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THE GEM

2^d

EVERY WEDNESDAY.



TOM MERRY & CO. IN THE THICK OF PERILS—

Held to Ransom!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD



It's a gang of crooks that get Bernard Glyn in their clutches.—But when Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's have finished with them they're a gang of crooks.

CHAPTER 1. Asking for It!

"GLYN!"

"Glyn, you frabjous duffer!"

Bang, bang, bang, bang!

Harry Noble and Clifton Dane were getting exasperated.

Having tried knocking and yelling, all in vain, they now tried banging on the door of the lumber-room—a proceeding they carried out with all their youthful vim and vigour.

Bernard Glyn would have been very deaf indeed had he failed to hear that.

But he did hear; his cool voice sounded from behind the locked door.

"Hallo! That someone knocking?"

Dane and Noble breathed hard.

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"Yes; it jolly well is!" bawled Noble. "Open this silly door, you footling owl!"

"What d'you want?"

"We want you, of course!" howled Dane.

"You want too much, old bean! I'm busy! Run away and play!"

"But what about Latchford?" yelled Noble. "Have you forgotten the thumping match, Glyn? You promised to come—"

"Oh, my hat!"

Evidently Glyn had forgotten the match. They heard him cross the room, and the next moment the lock clicked and the door opened.

Bernard Glyn stood there, his hair ruffled, his hands, face, and clothes smudged with paste, paint, and chemicals. He looked hot, bothered, and exasperated. But he grinned at his chums' wrathful faces.

"Sorry!" he murmured. "I was so busy I forgot the giddy time, old dears!"

"Busy be blown!" snorted Noble inelegantly. "You

—IN THIS ALL-THRILLS SCHOOL YARN OF ST. JIM'S!



promised to be ready by two, and it's fifteen minutes past now. We shan't get to Latchford before stumps are drawn at this rate. What the thump are you mucking with now?"

Noble sniffed as he stared round the room. The lumber-room certainly was a sight. Bernard Glyn had a decided inventive bent, and at his father's request, the Head allowed him to use the room as a workshop and chemical laboratory. That Glyn was a scientific genius nobody doubted. But that he was a tidy worker there was grave room for doubt. Just now the room was in an appalling mess—cardboard, paste, paint, test-tubes, glass bottles and jars, crucibles, bunsen-burners, and a great variety of other laboratory junk littered the place.

But Dane and Noble were used to the sight. What took their eye at the moment was something standing just under the window. It looked like a large telescope, made chiefly of cardboard, and it was fixed on a tripod beneath the window, pointing skywards.

"What on earth's that thing, Glyn?" exclaimed Noble. "A blessed telescope?"

"Oh, that!" said Glyn carelessly. "Well, yes, it is—a new kind! I've just finished the thing. It's a new idea altogether—in fact, I bet they haven't a telescope like that even at Greenwich! Matter of fact, I made it chiefly for that boring ass, Skimpole. You know how potty he is about astronomy!"

"You—you made it for him?" stuttered Dane.

"Chiefly for him—though any fellow's welcome to use it!" said Glyn, busily clearing his work-table as he spoke. "It's unusually powerful, I might say, and enables a chap to see constellations—stars and things, you know—in the day-time just as easily as at night. You fellows can be squinting at it while I'm clearing away. Shan't be a sec!"

Glyn spoke carelessly, as if not caring twopence whether they interested themselves in his latest invention or not. In the ordinary way, Dane and Noble were very suspicious

indeed regarding Glyn's experiments and inventions. Besides being a very clever youth who very often did invent ingenious and useful gadgets, Glyn was an inveterate practical joker, and his study-mates, more than anyone else, had suffered from being curious regarding his "latest." But his apparent careless manner now quite disarmed any suspicion they might have entertained.

After a hesitating glance at Glyn, Noble approached the telescope and applied his eyes to the circular disc of glass, while Dane looked curiously over his shoulder.

They stared and stared, eager to see stars and comets by daylight.

"Blessed if I can see anything at all, Glyn!" mentioned Dane, after a minute.

"Nor can I!" said Noble, with a sniff.

"Eh? Why, you frabjous duffers," said Glyn, looking round, "you've not opened the shutter yet. Press that button at the side—no, not on the telescope, on the tripod, ass!"

"Oh! Right-ho!"

Noble sighted the button and pressed it. Instantly the shutter of glazed glass slid aside, and from the mouth of the "telescope" shot a boxing-glove, soaked in ink, and worked by means of a powerful, coiled spring.

The soaked glove took Noble neatly between the eyes, and sent him head over heels backwards.

"Yarrooooo!"

Crash!

"Yow-wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Glyn. "Ha, ha, ha!"

But neither of the curious investigators laughed. Noble's head had come into violent contact with Dane's nose as he went head over heels, and both had seen far more stars than they had wanted to see.

Noble sat up dizzily, and hugged his ink-smudged brow, while Dane hugged a streaming nose.

"Ow, ow, ow!" gasped Noble. "Ow, ow, ow!"

"Ow, ow! Ow, ow! Yow! By dose!" gurgled Dane.

"Oh, you—you—" "Ha, ha, ha!" howled Glyn, delighted at the success of his "latest." "Well, did you see plenty of stars? Is it a success?"

"Oh, you—you—"

"You—you raving maniac! Ow, ow, ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha! I made it chiefly for Skimmy!" choked Glyn. "He's always coming here bothering me, and so I had to devise something to teach him to keep away—and other nosy chaps, too! My time's of value, you know! Ha, ha, ha! What d'you think of it?"

Noble and Dane proceeded, without further ado, to show him what they thought of it.

They scrambled up, raging, and went for the laughing inventor.

"Here!" Glyn suddenly yelled. "Hold on—you would try it! Leggo! I say—Oh, my hat!"

Bang!

Glyn went to the floor with his raging chums swarming over him.

"We'll show you what we think of it, you dangerous lunatic!" howled Noble. "Give him some of his own medicine, Dane!"

"Yes, rather!" panted Dane.

Bang, bang, bang!

Glyn roared for mercy, but he roared in vain. He was bumped until his head reeled, and then he was rolled in the paste and chemicals that covered the floor. Then he was dragged towards the remarkable "telescope" and after a terrific struggle Noble managed to hold him in position for the brief second required for Dane to press the button.

Like Noble, Glyn let out a wild howl as the ink-soaked boxing-glove got home on his features, and then he also went head over heels, his chums having released him the second the glove smacked home.

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Then, their vengeance satisfied, Noble and Dane left him and departed, jamming and locking the door behind them.

As he heard the click of the key Glyn gave a spluttering yell and sat up, dizzy as he was.

"Here—groogh! Hold on, you raving asses!" he shrieked. "Wait—I'm coming with you, you idiots! Hold on! Ow, ow, ow! Stop!"

He scrambled up and wrenched at the door-knob, still yelling. But evidently Noble and Dane were fed-up with their chum, for they heeded him not, and their footsteps died away on the uncarpeted stairs.

