restrain his emotion; he certainly looked as if he were trying hard not to laugh!

"Bless my soul!" he gasped. "I—I understand now! Dear me! Grundy, you utterly foolish fellow—"

"I don't see it, sir!" said Grundy sulkily. "Anyone's liable to make a mistake like that, and—"

"Silence! That is enough, Grundy!" gasped the Housemaster, trying to look stern. "You ought to have had more sense, you foolish and absurd boy! However, I must agree with Merry—it certainly was more the fault of the practical jokers!" he added grimly. "Therefore, I shall punish them more severely!"

"Oh, sir!" gasped Tom.

"However, the colonel is, naturally enough, very angry indeed!" resumed Mr. Railton sternly. "But when he knows it was not done from a spiteful and malicious motive, as he supposed, he will not be so angry, I think. Grundy and D'Arcy, you will each consider two hundred lines added to those you already have to do. The rest will take the same, and also remain here for a caning. Grundy and D'Arcy, you may go, but kindly remember in future that things are not always what they seem."

"Bai Jove! Oh, yaas, sir!"

Grundy went out, looking disgusted and angry. Arthur Augustus followed, looking very red in the face, but, nevertheless, considerably relieved.

The rest stayed for a brief few minutes while Mr. Railton exercised his arm and his cane. When the door opened again the Housemaster's arm was tired, and Tom Merry and the other practical jokers were squirming and squeezing their hands.

"Ow, ow! Wow!" gurgled Tom Merry, as they tottered away. "Oh crumbs! Who'd have thought it would end like this? If Lowther hadn't already had enough, I'd give him some myself! Ow, ow! Blow him, and blow his silly wheezes!"

"Never mind!" said Blake. "We had a good laugh, and, after all, we got off lucky! But no more of Lowther's jokes for me!"

And the rest agreed with him there. The great jape had ended rather too painfully for the jokers to want to risk a repetition.

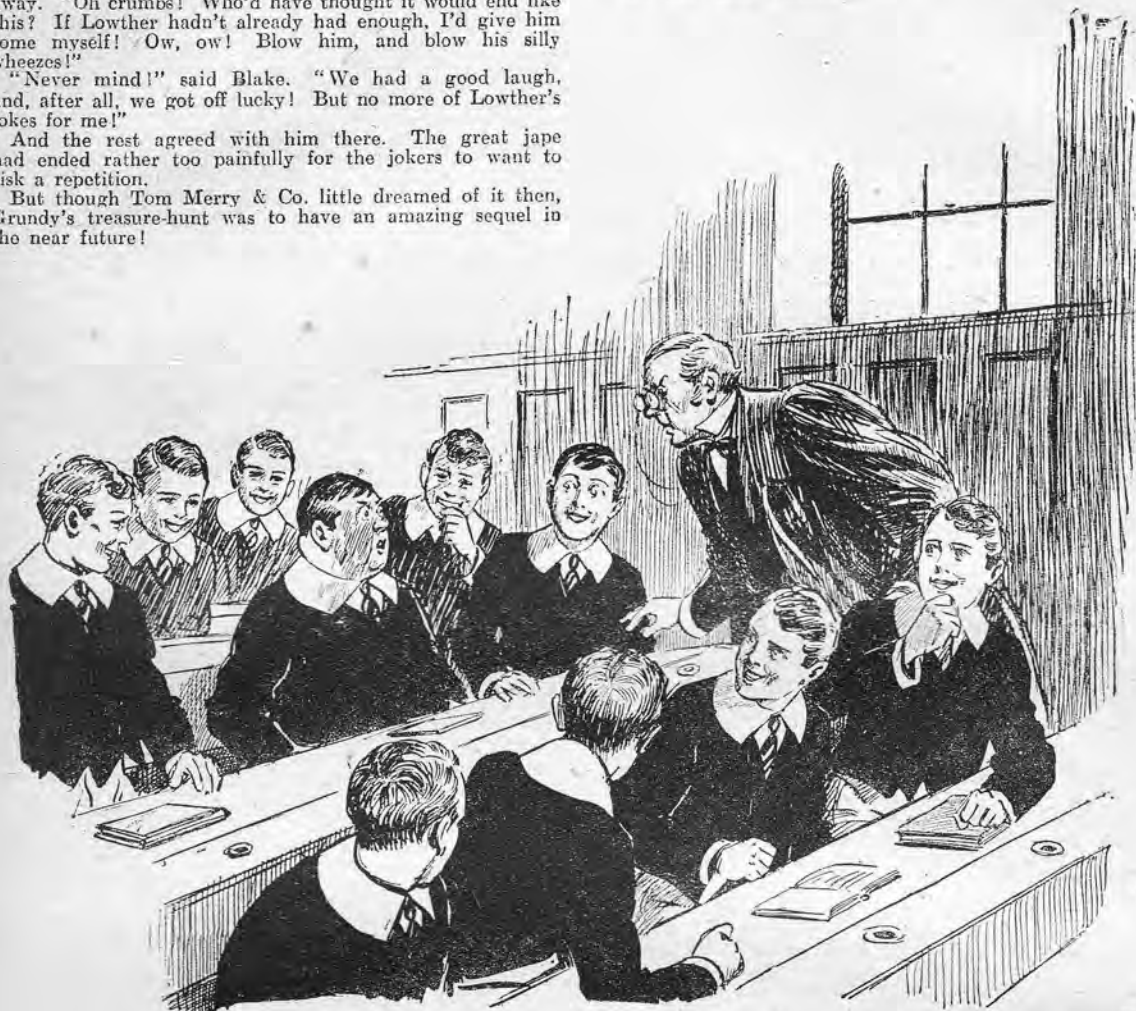
But though Tom Merry & Co. little dreamed of it then, Grundy's treasure-hunt was to have an amazing sequel in the near future!

"Pinched Railton's tea, what?"

"No! You silly ass!" snorted Trimble. "Do be sensible, Wildrake! The—the fact is—"

Trimble paused. Whatever the fact was, he did not seem in a great hurry to let it out.

"Go on!" said Wildrake.



"Good gracious!" articulated Mr. Latham as he finished his examination of Baggy Trimble's fat face. "How dare you come into the Form-room with your face in that disgraceful condition?" "Oh, sir!" exclaimed Trimble. "Is—is it dirty?" "Abominably dirty!" thundered the master of the Fourth. "Go and clean yourself—at once!" (See Chapter 4.)

CHAPTER 3.

Trimble Wants to Know!

"WILDRAKE, old chap—"

Baggy Trimble spoke rather hesitatingly.

Kit Wildrake, who shared Study No. 2 with Trimble and Mellish, looked at his fat study-mate curiously.

"Good!" he said.

"Eh?" said Trimble, staring.

"Good!" repeated Wildrake. "I was beginning to think you must be seriously ill, Trimble!"

"Ill? Why—"

"Because you haven't spoken for half an hour!" remarked Wildrake, with a chuckle. "Usually your chin's wagging without rest, but since you came in it hasn't moved once."

"Fathead!" said Trimble. "I say, old chap—"

"Don't! Now I know you're not on the verge of expiring, I'd rather you kept it up and gave your chin a good, long rest, Trimble. 'Keep it up!' said Wildrake encouragingly. "Life will be worth living in this study if only you can learn to stop chattering sometimes."

"Beast!" said Trimble. "I—I say, old fellow, I—I wanted to ask your advice!"

"Oh, in that case, go ahead, then!" said Wildrake. "I'm rather a whale at handing out advice—quite a giddy oracle! What's the trouble? Have you burgled the Head's dinner and been spotted?"

"Nunno! Don't rot! It's like this—"

"The—the fact is—"

Another pause.

"Cough it up!" said Kit Wildrake. "I can see you've been up to something, old fat man! Has Kildare discovered it was you who boned his chocolates?"

"No, you ass!" hooted Trimble. "Can't you be serious, Wildrake? I—the fact is, Kit, old fellow, I wondered if you—you knew anything about the law."

"The—the whatter?" ejaculated Wildrake, staring.

"The—the law!" stammered Trimble, eyeing his study-mate in quite a guilty manner. "You—you see, I'm awfully interested in the—the law! It's like this—"

Again Trimble paused.

"So it's come at last!" said Wildrake. "I always said the bobbies would get you sooner or later, Baggy. What's the trouble? Has Kildare summoned you for boning his chocs?"

"Of course not!" said Trimble. "I say, Kit, old fellow, do be serious! Look here, supposing—"

"Yes, supposing what?" grinned Wildrake.

"Sup—supposing a chap found some treasure!" gasped Trimble desperately. "Would he be entitled to keep it? That—that's what I wanted to know, Wildrake."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Mind you," said Trimble, hurriedly and cautiously, "I'm only putting a surreptitious case."

"A—a whatter?" gasped Wildrake. "Oh! You mean a supposititious case!"

"That's it! Supposing a fellow—I don't mean me, of course—found some treasure-trove on another fellow's land, would he be entitled by law to stick to it?"

Wildrake eyed Baggy very curiously now.

Since the fat junior had come in that tea-time he had been very strange in his manner. From the expressions on his podgy face he was in high feather about something. Yet now and again it was evident that his feeling of great satisfaction was disturbed by deep and gloomy thoughts.

Something very unusual had happened to Trimble—that was obvious.

Wildrake chuckled at last.

"You fat ass!" he said. "What's the game this time?"

"No game at all, old chap," gasped Trimble. "Just curiosity, you know. I was just wondering what—what would happen if that ass Grundy had really found any treasure! And, knowing you're such a clever chap, Wildrake—"

"I am," said Wildrake, with a chuckle. "Too clever for you, Baggy. But what's your game, you fat chunk of imbecility? Have you found any treasure?"

Trimble jumped.

"Eh? Oh, no, not at all, old chap; certainly not!" he gasped in hasty alarm. "What—whatever made you think that?"

"Well, you went digging on Abbey Island, didn't you?" said Wildrake. "You tried to double-cross Grundy by getting there first; and you dug a hole—I heard Tom Merry talking about it. He and his pals found you stranded on the island; your giddy boat had drifted away or something."

"I—I went there just for a look round," said Trimble, eyeing his study-mate rather uneasily. "I—I say, Wildrake, it's all right. I—I wish I hadn't—I mean, I don't really want to know about the law of treasure-trove; not at all. Only my joke."

Wildrake eyed him severely.

"What have you found there?" he demanded. "Cough it up! What did you dig up—pea-nuts? If you did, they belong to Colonel Bland, who owns the giddy island."

"I—I say, you're only joking, Wildrake!" said Trimble, realising that fact with some relief. "It's all right!"

"But if you dig up real treasure," said Wildrake, quite ready to air his superior knowledge. "I guess it has to be handed over to the Crown. If there's any reward going it belongs to the owner of the land where the treasure was found. See?"

Trimble's face fell dully.

"Oh, dear. I—I say, is that a fact, Wildrake?"

"Near enough, my fat tulip. So if you've found anything—"

"I—I haven't; of course not! I—I was only putting a surreptitious case," gasped Trimble. "You're an awfully suspicious beast, Wildrake!"

"What?"

"It's rather a low trait!" said Trimble. "I hate to see it in a fellow. But then, after all, where were you dragged up—out in the wilds of Canada or somewhere. What can a fellow expect?"

"Why, you—you—" spluttered Wildrake.

"As for the law, think I care for it," said Trimble independently. "Blow it! Of course I knew all the time what the law was regarding treasure-trove."

"What?"

"I was only testing your knowledge, old chap," said Trimble loftily, rather anxious now to end the dangerous discussion. "You're rather ignorant, if you don't mind my saying so. But a fellow can understand that, knowing you were dragged up on a ranch among ignorant cowboys and all that. I don't blame you, only I think—Here, what—Yooooop!"

Wildrake just managed to get home one hefty kick as Trimble flew through the doorway. Trimble usually showed his gratitude for advice in that manner. Wildrake returned to the study breathing hard and looking rather serious. He looked upon himself as being somewhat in the position of a keeper to the obtuse and fatuous Baggy, and he shook his head seriously now. Had Baggy found something in his search for treasure on Abbey Island? It certainly began to look like it! And Wildrake, being a good-natured fellow, and knowing Trimble's little weaknesses well, could not help feeling a little uneasy as he wondered what fresh store of trouble they were leading his fat study-mate into.

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CHAPTER 4.

Surprising the Natives!

FOR the remainder of that evening Baggy Trimble gave Wildrake a very wide berth.

He wished now that he hadn't asked his study-mate that question regarding the law of treasure-trove. Wildrake was such a suspicious beast. Really, Baggy could not understand how Wildrake had become suspicious. He prided himself that he had been very cautious and circumspect in his questioning. Yet Wildrake seemed to have guessed somehow that he had actually found some treasure-trove.

If he hadn't, of course, that wouldn't have mattered. But Trimble had! Deep in the heart of the hollow oak on Abbey Island was a big sack full of silver articles—solid silver, too! Baggy's fat heart leaped with joy as he thought of it. And what a score over the other fellows—especially the fellows who had played that jape and "planted" the clue to the supposed treasure. Like Grundy, he had been "taken in" by it, and like Grundy he had dug on Abbey Island for the legendary monks' treasure. But whereas Grundy had merely dug up his own property, Trimble had got there first and unearthed the real treasure. It was queer that the spot the japers had shown in the spoof clue was the actual spot where the real treasure was buried. Yet, after all, it was not such a strange coincidence. The spot was in a quiet corner of the ruins—a corner formed by two shattered walls; just the place where anyone might hide anything.

Yet was it the ancient monks' treasure he had found—was it the legendary treasure?

At the back of Trimble's fat mind was a lurking doubt—a doubt he strove to smother. Many of the silver articles found in the canvas sack looked far too new to have been the property of monks in Henry the Eighth's time. And that thick, canvas sack, showing little signs of having been buried for hundreds of years in the earth, certainly needed some explaining.

But Trimble didn't want to explain anything like that—he didn't want to worry about it at all. He determinedly banished all doubts from his mind—or did his best to do so. Trimble's mind was very accommodating, and his conscience gave him very little trouble. His logic was the logic he wanted to use. Findings were keepings—what did Wildrake know about it? He was entitled to what he had found—the silverware was his—that matter was settled quite to Trimble's satisfaction already.

But Trimble was worried. While he dreamed silver dreams that evening and night, the fat junior was also a prey to worry. The treasure was his. It lay safely in the old hollow oak on Abbey Island. It was a great pity Tom Merry & Co. had been hanging about at the time, or he could have brought it safely away with him. But that had been impossible, and the question now was first, how to get hold of it, and then how to dispose of it. After all, what was the good of a heap of solid silver worth hundreds of pounds if he couldn't dispose of it and buy jam-tarts and rabbit-pies with the money.

Disposing of the plunder was not likely to be easy. But the difficulty at present was how to get his hands on it again.

To all appearances it seemed easy enough. There it lay, waiting for him to fetch it. He only had to get a boat, row up-stream to the island and get it. But—

There was a "but"—a very big "but" to Trimble!

What about that evil-looking stranger whom he knew was, or had been, roaming about the island? Only the day he found the treasure he had seen the man on the mainland, and the insolent fellow had asked him to row him over to the island. And later, while Trimble was watching Grundy and his fellow-members of the treasure-hunt combine digging, he had glimpsed the fellow watching, like himself, from hiding.

Somehow, Trimble could not help wondering if the low-browed ruffian had something to do with the buried treasure he had found. It seemed absurd, and yet Trimble could not help the feeling.

Nor could he get the evil face of the fellow out of his mind. The man was up to no good on Abbey Island; that much was certain. Not for worlds, Trimble knew, dare he go on Abbey Island alone, with the probability of that awful ruffian still roaming at large there.

That was the snag—a very big snag!

The problem kept Trimble awake for hours that night; it occupied his fat mind during lessons the next morning. When Trimble came out of the Form-room at noon he was richer by two hundred lines, and his fat palms were tingling.

But the problem still remained unsolved.

Yet one thing was clear. Somehow, he had to get someone to go to the island with him.

All through afternoon classes Trimble worked his fat mind at top pressure—though not on lessons. And at last, near the close of afternoon class, the brainwave came to him—a real corker!

He acted upon it almost at once.

He licked his hands until they were quite wet, and then he rubbed them stealthily upon the dusty Form-room floor.

Having collected enough dust he carefully rubbed it over his face.

The result was remarkable. Baggy Trimble—never a very cleanly youth—now closely resembled a Christy Minstrel!

Mr. Latham did not see him for some moments—he was busy drawing a diagram on the blackboard. But suddenly he turned round and faced the Form.

"Now, boys," he began, "as you will observe from this diagram, the— Bless my soul!"

The master of the Fourth had sighted Trimble.

He stared and stared, and then he slowly adjusted his eye-glasses, and came down the aisle of forms to inspect the fat junior at closer quarters.

There was a chorus of deep chuckles as the fellows all turned and saw Trimble's smudgy, dirty face.

Mr. Latham stopped and finished his inspection of Trimble's fat face with a gasp.

"Good gracious!" he articulated, in growing wrath. "Trimble, what is that on your face, boy?"

"My face?" exclaimed Trimble, apparently surprised. "Is there anything on my face, sir?"

"Yes, sir, there certainly is!" hooted Mr. Latham. "Disgraceful! How dare you come into the Form-room with your face in that filthy condition? I cannot understand how I did not notice its abominable condition before, Trimble."

"Oh, sir! Is—is it dirty?"

"Abominably dirty!" thundered the irate master. "Take a hundred lines for appearing in the Form-room in such a condition, Trimble! And go at once and clean yourself—at once, you dirty boy!"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

Trimble rose from his place quite cheerfully.

"My hat!" murmured Blake. "What's his giddy game now. I wonder? It's a wangle, of course!"

"The crafty rotter!" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Trimble rolled out of the Form-room, followed by Mr. Latham's stern glance and grinning looks from his Form-fellows, who knew Trimble even better than his Form-master did.

The fat junior was absent for more than ten minutes, and more than one member of the Form wondered what he was "up" to this time.

Mr. Latham gave him a grim look when he returned at last.

"You have been a very long time, Trimble!" he snapped. "Go to your place at once, and take another fifty lines for being such an unreasonably long time in cleaning yourself."

"Oh, yes, sir!"

Baggy rolled back to his place quite cheerfully. Luckily Mr. Latham was short-sighted and quite failed to see that despite Trimble's long absence, the cleaning operation had not been carried out very efficiently. The lesson proceeded, many of the juniors eyeing the smiling Baggy very curiously. That Baggy had not "wangled" a trip from the Form-room just to escape a few minutes' work was obvious to them.

Lessons ended at last, and the Form was dismissed.