Breathing hard, and mopping a swollen, inky nose, the schoolboy inventor ceased wrenching at the door-knob at last. He was locked in, and it was more than likely he would be a prisoner there for the rest of the half-holiday. Once again Glyn's weakness for playing practical jokes had got him into trouble. In the usual way Glyn would not have minded being a prisoner in his den—he would have been quite happy among his precious experiments. But on this occasion Glyn was keen to accompany his chums to Latchford. There was a county match on there, and nearly every fellow in the school who was at all interested in cricket was likely to be there. And Glyn was interested in cricket. He had only come up to his den to spend the time after dinner in finishing the little surprise he had prepared for Skimpole and other curious youths before starting with his chums for Latchford.

Now the little cycle trip was off. He was a prisoner in the lumber-room until his chums came back to let him out.

CHAPTER 2.

An Inviting Invitation!

BERNARD GLYN breathed hard. Apart from his keenness to see the match it was a glorious spring afternoon, and the thought of sticking indoors was not pleasant even to a fellow who loved dabbling with smelly chemicals in a laboratory.

"The—the awful rotters!" he gasped. "Letting a fellow down like this! Oh, my hat! Why did I tempt them to try the thumping telescope? I might have known—"

Glyn broke off and walked across to the window. Gazing down into the sunlit quadrangle he sighted scores of fellows streaming gatewards, most of them pushing cycles and evidently en route for the great match. Then he suddenly sighted Noble and Dane hurrying along with their bikes, and he yelled to them.

But if they heard they did not heed. As he pushed his bike, Dane still mopped at his nose, while Noble still rubbed at his face. Obviously, there had not been time yet for his wrathful chums to forget, much less forgive.

"Oh, blow!" groaned Glyn. "What an ass I was! Hallo! There's Tom Merry and his pals! Good!"

Once again hope reigned in Glyn's youthful breast, and he started to yell desperately. But the lumber-room was a good height up, and Tom Merry & Co. did not seem to hear. With Tom were his study-mates—Lowther and Manners, and Blake, D'Arcy, and Digby—and they were going to the big match.

Tom, Blake, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were wheeling their bikes, but Lowther, Manners, and Digby were riding slowly in front of them. Riding a bike in the quad was against the rules; but Tom Merry & Co. very often overlooked rules. They rode on slowly, ready to jump off if a master or prefect hove in sight.

They soon paid for the breach of rules, however. Having failed to attract their attention by shouting, Bernard Glyn looked about for another way of doing so.

His roving eyes lit upon a small cardboard box in which reposed some small globular objects, like eggs in an egg-box. They were, in fact, small smoke-bombs, which Glyn had manufactured for a coming raid on the Grammarians.

Glyn was a reckless fellow, who rarely thought much before he acted—and he certainly acted without much thought now.

With a chuckle, he grabbed one of the bombs, leaned out of the window, took careful aim, and let fly.

It was a remarkably good shot, and the smoke-bomb dropped just about a foot in front of Monty Lowther's front wheel.

Bang!

There arose startled yells, but the smoke quite hid what followed, though the yells and howls were clear enough!

So startled, however, was Lowther, that he clapped on both brakes and toppled from his machine. The next instant Manners and Digby had crashed into him, and all three were mixed up in a scrambling, struggling heap of humanity and machines, amidst an uproar of howls and yells, and the billows of whirling black smoke.

"What the thunder—" gasped Blake.

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With Tom and Gussy he rushed to the help of his chums. Fortunately no lower windows overlooked the spot, and no masters or prefects were about at the moment. The smoke soon cleared, and the luckless Lowther, Manners, and Digby were helped up.

None of them was injured save for sundry minor bruises, but the bikes were—or, rather, two of them were. Lowther's left pedal was badly twisted, while Digby's front wheel was buckled a trifle—enough to put it out of commission until repaired, at all events.

"Well, my hat!" gasped Lowther, rubbing himself down dazedly. "What—what happened? Was it a giddy earthquake, or what?"

"It was a smoke-bomb, if I'm not mistaken!" said Tom Merry grimly, glancing about him with no little bewilderment. "If it was anyone it was that dangerous maniac G!—Why, there the idiot is!"

Tom suddenly sighted Glyn's laughing face high up at the top window. To their ears came a faint:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Tom Merry & Co. did not join in it; they saw no humour in the situation at all.

"Just like that harebrained lunatic!" gasped Blake. "Hallo, he's waving to us—to go up there! Well, I'm blown! Asking for it!"

Lowther scrambled to his feet, rubbing various bruises. His face was red with wrath as he glared up at the lumber-room window.

"Wants us to go up, does he?" he choked. "Yes, we'll go up all right!"

"My hat! Won't we just!" gasped Digby, rubbing the back of his head vigorously. "Nearly busted my napper, and busted my bike! Look at it!"

"Too bad—even for that weekless fellow Glyn!" agreed Arthur Augustus.

"Come on!" yelled Lowther. "Never mind the thumping bikes!"

He started off with a rush, and Digby and the rest of the indignant chums followed hot-foot. They were already late in starting out for Latchford, but they preferred to be later still rather than let Glyn's reckless trick go unpunished.

They dived into the School House, and raced up the stairs, reaching the top of the attic stairs in a panting crowd. Lowther charged at the door and rattled the knob furiously.

"Can't you see it's locked!" bawled Glyn from inside. "Find a key, you dummies, and let me out!"

Evidently Glyn misunderstood their intentions. If so, there was a surprise coming for the St. Jim's inventor. The next moment Lowther discovered that the key was in the lock, and as the door flew open they charged in.

Glyn yelled with astonishment as they fell upon him, and once again that afternoon he went down with a crash and a wild howl.

"Yarooop! Leggo, you— Here, what's this game, you maniacs? I only wanted— Yarooop!"

Bump!

"We'll give you pitching bombs at us!" gasped Lowther. "Bump him, you men! Shove some of his giddy bombs down the back of his neck! Roll him in his smelly chemicals!"

"Yarooop! Help! Stop it!" shrieked Glyn, struggling desperately in the avenger's grasp. "I tell you—"

"Mucked our ride up!" yelled Digby. "My bike's jiggered, and so's Lowther's. How can we get to the match now? Give him socks!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Look here! I tell you— Yarooop! Leggo!" roared Glyn. "I'll lend you my bike—"

"What good's that? We want two jiggers!" bellowed Digby.

"Leggo! Well, can't you—" Glyn broke off as a sudden, desperate inspiration came to him. Glyn was horrified at the thought of having bombs shoved down his neck and being rolled in his own smelly chemicals. In moments of acute crisis the mind works swiftly, and Glyn's worked swiftly now. "Hold on!" he shrieked. "I've got an idea! Make it pax and I'll take you all in the pater's car!"

"You dangerous maniac—"

"I will!" roared Glyn. "Leggo! Stop it! Listen, you raving idiots! I'll take you all—yow-ow!—in the car!"

"Eh? What's that?" demanded Tom, grasping at last what Glyn was shrieking. "Hold on, you chaps! Is that right, Glyn—you'll take us to Latchford?"

"Yow! Ow, ow, ow! Yes, blow you!" panted Glyn, sitting up dizzily, as he was suddenly released. "I just thought of it! Make it pax and I'll take the lot of you—stand you tea, too, for that matter! Ow, ow! What d'you want attacking a chap like that for? I was only attracting your attention! Those rotters, Dane and Noble, locked

me in and then cleared off, and I want to go to the match, too!"

"Well, next time you'd better find another way of attracting our attention," said Tom Merry, with a chuckle. "You've mucked up two jiggers—"

"I'll pay for them to be put right again—that's all right!" groaned Glyn. "Ow, wow! You silly owls—"

"Never mind your giddy aches and pains!" said Blake. "What about taking us to Latchford, Glyn? Is it honour bright?"

"Yes, of course—if you'll call it pax!"

"What about your pater—"

"He's away for a day or two on business. But that's

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes!"

"Groogh! Ow, ow, ow!" gasped Glyn. "You silly owls!"

But he was grinning now as he staggered to his feet and dusted his clothes down. For the moment he was even tempted to offer them a chance of looking through his marvellous telescope, but—fortunately, perhaps—he resisted the temptation. So while Tom Merry & Co. hurried away to put their bikes back in the cycle-shed, Glyn rushed off to change and make ready for the afternoon's outing. He had gained his release, and instead of being a prisoner in the lumber-room for the afternoon, he had the prospect of a trip to the match with congenial companions.



Lowther toppled from his machine and the next instant Manners and Digby crashed into him!

all right—you know I can have the car when I like so long as Turton drives it," said Glyn eagerly. "I say, we'll have a ripping run! It'll be a bit of a crush, but it's a roomy car, and two chaps can take it in turn sitting on other fellow's knees. Turton will run us over there in twenty minutes, and run us back after tea in Latchford. How's that?"

"Wathah a good ideah, deah boys!" remarked Arthur Augustus, wagging his noble head sagely. "The woods are vewy dustay, and widin' will make an awful mess of our bags, and the west of our clobber."

"Not so bad!" agreed Tom Merry, with a chuckle. "I think we'll be kind to him, and allow him to take us—what?"

"Yes, rather!" came the grinning chorus.

"You're forgiven, Glyn!" said Tom severely. "Next time we won't let you off so tightly, mind!"

"Next time we shall demand a trip to the Riviera, my lad!" said Lowther.

"Let him get up!" ordered Tom. "I hope he'll appreciate the honour we're doing him by allowing him to take us and stand us tea, and be duly grateful for our kind forgiveness!"

CHAPTER 3.

Very Queer!

"TURTON—where the dickens is the fellow?"

Bernard Glyn was getting exasperated.

The juniors had taken their time in walking over to Glyn House, which was less than a mile from St. Jim's across the fields. There was heaps of time, for the motor run would not occupy more than twenty minutes at most, as Glyn had stated.

But now, Turton, the Glyn House chauffeur, appeared to be missing. He was not in the garage, and the butler mentioned vaguely, at last, that he was nowhere about the house.

"Must have cleared off, the cheeky rotter!" said Glyn, breathing hard. "I've a jolly good mind to take the Rolls out myself!"

"Fathead! You haven't a licence—"

"Blow a licence! Bother a licence, and dash Turton!" snorted Glyn. "Still—"

"Better hire a car or a taxi, Glyn!" said Tom. "No

good going hunting for trouble, old chap! We'll whack the axes!"

"Yaas, wathah! Pway be sensible, Glyn, deah boy!" "I'll hire a car," said Glyn, at last. "But I'm standing the outing, you chaps! I'll phone for one now!"

And Glyn marched towards his father's study, his chums at his heels. The door was partly open, and Glyn flung it wide and walked in towards the telephone on his father's desk. His hand was almost upon the receiver, when suddenly he gave a violent start.

The room was not empty as he had supposed.

Standing almost behind the open door was a man—a man in chauffeur's uniform. It was Turton, the Glyn House second chauffeur.

He stood there, a curiously startled and uneasy look on his smooth dark face. His sharp, dark eyes met Bernard's astonished look, and then fell.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, suddenly sighting him. "Turton is here, aftah all Glyn!"

There was a silence. Tom Merry & Co., like Glyn, stared curiously at the man. His whole attitude was one of startled confusion. He seemed incapable of speech for the moment.

Bernard Glyn set his lips.

That the fellow had not heard their shouts and yells was quite impossible; he must have heard them. In any case—and Glyn's brow darkened at the thought—what was he doing in Mr. Glyn's private study, where he certainly had no right to be?

"So—so you're here, Turton!" said Glyn at last.

"Y-yes, Master Bernard!"

"We've been hunting all over the grounds for you!" snapped Glyn. "In any case, you must have heard us shouting your name!"

"I'm sorry, Master Bernard!" said Turton, becoming suddenly his usual, respectful self. "If—if you wish to speak to me, sir—"

"I'd like to know what you're doing in here, for one thing, Turton?" demanded Glyn impulsively.

"I—I—your father asked me to—remain near the study while he was away, Master Bernard! To—to keep an eye on it, sir!"

"But what for—what on earth for?" asked Glyn, his lip curling a trifle.

Turton did not reply.

"I'm blest if I can quite swallow that, Turton!" said Glyn bluntly, at last. "Anyway, I've been shouting like

billy-ho for you all over the grounds and the house. You must have heard me. Dash it all!"

"I'm extremely sorry, Master Bernard!" said Turton smoothly.

He did not offer any explanation as to why he had not answered, and he did not deny having heard.

Glyn set his lips. To him, the fellow's attitude smacked of insolence.

"You must have heard me, Turton!" he said quietly at last. "But well let that pass! I want you and the Rolls this afternoon. I want you to run us over to the match at Latchford, and to fetch us back again in the evening!"

"I regret that I cannot do that, Master Bernard!" said Turton calmly.

"And why not?" returned Glyn, flushing with anger. "You know perfectly well that the pater allows me the use of the cars whenever I want them—providing he and the mater do not want them!"

"Your father has asked me not to leave the house while he is away, Master Bernard!" said Turton.

"What rot!" snorted Glyn. "Look here, I want the Rolls and I'm having it! If you refuse to take us I shall take it myself—see?"

Turton looked disturbed, and his eyes gleamed a little.

"You had better phone for a car from the village, Master Bernard!" he said. "You are not old enough to drive yourself, and you have been forbidden by your father to take the Rolls out alone. If you will permit me to telephone for you, sir—"

"No! I will have the Rolls, Turton!"

"The—the car is out of action, sir!" said Turton, after a pause. "There is something wrong with the carburettor. You cannot use the car, Master Bernard. In any case I should get into trouble with your father if I allowed the car to go out!"

"That's enough!" snapped Glyn. His eyes were glinting, and Tom Merry & Co. were also looking strangely at the chauffeur now. It seemed plain to them, as it did to Glyn, that the fellow was not speaking the truth. For some reason or other he obviously did not want to take them to Latchford. And what was he doing in the study, anyway? He had been hiding behind the door, clearly in the hope that they would not enter the room. Glyn gritted his teeth.