Trimble was the first out of the Form, and he scudded downstairs to the quad in a great hurry.

When he returned a few minutes later his fat features were wearing a satisfied grin.

He made straight for the Fourth Form passage. In the doorway of Study No. 6 he found Blake & Co. chatting with the Terrible Three.

"Hallo, here you are, you fellows!" said Trimble affably. "I say, got anything on this afternoon?"

"Yes—my boots!" said Blake meaningly. "If you're not out of sight in two ticks, Trimble, you'll get one!"

"He, he, he! I say, Blake, I want you fellows to join me in my picnic up-river!" said Trimble, keeping a wary eye on Blake's boot. "My cheque came by the noon post, after all, and Dame Taggles has changed it for a whacking pile of grub—nearly two quids' worth. Care to come?"

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors stared at Trimble, the would-be benefactor. "I mean it!" said Trimble impressively. "This is the first of a whole series of feeds I'm going to stand my friends. I've always wanted to pay you fellows back some of the many kindnesses you've showered on me at various times."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Now I'm in the position to do so!" said Trimble. "Just say the word, as I'd rather you fellows came than anyone else. Just a pull up-river and a feed on Abbey Island, you know. It's a ripping afternoon for it! The grub's waiting at the tuckshop now."

The juniors blinked at Trimble.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus severely. "Is this more of your wretched spoofin', Twimble?"

"Certainly not!" said Trimble warmly. "All I ask is that you come along to the tuckshop and let me prove my words. If I'm spoofing—if the grub's not there—then I give you leave to kick me!"

"Well, my hat!"

This was something quite new from Trimble. Often and often he had asked them to feeds—to join in feeds that existed in his imagination only. But this time he was offering to allow them to kick him if it proved a "spoof!"

Was it possible that Trimble really was in earnest this time? The temptation to investigate was very great for the chums of the School House. As it happened, none of them was in funds—even Arthur Augustus was practically stony. In fact, the chums had come to the conclusion that tea in Hall was inevitable for that afternoon.

"If you're pulling our legs, Trimble—" began Tom Merry.

"Nothing of the kind. It's genuine enough!" said Trimble in rather a hurt voice. "Dash it all, am I the fellow to spoof over a serious matter like a feed? All I ask is that you come and see for yourselves!"

"We will!" said Blake grimly. "And if it's spoof you're for it, my lad!"

He took a tight grasp of Baggy's collar, and the party wended their way to Dame Taggles' tuckshop under the old elms. Baggy went cheerfully enough, however. In a smiling crowd they reached the shop, and Baggy rolled inside.

"My bag ready, ma'am?" demanded Trimble, rather loftily. "Oh, good, there it is!"

"There's somebody's cricket-bag, anyway," murmured Blake.

Dame Taggles smiled, and allowed Trimble to get the bag and take it out into the quad. The juniors, grinning and curious, surrounded Baggy as he opened the bag.

There was a gasp as it was seen to be packed tightly with good things.

"My only aunt!"

"Gwheat Scott! Weally, Twimble—"

"Just to begin with," said Trimble airily. "Now, you fellows, let's be getting along to the boathouse if you're coming. If you aren't, I fancy I can soon get a party together!"

"We'll come!" said Tom Merry faintly. "Well, if this doesn't beat the band!"

"Fancy Trimble in funds!"

"And standing feeds!"

"Wonders will never cease!"

The juniors were astonished, and they eyed Baggy Trimble quite affably for once. They were hungry, and the prospect of a picnic up-river was a very enticing one on that summery afternoon. They were more than willing to accept Baggy's kind invitation. After all, Baggy Trimble owed them a great deal one way and another, and it was just as well to get a bit back when they could.

That Baggy's "wangle" in the Form-room had anything to do with this stack of grub did not even occur to Blake & Co.—then. And the Terrible Three knew nothing of it. So, with Trimble leading the way, looking quite lofty and important, and with Blake and Herries carrying the heavy cricket-bag, the party wended its cheery way riverwards.

CHAPTER 5.

Very Queer!

"HERE we are, you fellows—jump in! Mind your great hoofs, Herries! Blake, get out of that seat—I want it! Now, Gussy, get a move on! Think we want to stay here all the blessed day?"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Twimble—"

"Be careful with that bag, Merry—dash it all, you are a clumsy owl! Here, drop those dashed rudder-lines, Digby—I'm steering on this trip!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The juniors looked expressively at each other. They were already beginning rather to wish they had not accepted Trimble's surprising invitation. Really, Trimble was a trying host. He gave orders right and left, and criticised unceasingly. And he did not forget to tell his guests know who was the founder of the feast—or, rather, who was pretending to be the founder of it. Tom Merry & Co. would have been very surprised indeed had they known then just who had provided that stack of good things!

But they didn't, and they stifled their feelings towards the fat Fourth-Former. After all, Trimble wasn't used to standing feeds like this, and the unusual experience was turning his head.

"Better let me steer, Trimble," said Lowther quite meekly. "You'll be able to rest then, and we shall feel we're safe from shipwreck."

"Don't talk rot! Who's in charge of this outing?" demanded Trimble. "Tell me that. Like your cheek to criticise me, Lowther. I've a jolly good mind to send you back!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Twimble—"

"Oh, you give your chin a rest, Gussy! Dash it all, you're like a blessed self-winding gramophone! I say, hand over that bag—I think I'll take a little snack. I'm hungry!"

The bag was silently handed over. After all, the grub was Trimble's! And Baggy took a snack as the heavily-laden boat rocked on its way upstream. It was a glorious afternoon, and the juniors felt that it was even worth putting up with Trimble to be able to enjoy a picnic up-river on such a day.

The island came into sight, its wooded banks reflected in the glimmering, shining river. Trimble had grown rather quiet and thoughtful as they approached it, and more than once Tom Merry eyed him a trifle curiously. Like Kit Wildrake, Tom Merry had noticed that Trimble had not been quite his usual self since the previous afternoon. In fact, Kit Wildrake had spoken to him about Trimble's queer behaviour, though Tom had laughed at the Canadian junior's doubts and fears concerning his fat study-mate.

He watched Trimble, whose eyes were fixed almost fearfully on the island. Somehow, though he had suspected nothing before, Tom could not help wondering if Baggy had some little game on with them. It occurred to Tom now that it was quite astonishing that Baggy had asked them to the picnic at all—unless he had some good reason for asking them. Baggy was a very greedy youth, and his usual course would have been to scoff the whole of the grub himself instead of asking seven fellows to help him dispose of it.

Really, it did begin to look strange.

"May as well camp here on the bank!" said Blake, as they jumped ashore with the bag at last. "No good tramping through the woods, is there, Trimble?"

"Eh? Yes, there jolly well is!" snapped Trimble, quite crossly. "Didn't I say we'd have tea at the ruins? Am I or am I not in charge of this picnic-party, Blake?"

"Sorry, old scout!" grinned Blake. "I won't dispute your authority again—until the grub's gone, at all events."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Trimble is a great success as a host, isn't he?" said Monty Lowther admiringly. "So polite and reasonable and accommodating to his guests!"

"You shut up, Lowther! Now, you fellows, let's be getting on! Collar that bag and get a move on, somebody! Here, leave that boat just as it is, Tom Merry!"

"Right, O Mighty One!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors tramped through the woods, Tom and Manners carrying the heavy cricket-bag between them. The ruins soon came in sight, the ancient, moss-covered stonework glimmering in the sunshine. All was quiet and still, and there was no doubt that it made an ideal spot for a picnic.

"Aren't you fellows glad I brought you?" demanded Trimble, glancing about him quickly. "Ripping here, what? Look here, you fellows can cut off now for a ramble round the island. Hold on—"

"But will there be any grub left when we come back?" asked Blake affably.

"Eh? Of course there will! Please yourself, though. In fact, I think it will be better if you fellows stay here to mind the grub, and I'll have a ramble round on my own. Yes, I think that will be best."

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove! That is not like you, Twimble!"

"What's come over the fat ass?" demanded Lowther faintly. "Fancy him not wanting to stand by the grub, you fellows! You really want to go for a ramble, Trimble?"

"Oh, yes!"

"And leave us with the grub?"

"Exactly. The—fact is," said Trimble coolly, "I want to stretch my legs a bit. You fellows stay here!"

"But I want to stretch my legs, too!" said Tom Merry, winking at the rest. "I'll come along with you, Baggy. The other fellows can stay."

"No, you jolly well won't!" said Trimble, eyeing Tom Merry quite crossly. "I'm in charge of this picnic-party. Dash it all, don't you fellows know how to behave when you're invited out?"

"Oh crumbs!"

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"You fellows stay here for a bit—I shan't be long!" said Trimble, eyeing them rather narrowly. "Just off to stretch my legs for a bit, you know. You be getting tea ready, Tom Merry!"

"Oh, all right!" laughed Tom. "Cut off, you fat ass!"

Amid a chorus of chuckles, Baggy Trimble "cut off," and vanished amid the trees round the clearing.

The juniors watched him go, with smiles, though Tom Merry wore rather a puzzled frown.

"Now what's his game?" said Blake, with a chuckle. "He's got something on! Shall we go after him and find out!"

"No," said Tom Merry, shaking his head. "Hardly the game—too much like spying, old chap. Let the fathead rip! After all, it's jolly pleasant here, and we'll take it easy until he comes back!"

It certainly was pleasant amid the age-old ruins, and, in any case, Tom Merry & Co. did not feel like rambling on that warm afternoon. They flung themselves down on the grassy sward, and let Trimble "rip."

"Beasts!" murmured Trimble, as he plunged through the trees. "I do believe they're suspicious of a chap! Lot of nosey, suspicious rotters! Oh dear! Supposing that ugly poacher's knocking about still!"

And Trimble glanced about him rather apprehensively as he hurried on towards his destination—the old hollow oak deep in the wood. Still, it had to be done, and, after all, he could easily yell if the ruffian did turn up. It was not as if he were alone on the island without help at hand. A shout would soon bring Tom Merry & Co. racing to his aid if aid were required.

Comforted by that knowledge, the fat youth plunged on, and soon reached the old oak.

He paused there, listening intently, and blinking about him. Then he cautiously approached the tree.

All was quiet, and hardly a leaf stirred in the lonely clearing. With another long glance about him, Baggy stooped and dragged away the brushwood and leaves from the opening in the hollow oak. Then he reached inside.

The sack was still there. Baggy's heart leaped in deep relief as he got a grip upon the sack. He tugged, and a musical sound followed.

Chink, chink!

"Oh, good!" murmured Trimble. "I was afraid that poaching beast might have seen me hide it! He looked the sort of rascal who wouldn't think twice about pinching it!"

The thought made Trimble feel quite indignant at the dishonesty of some people!

Grasping the sack firmly, he dragged it out of the hole in the hollow oak. The sack was heavy—very heavy indeed—and Trimble was breathing hard by the time he had hauled it out of its hiding-place.

He did not stop to examine its contents again—the sound of chinking metal was enough. After another struggle he managed to get it safely on his back. Then he staggered away through the trees with his burden, making a bee-line for the boat that had been left drawn up on the shingle.

It was not a pleasant journey, though short enough. More than once the fat Fourth-Former paused and listened, his heart thumping like a hammer. But he reached the fringe of the trees at last, and it was just as he did so that Trimble's heart almost missed a beat.

Someone was coming—he could hear the sound of a heavy body crashing through the undergrowth to his left.

It was a man—he felt sure of that. And then quite suddenly a figure came out of the fringe of trees thirty yards from where he stood.

Trimble could have yelled with fright.

It was the poacher—or the man Trimble believed must be a poacher. A single glance was enough—the ugly, lowering brow, the rough, unshaven chin and face, and torn, dusty clothes were the same.

"Oh dear!" gasped Trimble.

The man had not seen him yet. He came out, and his eyes glittered as they rested on the boat drawn up on the shingle. Had Trimble drawn back swiftly he might have remained undiscovered.

But Trimble lost his head completely.

He gave one startled gasp, and then he made a dive for the boat with his burden.

From the man by the trees came a startled cry—almost like the cry of a wild beast.

The sound seemed to lend wings to the fat youth. The weight of the bag of silver seemed like a ton, and how he reached the boat he never knew. But he did reach it, the thudding of the unknown's heavy boots in his ears.

Crashing the bag of silver anyhow into the boat, Trimble gave the boat a desperate, terrific push.

Fortunately it was only drawn up a few inches on the bank—the Rhyll was not a tidal river, and more was unnecessary.



Tom Merry & Co., grinning and curious, surrounded Baggy Trimble as he opened the cricket-bag. There was a gasp as it was seen to be packed with good things. "My only aunt!" "Bai jove!" "That's just to begin with!" said Trimble airily. (See Chapter 4.)

The boat slid off into deep water at once, almost sending Trimble sprawling into the water.

But he hung on frantically, and then he tumbled aboard as the boat rocked out in the stream.

"Come back! Come back, you young hound!"

It was a savage shout from the man as he rushed furiously towards the boat, crashing through the undergrowth.

"Oh!" panted Baggy.

He grabbed at the nearest scull and pushed off frantically, again nearly falling into the river in his fright and haste.

The move was not a second too soon. The man splashed into the water up to his knees and made a desperate, vicious grab at the boat's prow even as it slid off the shingle.

But his grasp slid off again, and he sprawled into the water on his face.

"Oh, dear!"

Trimble could have yelled in his almost overwhelming relief. The boat was well out in the river now, dancing away from the island. Without another glance at the man, Trimble turned the boat, somehow, and settled down to the sculls.

A few desperate pulls at the sculls took him round the corner of the island and well out of sight of the viciously-cursing man.

He was safe now—safe unless the rascal, whoever he was, had a boat. Trimble knew that he had much more to fear from the man than before.

But the man must have a boat, else how had he come to the island? Trimble remembered that the first time he had seen him the fellow had asked to be rowed across from the mainland—had even offered him money to row him across. Trimble had refused—as had Tom Merry & Co., later on. Yet, only the day before, Trimble had glimpsed him on the island.

"Oh, dear!" mumbled Baggy.

Frightened at the thought, he tugged away at the sculls for all he was worth, the perspiration streaming down his fat face.

He was round the bend in the river at last, and then, feeling safe enough, he pulled in under the shelter of an overhanging willow.

The drooping branches hid the boat well, and Trimble tied it up and scrambled out. Then, with no little difficulty, he lifted out the bag of treasure-trove.

He had already made his plans and selected a suitable hiding-place. With a hasty glance about him he plunged into Rylecombe Wood, which stretched for a mile or so on both sides of the river. He did not go far. Suddenly he halted by a lightning-blasted tree—an oak something similar to the one on the island.

There was no hollow, but the roots were bare, and beneath them was a deep hole that looked as if it had been made quite recently. Trimble dropped his burden, and then he began to scoop out more soil and sand from the hole.

It was big enough for his purpose at last.

He unwrapped the twisted end of the sack and looked inside, feasting his eyes on the glimmering silver articles within. There were solid silver dishes, goblets, silver candlesticks, and all sorts of silver ware inside, dull enough now, yet glimmering in the dark sack. Polished up, Trimble knew they would look different indeed.

"My hat!" he murmured. "I'm a rich fellow now! Won't all those beasts envy me when I'm simply rolling in money?"

Trimble crammed the big sack into the excavation, his greedy eyes glimmering with satisfaction. Then he covered the hole with soil, twigs and leaves. Over this he artistically covered a heap of brushwood.

He was satisfied with his new hiding-place at last.

Then, with a last lingering glance at the spot, he stole away, puffing and blowing with his unaccustomed exertions.

"Now for those beasts!" he murmured to himself. "Oh, dear! How am I going to land on the island again without that awful ruffian seeing me! I've a jolly good mind to

leave those suspicious beasts to it! Serve 'em right if I did!"

But upon reflection Baggy discarded the idea. To leave his invited guests marooned on Abbey Island all night would be going a bit too far. There would certainly be a very unpleasant reckoning with Tom Merry & Co. for Baggy to face afterwards, even supposing the authorities didn't deal with him for such a trick. Besides, Baggy was hungry, and that settled the matter.

Nevertheless, it was in fear and trembling that Trimble pushed his boat out into the sparkling river and sculled back to Abbey Island.

CHAPTER 6.

The Mystery of Trimble!

"TIME that fat ass was back!" said Tom Merry drowsily.

"Oh, my hat! Yes, rather!"

The juniors had laid tea on the grass, and while waiting for Baggy Trimble they had sprawled flat on their backs, taking it easy in the warm sunshine. In the clearing amid the ruins all was silent and still save for the hum of insects, and now and again the flick and rustle of a frolicking rabbit, and most of the juniors were almost asleep when Tom Merry made that remark.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, sitting up in the grass and raising his natty Panama from over his eyes. "Weally, it is most mystewious what that fat boundah is up to!"

"I'm hungry!" said Herries, climbing to his feet with a grunt. "Let's make a start on tea! Trimble's already had some of the grub!"

"We'll give him a bit longer!" said Tom Merry. "Hallo," he added, his glance falling upon a spot where two of the shattered walls of the ruined abbey met. "Somebody's been digging there again—where we planted those things for dear old Grundy to find!"

"My hat! So they have!"

Tom Merry walked over to the spot, his chums following rather wonderingly. Someone evidently had been digging there. They remembered the hole Grundy had dug—it was not a big hole at all. And Grundy had left it just as it was when he had dug it and hauled out the "treasure chest" containing his cake and Gussy's silk hat, among other things.

But now the hole was much bigger. It extended for yards round the spot where they had dug. Someone evidently had been digging since—and very extensively. What had they been digging for?

"It can't have been Trimble!" said Tom. "It would take that lazy, fat bounder a week to dig a hole like that."

"Looks as if someone else has been searching for the giddy treasure!" chuckled Blake. "Perhaps Grundy lost the chart, and some giddy stranger has found it and thinks he's on a good thing?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anyway, what about Trimble?" growled Herries. "And what about tea? I'm hungry!"

"We're all pretty peckish, I fancy!" said Tom Merry, turning away with a puzzled frown. "I—Great Scott!" He paused with rather a startled look on his sunburnt face.

"What's the matter, Tom?" asked Blake.

"I—I was wondering!" said the captain of the Shell. "You don't think that fat ass has gone off in the boat and left us stranded, do you?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"The fat ass isn't usually fond of a practical joke!" said Tom Merry. "But he's ass enough for anything! What if he's played that trick on us and marooned us?"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Let's go and see!" suggested Manners, frowning. "You never know, and the beggar's been gone a jolly long time!" In some trepidation Tom Merry and his chums hurried back to where they had left the boat. They soon reached the spot, and found their worst fears were realised.