"Look here, Turton!" he went on curtly. "We'll be ready in fifteen minutes to go to Latchford—"

"Very good, sir! Shall I ring up the local garage now?" asked Turton, reaching for the phone.

"No, you jolly well won't!" snapped Glyn, his face aflame.

"You'll go and get out the car at once, Turton. Got that? If there is anything wrong with the carburettor, you've just fifteen minutes to put it right."

"You mean that you order me to take you, notwithstanding your father's orders to me, Master Bernard?" said the chauffeur respectfully.

"I jolly well do!" snapped Glyn. "We'll be ready in fifteen minutes, Turton! Come on, chaps!"

And, without waiting for the man's answer, Bernard led his chums to the top of the house, where Glyn's own combined study and laboratory was situated.

"We can be looking at my gadgets while we're waiting!" said Glyn, trying to cheer up. "He'll take us, all right—he daren't refuse! Any of you chaps care to try my new weighing machine—my own invention!"

"No, thanks!" said Tom, smiling. "If it wasn't your own invention I might, old chap!"

"Not to-day!" chuckled Blake. "We've had some, Glyn! Let's see you try it yourself, old bean!"

"What a suspicious lot you are!" grinned Glyn. "Don't sit in that armchair, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus, who had been about to sink into a comfortable-looking armchair, jumped up again, as if he had sat on a tin-tack. He remembered that one of Glyn's pet hobbies was to construct chairs that collapsed when anyone innocent enough sat in them!

"Bai Jove! Thank you vewy much for warnin' me, deah boy!" he chuckled. "You are impwovin' in your treatment of your guests, Glyn," he remarked approvingly, selecting the next chair—a small, solid-looking piece of furniture. "I know what you are for constwuctin' wotten—Wha—Yawwoooooop!"

Bump!

Alas! The chair Gussy had selected was, after all, one of Glyn's fiendish contraptions. As Gussy sank gracefully into it, tired after the long climb upstairs, the chair closed up like a pocket-knife, and Gussy found himself seated on the floor inside it, with his arms pinned to his sides and his knees hugging his cheeks.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Glyn, quite recovering his usual high spirits at the quaint sight. "I knew you'd sit in that one if I warned you off the other, Gussy. This comes of having a suspicious nature!"

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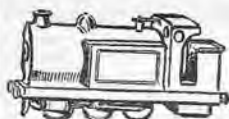
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HELD TO RANSOM!

(Continued from page 6.)

"Yoooooo! Welease me, you feahful wuffian, Glyn!" shrieked Gussy, his features red with wrath. "I am hurt, and my clobbah will be feahfully wumped, and—Yow-ow-ow!"

He struggled desperately, but he was gripped as in a vice. "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Glyn. "I made that for unwelcome visitors, Gussy. Trimble came here uninvited one day, and I kept him in it all the afternoon, as a little lesson. Ha, ha, ha!"

He touched a hidden button on the chair, and at once the chair jerked into its rightful position, shooting Gussy out in a heap on the floor.

"There's the car coming out!" said Glyn. "Come on!" He led the way out and along to the garage. The second chauffeur was at the wheel, and his face was composed, and they glanced at it keenly.

"We may have trouble with the carburettor, Master Bernard!" said Turton.

"We'll chance that! Get in, you fellows!"

"You would be wiser not to rely upon the Rolls if you want to see the match, sir. If I might once again make the suggestion, would it not be better to phone for a car or taxi?"

"We'll rely upon the Rolls, Turton, thanks!"

"Very good, sir!"

Turton said no more, though his face was hard and his eyes gleamed a little. In silence they tumbled aboard, Glyn's eyes scanning the big, silent house in its setting of dark trees. For the moment he almost decided to stay—to stay, and allow only his chums to go. But, troubled and uneasy as he was, he did not wish to disappoint them. He knew well enough that if he wanted to stay they would insist upon staying with him.

The car shot smoothly along the drive and turned out of the big bronze gates, en route for Latchford.

CHAPTER 4.

More Mystery!

"HALLO! What the thump is he stopping for?"

It was several minutes later, and the smooth-gliding Rolls-Royce had covered barely two miles of road to Latchford, when Glyn gave vent to that grim remark.

There was good reason for it. The car had suddenly come to a halt as Turton appeared to struggle with the clutch.

"What is the matter now, Turton?" demanded Glyn, through the speaking-tube. "What are you stopping for?"

"Something wrong, Master Bernard! I am afraid it is the carburettor, sir!"

"Well, see what you can do to put it right!" said Glyn, his eyes showing determination. "We'll wait in here."

"But—Very good, sir!"

Obviously it was not "very good" for Turton—his looks showed that plainly.

He left his seat, and a moment later was busy with the engine—or appeared to be.

"How long will the job take you, Turton?" asked Glyn, poking his head out of the saloon window after a while.

"An hour, at least, sir! As I feared, it is the carburettor. If I may once again make the suggestion, I think it will be wiser for you to walk to the village and get a car there, Master Bernard!"

Bernard Glyn breathed hard.

"We'll wait until you repair it, Turton!" he returned.

Tom Merry frowned. He simply did not know what to make of the whole curious affair. In his own mind he felt it useless to insist—the man obviously was determined not to take them to Latchford. Still, he did not wish to add to Glyn's growing fury.

"Hold on, Glyn, old man!" he said quietly. "If it's not going to be repaired under an hour what's the good of sitting here? We shall miss most of the match!"

"All of it, by the look of things!" grunted Blake. "We shan't get there in this car, anyway, old scout! That merchant's fairly got his back up!"

"Yaas, wathah! Let us get anoathah car, deah boys!"

"It's more than a bit thick, you fellows!" said Glyn, in a low voice. "As a matter of fact, I might as well tell you that I had no intention of staying to watch the match."

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—not after what's happened at Glyn House. I was going to make him drive me back right away the moment I had landed you chaps there. I tell you that this car was as right as rain last night—I saw the mater out in it. If the carburettor's gone wrong, then Turton's worked it!"

"That's pretty clear, Glyn. But—"

"But it's no good you fellows missing the match!" went on Glyn savagely. "If I was alone, though, I'd hang on here until the cows come home before I'd let him do me down like this! Come on!"

He jumped out of the car, and his chums followed his example, all of them not a little relieved.

Turton looked round, a curious look on his face. There was anxiety in his dark eyes as he scanned the juniors' faces.

"It will take me more than an hour, I am afraid!" he began. "Do you not think it will be advisable, sir—"

"We're going to try to hire another car, as you suggest, Turton!" said Glyn steadily. "My friends wish to see the match, and I do not want to disappoint them. Come along, you fellows!"

"Very good, sir!"

Turton resumed his inspection of the engine, turning his face away as if to hide his deep satisfaction.

The juniors tramped away, Glyn heading towards the village. But once out of sight of the car he changed his direction, and they hurried back to Glyn House.

"Wotten!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "But it is not your fault, Glyn, deah boy! Pway look at it in the wight light!"

"The—the rotter!" breathed Glyn.

"You think he mucked the engine up on purpose?"

"Of course! Or else there's nothing at all wrong with it!" said Glyn grimly. "I could easily have looked to find out, of course. But I didn't wish to. I want to find out what's going on at Glyn House this afternoon. Something's wrong there—seriously wrong!"

"I think so, too!" agreed Blake seriously. "It's no end queer!"

Tom's face was dark with suspicion.

"It should be pretty queer to you fellows by this!" he muttered, his brow puckered with worried thoughts.

"True enough!" said Glyn. "It's all jolly mysterious, if you ask me. Anyway, if you fellows don't mind I'm going to hang on at home for this afternoon. You can get a taxi or car, and I'll stand the exes, of course."

"We'll hang on, too, if you like!" said Tom Merry.

"You jolly well won't!" said Glyn promptly; and he refused to hear the suggestion.

Almost in silence they tramped the rest of the way back to Glyn House. Glyn was looking back over his shoulder practically all the way, and it was clear to his chums that he fully expected to see the Rolls-Royce appear, speeding back to Glyn House. It was hot walking, and the roads were dusty, and none of the juniors felt very happy over the affair. But it was not Glyn's fault, Manners, Lowther, Digby, and D'Arcy felt that he was making rather a mountain out of a molehill—though they could not help admitting that the affair was queer. It was possible—though extremely unlikely—that Mr. Glyn had ordered the chauffeur not to leave the house, and in that case it was unlikely he would disobey the order even to please Bernard Glyn.

Glyn seemed desperately anxious to reach the house, and it was as they were tramping up the long drive, scanning the big house through the thick trees, that the schoolboy inventor came to a sudden halt with a startled exclamation.

"Hold on!" he breathed.

There was thrilling excitement in his voice, and his chums stared at him.

"What's biting you now?" demanded Lowther.

Much as they liked the schoolboy inventor, they always looked upon any unexpected action of his with suspicion. Glyn did not answer for a moment—he still stood staring hard into the thick bushes and trees lining the drive.

"Looking for trouble?" asked Manners sarcastically. "That seems to be your chief occupation in life, old bean!"

"I thought I spotted something in the trees yonder—a face!" said Glyn, in a low tone.

"He's seeing things now!" groaned Digby. "Was it the wicked Turton's chivvy, Glyn?"

Glyn did not answer, and they walked a few more steps. But an instant later, to their great surprise, he suddenly gasped, broke away from them, and darted into the bushes.

"Bai Jove! What evah is the fellow aftar?" said Gussy.

"Hunting mares' nests this afternoon!" sniffed Digby.

"I don't believe—"

"It's all queer, though!" said Tom Merry soberly. "He's seen something out of the way!"

Tom Merry was right there. Glyn felt quite certain he had seen a face in the bushes. He dashed towards the spot

recklessly, but reaching it the next moment he stood stock still, staring about him.

Nobody was to be seen. But the laurels were high and thick hereabouts, and it was difficult to see more than a yard or so away. But though he saw nobody he had a curious and certain feeling that he was not alone. All was silent, and not a leaf stirred as he stood and listened intently, his heart throbbing a bit at the almost certain knowledge that he was not alone—that scarcely a yard away from him was the unknown prowler.

And then Glyn heard a slight rustle in the leaves, and instantly he braced himself and sprang towards the spot.

He instantly collided with a man's form, and before he could get a glimpse of the unknown's face he felt himself grasped in a grip of iron and whirled round. Then hands like steel closed on his neck, and he was flung with brutal force against the trunk of a tree.

He crashed against it, and slid down, half stunned, hearing dimly as he did so the rustle and snapping of departing feet in the underwood.

Though sick and giddy, the junior scrambled up again, his teeth set hard. It was more than enough for Bernard Glyn. Whoever the unknown prowler was he was an enemy and up to no good. The next moment Glyn was pelting hard after the man, though he felt half-choked, and his head still sang.

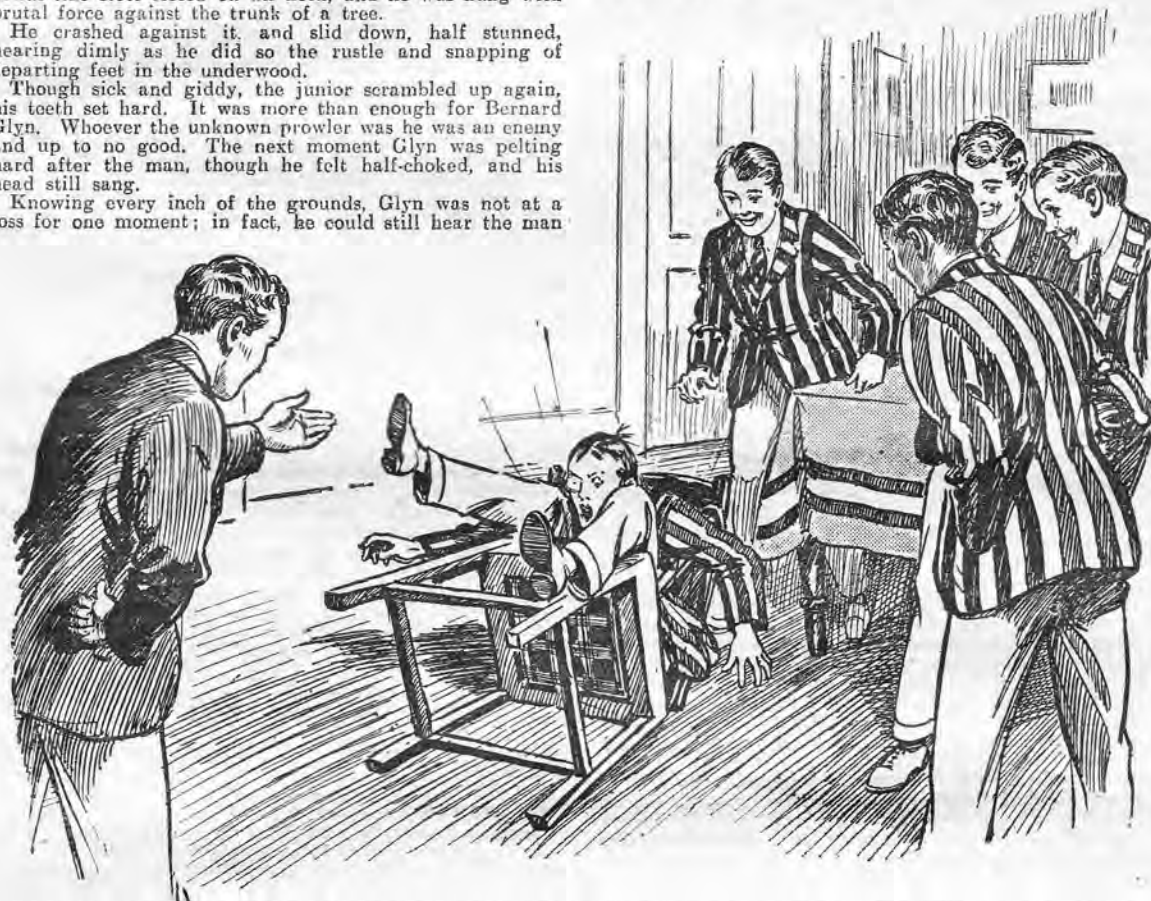
Knowing every inch of the grounds, Glyn was not at a loss for one moment; in fact, he could still hear the man

"That man—the rotter I chased, of course!" howled Glyn. "Quick! Must be up to something! I spotted him sneaking among the bushes. Jolly nearly nabbed him as he tried to shin over the wall. But he biffed me with his dashed boot. Yow-ow-ow!"