The boat had gone!

"Well!" gasped Tom Merry. "Well, upon my word!" Words failed the others for the moment.

That Trimble should dare to play such a trick was really extraordinary! Moreover, what about the grub? They could hardly believe it possible that Trimble would go away and leave the grub—his own grub—behind like this. What on earth did it mean?

As they stood there, Blake suddenly gave a start and motioned for silence. Then the unmistakable splash of oars reached their ears.

"Come on!" breathed Tom Merry. "That's Trimble for a pension!"

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The juniors followed Tom as he hurried away along the bank and round the corner of the island. Then they saw Baggy Trimble. He was gently pulling his boat in to the island, glancing over his shoulder all the time as he did so.

There was something curiously stealthy in his actions, and his fat face wore a look of mingled fear and apprehension.

"What on earth is the fat ass up to?" murmured Blake.

"Let's watch a bit!" suggested Manners. "There's something fishy about this!"

"Yes, rather!"

They remained in hiding and watched. Nearer and nearer came the boat, edging cautiously in to the island. It touched at last, and after a cautious blink about him Baggy Trimble stepped ashore and dragged the boat up a little on the sand and shingle.

Then an astounding thing happened.

Without warning a man burst from the trees near the water's edge—a burly, low-browed, ruffian-looking fellow with an ugly face and bristly jaw.

He was upon Baggy Trimble in a couple of strides, and the fat junior's howl was enough to waken the dead.

"Yarrooogh!"

"M-mum-my hat!"

"It—it's that chap who wanted us to row him over the other day!" breathed Tom Merry. "That chap Trimble called a poacher! On the ball, chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Help! Help!" shrieked Trimble. "Rescue, you fellows! Help! Murder! Police! Yarrooogh! Help!"

Crash!

Baggy was down, with the ruffian kneeling on his chest, and a savage hand over his mouth.

But help was at hand.

The next moment Tom Merry & Co. were on the spot, and the man went crashing over with a startled yell as seven determined juniors rushed him.

Crash!

Next moment the fight was waging fast and furious.

The man was powerfully built and enormously strong. But against seven athletic youngsters he had more than his hands full.

Trimble squirmed out of reach at last, and the other juniors had the ruffian all to themselves. He kicked and struggled furiously, cursing savagely as he did so. But they mastered him at last, and soon he was flat on his back, with the juniors pinning him down.

All of them showed plain signs of the terrific combat.

But they were triumphant, and that was all that mattered.

"Now, my ugly-looking pippin!" panted Tom Merry. "Give in, you ruffian, or it'll be the worse for you!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hang you—hang you! Let me go, you young brats!" hissed the man, his chest heaving.

"We'll let you go—when you've explained why you attacked this chap!" said Blake, indicating the shivering Baggy Trimble. "Now, out with it, you blighter! What's your game?"

The man's eyes glittered under his heavy brows as his glance went to Baggy.

"He—the young brat's got summut of mine!" he panted.

"What is it he's got?" snapped Tom, his lip curling.

The man was silent, his fiercely-gleaming eyes fixed on Baggy, who shivered and trembled.

"I—I say, you fellows, it's not true of course?" said Trimble in a stammering voice. "The brute's lying—can't you see he is? He was going to rob me, I bet! I say, don't let him get up!"

"He hasn't answered my question yet!" snapped Tom. "You shut up a bit, Trimble! Now, my man, what has that chap got of yours—if he has anything?"

The man scowled, but said nothing.

"What are you doing on this island, anyway?" said Tom. "It's private property, as I suppose you know well enough!"

"I—I came over to lay night lines!" said the man, his voice changing suddenly to a husky whine. "You let me go. I shan't 'urt that kid—I never meant to 'urt 'im! I thought as he'd bin interferin' with my night lines, strike me pink, I did! Them village kids sometimes does!"

"Well, you'd better clear off!" said Tom curtly. "This island belongs to Colonel Bland, and he doesn't like merchants like you hanging around!"

"You let me go!" begged the ruffian, a look of fear coming into his eyes at mention of Colonel Bland. "I mean no harm to nobody, young sirs!"

"Right!" said Tom, exchanging a glance with Blake. "We'll let you go. But any games, and—well, I fancy Colonel Bland, who's a magistrate, will know how to deal with you! I don't believe your yarn about night lines, anyway. I suppose you were up to some poaching game. Anyway, clear off. And if you take my tip, you'll get off this island—sharp!"

"I—I will!" panted the man huskily, all his defiance gone. "My boat's on the other side of the island, young gents. I'm going now!"

He staggered to his feet as they released him, his glance still resting on Baggy Trimble's terrified face. But he said nothing, nor did he make any further trouble.

Touching his cap, he shambled off, and vanished into the trees. Tom Merry & Co. heard his tramping feet die away.

"Well, this beats the band!" said Blake, eyeing Trimble curiously. "Say what you like, Tom, that fellow wasn't after bunnies here. As for Trimble—"

"Ow—ow!" gasped Trimble. "Ow—yow! That awful brute nearly killed me. Why didn't you fellows come along sooner? Nice way to treat a host—letting him be attacked like that!"

"You fat ass—"

"But don't you believe what he says," said Trimble, eyeing them rather uneasily. "The beast saw I was rather a wealthy chap, and he thought it a good chance to rob me, you know."

"Oh, my hat!"

"What did you leave the dashed island for, anyway?"

snorted Herries. "You fat rotter! You've been up to some game or other!"

"Not at all!" said Trimble. He was feeling reassured now. After all, the fellows had fairly easily overmastered the ruffian, and there was little fear from him. "Not at all. Wouldn't you have tried to escape if that awful brute had chased you?"

"Did he chase you?" exclaimed Tom, staring.

"Yes—I lost my head and made for the boat!" said Trimble. "I happened to be nearer the boat than to you fellows, and it was really the only thing to do. I would have stayed and tackled him, only—"

"Only you didn't!" grinned Lowther. "Afraid of hurting him, what?"

"Exactly," said Trimble calmly. "Still, I saw no reason why I should have to fight a ruffian like that. So—so I bolted for the boat. Luckily I just pushed off in time, and the beast fell into the water—fairly sprawled in it."

"Well, I believe that at all events!" said Blake. "I

(Continued on next page.)



Free, gratis, and for nothing, the Oracle will put you wise about that puzzler. Fire him a question—or two or more—and let him do his stuff—snappy and

humorous, but without frills. Try to put one over on him—the office-boy can't.

Q. What is "La Pique"?

A. A famous old sea-shanty supposed to have been written by the sea-lawyer in the crew of an old-time vessel called the *Pique*. The first verse ran something like this:

"There is a crack packet—crack packet of fame—

She hails from old Pompey and the *Pique* is her name.

You may talk of your *Fiers*, *Swallow Tail* an' *Black Ball*,

But the *Pique* is the packet to wallop 'em all!"

Q. What is an epic?

A. A stannch chum of the GEM who signs himself "Wheeler" seems to imagine it is some sort of metal polish, for he has written to ask me whether he can buy some to clean up the handle-bars of his push-bike. Epic, my chum, means a poem or story narrating the achievements of one or more heroes. A good example is the "*Iliad*" of Homer. Anyway, "Wheeler," why trouble to send the question to me? Isn't there a cycle shop or an ironmonger's in your neighbourhood?

Q. What does a road sign with a white ring and a number indicate?

A. Charlie Weekes, of Reading, says he has noticed a number of such signs on the road and wishes to know the meaning of the indication. It is the sign for a reduced speed limit, Charlie, and means, for instance, that motorists and others must not proceed faster than ten miles an hour in its neighbourhood. It is also customary for red bands to be painted on tramway poles, lamp standards, and trees within the area where the reduced speed limit is effective.

Q. What is St. Elmo's Fire?

A. It is a most extraordinary phenomenon, G. G. S., of Stoke, sometimes seen at sea. During thunderstorms or at other times when there is much electrical disturbance in the atmosphere, a ship's masts and spars may glow as though electric lights were attached to them. Sometimes this St. Elmo's Fire, as it is

called, will form a halo round a sailor's head, or else sparkle from his fingers, while he is working aloft. It is quite harmless, but, as you can easily imagine, the weird phenomenon used to strike deadly fear into the superstitious sailor-men of bygone days, and even now it is looked upon by many with the most intense awe.

Q. What is a sprocket?

A. A tooth of that type of wheel that works in connection with a chain drive. As the sprocket-wheel turns, each single sprocket engages in a link of the chain. I regret I cannot answer any more of your fifty odd questions on mechanics, Geo. Sparling, owing to lack of space; nor does our office-boy wish to exchange his bike for a tortoise and two Angora rabbits.

Q. Where are the Horse Latitudes?

A. In the Atlantic Ocean, "Wondering Wally." They are regions of calm where, in the old days of sailing ships, vessels were often becalmed for so long that they had to heave overboard any horses they were carrying to conserve the fresh drinking water.

Q. What is a cornice?

A. The word has more than one meaning, Fred Morton. It is the name given in an architectural way to the horizontal moulded projection crowning a building, or it may be the ornamental moulding round the wall of a room below the ceiling. Then "cornice" is also a mountaineering term applied to any overhanging and hardened mass of snow at the edge of a precipice. By all means you may send more questions, Fred.

Q. Who was Captain Boycott?

A. The agent of a wealthy landlord who came into prominence when Ireland was in a state of unrest in 1880. The poor tenants of his master agreed among themselves not to pay the rents, so Captain Boycott put pressure on them to make them divvy up. In retaliation to this, the astute tenants decided to punish him in a novel way; in short, to make it impossible for him to live in Ireland. When he wanted food the tradespeople

refused to sell, and he was unable to get in his own crops because no one would work for him. For a time food was got to him from many miles away, but at last Captain Boycott was forced to leave Ireland altogether. And so the word "boycott" has come into the language, meaning to punish by a systematic refusal of social and commercial relations.

Q. What is a "snip"?

A. Tim Hedley, of Richmond, saw this expression in an advertisement offering a thoroughbred Alsatian for thirty bob. It is a term, Tim, more commonly in vogue in the United States and Canada than over on this side, and means a real bargain. If you are thinking of buying the dog, though, be careful that the "snip" doesn't snap!

Q. Can a copy of the original edition of "Robinson Crusoe" still be obtained?

A. Yes, "Lover of Literature"—at a price. A first edition of the famous book by Defoe was bought quite recently for no less than £1,000. You can get a first edition of the 1930 "Holiday Annual" at the present moment for only six shillings.

Q. Who was W. G. Grace?

A. Ye fishes! Such a question from a schoolboy who signs himself "Sporting Stan" makes an oldster like me squirm in his chair! And this lad writes that he "has heard the name in connection with some form of sport, but can't quite remember which." Chum, a sportsman who doesn't know about W. G. Grace is like a politician who has never heard of Lloyd George. The late Dr. Grace was equally famous as one of the greatest cricketers who has ever lived, and for his luxuriant beard. He played for the county of Gloucester, and many are the stories told about his prowess—and his beard. Once a demon bowler sent a "snorter" clean through it—the beard, I mean—but all Grace said in protest was, "Here, whatever are ye at?" Old fogeys like myself who saw him play many a time and oft, still hold that in his prime he was better than Hobbs or any of 'em!

Q. What is the "Flying Pig"?

A. As Jack Tyler, of Wolverhampton, says he is interested in trains, I presume he does not refer to some hostility by his query. The crack goods train of the Great Western Railway goes under this name, Jack, and among other famous freighters are a couple known as the "Grimsby Fish," which roars along at forty miles an hour to London each night with the catch from the North Sea, and the "Southampton Meat," that conveys beef and mutton to the metropolis in special refrigerators.

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noticed the brute was about drenched through! But where have you been all this time, you fat rotter?"

"Didn't I tell you I was going for a ramble round?" said Trimble. "Mind your own rotten business, anyway. I was just making for the ruins again for tea when that chap went for me. I rushed for the boat as I say, and then I pulled round the corner here, hoping to land and get back without the brute seeing me. But he must have been on the watch. Anyway, I hope you fellows haven't scoffed any of my grub yet?"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"No, we haven't!" said Tom Merry, unable to restrain a laugh. "Come on—we'll go and have tea now. I don't fancy we shall have any more trouble from that merchant again!"

And they tramped back to the clearing. Tom Merry glanced at Baggy Trimble very curiously every now and again. The fat junior's yarn sounded likely enough, and everything seemed to support it. And yet there was something very fishy about it all—Tom felt certain about that. He could not forget how they had found Trimble marooned on the island a day or so ago. Certainly it proved to be quite true that Trimble's boat had drifted away. Yet what connection was there between the island and the poacher—if poacher he was, and also between Trimble and him, if any?

But Tom asked no more questions of Trimble—nor did the others. They knew, in any case, that there was little likelihood of their getting the truth out of him. They reached the ruins at last, and then they settled down to tea, all of them showing good appetites. But Trimble showed a better. Yet, for once, he was not so greedy as usual, and all of them had enough—a most unusual happening when Trimble was present at a feed. He seemed much too preoccupied to give his full attention to the good things, and as he ate he glanced again and again over his shoulder into the shadowy woods, and he was the first to suggest that they should go when the meal ended.

So, as Trimble's word was more or less law for that afternoon, they boarded the boat and set off for the boathouse. And yet again the mysterious Trimble surprised them.

Hardly had they pulled down stream half a mile when Trimble made a suggestion that brought gasps of astonishment from Tom Merry & Co.

"You fellows can drop me off about here," he said calmly. "I want to run over to Rylcombe across the fields before lock-up. Just about do it if I'm sloppy. Pull in, you chaps!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, my hat!"

"You—you'd rather walk than be pulled down by us?" ejaculated Tom.

"Getting deaf?" asked Trimble pleasantly. "Haven't I told you I wanted to go to Rylcombe. Just pull me in, and don't argue!"

"Oh, my hat! You're going through the woods?"

"Yes, and then across the fields," said Trimble coolly. "I'm not a bit tired—not so soft like you fellows, you know! I always keep myself fit! A little run to Rylcombe will just suit me before lock-up. Well, what the thump are you waiting for? Blessed if I shall bring you fellows out on a picnic again!"

The juniors pulled into the bank—too overcome to argue the point further. The boat touched the shore, and Baggy jumped out. With a wave of his fat hand he dived into the wood and vanished.

"Well," said Tom Merry, "that fellow beats me hollow! What silly game can he be up to, I wonder? I don't like the look of things at all!"

"I've been thinking," said Lowther, with a deep chuckle. "I wonder of his yarn about a cheque was true, after all? I'd like to know where he got his grub from. It looks rather fishy to me now!"

It began to look like it to all of them. They pulled back to the boathouse and made for St. Jim's in a rather thoughtful mood. The mystery of Baggy Trimble and his supply of tuck was puzzling every member of the party. They had not long to wait, however, before the solution to that mystery was forthcoming!

CHAPTER 7

The Reckoning!

"YOU fellows seen that fat rotter, Trimble?"

Ernest Levison asked the question as Tom Merry & Co. arrived at the School House that evening.

Levison was standing with his chums, Cardew and Clive, in the School House doorway, chatting, as the Terrible Three and Blake & Co. came up the steps.

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"Trimble?" echoed Monty Lowther thoughtfully. "Trimble! I seem to know that name! Is he rather a fat chap? Have we seen him, Tommy?"

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Just a few!" he answered. "Looking for him, Levison?"

"Yes. I heard you fellows went off with him somewhere! There's no accounting for tastes!" grunted Levison. "The question is, where is he now?"

"And did he happen to be carrying a pot of strawberry jam?" asked Cardew seriously. "That's most important, as we've missed one."

"And some chocolate biscuits!" snorted Levison. "We had nothing for tea excepting bread and butter! That fat burglar wants—"

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Tom Merry, with a queer look at his chums. "Strawberry jam—"

"Yes!"

"And chocolate biscuits—"

"Yes—gone; absolutely vanished!" growled Levison in sulphurous accents. "We're waiting for that fat villain—"

"You're sure he took them—" began Tom, though he felt sure enough himself.

"Of course he did! I wondered what that wangle in the dashed Form-room meant. I see it now. It was an excuse to get out to raid the studies."

"Oh, my hat!"

None of the Fourth-Formers had thought of that, though Blake had wondered as well as Lowther where Trimble had got his grub from—or, at least, the money to buy it.

"That's rather queer!" said Blake, looking at Tom Merry. "Trimble tried a new stunt this afternoon—rubbed his chivvy with dust so that Lathom would send him out to wash himself. It came off all right, and the fat rotter was away for about ten minutes. Supposing—"

"There's no thumping doubt about it, you asses!" said Levison wrathfully. "Practically every fellow in the Shell and Fourth has lost something from their cupboard. The fat burglar's been round collecting tit-bits from every study—something here and something there! He took a pot of strawberry jam and some chocolate biscuits from us."

"Oh, dear!" mumbled Tom Merry. "We—we had strawberry jam and chocolate biscuits, you chaps!"

"Oh, crumbs! So we did. And—and I thought I recognised that box of chocs!" said Blake faintly. "Gussy had one sent him this morning by a doting aunt—just like it!"

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus jumped.

Without another word Tom Merry rushed off across the quad at top speed, making for the tuck-shop. Dame Taggles smiled at him as he entered.

"Well, Master Merry?"

"Excuse me bothering you, ma'am," said Tom breathlessly, "but did Trimble buy a stack of grub from you this afternoon?"

Dame Taggles shook her head.

"Nothing at all, Master Merry!"

"But—but—that cricket-bag, Mrs. Taggles! We saw him take it from the counter there. It was full of grub—"

"Oh, I don't know what was in that, Master Merry!" said Dame Taggles. "Master Trimble just left it with me—asked me if he might leave it for a few minutes. He brought it just as I was opening the shop this afternoon."

"Oh! Oh, my hat! Oh! Ah! Ye-es, Mrs. Taggles. Thank you very much!"

With that Tom Merry hurried back to his chums.

His face was scarlet. He knew now where the whacking collection of tuck had come from. It had been raided from the various studies by Trimble! The cheque yarn was all spoof—as they might have known well enough! And Trimble had even raided their own studies—the studies of his guests—to get the supply he needed. Tom remembered now that the tin of pineapple had looked suspiciously like a tin they had got in for tea that day. It was not likely to be in the cupboard in Study No. 10 now!

"Well, the—the fat, scheming burglar!" gasped Jack Blake, as Tom told the sad news. "Oh, the—the—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther. "It's—awfully—ha, ha!—funny, though!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry could not help it—he also had to laugh. Baggy Trimble's weird and wonderful schemes were the limit!