"Bai Jove!"

They stared at Glyn. Not one of them had even glimpsed the man, and for the moment they believed Glyn was spoofing. Then Tom Merry sighted Glyn's shirt-front, which bore a dusty smudge, and his bruised chin.

Without a word, Tom shinned up the wall, and glanced quickly about him. He saw nothing suspicious—not a sign of movement in the trees beyond the wall. After a few seconds' careful looking about him, he dropped down from the wall again.



The chair closed up like a pocket-knife and Gussy found himself sitting on the floor inside it, with his knees hugging his cheeks.

in front crashing heedlessly through the bushes now. He burst out from the trees at last, and pulled up short before the high wall that encircled the grounds.

Over the wall his quarry was just hauling himself, aided by the thick ivy.

"Got you!" yelled Glyn. "Quick, this way, you men! Help!"

He made a desperate leap forward, and his grip closed on the man's waving leg as he swarmed over. But the schoolboy inventor had spoken too soon. As he made the grab the fellow lashed out with his other foot, and his boot caught the junior just under the chin.

It was a hefty drive, and with a strangled yelp, Glyn let go and crashed backwards into the bushes.

The strange intruder vanished over the wall.

CHAPTER 5.

A Startling Discovery!

TOM MERRY came rushing up, attracted by Glyn's wild yelp. They stared blankly at the schoolboy inventor as he grovelled in the grass, hugging his chin in both hands.

"After him!" he gurgled desperately, sitting up dizzily.

"After the brute! Over the wall, you idiots! Quick!"

"After whom?"

"Nobody in sight, Glyn!" he said briefly. "But—"

"Too late!" groaned Glyn, still hugging his aching jaw. "Look at my thumping chin! The rotter lashed out at me when I caught his other leg, the brute! I should have nabbed him but for that!"

"Bai Jove! You're sure you didn't imagine it, Glyn, deah boy?"

"Of course I didn't, you fooling owl!" yelled Glyn wrathfully. "If you had this thumping ache in your chin and teeth you'd know it wasn't silly imagination, blow you!"

"A man—you saw him, Glyn—"

"Don't I keep telling you I did!" hooted the exasperated Glyn. "A well-dressed chap, with a pimply, clean-shaven chinny! I want to know what he was up to, roaming about the grounds! He couldn't have been up to any good, the rotter!"

"It's queer!"

"It's more than queer!" snorted Bernard Glyn, his eyes gleaming. "I shouldn't be surprised if Turton—"

He paused, suspicion gleaming in his angry eyes.

"You've got Turton on the brain, old sport!" said Blake soothingly. "Look here, old chap—just put Turton out of your mind and come along to the match with us!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

But Glyn shook his head, and accompanied them to the house in silence, his eyes roaming suspiciously about the grounds as he went. Tom Merry & Co. were puzzled. It was possible that Glyn had fallen and caused that bruise on his chin. None the less, he was the last fellow in the world to imagine things. They had to believe him.

Something was undoubtedly going on at Glyn House—something mysterious, if not unlawful.

"Look here, Glyn," said Tom Merry, as they went indoors, "I think you must be right about something being amiss here. These chaps can go on to the match, and I'll hang on here with you!"

Glyn protested—not very keenly, however—but as it happened the matter was settled for the juniors very quickly. Arriving at the house Glyn first saw the butler, and his face cleared on learning that all was well—nothing amiss had happened in their absence. So Glyn got on the phone, and his face was dismal when he announced the result of his telephoning.

Not a car or taxi was to be hired in the neighbourhood. All had already been booked to go to the big match.

"We might have known it!" said Tom Merry. "Practically every giddy senior in the school would be going, and you bet few of them would cycle."

"Fairly done in the eye!" groaned Blake.

"I'm dashed sorry, you fellows!" said Glyn sincerely.

"I'm afraid it's all my blessed fault! All I can do is to ask you fellows to stay here and have tea with me. We can have a few sets of tennis, and—"

"Well, that isn't a bad wheeze!" said Blake, brightening up. "Good man, Glyn!"

"Yass, wathah! Wathah bettah, in some ways, than cyclin' to Latchford, deah boys! The woods are so wretchedly dustay—"

"All Gussy thinks about is his clobber!" grinned Lowther. "Right! It's a go, then! So long, that is, as Glyn doesn't get up to any monkey tricks—"

"I'll be as good as gold!" said Glyn, with a feeble chuckle. "I shan't even ask Gussy to sit down in a chair, or to try—Hullo! What's that?"

From somewhere in the house had sounded a faint crash, as of something being dropped.

"Only a giddy maid dropped something, you ass!" said Blake. "Blessed if you aren't—"

But Bernard Glyn was suspicious of anything that afternoon, and without waiting for Blake to finish he pelted away through the front hall. Though he had not located the sound, he made straight for his father's study, and as he twisted the handle and flung open the door he broke out with a startled yell at what he beheld.

Before the big safe in one corner of the room a man was crouching—a man in a dark suit and wearing a cloth cap. Glyn could not get even a glimpse of his face—in fact, the fellow had a handkerchief twisted round it, though Glyn only glimpsed him from behind.

He had no time for more than a glimpse. As the door flew open the man leaped upright with an oath, and then made a wild leap for the open french window.

Tom Merry & Co. just caught a glimpse of his face, as he leaped through into the garden. The next moment they were pelting after Bernard Glyn in pursuit.

"After him!" bawled Glyn. "This way, chaps!"

He vanished amid the laurels fringing the wide lawn, and the startled juniors tore in pursuit. If they had any doubts before as to there being anything amiss at Glyn House those doubts fled now. Glyn had been right. The shadow of crime and mystery hung over Glyn House that afternoon.

The fugitive seemed to be making for the gates, and, realising this, Tom Merry & Co. pelted along the drive, hoping to cut him off. But Glyn was hard on the fellow's heels now, and he saw the man suddenly swerve off, and make a dive for the high wall.

Glyn went after him, unmindful of his previous dismal adventure with the pimply-faced intruder.

But this time Glyn was yards behind, and he arrived at the wall just as the man scrambled over and vanished.

Glyn gritted his teeth, and after three or four vain efforts succeeded in clambering up, though there was scarcely any ivy here to aid him, and he was not tall enough to get an easy grip of the top.

He reached the top at last, however, and as he did so he heard the sudden buzz of an engine starting. Astride the wall, he glanced along the lane that ran alongside the Glyn House wall.

He was just in time to see the back of a car—a covered car—vanishing round the corner by the gates.

"Blow!" panted Glyn, with savage disappointment.

He dropped into the lane and raced along it, anxious

to get a better glimpse of the car; for he had no doubt the man he had chased was escaping in it.