"It's nothing to laugh at!" stuttered Levison. "Grundy's going to smash the fat thief, and we're going to help him. Everybody seems to be asking for him, so there's a warm time coming for the fat scoundrel. Where is he?"

"Lying low somewhere, I suppose!" said Tom Merry. "I expect he guessed he'd be suspected!"

"That's why he wouldn't come back with us!" chuckled Lowther. "What a lad he is!"

"But—but I don't understand this!" snorted Clive. "He's been with you, you say? Then—"

"Awfully sorry, you fellows!" said Blake, with a chuckle. "But Trimble invited us to his picnic and we accepted. We know now that the grub he supplied was raided from all the studies—even our giddy own!"

"You—you've helped him scoff our grub?" yelled Clive.

"Exactly—our own as well! Trimble spoofed us with a yarn about a cheque; we ought to have been kicked for swallowing it. He'd got a cricket-bag full of grub in the tuckshop, but we know now that he simply took it there himself to throw dust in our optics. See the wheeze now?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. passed on, roaring with laughter. But Levison & Co. did not seem to see anything to laugh at in the story. Unlike the picnicers, they had not enjoyed the strawberry-jam and the chocolate biscuits.

On the way upstairs the juniors met quite a number of fellows asking after Trimble. Grundy was like a raging lion, and Trimble's guests—wisely, perhaps—refrained from telling him the story.

"It's a bit thick, though!" said Blake, shaking his head. "The fat rotter fairly did us down, and has made us look born idiots! He's made us a party to his rotten pinching. I'm going to kick him hard when I see him!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, who was quite upset about the discovery. "We have scoffed grub that did not belong to us—that we had no wight to touch, deah boys. That fat wascal ought to be seaveahly dealt with!"

"He will be severely dealt with when he turns up, don't you worry!" chuckled Lowther. "He can't be long—it's close on call-over now. Well, cheerio, you chaps!"

The three Shell fellows were just about to part from Blake & Co. at the door of Study No. 6 when Blake gave a yell.

"There he is!"

And there he was! Like a great fat shadow Baggy Trimble came scudding softly along the passage from the back corridor. He appeared to be carrying something bulky under his jacket—they glimpsed brown paper sticking out. He vanished like a bolting rabbit into Study No. 2.

"The fat rotter!" gasped Blake. "He's sneaked in by the servants' entrance and up the back stairs, of course! Come on—before he gets the chance to lock the door!"

"Phew! Yes!"

They made a rush for Trimble's study. As they reached it they heard a startled exclamation from within, followed by a hurried, frantic rattling as the fat junior strove to jam the key in the lock and turn it.

But Blake was just a second too quick for him. He twisted the door-handle and put all his beef into a shoulder-charge.

Biff!

The door flew open under that hefty charge. Baggy Trimble went whirling away across the room with a loud yell, to trip backwards over the edge of the carpet.

Crash!

"Yarroooooop!"

There was no sign of the parcel, or whatever it was Trimble had had under his jacket. But Tom Merry & Co. were not interested in that. They wanted a settlement with Trimble. He had tricked them, and they did not like it. He had invited them to a picnic under false pretences—had practically made them a party to his raiding, besides putting them in the light of gullible fools. The fellows would be bound to grin at the way he had spoofed them.

Tom Merry & Co. had quite lost sight of the humour in the situation now. Trimble had to be taught a lesson.

Hardly had Trimble's yell rang out when hurried feet sounded in the passage. Doors opened, and fellows came hurrying out—all of them making straight for Study No. 2. Trimble's dulcet tones were well known.

At the door appeared half a dozen furious faces.

"Yes, here he is!" hooted Dick Julian. "He's come in—I thought I heard him yell. Trimble, you fat worm—"

"Trimble, you fat burglar—"

"Trimble, you rotten plunderer—"

"Yarrooooo!" roared Trimble. "I say, you fellows, keep off! It wasn't me—it was these fellows!"

"What?"

"I know nothing about the grub—nothing at all. Besides, my pater sent me a hamper—I mean a cheque!" gasped Trimble, scrambling up, and eyeing the wrathful visitors apprehensively. "I say, you chaps," he added, appealing to Tom Merry & Co., "back me up—didn't I stand you a ripping picnic? Don't be so beastly ungrateful!"

"Bai Jove! You fat wottah—"

"Oh, really, Gussy—after all I've done for you; after such a splendid time this afternoon! Look here—it's all right—Keep off!" yelled Trimble as the crowd surged into the study. "It's all right! Look here, I'll make it

right! I'll soon be rolling in money. I'm going to stand both Forms a lot of whacking feeds— Yarroooooop! Help!"

Crash!

Trimble went down beneath a rush of irate juniors.

Other fellows came along, hearing the row and guessing the reason for it. George Alfred Grundy appeared on the scene, and he did not stop to pass any remarks. He just went for Trimble—or what could be seen of that hapless grub-raider.

Trimble's voice was raised in dire anguish above the uproar of angry, vengeful yells.

Once again had Baggy Trimble overdone things. This time he had roused a hornet's-nest around his ears. Other times it was merely a single study that lost articles of grub. On this occasion the losers were too numerous to mention.

"Smash him!" brawled Grundy. "Teach the fat thief a lasting lesson this time! Here, lemme gerratin!"

"Yoooooooop! Help! Murder! Pol— Yarrup! Help!" shrieked Trimble.

Tom Merry & Co. withdrew from the mass of vengeance-seekers. They realised that there were quite enough to deal with Trimble without their help. Trimble, from his howls of anguish, was obviously under the impression that there were far too many.

Bump, bump, bump, bump!

The dust rose in clouds from the study carpet as Trimble's fat person struck it again and again. Wildrake came in, and looked on the proceedings with many chuckles. Trimble howled to him for aid—in vain. Wildrake himself had missed a tin of sardines, and he was not likely to render aid—unless it was to the bumpers.

They finished at last—even Grundy realised at length that Trimble had had enough. Then they streamed from the study, breathing hard but looking more satisfied. Trimble was likely to remember that bumping for a long

(Continued on next page.)

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time, and they hoped it would be a lesson to him. At last the fat Fourth-Former found himself alone—even Wildrake had followed the rest out, leaving him to recover at his leisure. And Baggy Trimble sat on the carpet, dishevelled and crimson, and panted and gasped for breath, and groaned and groaned in anguish. At that moment Trimble must have wondered if the splendid picnic—or even the whacking bag of silver—was worth such a reckoning!

CHAPTER 8. No Offers!

KIT WILDRAKE came into Study No. 2 later on in the evening and he smiled grimly at Baggy Trimble who was lounging in the armchair—possibly resting after his busy, exciting time.

"Well, feeling better now, fatty?" he asked.

Grunt!

"Your own fault, you know!" said Kit Wildrake sagely. "You'll learn better some day, I suppose—when it's too late, fatty! Why can't you leave other people's grub alone? You'll be losing your giddy sense of proportion soon and bagging other things as well if you're not careful, my lad!"

Grunt!

"You'll end up in chokey as sure as Fate!" warned Wildrake, who was a very good-natured youth and had just a bit of sympathy for Trimble's many weaknesses. "Everybody knows, of course, that you're more fool than knave. But I guess— What the thump—"

Wildrake broke off in utter amazement as his eye suddenly fell on the mantelpiece.

Something was there that had not been there before!

Usually the study mantelpieces at St. Jim's were receptacles for all sorts of articles, from photoframes to footer boots! Fellows with artistic tastes sometimes made an effort to make them look nice with a vase of flowers—usually a cracked vase which remained there until knocked off by a flying book during a scuffle. More often than not, however, the most artistic ornament there was a broken clock that wouldn't go!

But now—what a change there was in Study No. 2.

On the mantelshelf, fairly gleaming in the evening sunlight, was a magnificent silver goblet. On either side of it was a handsome silver candlestick!

Kit Wildrake blinked at them and blinked again.

Even from a distance it was easy to discern that the things were valuable. They were works of art—the candlesticks were finely embossed and handsome; the goblet was also finely moulded, and bore a crest.

"G-good lor!" gasped Wildrake. "Trimble, where on earth have these things come from?"

"Eh? What things?"

"These silver things on the mantel!" demanded Wildrake.

Trimble glanced round carelessly.

"Oh, those!" he said. "Only a few things—presents—from my aunt!"

"You—you fat fibber!"

"Oh, really, Wildrake!" said Trimble warmly. "I think you go a bit too far with your rotten remarks. Didn't you see that parcel that came for me at tea-time?"

"No, I jolly well didn't."

"It was waiting for me when I got in," said Trimble airily. "Nothing to make a fuss about, you know. They're pretty, I'll admit. But I wish my uncle had sent the cash instead as he promised."

"You said your aunt—"

"D-did I? I meant to say my aunt—my uncle's wife, you know—Lady Patricia Trimble! The old chap—Sir James Trimble—is rather a big pot in his way, you know!"

"You—you fat fibber! I don't believe—"

"It was always understood that I should have these things—all the silverware, you know—being the favourite nephew," explained Trimble carelessly. "My aunt said I should have them when she died. She only passed away last month! She's kept her word and sent them along as you see—at least, these are only a paltry few items to be going on with."

"She sent them after she was dead?" yelled Wildrake.

"Yes—oh, crumbs—I mean, nunno! Before she died at least my uncle, the admiral, sent them! Out of respect for her dead wishes, you know! But I do wish you wouldn't ask so many dashed questions, Wildrake!" said Trimble peevishly. "Dashed if you aren't as ill-mannered—"

"Well, you fat fibber!" gasped Wildrake.

His face went grave as he picked up the beautiful goblet and examined it. It was very heavy—obviously of

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solid silver. It also looked as if it had not been cleaned for a long time, and only recently been carelessly rubbed over. The candlesticks gave the same impression.

Kit Wildrake whistled. Then he looked very queerly at Trimble.

"Trimble," he said seriously, "where did you get these things?"

"Haven't I told you?" hooted Trimble. "Dash it all, can't you believe a fellow? Haven't I told you before—only yesterday, in fact—that I was expecting some ripping presents, and that I should soon be rolling in money? You wouldn't believe me—"

"I wouldn't!" said Wildrake grimly. "And I don't know now. Trimble, where on earth have you burgled these things from? Why, they're worth no end of money, I guess."

Trimble gave him a haughty blink.

"I absolutely refuse to speak with a fellow who doubts



"Come back! Come back, you young hound!" As Baggy Trimble splashed into the water up to his knees. He made a vicious snarl at the water on

my word, Wildrake!" he replied cuttingly. "Such suspicion and inquisitiveness shows a low mind! You're awfully ignorant and quizzical, Wildrake—nosey, in fact, if you don't mind my saying so! I suppose it's living on a ranch with cowboys, and all sorts of ignorant fellows! Kindly refrain from speaking to me again!"

Kit Wildrake looked at him and then at the "presents." His face was very grave. He knew Trimble only too well. The fat Fourth-Former was not willingly dishonest, but he had a most accommodating conscience, and could persuade himself to believe anything he wanted to believe. That findings were keepings had always been a favourite motto of Baggy Trimble's, and had more than once got him into trouble. But he was a fellow who never learned a lesson. Like Grundy, he had dug for the treasure—but, unlike Grundy, had found it! Grundy intended to stick to it if he found it, so why shouldn't he?

But Wildrake looked at matters in a different light.

In any case, he did not know that Trimble had found any treasure.

“What do you intend to do with the stuff, Trimble?” he asked quietly at last.

“Eh? Sell ‘em, of course!” said Trimble. He looked at Wildrake hopefully. “I say, Wildrake,” he said, “I’ll sell ‘em to you if you like, old chap!”

“Will you?” gasped Wildrake.

“Yes. I think it only fair to give my study-mate the first chance,” said Trimble generously. “I’m ready to lose money on it, in fact. I know you’re rather a poverty-stricken bounder, and that you can’t afford to pay as much as, say, old Gussy or Cardew! But I’d rather sell ‘em to you than anyone!”

“Oh, my hat!”



reached the nearest scull and pushed off frantically from the island the boat's prow, but his grasp slid off again, and he sprawled into (See Chapter 5.)

“If I can sell ‘em by private treaty,” said Trimble reflectively, “so much the better. But if that fails, I shall sell by auction. But I’m giving you the first chance, old man. How much for this ripping goblet! Tophole for drinking lemonade out of, you know!”

Wildrake drew a deep breath.

“Trimble, you crass idiot!” he gasped. “What’s the meaning of it? You’ll be landing yourself in serious trouble if you aren’t careful. Anyone can see these things are no end valuable! It’s family silver right enough; but it’s not your family silver, Trimble!”

“My uncle—I mean, my aunt——”

“Blow your aunt, and blow your uncle!” snorted Wildrake. “Don’t try to take me in with that silly yarn! Where did you get the stuff?”

“You cheeky rotter!”

“You won’t tell me, then?” snapped Wildrake. “I only want to save you from serious trouble, Trimble. If I can help you out I will. But——”

“Of all the cheek!” said Trimble loftily. “You jolly well

forget yourself, Wildrake! Who the dickens asked you to help, or shove your silly nose in my affairs? Like your dashed cheek——”

“You won’t explain, then?”

“Certainly not! If you refuse to take this splendid opportunity and buy this stuff——”

“I wouldn’t touch it with a barge-pole!” said Wildrake grimly. “I don’t want to see the inside of a prison, if you do, Trimble. Well, go your own silly way! I’ll leave you to it, you fat fool!”

And with that, Kit Wildrake walked out.

Trimble glared after him.

“Cheeky rotter!” he grunted. “Like his rotten cheek and impudence. Blow it! I was hoping—— Still, there’s heaps of time and heaps of fellows who’ll be only too jolly glad to avail themselves of such a splendid opportunity of acquiring such ripping things. I think I’ll go and see old Gussy. He’s not so dashed nose-y and suspicious as Wildrake, the awful beast!”

Trimble took down the silver goblet, and, after wrapping it in brown paper, left the study on business bent.

He was looking rather disappointed, however. It seemed as if disposing of his treasure was not going to be such an easy matter as he had supposed. Certainly Wildrake was rather a suspicious beast, and he was not exactly a wealthy fellow. Still—— Trimble frowned as he walked along to Study No. 6. Why couldn’t fellows believe a fellow—especially a truthful fellow like him? It was really too thick!

He found Blake & Co. at home. They grinned as Trimble rolled in.

“After another bumping, Trimble?” inquired Blake. “If you are—— Hallo, what’s that you’ve got under your jacket?”

Trimble drew out the parcel, and, placing it on the study table, proceeded to unwrap the paper.

The goblet was fully disclosed at last.

Blake & Co. blinked in astounded wonder at the goblet that was revealed.

“What the dickens is that, Trimble?” ejaculated Blake. “Where the merry old dickens did you get it from?”

“Pinch it from?” added Herries. “Phew! It’s solid silver! Trimble——”

“Trimble——”

“I’m giving you fellows the first offer of it!” said Trimble calmly. “It’s worth about twenty quid, I should think. I’m letting it go at half-price—ten quid! Now, Gussy——”

“Bai Jove!”

The juniors stared at the handsome piece of silver-ware, and then they stared at Trimble, and then at each other.

Blake broke the silence at last, and his voice was stern.

“Where did you get that thing from, Trimble?” he said.

“Family silver,” explained Baggy. “The pater—I mean, my aunt, sent it along—just a trifling present to be going on with, you know! I think I mentioned to you fellows that I was expecting to be rolling in money soon?”

“You did; but you always are expecting that, Trimble!” said Blake gravely. “If this is a trifle of your aunt’s family silver, what are you doing with it?”

“Haven’t I told you she’s sent it me as a present?” said Trimble testily. “Dash it all, you fellows are awfully dense! My uncle always said I was to have the family silver when he passed away——”

“Your uncle? I thought——”

“I mean my aunt!” said Trimble hurriedly. “You see, she’s just pegged out, and my uncle—Sir Jasper Trimble, you know—has just sent this on. He’s sending the rest of the silver on later!”

“Is he a professional burglar,” asked Digby curiously, “or only an amateur? I suppose he’s sent the stuff along to you because the bobbies are on his track, what?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“You awful ass!” snorted Trimble. “Now, you fellows, do stop rotting! What offers for this handsome goblet? Only ten quid, Gussy; you can pay a little now, and the rest later if you like. All business houses are now adopting the instalment system, you know!”

“Wats!”

“I’ll take any reasonable offer!” said Trimble. “I’m not anxious to make money! I’m only anxious to get rid of the things!”

“Take ‘em back to their owner, then—or to the police!”

“Oh, really, Blake, don’t rot! I’m the owner, aren’t I? My aunt——”

“Blow your aunt!” said Blake, eyeing Trimble fixedly. “Your aunt never sent you that thing, Trimble! You’ve found it or boned it from somewhere! Take my tip and take it back, or hand it to the police, you fat idiot!”

“You silly ass!” hooted Trimble. “Don’t I keep telling you it belongs to me. Findings are keepings—— I—I mean, my aunt sent this by this evening’s post. I’ve got

some silver candlesticks in my study as well as this. She's sending me a whole heap of stuff."

"I thought you said she was dead, old bean?"

"Ahem! You—you see, it's my uncle who's sending them along now!" explained Trimble crossly. "Respecting my poor aunt's last wishes, you know. Can't you believe a fellow?"

"No; we jolly well can't—not a fellow like you!"

"You silly asses! I tell you it's genuine enough!" said Trimble earnestly. "I shall soon have a whole stack of stuff—heaps better things than this. I can afford to let this go cheap! Now, Gussy, ten bob for this handsome goblet. Magnificently chased, and with the family crest on it! Worth twenty quid! Did you say ten bob?"

"Bai Jove! Wathah not! I believe a fellow's liable to get two years or more for accepting stolen propahity, deah boy!"

"You—you fathead! What about you, Blake?"

"Nothing about me, Bill Sikes!"

"Ass! Throwing away a splendid chance like this! What about you, Dig—"

"Rats!"

"You, Herries?"

"More rats!"

Trimble looked disgusted.

"Look here, you fellows," he snorted peevishly, "I'll go and give this splendid chance to some other study if you don't make me an offer soon. I warn you! I'll tell you what; you fellows club together and buy it—ten bob only! It'll look ripping on the mantelpiece there."

"And we shall look ripping wearing broad arrows!" said Blake grimly. "Get out! And take my tip, you fat ass! If you found that thing—"

"You silly ass!" howled Trimble, who was really almost believing his own fictions by this time. "Aren't I telling you my aunt sent it along? Look here, five bob and this splendid silver goblet's yours!"

And Trimble waited expectantly.