But he was too late to see it again—as were Tom Merry, Blake, Manners, Lowther, Digby, and D'Arcy, who came pelting up the long drive a second later.

"Lost him!"

"Yes, blow the luck!" gasped Bernard Glyn. "He was in that car, I suppose!"

"We heard it buzz off!" panted Tom Merry. "Phew! This is a fine how-d'you-do, Glyn! Your home seems bewitched this afternoon! What's it all mean?"

"Looks like burglars!" said Glyn, after a hesitating pause. "I caught that Johnny kneeling before the safe, at all events."

"But what about the other chap? Was it the same man, by the way?" asked Tom, with sudden excitement.

Glyn shook his head.

"A different chap altogether!" he said grimly. "But I bet they were together, for all that. As for Turton—"

"Great pip! You don't suppose that chap has anything to do with this affair?" stuttered Blake.

"You never know!" said Glyn coolly.

"But, dash it all, that's too thick, Glyn!" remonstrated Tom Merry, though he was looking uneasy enough himself. "If Turton was in league with those men—"

"I don't say he is," said Glyn soberly. "But—you fellows must see that it's queer!"

"If he was in league with those men he would have been only too glad to rush us to Latchford—to get us out of the way!" said Manners sagely. "That's rot, Glyn!"

Glyn said nothing.

A moment later he was leading his chums to the tennis-courts, which gave a good view of the house, including the study—and that was all Glyn wanted. For the rest of that afternoon tennis was in full swing, and Tom Merry & Co. almost forgot the recent happenings in the fun of the game, and the jolly tea that followed on the lawn in front of the study window. Once the game was interrupted by the arrival of a police sergeant from Wayland, but after hearing the story of the attempted burglary and making voluminous notes the sergeant went away, looking very wise—though Glyn did not make him "wise" to his suspicions regarding Turton; Glyn kept that to himself.

Beyond that nothing happened. And when Glyn joined Tom Merry & Co. in the junior Common-room at St. Jim's that evening after lock-up he had no fresh news to report—nothing out of the way had happened to add to the mystery of Glyn House.

CHAPTER 6. Another Burglary!

"G LYN!"

"Yes, sir?"

"The Head wishes to speak to you, my boy!"

"Oh! Very good, sir!"

Bernard Glyn stared at Mr. Raiton. It was the Friday morning, and Glyn was far from thinking of the events at Glyn House at the moment. During the previous day he had been over to his home twice—at noon and in the evening—but everything was normal there, and his apprehensions and suspicions were beginning to melt away. His mother and sister pooh-poohed the idea that Turton had anything to do with the attempted burglary. Turton had made himself popular with the household since he had been at Glyn House, and Glyn's own suspicions were fading now. None the less, even his mother and Miss Edith could not understand why Turton had had—and, curiously enough, still seemed to have—such a curious interest in Mr. Glyn's study.

But the sudden thought of home affairs came to him now as he stared at the Housemaster. What the Head wanted him for he could not imagine. He had done nothing wrong—not for two or three days, at least. It was three days since he had fixed that electrical alarm-bell under Mr. Ratcliff's chair in the dining-hall, and he had already been whacked by Mr. Raiton for that. And he was quite sure that the beaks could not have discovered that it was he who had fixed an electrical "shocking" wire, worked from a hidden battery, to the door-knob of the prefect's Common-room.

"Is—anything wrong, sir?" he ventured to ask Mr. Raiton.

"I think there is something wrong at your home, Glyn!" said the Housemaster gently. "But it is nothing to occasion you undue distress, my boy. The Head will explain all to you!"

"Thank you, sir!" gasped Glyn.

He touched his cap and hurried indoors, making his way to the Head's private study. He found the Head alone.

"You—you wished to see me, sir?" exclaimed Glyn apprehensively.

"Yes, my boy. It is nothing to worry about, Glyn! There has been a burglary at your home during the night!"

"A—a burglary!"

"Yes—I have just had a telephone message from your mother, Glyn. She wishes you to go home at once. Your father has been wired for, and should be home to-day. As far as I can gather, nothing has been stolen, but—but one of the House staff is missing!"

"Missing, sir?" gasped Glyn. "Is—is it the second chauffeur?"

He halted.

"The second chauffeur is missing, and your mother is naturally very upset, in the absence of your father, Glyn! In the circumstances I will grant you a day's leave, my boy—until this evening, at all events! Possibly your father will have returned by then. I shall expect you back at calling-over."

Glyn stammered his thanks and hurried out, his eyes gleaming.

He hurried to his study, and in the passage outside met Tom Merry and Lowther.

"Anything the matter, Glyn?" asked Tom, staring at his flushed face.

"Yes—I've just seen the Head! There's been another burglary at home!"

"Another? My hat!"

"And Turton's missing—done a bunk by the look of things!" said Glyn, setting his teeth. "What d'you fellows think of that?"

"Then—then it's been successful this time, Glyn!" said Tom. "Has much been taken—"

"The Head says nothing has, so far as is known. But who can tell that, until the pater returns? Something must have been taken or Turton wouldn't have vanished!"

"Phew! Looks like it!"

"I'm off now, anyway!" said Glyn curtly. "So long, you fellows!"

He hastily got his cap and left the House. Getting his bike out, he raced at top speed for Glyn House. On the



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drive he met the portly figure of Inspector Skeat, of Wayland.

"Well, what's the news, inspector?" demanded Glyn, leaping from his machine.

"You've heard, then, Master Glyn?"

"Yes—the headmaster told me! Look here, something must have been taken, inspector!"

"That cannot be ascertained until your father's return, Master Bernard!" said Inspector Skeat slowly. "The study was in a great state of disorder, and the safe was burst open! But various bonds and securities—also a certain amount of money—have, apparently, not been touched! Your mother does not believe anything is missing!"

"But Turton is missing!"

The inspector's face changed.

"Turton is missing!" he assented grimly. "It is very strange indeed—very! I should like a few particulars regarding that young man, Master Bernard! How long has he been with you, to begin with?"

Glyn gave the required particulars. It was on the tip of his tongue to tell of the happening on the Wednesday afternoon, but beyond their adventure with the burglars—if burglars they were—he was silent. Somehow he felt it wiser to consult his father before mentioning his own suspicions of Turton.

"It is all very strange!" repeated Inspector Skeat, when he had taken down what Glyn told him. "But—however, we shall see! I wish you good-morning, Master Bernard!"

And the inspector strode on towards his car, which was standing outside the gates.

Bernard hurried to the house. He found the household still in a state of seething excitement, and their chief regard seemed to be for the missing second chauffeur. After hearing all the facts from his mother and sister, Glyn tackled old Chambers, the butler. But he knew nothing—he was slightly deaf, and he had heard no sound during the night—nor, in point of fact, had anyone else in the house.

An examination of the study told him nothing, either. The room was still as it had been found that morning, save that the valuables and money had been removed from the broken safe to a safer place for the time being.

Bernard Glyn roamed about the house and grounds all morning, trying to puzzle out the mystery—the mystery of Turton's disappearance. Had the money and valuables gone the matter would have been fairly clear. But—

It was all very strange and unaccountable.