Jack Blake regarded him with a very searching gaze indeed. It was barely possible, of course, that Trimble was speaking the truth, and that the thing had been sent him as a present. It was certainly not very probable, however. He knew Trimble's extremely easy-going views on the subject of property—other people's property, that is. And that any aunt or uncle would send a junior school-boy such an extraordinary and valuable present was too steep—for Blake, at all events!

"Where had Trimble got it from?"

"Listen to me, Trimble," said Blake, quietly and seriously. "You're too big an ass, I suppose, to understand what you're doing. For your own sake I'm advising you; if you've found the stuff anywhere, take it to the Head or to the police. You'll find yourself in jolly hot water if you don't!"

Trimble elevated his snub nose loftily, and wrapped up the goblet again. Obviously there was nothing doing in Study No. 6.

"When I want your advice I'll ask for it, Blake," he said. "Like your cheek to offer it to a fellow in my position. I shall soon be rolling in money, and I'll see you get none of it! Does this mean you all refuse to make an offer for this—even you, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What about a silver cake-stand?" urged Trimble, eyeing Gussy hopefully. "Or a ripping pair of candle-sticks? Or, if you like, I can sell you a splendid silver set of fish-knives. I've also got some ripping silver frames to dispose of—jolly cheap! I shall soon have a whole heap of stuff here, and I'll let you take your choice, old chap!"

"Wats!"

Trimble snorted, and again his lip curled.

"I might have known it!" he said scornfully. "I was rather an ass to come to a poverty-stricken study like this! If you don't mind my saying so, you're an awful lot of miserable paupers, you know. When I want to sell you fellows anything again I'll bring along a stack of cheap tops for—Here, what—Yarooogh! Oh crikey! Mind my silver—Yooooop!"

Bang!

Trimble found himself sitting dazedly in the passage, hugging his precious goblet, and facing the closed door of Study No. 6. He staggered to his feet, seething with wrath, and rubbed himself furiously where Blake's boot had landed.

"Beasts!" he gasped. "Measly, poverty-stricken beasts!"

With that, Baggy Trimble rolled away to try his salesmanship elsewhere. Very obviously there was nothing doing at No. 6 Study. Realisation was forcing itself upon Trimble that it was not going to be such an easy matter to dispose of his treasure as he had supposed.

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CHAPTER 9.

The Wheeze That Didn't Work!

BAGGY TRIMBLE spent a very busy time that evening. He rolled into practically every study in the Fourth and Shell, and he rolled out again from most studies much more quickly than he had rolled in.

It was a distinctly disappointing evening for Baggy.

Trimble had read somewhere that silver was a drug in the market, and he certainly had good reason to believe that it was the same at St. Jim's.

Nobody seemed to want any silver goblets, or handsome silver candlesticks, or anything else in the silver line. They all wanted to know, however, where Trimble had got the goods from. And when Trimble told them nobody believed his story.

That was the annoying part about it all.

Even when Trimble, in sheer desperation, offered the massive silver goblet to Mellish for half-a-crown, Mellish refused to do a deal. Mellish wasn't a very particular youth, but he wanted proof from Trimble that his aunt had, indeed, sent him the presents. If Trimble could produce that proof, then Mellish promised he would buy it.

That was the nearest Baggy could get to an actual sale.

The fellows were so awfully suspicious. Trimble had never realised before how inconvenient it was to have a reputation for telling "whoppers."

Tom Merry, indeed, had not only refused to believe him, but he had talked of taking Trimble, with his silver presents, to Mr. Railton. Fortunately for Trimble, he had only talked about it, and had not done it yet.

Really it was horribly disappointing.

Trimble's dreams of wealth and unlimited tuck were beginning to fade already. Still, if he found he could not sell the stuff at St. Jim's he thought it would be an easy matter to sell it outside. The jeweller in Rylcombe might buy them, and they would certainly find a market in a place like Wayland. In fact, he felt quite certain he would get much better prices for the things at a jeweller's or a pawnbroker's.

Only—Trimble didn't want to risk it!

Obtuse as he was, the fat Fourth-Former felt sure that a jeweller would want proof that the silver was a present from his uncle or aunt; he would want to satisfy himself that Trimble had come by the things honestly.

Of course he had come by them honestly—Trimble was quite satisfied upon that point! He had found the silver, and findings were keepings; nobody could deny that! But there was that absurd and unjust law of treasure-trove to be considered. If it got out that he had found the stuff on Abbey Island—that it was treasure-trove—then he would have to hand it over to the authorities at once, which was the last thing the fat Fourth-Former desired.

Only as a last resource did Trimble wish to sell the silver outside St. Jim's. Hazy as were his ideas on the law where treasure-trove was concerned, Trimble did not wish to risk breaking it unless obliged to do so by the lack of buyers at St. Jim's.

By the look of things, there was going to be a lack.

But Trimble was still hopeful. Hadn't Mellish offered to buy his goblet if he could furnish proof that it had been sent him by his aunt—uncle? It was clear to Baggy that suspicion had to be allayed—somehow!

The question was, how? The problem occupied Trimble's mind until late that night, and all through classes the following morning. But by the time the Fourth was dismissed, it had been solved—to Trimble's satisfaction, at all events.

Immediately dinner was over Trimble got busy. In the box-room he found an empty, folding cardboard box, and with due care he smuggled this to the cycle-shed. Then he "borrowed" Digby's bike without troubling to ask Digby's permission, and made a flying visit to his secret hoard of silver hidden in the old oak in Rylcombe Wood.

Selecting various articles from the sack of "treasure," Baggy wrapped them carefully in paper and packed them in the cardboard box. Then, from his pocket, he took a sealed envelope and placed it on top of the packed silver. He corded up the box securely and carried it to where he had left Digby's bike on the towing-path.

Five minutes later Trimble was knocking at the door of Mr. Craggs, the local carrier's cottage in Rylcombe. Mr. Craggs worked for a firm of carriers in Wayland, and he usually journeyed between Wayland and Rylcombe twice a day, collecting and delivering packages and boxes.

For the consideration of half-a-crown—luckily Trimble happened to be in funds that morning—Mr. Craggs agreed to take the box to the office in Wayland, get it labelled there, and then to deliver it at St. Jim's the following morning.

The little bit of business satisfactorily arranged, Trimble

cycled back to St. Jim's. He was a little late for afternoon classes, but the fifty lines Mr. Lathom awarded him did not seem to trouble Trimble. For the rest of that day he looked very cheery. But he attempted to do no selling of the silver still in his study.

Soon all suspicion would be removed, and then the bids would come quickly enough, he felt quite sure.

He mentioned that he was expecting more silver "presents," however, to a good many fellows, who were still more perplexed when they heard that. Naturally, the whole strange affair had aroused no little interest in both Shell and Fourth, and many theories—all of them very suspicious theories—were rife as to the meaning of it all. But Trimble insisted that his "uncle" was sending him more stuff soon, and they felt very curious as to whether it would come. If it did, then it would begin to look as if Trimble's story was true, incredible as it seemed.

After morning lessons, the next day, Baggy Trimble

hovered round the school gates with an expectant air. The Terrible Three and Blake & Co. happened to be chatting there at the time, and they could not help noticing him.

"Waiting for the postman, old fat man?" asked Lowther. "Eh? Oh, no—I mean, yes; exactly!" said Trimble. "I'm waiting for the noon post—expecting a parcel, you know!"

Trimble fancied that was a master stroke. If he pretended he was expecting something by post, and something came instead by carrier, then the fellows would not be suspicious!

"I'm expecting a few more little things from my aunt, you know," he went on carelessly.

"The dead one?" inquired Lowther gravely. "Are they coming by aeroplane, or by underground, Trimble?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fathead," grunted Trimble, gazing rather anxiously up

(Continued on next page.)

FAMOUS DAREDEVILS!



For sheer nerveless daredevilry, few men have so astounded the world as did Charles Blondin, when he crossed Niagara Falls on a tight-rope, blindfolded and trundling a wheelbarrow containing a girl!

CROSSED NIAGARA FOUR TIMES!

HE walked across Niagara Falls on a tight-rope alone!

Then he repeated the feat, blindfolded, and trundling a wheelbarrow containing a girl!

Then he did the hat-trick with a man on his back!

Then he did it just once more for luck, this time on stilts, in the presence of the late King Edward, at that time Prince of Wales.

Who? Why, Charles Blondin, the world-famous acrobat and tight-rope walker, whose astounding feats of daredevilry have lived and are remembered with awe and wonderment long after the man himself is dead.

Charles Blondin was, indeed, a daredevil of the first water! All his sixty-six years of adventurous life were packed with thrills and amazing feats of daring of every description.

He was a Frenchman, born at St. Omer, near Calais, and his real name was Jean Francois Gravelet.

From his earliest years his ambition was to take up the perilous profession of an acrobat, and young Blondin could often be seen in the back garden of his home, utilising his mother's clothes' line as an impromptu rope, while he walked its length, from drain-pipe to water-tub, balancing himself by means of a broom handle.

Sometimes he fell, not often, because even in those days his sense of balance was extraordinarily developed, and in those first wobbly essays on the tight-rope, he showed promise of attaining to great heights in this most difficult of all arts.

Sometimes the rope broke! Sometimes the barrel tipped up! More often his mother caught him, which was even worse. But, nothing daunted, young Blondin, practised assiduously and waited for the great chance that he was sure would come his way one day, when he would be enabled to set his feet on the ladder of fame as an acrobat.

RISE TO FAME!

EVENTUALLY he got a job with a circus operating in Lyons, and there, after many hardships and narrow escapes from death and injury, became proficient as a tight-rope walker.

Rapidly he rose to fame. People flocked from near and far to see "The Little Wonder," as he soon became known. But ambition flamed within him to seek further afield than France and Europe generally, and so he paid a visit to the New World, and astonished and delighted the Americans by his feats of daring upon the tight-rope.

After touring the United States for some years, he made his first great conquest of the Niagara Falls. On June 30th, 1859, in his thirty-fifth year, he actually crossed Niagara Falls on a tight-rope in five minutes.

The banks were crowded with spectators, more than twenty-five thousand being present. They came from all over the continent, when the news flashed like wildfire from town to town, city to city, hamlet to hamlet, that the world-famous acrobat, Blondin, had chosen a quick way of committing suicide.

ONE FALSE STEP MEANT DEATH!

TRY and imagine the great American-Canadian Falls, if you can. American-Canadian, because they mark part of the boundary between the two great countries. The thunder of Niagara Falls can be heard for miles around. No less than fifteen million cubic feet of water pass over the mighty chasm in a minute; a roaring, howling, hissing, flooding cataract, dropping hundreds of feet, to a boiling whirlpool of foaming spray, beating on the cruel, jagged rocks below.

Bearing those amazing facts in mind, you will agree that it takes a bit of pluck to try to walk across the Falls on a tight-rope, when one false step, one momentary loss of nerve, one look downwards, would mean certain death.

But Blondin knew what he was doing. He must have argued in his own mind that he could walk any rope, whatever lay beneath. He had walked worse ropes than this during his many performances, and so he crossed in sight of twenty-five thousand people, who held their breath and gasped at his marvellous feat.

BLONDIN'S CROWNING EFFORT!

BUT Blondin, not yet satisfied, crossed Niagara again in the following month of July, blindfolded, and trundling a wheelbarrow containing a girl. Has the passenger been given her due? If Blondin was a great daredevil, his fair burden shared his glory. Again he crossed successfully. A month later, in August to be exact, he again tempted Providence, this amazing man who laughed at Death, and risked his life with a smile on his lips. This time he carried a man on his back, and then in September of the same year, he again crossed on stilts, with King Edward, at that time Prince of Wales, looking on.

It was his crowning effort, and it brought him the success and fame he deserved. Coming to England in 1862, he performed at the Crystal Palace, London—the Mecca, at that time, of circus and acrobatic feats—and walked a tight-rope two hundred and forty-nine yards long, one hundred and seventy feet above the ground. Never had the great Crystal Palace housed such crowds as flocked to see "The Little Wonder," the man who crossed Niagara four times.

Few men have so astounded the world as did Charles Blondin. Few men have gained for themselves a name for sheer unadulterated nerveless, daredevilry as did the little Frenchman of St. Omer. He was a great and famous daredevil. Honour his memory, for he deserves to be remembered!

(Next week our special contributor deals with Mallory and Irvine, the most daring mountaineers the world has ever known.)

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Rylcombe Lane. "The stuff's being sent by my uncle, of course!"

"Oh, a pawnbroker, what?"

"No," roared Trimble. "My uncle's sending the stuff, but it's by the express wish of my p-poor aunt! I'm surprised at you—Hallo, here's old Craggs! Any of you fellows expecting anything?"

"Nunno! But you—"

"Where the dickens has that dashed postman got to?" said Trimble, with one eye on the approaching carrier's cart. "He should have been here before this. Seen the postman on the road, Craggs?"

Mr. Craggs lumbered down from his seat and went round to the back of the cart. He reached inside and brought to light a cardboard box, securely corded and labelled with his firm's label.

"No, I ain't seen nothing of the postman, Master Trimble!" he said. "But I got a package 'ere for you, Master Trimble!"

"Oh, for me?" said Trimble, with a rather overdone air of surprise. "That's queer! I was expecting something by post to-day, but— Anyway, hand it over! Anything to pay?"

"Which there ain't nothing to pay, Master Trimble!" grinned Mr. Craggs.

"I say, you fellows, lend me a tanner to tip Craggs!" said Trimble in a loud voice. "I'll pay you back this evening! I'm broke at the moment!"

Nobody seemed in a hurry to lend Trimble a "tanner." But Craggs waited expectantly, and as Trimble made no effort to feel in his pockets, Tom Merry, breathing hard, handed one into the horny palm of the carrier, who touched his hat and climbed into his seat again.

The cart rumbled away and Trimble examined the box.

"Yes, it's from my aunt—that is, my uncle!" he announced carelessly. "Sent it by rail, after all."

"Has that come by rail?" said Blake. "No railway marks on it that I can see!"

"Eh? Oh! They—they must have been rubbed off on the way!" explained Trimble. "Awfully careless on the railway, you know. Anyway, Craggs must have collected the stuff from the station at Wayland. Good! You fellows can come along and see it unpacked, if you like."

"We will!" said Blake grimly.

The juniors all accompanied Trimble into the House with his box. They were very curious indeed now. Trimble appeared to be quite unconcerned whether they came or not, but inwardly he was delighted. He wanted that box opened in public, and the more witnesses the better.

They gathered round the table in Study No. 2 as Trimble untied the cord.

"Hallo!" said Blake, glancing at the label. "This looks O.K., anyway—it's one of Paterson's labels right enough."

"Of course it is!" snorted Trimble.

"Then where's the other label—the one put on by your deceased aunt?" asked Blake blandly. "There isn't an address on the box—not even a written one!"

"Oh! Ah! Look here, didn't I say it must have been rubbed off on the way?"

"Then how did Paterson's know where to send it?"

"Find out! How should I know?" snorted Trimble. "You're an awfully suspicious beast, Blake! Hallo! Here's my aunt—I mean, my uncle's letter."

He tore open the sealed envelope. It was addressed to "Bagley Trimble, Esq., St. James' School, Sussex." Unfortunately, it was addressed in Baggy's own handwriting, and Blake spotted it at once.

"And this is your own handwriting, Trimble!" he said.

"How d'you account for that, you fat clam?"

"Eh? Oh, easily enough!" said Trimble airily. "I remember giving my aunt some addressed envelopes so she could write to me. See? I say, what do you think of this letter, chaps?"

And Trimble showed the letter round. It ran as follows:

"My dear neffyou,—I am sending you some moor of the family heerlooms for you to do as you like with. They are not required by me any longer as I have now replased them with gold plate. I would have sent them to your home, Trimble Hall, but I know your farther much preffers his own gold plate, like me. I hope you will keep some to make your studdy look nice, and the rest you can sell to your skoolfellows. I will send you a lot moor later on, as it was your deer aunt's wish.

"Ever your luvving unkle,

"SIR TIMOTHY TRIMBLE, Bart."

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

"It's Sir Timothy now," murmured Lowther. "It was first Sir James, then Sir Jasper, and now Sir Timothy! Does he change his name every day, Baggy?"

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"And his spelling, I expect!" said Digby. "To keep it original, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But it's Trimble's own handwriting!" said Tom Merry, hardly knowing whether to laugh or look grave. "The fat ass has written this himself, and sent the box to himself."

Trimble jumped.

"Oh, really, Merry—"

"And this giddy box came from Rylcombe!" said Herries, holding it up. "It's got Tigg's, the outfitter's, name on it!"

"Bai Jove! I believe that's the vevy box my new waistcoat and gloves and things came in the othah day!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I wemembah thwown' it in the box-woom!"

"Oh, crumbs! I—I say, you fellows, that's awful rot!" gasped Trimble. "My aunt must have bought some stuff when she went through Rylcombe the last time she came to see me. That's it! I remember her saying she had to buy some gloves and things to take back—a present for Sir James, you know!"

"You fat ass!" gasped Blake. "Can't you see you're bowled out. What's the good of keeping that silly yarn up? This is your own handwriting and your own giddy spelling. You had that box sent from Wayland just to spoof us, you fat rotter!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That's it. The spoofing, artful dodger!"

"I tell you I didn't!" roared Trimble, quite alarmed and uneasy now. "You awful beasts. Why can't you believe a chap?"

"Because you aren't to be believed, old fat man! But what's in the box?"

And Blake tore out the paper, and there was a glint of silver. The next moment he had dragged out a massive, finely-shaped cake-stand with a crest upon it; two more silver candle-sticks; several silver photo-frames, and a silver salver.

The startled juniors blinked at them.

Baggy Trimble summoned up an uneasy grin.

"Nice, aren't they?" he gasped. "I—I say, you fellows, I'll give you the first refusal. How much for this cake-stand? I'll let it go at a sacrifice. Ten bob! It's worth twenty quid at least. It'll look nice on your study table, Tom Merry."

"Well, my hat!"

"I'd rather sell privately to avoid the necessity of an auction sale," explained Trimble hopefully. "My uncle says I can sell the stuff to my school-fellows—you can see that from the letter yourselves. So it's all right now. What about this card-tray, Gussy? Blake, these candle-sticks would look ripping on your mantelpiece!"

"You—you—"

"What about you, Herries? You're an awfully suspicious beast and rather poverty-stricken, I know, but I'll let you have this cake-stand cheap!"

"You fat burglar—"

"Oh, really, Herries! I say, Gussy, I'll tell you what! I'll let you have this box packed with silver to send home to your pater. I expect his lordship will be glad to pick up a bargain like this. He can take his choice and send the rest back with his cheque for what he keeps. How's that?"

"Bai Jove! Weally, you fellows!" said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head. "This is beginnin' to look wathah sewious, you know! It's pwetly cleah now that Twimble never had the wotten things sent fwom a welation at all."

"Rather not!"

"If he had come by the stuff honestly," said Arthur Augustus, in quite a worried tone, "why should he take so much trouble to spoof us and have that box sent heah?"

"Oh, really, Gussy—"

"You fat ass!" said Tom Merry, his face setting grimly. "Can't you see your yarn won't wash now? That chicken won't fight, Trimble? Where did you get this stack of silver stuff from, you silly young fool?"

"Can't you see it's just come from my uncle?" hooted Trimble. "Dash it all, can't you believe the evidence of your own eyes? I refuse to sell any of you anything after this. You're had your chance, and thrown it away owing to your rotten suspicions!"

"Trimble, for goodness' sake listen to me!" said Tom Merry. "You're a fool, but you're not a knave. But if you go on with this game you'll land yourself in quod. If you've found this stuff somewhere—"

"I utterly refuse to discuss the matter further with you, Tom Merry," said Trimble haughtily. "Like your cheek to talk to me like this! Such low, ill-bred suspicions! Bah!"

"But look here—"

"Rats! Go and eat coke!"

And Trimble put the lid on his box again and walked

out of the study with it, taking great care to take the letter also. He seemed rather anxious to get away from the keen, searching eyes of Tom Merry & Co. Possibly he had a guilty conscience, after all.

"Well, the awful young fool!" said Tom Merry. "This beats the band, you fellows! The fat ass must have found that stuff. It's pretty clear now. What's to be done?"

"Goodness knows! Somebody will be done if he does

sell any of the stuff. As for—Hullo, there's the bell! Come on!"

Tom Merry & Co. went into afternoon classes looking very thoughtful and very grave. That Trimble had no right to the valuable silverware, they were quite certain now. And they felt quite worried about it. Tom Merry himself, more than once, felt that it was up to him, for Trimble's sake, to bring the matter to the notice of Mr. Railton. But he decided, after all, to wait a bit and try to find out more first. So far the mystery of Trimble was beyond his comprehension.

CHAPTER 10.

Baggy's Bargain Sale!

"**W**HAT the thump!"
"Bai Jove! Twimble again!"
"Phew!"

Blake & Co. came to a sudden halt.

Tea was over in Study No. 6, and the juniors were on their way to the Shell quarters for a footer discussion with the Terrible Three. But as they reached the door of Study No. 2 they halted.

Several grinning juniors were already congregated round Trimble's study door. They were keenly interested in a large notice that hung there. On the large sheet of paper that hung on the door was the following announcement:

BARGANE SAIL!

ROLL UP! ROLL UP! ROLL UP!

Valluabel Family Plate.

SOLID SILVER!

To be sold by

ORKSHUN.

In the Junior Common Room at
six o'clock this evening.

GRATE BARGANES FOR SPOT CASH!

Roll up! Roll up! Roll up!

Owner of family plate: Bagley Trimble, Esquire.
Orkshuneer: Bagley Trimble, Esquire.

That was the interesting announcement.

The juniors blinked at it. Obviously, Baggy Trimble had not had much success in his efforts to sell the silver privately, and was resorting to an auction sale.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "The feahful

"Yes, rather!"

Baggy Trimble was, apparently, still hopeful of disposing of his stack of silverware at St. Jim's. Why he should hope to do so by means of an "orkshun," when he had utterly failed to do so by means of private sales was a mystery that only Trimble himself could fathom.

As the juniors still stood staring at the announcement, the door opened, and Trimble himself came out. He grinned on sighting the little group.

"Nearly six o'clock now, you fellows," he remarked. "Better be getting along to the Common-room. I don't want any of my friends to miss my splendid bargains. Spot cash, mind. At least, I shall require a substantial deposit! That's only fair."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Trimble rolled away towards the Common-room. Most of the fellows laughed and followed. But Blake was look-



"Here, what—mind my silver! Yarroooooh! Oh, crikey! Yooooop!" Bang! Baggy Trimble found himself sitting dazedly in the passage, hugging his precious goblet, and facing the closed door of Study No. 6. (See Chapter 8.)

ing grim as he went along to see the Terrible Three, with his chums.

Tom Merry and Manners came out of Study No. 10 just as they reached the door. Tom was looking serious.

"Seen Trimble's notice, Tom?" asked Blake. "About the—"

"I've heard of it, but not seen it," said Tom quietly. "Lowther's seen it, and the fathead has some game on with Trimble, I believe. Going to put the wind up him. We were just going along to the Common-room to see what happens."

"We'll come, then," said Blake, with a faint chuckle. "If Lowther's on the warpath something will happen, I fancy. Isn't Trimble the limit?"

"He's gone beyond the limit this time," said Tom grimly. "I wish I knew what it meant. I want to get to the bottom of it for the fat idiot's own sake. He's not really bad—only a born idiot!"

"Well, that's a lot," chuckled Blake. "Anyway, let's get along. Where's Lowther now?"

"Goodness knows! He wouldn't tell us what his game is."

They strolled along to the Common-room. Quite a crowd of fellows were on their way there, all wearing anticipatory smiles. Trimble's "orkshun" was causing quite a mild sensation. They reached the door to find another notice tacked there. This one read:

"SAIL NOW ON!"

Tom Merry & Co. marched in. The room was already more than half full of Shell and Fourth fellows, with a sprinkling of grinning Third-Formers. Most of the Shell

and Fourth fellows were grinning, but some were looking very serious. Curiosity had drawn a good many there, but most, obviously enough, had gone there for entertainment. Possibly there were a few there also who had gone in the hope of picking up a stray bargain, while several fellows took the view that the goods for sale were imitation goods which Trimble hoped to palm off on them.

The majority, however, felt very dubious indeed about Trimble's right to sell the stuff, and they had no intention of buying, whatever absurd price was asked.

Altogether it did not look a very hopeful gathering from Trimble's point of view.

The fat "orkshunner" was there, looking important and beaming. He was quite pleased—delighted, indeed—to see such a splendid gathering. He stood by the table, and on the table was the cardboard box. In the box, presumably, were the articles to be sold. This, Trimble intended, was to be only the first of many such sales. To sell the whole lot at one single sale would be a mistaken policy in Trimble's view. For the present, the rest of the treasure-trove was safe where it lay under the roots of the old oak.

In his hand Baggy held his official hammer, with which he tapped the table.

"There you are, gentlemen," he said. "Solid silver and worth twenty quid at least. Lot 1, gentlemen. What offers? Look ripping on any study mantelpiece."

"But would the buyer look so well in the dock?" inquired Cardew.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You shut up, Cardew," snorted Trimble. "You fellows know exactly where this family silver's from; it's been sent to me by my uncle, a member of the nobility. Any fellow ought to be proud to own such handsome candlesticks. Did you say five quid, Levison?"

"No, I didn't! I was mentioning quod, not quid!"

Trimble gave an exasperated snort. "Lot 1" did not look like selling very quickly at all events.

"You silly asses!" he snorted. "Can't you tell a bargain when you see one?"

"We can tell a spoofer when we see one!" said Manners. "That's why we're not yearning to bid, old fat man!"

"You shut up, Manners—everybody knows you're rather a poverty-stricken bounder! Now, Gussy, old fellow, did I hear you offer two quid?"

"Bai Jove! Wathah not, Twimble!"

"You're expecting too much from juniors, Trimble," said Wilkins. "I say, shall I go and ask Lathom and Railton and some of the beaks to come? They might make good bids, old chap."

"Oh, crums! I—I say, nunno! Here, come back, you ass!" almost shrieked Trimble.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Chuck the fat rotter out and his stuff with him!" snorted Grundy. "It's plain enough he's either pinched the stuff or found it! I've a jolly good mind to tell the Head. Trimble, you fat rotter—"

"Oh dear! I—I say, Grundy, don't be a beast! Look here, I'll make you a special offer of these splendid candlesticks. As you're an old pal you can have 'em for half-a-crown."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What? Want to make me a blessed accomplice, do you?" shouted the ungrateful Grundy. "My hat! Blessed if I don't yank you along to—to— Oh, erikay!" Grundy broke off short with a gasp.

The next moment every fellow in the room seemed rooted to the floor with startled amazement.

Baggy Trimble himself almost fainted. For the door opened just then, and into the room stalked a figure in big boots, a blue uniform, and a helmet.

"G-good lor!" gasped Levison. "A blessed bobby! Oh, my only hat!"

There was a startled buzz. The fellows stared at the constable, and then they stared at the hapless, palpitating Baggy.

Trimble looked as if he were doing his utmost to hide his fat person behind the table and the box—quite an impossible accomplishment.

It was too late in any case—the constable, a short, fat little man, wearing a heavy, walrus-like moustache, had already sighted Baggy.

"Ha!" he exclaimed. "There he is—the very bloke I'm arter! And what's this—ere, what's this? Why, if it ain't the bloomin' stolen goods! My heye!"

He spotted one of the silver candlesticks sticking up out of the box, and held it up.

"My heye! Shut that door, young gents! I ain't goin' to lose my man now I got 'im! 'Ere, I'll soon 'ave the darbies on 'im! My heye! 'Old 'im!"

"Ow! Oh, help, you fellows—keep him off!" wailed Baggy. "Oh dear! I say, it wasn't me! Ow!"

As the constable made a rush round one side of the table the terrified Baggy darted round the other. The next moment they were chasing round the table, the startled juniors jumping out of the way.

"Help!" shrieked Baggy. "Rescue, you fellows—rescue!"

Baggy howled as the constable got a grip on his arm. In sheer desperation the fat junior suddenly ducked and rammed the constable in his prominent waistcoat.

"Yooop!"

This time it was the constable's turn to howl, and his voice this time was really amazingly like that of Monty Lowther's. So remarkable was the resemblance, in fact, that most of the fellows stared for a moment, and then they roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, you fellows, it is vewy sewious!" gasped Arthur Augustus in great alarm. "Fetch Mr. Waitton, someone. Twimble cannot be taken away like this! Oh, great!"

Crash!

Again Trimble had acted in desperation. This time he succeeded in tripping up the constable, who now seemed determined to put the "darbies" on him. Over Trimble's legs went the officer of the law, and he landed full-length on the floor with a terrific crash.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A howl of laughter went up then, for as he sprawled on the floor, the constable's helmet rolled off, and with it came a gingery mass of hair. Moreover, the big, handsome moustache had become unhitched in some way, and now hung round its owner's left ear.

The fellows shrieked with laughter as they recognised Monty Lowther, the japer of the School House, under the grease-paint.

Trimble had been about to make a blind rush for the door; but even as he turned to bolt he caught a glimpse of the "constable's" disarranged features.

"Ow! Oh!" he gasped. "Oh dear! It—it's that awful beast, Lowther! Oh dear!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Again Trimble almost fainted—this time in sheer relief. "Oh, bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, who was



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also looking rather relieved, for Trimble's sake. "It weally is, deah boys! It is that feahful jokah, Lowthah! Gweat Scott!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lowther staggered to his feet, going quite red under his grease-paint. Somehow, though the fellows were laughing hard enough, the joke seemed to have fallen a little flat. He rubbed his chin dismally where it had come into painful collision with the floor, and glowered at Trimble.

"You—you fat ass!" he panted. "Yow! You've nearly busted my chin!"

"Serves you right, you awful beast!" groaned Trimble, glowering back. "Oh, dear! You did give me a fright! I thought—I mean I knew all the time it was only a joke, of course!"

"Bai Jove!"

"You mean—you thought your number was up!" said Blake, ceasing to laugh and looking grave. "This settles it, you fellows. If ever a chap showed a guilty conscience, Trimble did just then. If he had any right to this silver stuff he wouldn't have tried to bolt, would he?"

"Phew! No fear!"

"Oh, I say, Blake—"

Trimble paused, and eyed the grim-faced juniors uneasily. He had given himself away completely, and he saw that the "sail" was off for the time being—distinctly off!

"Oh, you awful beast, Lowther!" he gasped. "Of course I wasn't frightened! Only I thought—"

"Oh, cheeze it, Trimble!" snapped Tom Merry. "This has gone quite far enough! It's clear you've no right to that stuff! If you'll take my advice—and I mean it for your own good—you'll take that stuff and the rest of it, if any, to Mr. Railton at once, and tell him where you got it from."

"Shan't!"

"What?"

"I jolly well won't!" gasped Trimble, his eyes still glowering at the rather crestfallen japer of the Shell. "Don't I keep telling you the stuff's mine? Now you've gone and mucked up my auction sale, Lowther, you beast!"

"You're going to hold no more auction sales with this stuff, Trimble!" said Tom Merry sharply. "This has gone on long enough. If I hear of you trying to sell anything more at St. Jim's again I shall speak to Kildare or Mr. Railton about it!"

"Oh dear! Why, you awful beast—"

"That's for your own good, Trimble!" said Tom. "Where on earth you've got the stuff from beats me! But it's not my affair to go and tell the beaks about it. I'll leave that to you, and if you've a scrap of sense you'll do it before you get yourself landed in a mess!"

And with that Tom Merry walked out of the room. Trimble glowered after him, but he knew better than to continue with his auction. He scowlingly packed up his splendid bargains again, and then he left the Common-room, followed by grinning glances and chuckles.

The great auction was ended.

"The—the fat ass!" gasped Lowther, when Trimble had gone, and as he divested himself of his "props." "What a sell. If the fat ass hadn't lost his head like that I should have got the truth out of him."

"So that was the idea?" said Blake.

"Just that!" grunted Lowther. "That and a lark, of course! But I meant to question him, and frighten the fat ass into telling the truth! Oh, blow the luck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Lowther went off to return his clothes and make-up to the Dramatic Society's property box, feeling very exasperated and disgusted. The great mystery of Baggy Trimble was still unsolved, and Tom Merry, for one, was feeling quite alarmed about it. Would it be solved before Baggy landed himself in what it seemed must certainly be very serious trouble? That was the question.

CHAPTER 11.

In Ruthless Hands!

BAGGY TRIMBLE did not try his salesmanship again that day. He realised now, dismally, that there was nothing doing at St. Jim's. If the fellows had had any doubts as to whether his uncle, or aunt, or any of his relations had actually sent him that valuable silver, those doubts were set at rest now. If they had had any lingering, faint intentions of purchasing any of his splendid bargains those intentions vanished. Most emphatically there was nothing doing.

Trimble had shown clear enough proof that he had no right to the things, and nobody was going to risk making a heap of trouble for themselves by buying them.

That evening Wildrake, as well as Blake and Tom Merry,

did their best to make Trimble realise that he was treading a very dangerous and slippery path. They knew a bit and they suspected a lot. But they could get nothing out of the obtuse, obstinate fat junior. Trimble would neither take advice nor tell anything—excepting the same story of his deceased aunt's last wishes regarding her family silver.

Trimble stuck to that, and was determined to stick to it. Tom Merry and Wildrake and Blake gave it up at last, and left him to it. There was really little else to do excepting to go to the authorities and tell their suspicions. But they did not want to do that until it became necessary.

Had they only known it, Trimble was already planning a course that made it very necessary indeed.

That night and the next morning Baggy Trimble gave the matter a good deal of anxious thought, and by the end of morning lessons he had come to another decision. There was nothing else for it. Having failed to sell his treasure-trove at St. Jim's, he would have to risk breaking the law and make an attempt to sell it elsewhere.

After all, he was much more likely to get good prices for the stuff in Wayland. Also, he had no need to tell where he had found the stuff. He could spin the same yarn to the jewellers that he had spun at St. Jim's. Certainly it had not been swallowed there. But then the fellows at St. Jim's were suspicious beasts! Besides, they knew him—Trimble could not help admitting that point!

Immediately dinner was over Trimble got Digby's bike out again—he selected Dig's bike because it was the newest and best junior machine in the shed! Trimble had already smuggled his box of silver-ware out of the School House, and now he strapped it securely on to the carrier, and rushed the bike down to the gates.

Old Taggles, the school porter, was sunning himself by the gates, but nobody else was out of doors yet. Ignoring Taggles, Trimble mounted the machine and rode away swiftly, turning off from the lane presently into a much narrower side-lane leading to the river.

It had dawned upon Baggy's peculiar mind that to take the silver in small doses might arouse suspicion. Much better to take a decent "whack" while he was about it and make a job of it! Moreover, the jeweller would be able to make a selection, if necessary, then.

Turning on to the towing-path at length, Baggy pedalled along by the river at quite a good speed. Though it was a half-holiday he had none too much time in which to ride to Wayland, get through his bit of business, and ride back again.

He jumped from his machine at last.

Higher up stream showed the mass of trees on Abbey Island, and Trimble could not suppress a shiver as he thought of the brutal ruffian who had attacked him there.

He little dreamed that the evil-faced man he was thinking of was at that moment scarcely half a dozen yards away, watching his every movement.

Under the low-hanging branches of a spreading willow a small skiff rocked on the stream, hidden from both towing-path and river. On the bank above it half-sprawled, half-crouched the bristly-chinned "poacher" as Trimble had deemed him. The man had been watching towing-path and river, and into his dark eyes had come a sudden glitter of triumph as Trimble came riding along on the bike.

He had been on the point of springing out at the junior, in fact, when Trimble suddenly jumped off and leaned his machine against the fence bordering the wood.

Now the ruffian crouched, hesitating. And then, as Trimble unfastened the cardboard box and plunged into the wood with it, the man stealthily left his hiding-place and followed, treading with the softness of a great cat.

His eyes were glinting now, and his bristly jaw set square as he trod in the wake of the junior through the undergrowth.

Trimble stopped at last, completely ignorant of the danger that threatened him.

Before him was the old oak set in a sunny, open glade. He dropped the box into the long grass and ferns, and soon he was dragging back the loose soil and brushwood from round the roots of the giant tree.

A large cavity was disclosed at last, and then Trimble crouched on hands and knees, and dragged out a thick, musty-looking sack.

Clunk, clunk!

From the sack came a metallic clinking, and the eyes of the ruffian, watching from the trees a few yards away, gleamed like coals of fire.

Trimble opened the sack and feasted his eyes on the contents for a moment. It was only for a moment, however. A sudden sound made him glance round swiftly, startled. It was all he got the chance to do.

The next moment the ruffian was upon him with the spring of a tiger.

Trimble crashed backwards, with fierce powerful hands grasping him. He opened his mouth to yell, but a rough, huge hand stifled his terrified cry.

"Got you—at last!" grunted the man, pinning the junior down in the thick grass. "I bin watching for you—watching since you went off that day! I knew I'd get you sooner nor later! And, by hokey, by the look o' things I've got what I wants as well, you young 'ound!"

"G-gug-groogh!" gurgled Trimble, his eyes nearly starting from his head.

"Make a sound, and I'll wring your bloomin' neck!" hissed the ruffian.

He gagged the junior with his own handkerchief, and then he took a length of cord from his pocket and bound Trimble's hands and feet securely. Then he hurriedly examined the sack as if he still doubted its contents.

He gave Trimble an evil look of triumph as his gloating eyes finished feasting on the silver inside.

"Durn you!" he muttered. "You've given me a lot of trouble, you blamed little rat! But I knew you 'ad it, you little thief! I knowed as it was this 'ere sack as I saw you go off in that boat with. You ain't told nobody about this stuff, I suppose? But then I can see you can't 'ave; you wouldn't 'ave hidden it 'ere if you meant to do that!"

He tied up the sack, grinning with evil satisfaction.

"Well, now I've got you I'm goin' to keep you for a bit!" he resumed. "I ain't lettin' you go off and give me away—not likely! You're comin' across to my little hut, and you're stayin' there until I gets clear with this arter dark! Perhaps you'll stay there longer nor that, too," he added, with a sinister chuckle. "You've given me a lot of trouble, and I ain't likely to forget it!"

He shouldered the sack and plunged away through the trees. But Trimble's relief was short-lived. In a couple of minutes he was back again. This time he lifted Trimble as though he were a child, and carried him through the trees to the towing-path.

A swift, sharp glance round him, and then the ruffian dropped the helpless, terrified junior into the bottom of the boat where the sack of silver lay.

At the bike leaning against the fence the rascal never even glanced. He seemed to have forgotten all about that and the cardboard-box in his gloating triumph. A moment later the boat had left the shelter of the willow, and was being pulled swiftly up-stream, and then across to the island in the centre of the wide river.

The river was completely deserted at that hour, and soon the boat had reached the island, and was gently paddled by the rascal under the shade and shelter of another large willow that hung over the water. Trimble realised now where the man had kept his boat hidden—if it was his boat.

Once again Trimble was left while the man disappeared with the sack of silver, and this time he was gone many minutes. But he returned at last and cut the cords from the junior's legs.

"Now—you got to leg it, my lad!" grinned the man. "It's a nice little hut in the middle of the island as I'm staying in at present, and it's goin' to be your home for a bit, and arter dark you'll have it all to yourself! Now get on—afore I 'as to use my durned boot! Any tricks and you'll know about it."

But Trimble was not likely to attempt any tricks. One glance into the evil eyes of the ruffian was enough to make him banish that idea. With a deep groan, he stumbled off inland, his captor tramping behind him. He had lost his treasure—that much seemed certain. But Trimble wasn't thinking of the treasure now. He was thinking of his fat skin only. He was a prisoner, and from the rascal's grim remarks he was to remain a prisoner on Abbey Island—for how long he could only guess! Obviously the man would not release him—would not dare to give him a chance to escape until he was well away. And nobody knew he had gone near Abbey Island!

Trimble realised well enough that his position was serious—desperate! He might be a helpless prisoner on the island for days and nights! The prospect was a terrible one!

If Trimble had had any doubts as to the silver not being the monks' treasure, he had none now. Obviously it was not treasure he had found, but plunder! All along, Trimble, in his fatuous obstinacy, had refused to entertain that suspicion. But now that it was too late, he wished from the bottom of his fat heart that he had done so, or, better still, that he had never attempted to forestall

Grundy in the hunt for the treasure. He had succeeded where the Treasure Combine had failed, and it had brought him—to this!

CHAPTER 12.

Daylight!

"READY, you fellows?"

Tom Merry asked the question as he looked in at the doorway of Study No. 6 on the Fourth Form passage that afternoon, with Lowther and Manners. It was a warm, sunny afternoon, and by common consent the chums of the School House had agreed to spend the afternoon on the river. It was Tom Merry's suggestion, for Tom had a curious desire to visit Abbey Island again. A vague theory as to how Trimble had come into possession of that amazing supply of silver was forming in the junior skipper's mind. He remembered how Trimble had forestalled Grundy—in digging there for the legendary treasure. Was it possible the fat youth had found it there? To Tom Merry the silver seemed suspiciously like stolen plunder—possibly the proceeds of a burglary, and he could not imagine how else the fat youth could have come into possession of it.

Moreover, there was the decidedly suspicious circumstance of the low-browed, villainous-looking man they had found on the island. What was he doing there? And why had he attacked Trimble! Why, more suspicious still, had he claimed that Trimble had got something belonging to him?

The more Tom thought it over the more convinced did he become that there was something in his theory.

And why had Trimble wanted them to accompany him to the island? Was it because he knew the man was there and was afraid to visit the island alone? It certainly looked like it. And where had Trimble gone when he had left them so mysteriously? Was it possible the fat youth had the plunder hidden somewhere on the island still? He had had nothing with him when they left the island, but he could easily have taken the stuff across and come back again. Indeed, it was while he was approaching the island—landing upon it, rather—that the man had so savagely attacked him. Hadn't Trimble left them halfway back to the boathouse, making the excuse that he wanted to visit Rylcombe? And it was that same evening that Trimble had turned up with the silver goblet!

The facts as Tom Merry knew them certainly fitted in with his theory, vague as it was. And Tom meant to visit Abbey Island, and to have a good look round for clues, if not for the actual store of silver he suspected Trimble had hidden away there.

"Ready and waiting, old top," answered Jack Blake, in response to his rather impatient question. "Come on, chaps."

The chums of the Fourth left the study and went downstairs with the Terrible Three. Tom had explained his theory to his chums, and all agreed that it was a likely one, and they were eager to put it to the test. In any case, a ramble round the island would not come amiss, and would fill the afternoon nicely.

"Trimble's gone out of gates, I believe," said Blake, as they crossed the quadrangle, bathed in sunshine. "Herries fancied he spotted him from the study window, cutting off on a bike. He may have gone for more stuff and—"

"More likely gone to pop what he's already got," said Herries, with a whistle. "I believe he did have a box on his bike."

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"If he has, then he's booked for serious trouble," said Tom Merry gravely. "I'm certain now—"

He halted, and a very strange look came over his face.

"What's the matter, Tom?"

Tom did not answer. He had stopped in the old gateway, and his eyes were fixed upon a carriage and pair standing outside the gates. The juniors all knew to whom it belonged—that carriage and pair was a familiar sight to St. Jim's fellows. It belonged to Colonel Bland, of Rylcombe Manor, and it brought the old gentleman to St. Jim's twice a week. Colonel Bland was an old St. Jim's boy, and a governor of the school. His interest in his old school was, perhaps, a trifle too keen, for he was always pottering around, chatting with old Taggles, or ambling round visiting the masters.

He was talking to Taggy now outside the porter's lodge while his footman and coachman remained outside the gates. The colonel was old-fashioned, and refused to exchange his carriage for a car.

But it was at the carriage itself Tom was staring now—or, rather, at the coat-of-arms painted upon it.

Tom Merry and Lowther were sent staggering away by savage blows, and the ruffian was almost on his feet again when Herries arrived with a rush. He did not stand on ceremony. Grabbing a chunk of wood, he raised it aloft and brought it down on the man's head! (See Chapter 12.)



Tom must have seen it scores of times, but he had never quite "taken it in." He took it in now, however, and quite suddenly he remembered where he had seen the crest before. It was on the silver articles Trimble had been hawking!

Here it was, on Colonel Bland's carriage. It was the very same without a doubt—the crossed swords above a rampant lion. There could be no mistaking it. Tom drew a deep, deep breath.

"By jingo!" he exclaimed. "Why didn't I see it before? That crest on old Bland's carriage, you fellows; it's the very same that was on that silver goblet and the other things Trimble had—on the cake-stand, at all events. Don't you see?"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"My hat! So it jolly well is!"

Tom set his lips and hurried across to the coachman, who knew him well. He spoke to him for a few moments, and then he rejoined his chums, his eyes gleaming.

"I was right, you fellows!" he breathed. "I've just been pumping Symonds. He tells me there was a burglary at the Grange three years ago. The burglar was collared, but the plunder was never found. And the burglar got three years."

"Phew! He got three years, and it happened three years ago!"

"Yes. Don't you see?—that ruffian on the island. It all fits in. He's just out of prison, and come after the plunder he'd hidden—on Abbey Island. But Trimble got on the job before him and found it."

"Gweat Scott!"

It seemed an amazing coincidence, and yet—it was reasonable enough, if true. And Tom felt quite sure now that it was true.

"Not a word now about it," he breathed. "But we'll go ahead with our investigations. That fat fool may have gone to the island, and, in any case, we may find something out. We'll examine that hole again that Trimble dug. Don't you remember that it was much bigger the

next time we went? That ruffian must have been digging there!"

The juniors hurried on to the boathouse, though they felt the impulse to go to the old colonel and tell him of their suspicions. But they were determined to get actual proof first. In any case, Trimble had to be saved somehow.

Reaching the boathouse, they soon launched a boat, and with Blake and Tom Merry at the oars, it shot swiftly downstream. Digby was steering, and it was he who caught sight of the deserted bike leaning against the fence on the towing-path. To see a bike there unattended would not have excited Digby's interest, perhaps, but for the fact that he recognised it at once as his own new jigger.

He gave a yell of surprise and wrath.

"My bike!" he yelled. "Easy, you fellows! Pull in to the bank. My hat! I bet this is that fat villain's work! That's my bike—I'd spot it a mile away! Oh, the—the—"

Words failed Digby. His chums pulled in quickly enough as they grasped the position. It was nothing unusual for Trimble to "borrow" a fellow's bike. But what was it doing here?

Wonderingly, the juniors jumped ashore, and Digby grabbed his machine and looked it over. It was at that moment that Tom Merry gave a warning cry.

"Look out, you fellows—hide quickly! Get the boat under the willow there—quick!"

"Bai Jove! What—?"

"Someone coming across from the island!" snapped Tom. "If I'm not mistaken it's that brute again. Let's see what he's after!"

"Good egg!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The boat was dragged deep beneath the overhanging tree, and the juniors took cover. In silence they watched the small boat coming across the river from Abbey Island. They soon recognised the burly, square-jawed man, and Tom Merry soon recognised something else.

"It's a Grammar School boat!" he breathed. "Phew! And I never suspected the truth though I heard Kildare making inquiries. They lost one the other day from the

Grammar School—one of the chaps there left it tied up to the bank, and when he came back it had vanished. So that's how the brute got across there."

"Bai Jove!"

All seemed to be coming clear now. Tom watched the man in the boat with gleaming eyes. He came in a direct line to where they were hiding, as if he knew they were there.

"He couldn't have spotted us, though!" said Tom. "Just stick tight, chaps! I caught sight of him just rounding the island. He doesn't dream anyone's here."

That much was soon obvious. The boat touched the shore at last quite near to the willow, and the ruffian jumped out, and hurriedly ran the painter round a stump. Then he scrambled up the bank, and dived into the wood, his eyes gleaming strangely.

"Up to something!" murmured Tom warningly. "Don't move—looks as if he's coming back soon."

It was well they did not move. Scarcely a minute after the ruffian had disappeared, the juniors heard him coming back again. He came out from the trees suddenly, and he ran down to the boat, carrying a cardboard box in his hand.

He dropped it into the boat, and then he released the painter and started to pull back to the island.

"Lie low for a bit!" warned Tom Merry. "Phew! We're getting warmer, chaps! Did you notice that box? If I'm not a Dutchman, it was the one Trimble had his silver stuff packed in."

"Bai Jove!"

"I noticed that!" breathed Blake. "And Trimble had it strapped on the back of his bike. Then where is Trimble now?"

"We're going to follow that merchant, anyway!" said Tom. "Jump in the boat when I give the word."

"Right-ho!"

Tom gave the word at last as he saw the man reach the island and dive into the trees. The juniors tumbled excitedly into the boat, and then they made it fairly cut through the water across to the island.

"We'll chance it!" said Tom Merry. "If the beggar spots us it can't be helped!"

But they reached the island without incident, and it was clear the man had not been on the watch. They tumbled ashore, leaving Herries to guard the spot, and started inland, carefully following the tracks of the man, which were fairly clear in the long grass and ferns.

They had fully expected them to lead to the abbey ruins, but instead they led them deep into the trees towards the centre of the island.

Tom called a halt suddenly.

Ahead of them, through the thinning trees, was a clearing, and in the centre of the clearing a small, roughly-built shanty could be seen—a woodman's hut.

To their ears came the sound of muttering in a harsh, threatening voice. Then, quite suddenly, sounded a squeal—in a very familiar tone to the St. Jim's fellows.

"Trimble!" gasped Blake. "That brute's kicking him, or something. On the ball!"

It was enough for the St. Jim's fellows—more than enough.

As one man, they charged to the rescue, heedless of caution now. None the less, their coming was a complete surprise to the unshaven, evil-faced ruffian.

He was standing just inside the doorway of the ruined shed, and they were upon him before he could even turn to face them. He went crashing down, and the next moment six determined juniors were swarming over him.

Even so, Tom Merry was taking no chances, and he gave a wild yell.

"Herries! This way, Herries! Help!"

His yell rang over the island.

It reached Herries, guarding the boat, and he left it instantly.

His help was needed, despite the fact that the fellow was taken unawares. He was powerful, and he fought like a wild beast, realising that not only his plunder was at stake, but his liberty as well.

Trimble was not gagged now. He lay, bound hand and foot, in the gloomy hut, and he fairly shrieked with delight as he recognised his rescuers.

His howls soon guided Herries to the spot without troubling to follow the "sign." And his coming proved the deciding factor in the fierce struggle. Tom Merry and Lowther had been sent staggering away by savage blows, and the man was almost on his feet again when Herries arrived with a rush.

He did not stand on ceremony. He grabbed a chunk of wood, raised it aloft, and brought it down on the ruffian's head.

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It was a hefty crack, and the man's struggles ceased quite abruptly then. He fell, half-stunned, to the floor of the hut. And before he had recovered he was held down, and the cord from the sack twisted and made secure round his wrists.

"Good man, Herries!" panted Tom Merry. "My hat! I believe the beggar would have beaten us if you hadn't turned up. Cut Trimble free and make a job of the merchant with the cord."

This was soon done—the cord Trimble had been tied up with was used to make the ruffian still more secure.

Tom was satisfied at last, and then the juniors had time to examine the box and sack.

They did not need Trimble to tell them much after that.

"This is the stolen swag, right enough!" said Tom. "And this merchant is the burglar! Well, Trimble, do you still stick to that silly yarn about your aunt, after this?"

"Ow! Ow—wow!" gasped Trimble, his face still green with fright. "I say, you fellows, that beast must be a burglar—I could have told you that, Tom Merry! I've bowled him out, though, and recovered the swag!"

"Well, my hat!"

"I knew all the time it was, of course!" said Trimble. "I—I was just playing a lone hand so—so I could capture this fearful ruffian!"

"You—you fat ass! What about trying to sell this stuff? Do you know to whom it belongs? It belongs to Colonel Bland! It was burgled from the Grange three years ago!"

"Oh, crumbs! I wondered—I mean, I know nothing about the stuff, of course! I've just come across it by accident! I—I say, you fellows, keep it dark about me trying to sell that—that other silver! It wasn't this stuff, of course! It was stuff my aunt sent me to sell for her; she's hard up, you know! I say, d'you fellows think I shall get a reward for recovering the swag?"

"A—a reward!" gasped Tom. "Did you ever? You fat ass! The reward you're likely to get is a year or two in a reformatory, or the sack at least!"

"Oh, dear! I say, you fellows, keep it dark—"

"Dry up, you fat ass! How on earth are we to keep it dark now?" snapped Tom. "You're coming back to St. Jim's with us, and this swag's coming with us. We'll leave this merchant here to meditate over his sins until the bobbies come for him!"

"That's the idea! Come on, Trimble! You can take a hand carrying the sack! You'll get another kind of sack when we get back, I expect. Still, if ever a fellow asked for it, you did!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Trimble went back with them—though he seemed strangely reluctant to go. The silver articles in the cardboard box were transferred to the sack—Trimble explaining dismally how the man had missed those articles whilst examining the swag, and how, having forced Trimble to tell where they were, he had gone back for the box—luckily for his prisoner!

To make sure the rascal should not escape, the juniors took his boat with them—or, rather, the boat that was afterwards proved to be the missing Grammar School boat! And at St. Jim's Tom Merry handed over the sack of silver to the Head, that astounded old gentleman listening to the story in stupefied wonder, and then in growing wrath as Trimble's part in the affair came out—as it obviously had to.

The only part Tom Merry & Co. did not divulge was Trimble's attempt to dispose of the plunder at St. Jim's—which, if it had come to light, would probably have meant the end of Trimble's career at St. Jim's. Luckily for the fat junior, also, the Head believed his story that he had imagined the silver was the ancient monks' treasure, and he decided to take a lenient view of his reluctance to divulge the news of his find to the authorities! Knowing the story of Grundy's Treasure Combine already, also Trimble's obtuseness, the Head was hardly likely to doubt it, in the circumstances. And Trimble escaped with a very severe lecture—and nothing else!

But Trimble was not grateful—far from it! All his dreams of wealth and unlimited tuck had dissolved into thin air, so it was hardly surprising that Baggy should consider he had been meanly treated—shockingly treated—in the matter! He had expected a reward—a big reward. But he did not get one—Dr. Holmes saw to that!

THE END.

(There will be another grand long story of Tom Merry & Co. in next week's GEM, featuring Bernard Glyn, the St. Jim's inventor. Make a note of the title, chums: "THE SILENT WITNESS!" You'll enjoy every line of it.)

CONCLUSION OF OUR REMARKABLE SERIAL—



The professor was lifted high in the air, struggling and screaming in that iron grip. The next moment, he went flying through the air, and fell to the earth a hundred feet below!

Professor Rollins Makes An Offer!

THE more Jack Carter thought over the whole affair, the more convinced he became that Roderigo was lying when he said that the professor was still alive.

Remembering the radium pit, and recalling the livid face of the professor as he disappeared into that thick, oily cloud of noxious gas, Jack found it impossible to believe that any man could have survived such an experience.

"He is dead, and I killed him," he said to himself thoughtfully. "If he came to life again now I should be almost inclined to believe in magic myself. But this is nonsense! Of course he is dead! I have destroyed the greatest inventive genius of modern times, and I am glad! Never again will those ghastly eyes of his strike terror into—"

The current of his thoughts was interrupted by a slight and unusual sound out there in the garden.

He turned his head quickly, and then rose slowly to his feet, grasping his rifle.

In the long grass some twenty feet away from the veranda he had detected a slight movement.

It might be some animal or bird, but he was taking no chances.

"Who goes there?" he demanded, and raised his rifle.

"A friend!" came the immediate reply; and at the same instant a figure rose and stood knee-deep in the long grass.

It was moonlight, and the figure was plainly visible in dark outline.

Jack recognised the voice and he recognised the figure, and immediately there surged through him a wave of cold anger.

"You are covered, Professor Rollins!" he said in quiet, resolute tones. "I give you ten seconds to tell me why I should not shoot you like a dog!"

"I carry no weapons, and it will pay you to hear what I have to say—that is, if you and your friends wish to get out of this country alive."

THE ROBOT MAN!

For some considerable time the Iron Monster, the Robot Man, has spread terror amongst the natives of the Amazon. But with the passing of the Robot's creator the shadow lifts and the natives come into their own again!

"Put up your hands!" said Jack.

The man obeyed.

"Stay where you are. If you come a step nearer I fire!"

"Very well. I have no wish to come any nearer. By the way, that Death Ray you stole from me is no longer of any use. Its power is exhausted; it will have to be recharged."

"I am aware of that," replied Jack coolly. "But this is an English made rifle I hold, and I am reckoned a good shot."

"I am willing to believe that," replied the professor with equal coolness. "You are an exceptional youth, Carter, and I have no doubt that whatever you do you do well. That is really why I am here to-night. I am anxious to come to terms with you."

"I refuse. I would as soon bargain with a rattlesnake!" retorted Jack contemptuously.

"You will change your views when you have heard what I have to say," replied the professor. "I am here to offer you your lives. Will you hear me? Remember that not only your lives, but the lives of all those foolish people now herded together like sheep on the great plain, depend upon your decision."

"Keep just where you are and tell me what you want," Jack said bluntly.

"May I put my arms down? This position is a little fatiguing."

"Yes; but don't attempt any tricks. You are covered."

The professor lowered his hands.

"I have not come here to play tricks," he said; "but to point out to you the one way—the only way—in which you can save your life and the lives of your friends. You can kill me if you like; but, as you may imagine, before I came here I gave my people certain instructions, which they will carry out if I do not return safely at a fixed hour to-morrow morning."

"You have threatened me before, Professor Rollins, and so far your threats haven't come to much," returned Jack.

"Suppose we drop that and come to business—if you have any business. Why have you come here to-night?"

"To deliver myself into your hands as a prisoner," was the surprising and unexpected reply.

"You'll have to explain that," said Jack curtly.

"It is quite simple," replied the professor. "My plans have gone wrong. The people have returned to their lands. As I cannot drive them away again I must come to terms with them. But if I approach them they will not listen. They are very angry, and they will simply destroy me."

"I think that very likely if they get the chance," said Jack dryly.

"Quite so. Therefore, I place myself in your hands. And this is what I propose. Bind me hand and foot if you like, and then take me to the rocky ledge which overlooks the great plain. The people are gathered there, and I will address them while under your protection. I think I shall be able to persuade them that I am willing to become their friend. When that is done you and your comrades can return to the coast, simply giving me an undertaking not to reveal to anyone what you have discovered of my secrets."

"That is my offer. Take it or leave it. Do what I suggest, or put a bullet through me. I am in your power. But I warn you that if you adopt the second course my servants will let loose all the mechanical devices that are hidden in the heart of that mountain. You will be destroyed, as well as many hundreds of innocent people, and the whole land will be laid waste. I have no more to say. Now call your friends and take counsel with them."

He folded his arms, and not without dignity confronted Jack's loaded rifle, his face looking pale but resolute and unflinching in the light of the coming dawn.

The Robot Man Walks Again!

JACK had no need to summon his friends. Aroused by the sound of voices, they had already risen from their beds, and were now gathered in a little group in the shadow behind Jack, and were listening with straining ears to the extraordinary conversation between him and the professor.

A council was now held, but while it lasted four rifles were kept levelled at that silent and motionless figure out there in the garden.

"Well, captain, what do you think?" said Jack at length, after some talk.

"I think we may as well take him at his word," replied Captain Storm. "Of course, we won't trust him an inch. He would not scruple to kill the lot of us if it suited him. But there is something in what he says, and as things have turned out it may suit him best to have us on his side. When he had us here alone murder was his game, but now all the people have come back he will have to be more careful, and he knows it. I suggest we tie his hands behind him, and then take him to Rocky Ledge and see what happens. With him in our power we ought to be fairly safe."

"I'd feel safer meself if we popped him off and put him underground like Paul Tench," remarked Teddy.

However, the general view was in favour of the captain's suggestion.

When this was settled events moved swiftly.

"Put up your hands and come forward!" shouted the captain.

Professor Rollins obeyed promptly and advanced till he was close up to the veranda rail.

Jack could not help admiring the man's nerve. He was risking his life, he was placing himself in the hands of those who had every reason to be his bitter and remorseless enemies, and yet he showed no sign of fear or even of concern.

"Keep him covered!" said the captain curtly; and then, leaping into the garden, he, in a very workmanlike fashion, secured the professor's hands behind his back.

The swiftly coming day was already flooding the land, and it was decided to set off on the journey to Rocky Ledge at once.

Jose announced that the people who had come back in their hundreds, and who were now camped on the great plain, were a peace-loving folk, who would be sure to greet them in friendly fashion now that the blight of magic had been removed from their land.

Therefore, the little party was in high spirits, and full of hope and confidence, as it set forth through the forest and up the steep hillside.

Jose went a little in front, as he had a genius for finding a way through the tangled and apparently impenetrable undergrowth.

The professor came next, with Jack and Captain Storm on either side of him.

Teddy White and Harry Frobisher were close behind.

"Rummy sort of finish to it all," said Harry, as they trudged along. "This looks like the end of our adventures."

There was a note of regret in his voice.

"Ah!" responded Teddy.

It was a wearisome journey as they toiled up the hillside through the twilight gloom of the forest, and all were glad when they saw the sunlight shining through the trees ahead of them.

A few minutes later, they emerged in a body on to the little bare plateau which they had named Rocky Ledge.

They came to a sudden halt, and for a moment stood staring in amazement.

The great plain was spread out below in front of them; but it was no longer as they knew it.

The dead, silent, desolate waste had become a scene of throbbing life.

From end to end and side to side it was covered with tents, wagons, horses, cattle, and people.

A hundred fires were sending thin columns of smoke to the sky, women were busy preparing the morning meal, men were lolling about.

Teddy White was the first to speak.

"Ampstead 'Eath on a Bank 'Oliday!" he said, with a gasp of astonishment.

Jack turned to the professor.

"And you drove all these people out of their homes for the sake of your wretched science?" he said contemptuously.

The professor returned his gaze unmoved.

"Science alone matters," he said calmly. "Men are nothing. They live their foolish lives and they die, and others take their place. But if the torch of science is put out who will light it again?"

"Well, do your speechifying!" said Jack impatiently. "There is your audience. Say what you have to say, and, remember, if you don't speak fair, we will put an end to you; and there won't be any mistake this time!"

A faint, wintry smile passed over the man's face; but his terrible eyes became more coldly penetrating than ever.

"It is not to that common herd that I have anything to say," he said, with a disdainful glance at the multitude below. "Such human trash does not interest me. It is to you, Carter, I intend to speak—to you and those who are with you."

He turned his gaze as he spoke on Captain Storm and Harry Frobisher and Ted White, and surveyed them coldly each in turn.

In spite of his bound and helpless condition, they all felt strangely uncomfortable. With his extraordinary eyes, the professor gave the impression of one possessed of some secret power.

"You said you wanted to speak to the people," declared Jack, who alone seemed inclined to address any remark to this evil and mysterious man.

"What I have said you may as well forget," replied the professor. "What I am going to say it will be well for you to remember. I seem to be in your power, my life in your hands. But that is not so. If you raise your hand against me it will be the signal for your immediate extermination, besides the slaughter of many hundreds of those men, women, and children you see down there. Do you think I came to you without making my preparations? You are no fool, Carter. On the contrary, you are a remarkable young man. A young man of brains and brawn, worthy to be my colleague. I can pay you no higher compliment. Now, listen! Listen all of you! I am about to show you a sample of my power. Presently you will see something that will startle you and bring your hand to the trigger. But do not fire, for if you do you may kill me, with the result that you will bring destruction on yourselves and upon those wretched people!"

Again he glanced down at the swarming plain.

Jack by this time knew the crazy, murderous professor too well to suspect him of boasting.

"What do you intend to do?" he asked quietly.

"It is all done," replied the professor coolly. "My instructions have been given. Presently they will be carried out. If you keep quiet, whatever happens, and raise no hand against me, no lives will be lost. I do not want to kill, I simply wish to demonstrate my power. When I have done so I will make you an offer which I think you will accept."

Having spoken, the professor walked to the edge of the cliff-like ledge and gazed out across the plain to the northern side, towards the mountain in the heart of which were hidden the diabolical contrivances which his genius had created.

After standing there for a few moments he returned slowly and once more faced the friends who were standing together in a group.

"If this is a bluff—" muttered Teddy White; and then his voice was drowned by a mighty crash in the forest behind them.

With startled cries, they turned and gazed in the direction whence the sound came.

In the heart of the forest there was a terrific commotion, trees waved like flags, and the sound of cracking wood was like a rifle volley.

It was as though two monsters of prehistoric size were engaged in a mighty struggle somewhere in that dense black forest.

And then suddenly there rose above the tree-tops a stupendous, incredible shape.

It had a human form, but it was monstrous, colossal, and terrifying. It was the Robot Man!

Completely restored, and even more life-like than before, the Thing stood there, its mighty head and shoulders rising above the trees, its great arms outflung, its eyes glowing with electric fire.

And now it was moving again, crashing through the forest and advancing slowly, but with irresistible mechanical power, towards the rocky ledge on which the group of puny mortals like tiny dwarfs stood petrified with terror.

Teddy White was the first to awaken from that nightmare of horror.

With a scream of rage and fear, he turned upon Professor Rollins.

"You dog!" he yelled. "Whoever lives to see the end of this it won't be you!"

At the same moment, he lifted his rifle.

"Stop him, or the great plain will be soaked in blood."

The words came swiftly but coldly from the lips of the professor, and they were uttered in a tone which carried conviction.

Jack sprang forward and snatched the rifle from Teddy's trembling hands.

"Steady, old boy!" he said, in an urgent whisper. "Leave this to me!"

Then he turned to the professor, who was standing calm and impassive, a faint, cynical smile on his haggard face.

"What is the meaning of this tomfoolery?" said Jack.

"Wait, and you will see. Obey me, and no life will be sacrificed. I seek but to demonstrate my power. But be careful. My people are watching you. A single false move and the hand of death will descend not only upon you, but also upon those helpless people down there. Even I could not save them. Their lives are in your hands."

The whole party who had heard the words had a ghastly conviction that the man was speaking the truth, and that bound as he was and helpless as he seemed, he was yet master of the situation.

Sick with terror and horror, they stood silent and motionless while the Robot Man came nearer and nearer.

And then the monster emerged from the forest and stood before them in all its gigantic immensity.

For one second it stood motionless, and then with a single stride moved across the plateau to the cliff-like edge, and seemed to gaze down on the swarming multitude in the plain below.

Instantly the laughter and the hum of talk ceased. A frozen silence ensued, broken suddenly by screams of frenzied terror.

Then throughout that vast plain all was confusion. Women grabbed their children, men rushed to and fro. Some made frantic attempts to harness their horses to the wagons, others simply fled in wild terror, while the remainder flung themselves face downwards on the ground.

And presently the teeming population could be seen swarming away across the plain like an army of terrified ants.

The friends were gazing on the scene in dismay, when suddenly they were roused by hearing a low but diabolical laugh quite near to them.

They turned, and beheld Professor Rollins smiling at them.

"That is how I deal with ignorant people who interfere with me in my work," he said blandly. "I frighten them away. Now I will deal with you. All of you, except Carter, will right about turn and march to the edge of the forest-yonder. Then—"

"I'm hanged if I will!" cried Harry Frobisher.

"Nor I!" declared Captain Storm.

Teddy White was equally emphatic.

An ugly look came into the professor's face, and Jack, seeing that the situation was critical, intervened swiftly.

He conferred with his friends in a rapid, earnest whisper. "We won't desert you and leave you in that monster's hands!" said Captain Storm fiercely.

"Of course not, but you must do as he says," replied Jack. "It is our only chance. I know how to manage him. I got out of his hands once, I'll do it again. For Heaven's sake leave it to me, or he will kill the lot of us."

Finally Jack got his own way, and his friends gloomily and reluctantly turned and walked away across the hundred yards of open space to the forest edge.

Jack and Professor Rollins were left alone in the centre of the plateau.

The Robot Man was still glaring down at the terrified mob in the plain.

"Unfasten my hands," said the professor.

Jack obeyed.

"Now stand between me and your friends, so that if they fire they will hit you and not me."

Again Jack obeyed.

"You are no fool, Carter," said the professor, "and I have no doubt you have already realised the purpose of what I have done. Therefore I will now tell you simply what is going to happen in the next few minutes. You want to save your friends; I want to spare them if I can. There is one way. I need you to assist me in my scientific researches, and I am going to carry you off. If you submit without resistance your friends will come to no harm. If you give any trouble—"

He shrugged his shoulders significantly.

"How do you mean to carry me off?" asked Jack.

He was pale, but the other could read no fear in his clear eyes.

"Quite simply," replied the professor quietly. "My good Robot has been selected to do the work. Presently he will pick you up as he picked up Captain Storm. If you remain passive you will suffer no injury, hardly any inconvenience, for my Robot is skilful as well as strong. Quite tenderly he will carry you back to my workshop, and there in a little while I shall join you. Do you agree to that, or shall I give the signal which will cause a blast of death to descend upon your friends and those squealing vermin down there on the plain?"

Jack Carter was white to the lips, and he had to struggle

BEGINS NEXT WEEK!

The Worst Form at Codrington!

By
David
Goodwin



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desperately to control the mortal fear that was gripping at his heart.

But the thought of his friends and their peril gave him strength, and he answered steadily.

"I am in your hands."

In that moment of mental agony he neither pleaded nor threatened, but secretly he registered a vow.

Some day he would be even with Professor Rollins. Never would he leave this tortured land until that inhuman monster lay dead before his eyes.

"You are wise, Carter," said the professor, his strange eyes flashing. "There are great days before us. You and I will conquer the world together!"

Even as he spoke, the Robot Man wheeled round with an almost human movement and came slowly towards them.

Jack gritted his teeth and stood rigid, like a figure turned to stone.

His heart was beating wildly; he wanted to shut his eyes, but could not. He could only stare with fascinated gaze at that monstrous figure.

The Thing came nearer and then paused.

Its great right hand swept up in a tremendous half-circle and then slowly descended.

Jack saw the mighty, clutched hand of jointed steel coming nearer and nearer, and yet he did not move.

Straining every nerve to maintain his sanity, he kept quite still and waited.

In another second—

And then the hand reached him, but did not touch him.

Gliding over his head, it went forward with a sudden swift movement and closed with a vice-like grip round the waist of Professor Rollins.

The startled scientist gave a cry of angry protest, and then his voice was drowned by a laugh—a terrific laugh which shook the heavens and rolled among the hills in a thunderous mocking roar.

And then came a voice—fierce, savage and exultant, and so loud that it could be heard by the poor scurrying creatures in the plain.

"The broken tool, master! The tool you flung away!" cried that voice in an ear-shattering scream. "This is the answer of your slave. Behold the vengeance of Gonzales!"

The next moment the professor was lifted high in the air and held aloft, struggling and screaming hysterically, but helpless in that iron grip.

Jack wanted to rush towards the forest and rejoin his friends, but he could not move. He could only gaze upwards at that writhing figure and at that blanched, terror-stricken face.

And as the boy gazed like one fascinated, the Robot Man turned from him and strode once more to the cliff-edge overlooking the plain, and once again the mighty voice boomed forth:

"Have no fear, good people, this is the end. Behold the Magic Man who can hurt you no more! Take him and trample him beneath your feet!"

The voice stopped, the mighty arm of the Robot Man swung out over the plain, the steel-jointed hand opened, and the body of Professor Rollins went flying through the air and fell with a thud to the earth one hundred feet below.

From the crowd there rose a gasp of amazement like a mighty sigh.

And then suddenly the Robot Man, as though deprived of life and power, sank to its knees, toppled forward, and rolled down the hillside, and finally lay once more a wreck on the plain by the side of the dead body of its creator.

Jack took a step forward. He heard in a dim way the shouts of his friends as they came racing towards him, but before they could reach him he collapsed and fell to the ground in a dead faint.

With the final destruction of the Robot Man and the death of its terrible creator, this story rightly comes to an end. What else need be told will occupy only a few lines.

The friends, greatly shaken by what had happened, made haste to leave the country.

Making their way down the river, and after enduring many privations and facing many perils, they reached the coast and then sailed for home.

On the news of their arrival in England, Harry Frohisher's infamous uncle and guardian fled, and in due course Harry came into his fortune.

It was in Harry's charming Sussex home that the friends all gathered one day some few weeks after their return.

Harry had offered Teddy White a sum of money to set up business in his beloved Hammersmith. But Teddy's views had changed, and he shook his head.

"No, Master Harry," he said, "Even Ammermiff is a bit too exciting after what I bin through. What I really want is a cushy job."

He got it on Harry's estate.

When the four met and talked over old times they all had much to say except Jack Carter.

He kept strangely quiet.

At last Harry noticed it.

"What about you, old boy?" he said, addressing his chum. "Why don't you come down here and help me to run this place?"

Jack smiled.

"No, thanks all the same!" he said, "But I haven't yet had my fill of adventure."

Harry laughed.

"Well," he said, "whatever you do next you won't beat out trip to the land of the Robot Man."

THE END.

Next Week's Programme!

"THE SILENT WITNESS!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

This is a unique story featuring Bernard Glyn, the schoolboy inventor, and tells of a wonderful discovery he makes in connection with television. Fun, thrills, and dramatic situations abound in this novel, long complete story of St. Jim's. Don't miss it.

"The WORST FORM at CODRINGTON!"

By DAVID GOODWIN.

The opening chapters of a brilliant school serial by popular David Goodwin, telling of the amazing escapades of Taffy Wynne & Co. You'll enjoy this no end.

"FAMOUS DAREDEVILS!"

Next week our contributor gives you a vivid account of three courageous attempts on the part of Mallory and Irvine to climb to the peak of Mount Everest, and lastly

THE ORACLE

has a heap of questions and answers which you will find both instructive and amusing.

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