He was soon to learn something, however. At noon his father came home. Bernard greeted him in the hall, and the moment he had heard all that was known, Mr. Glyn hurried to his study, his face showing great alarm and anxiety.

Bernard followed him, and found him rummaging almost feverishly in the empty safe. He then went through all the articles that had been in the safe that morning, and at last he gave a scarcely audible groan.

"Something is missing after all, dad?" demanded Bernard anxiously.

"Yes!"

"What—"

"I see no reason why you should not know, Bernard!" said Mr. Glyn quietly. "Those men have taken what they were after!"

"Dad—"

"They have taken some secret plans that were placed in my charge, Bernard," exclaimed Mr. Glyn huskily. "They are of very great value, not merely from a financial point of view. Moreover, the loss is not so much mine, as the loss of a friend—a very serious and distressing loss it will be to him. I need not tell you more, my boy, but—but the matter is very grave, and very upsetting indeed. I would rather have lost everything of value in that safe than the plans."

"Turton's the man," said Glyn impulsively. "Turton's in with the scoundrels, anyway."

"Nonsense, Bernard!" said Mr. Glyn, frowning. "The disappearance of that poor fellow is still more grave. Something serious must have happened to him."

"He's bolted with the plans, of course," said Glyn indignantly. "It's clear enough, dad."

And he told of Wednesday's happenings, his father listening without comment.

"Doesn't that prove he's had a hand in it, dad?" ended Glyn. "He was sneaking about in this room."

"I told him to guard this room, Bernard."

"What?" Glyn jumped.

"You are wrong, my boy," said Mr. Glyn grimly. "At least, I hope so, though it is all very strange. I told Turton about the plans and their great value. I liked the young fellow and trusted him implicitly. Apart from

the inventor and myself, Turton was the only man who knew of them—or so I have believed."

"But—but—"

"When I went away I instructed Turton not to leave the house," went on the scientist millionaire. "He was quite right in not wanting to take you out in the car, my boy, though he took my orders rather literally. I told him not to breathe a word to a soul, though it would scarcely have mattered had he told you, Bernard. Still, he was quite right in refusing to leave the house. I confided in him, and relied upon him because Chambers is much too old, while Turton is a strong young man, and exceptionally intelligent."

Bernard Glyn was silent; his breath was taken away by his father's news. He understood now Turton's reluctance to leave the study and the house.

None the less, Glyn's suspicions remained.

Turton need not have been so secretive to him. He could have made matters clearer without actually breaking his word to his master. Now Turton had vanished, and the plans had vanished.

"I had no idea of this, dad," said Glyn, at length. "For all that, I—I still think Turton's played false with you. I believe he helped those men to escape on Wednesday, and I believe it was the back of the Rolls that I spotted just disappearing down the lane. Now he's gone, and the plans have gone. And it's clear the inspector thinks as I do, though he knows nothing of the plans."

"I do not know what to think, my boy," said Mr. Glyn, his voice showing his doubts. "It is all very strange. I trusted the fellow, and yet— But I must get into touch with Inspector Skeat without delay. Those plans must be recovered at all costs."

Mr. Glyn hurried out to phone to the inspector, who was at the house again within twenty minutes. Leaving his father closeted with him, Bernard went for a walk in the grounds. He had little hope of the police being able to help. His father did not intend to tell the inspector about the plans—only that valuable documents of a confidential nature had been stolen. Still, Bernard Glyn felt that if the police could get on Turton's trail, there was hope. For he felt quite certain that Turton had been false to his trust, and that he was in league with the crooks who had got them.

CHAPTER 7.

What Baggy Witnessed!

BERNARD GLYN started back for St. Jim's that evening in a very troubled mood.

He was nearing the gates of the drive, when a sudden rustle among the bushes caught his ears. And, to his amazement, he was just in time to get a swift glimpse of the man, who had obviously sighted him at the same moment.

The man turned abruptly and vanished.

Glyn stood stock-still for a moment, his heart thumping with sudden excitement. The man was the last person he would have dreamed of seeing in the grounds of Glyn House just then.

But the sight brought a determined gleam into the school-boy inventor's eyes. What should he do? Should he follow the man, or should he rush back and report what he had seen to his father?

A moment's reflection decided the junior, and the next he was racing for the gates. He knew the man had seen him, and he guessed he would make himself scarce. Instead of following, Glyn slipped through the open gates and ran softly along the wall, fully expecting to see the man drop down from the wall at any moment.

But the lane was still empty, and he knew the young man could scarcely have got clear so soon. With his eyes gleaming, Glyn dropped down behind a mass of brambles growing against the wall, to watch and wait.

He had not to wait long. There came a sudden scraping of feet on the wall a few yards away, and a figure swarmed over and dropped down into the lane. There he halted, listening, as if undecided how to act.

"He's not sure whether I spotted him or not," breathed Glyn. "Jove! This beats the band! If the merchants have got the plans, then what is that brute doing here again? He's risking a lot—"

The junior's musings came to an abrupt end. As if

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his mind was made up, the pimply-faced young man turned suddenly and walked quickly towards where Glyn was hiding.

Scarcely daring to breathe, Glyn crouched against the wall. But he was well screened, and not once did the fellow glance towards the mass of brambles. He walked swiftly on, and then turned off into the trees.

Glyn followed him, congratulating himself on his good fortune. Only a moment or two ago he had been longing for such a chance to get on the trail of the rascals. Now he had the chance, he intended to make the most of it.

The plans were gone, undoubtedly, and why the stranger was still skulking round Glyn House seemed to him a bigger mystery than ever. But the thought came to him that, quite possibly, Turton had double-crossed the crooks—if crooks they were. At all events Glyn felt certain he was on the verge of learning something.

With fast-beating heart he trod in pursuit. Though a member of the St. Jim's Scouts, Glyn rarely accompanied them in their frequent tracking practices and games. But he had the instinct for scouting, and he showed great skill and caution now

as he trod carefully on the trail of his quarry. Through a little spinney, and then alongside the hedges of a couple of fields the trail led him, and then the man in front suddenly dived into the woods.

Taking the risk, Glyn hurried in pursuit, fearful of losing his quarry. He could hear him moving swiftly ahead, and then, through the thinning trees, Glyn saw his tall form emerge on to a grassy ride that cut through the woods just there.

Then Glyn pulled himself up short. Through the trees he suddenly sighted something—something rarely seen in such a secluded spot. It was the top of a closed car, and as he sighted it he heard subdued voices.

The man had stopped, and was talking to a second man standing, smoking a cigarette, by the side of the big car.

"Phew! So they've got a giddy car on the job—eh?" muttered Glyn to himself.

Anxious to see and hear all he could Glyn crept cautiously nearer, squeezed through the sparse hedge, and dropped down behind a thick furze-bush. It was a mistake—a mistake for which the reckless junior paid dearly. Even as he dropped down a twig snapped sharply under his knee.

Snap!

In the quiet ride the sound was startling, and both men started violently. Then Glyn's quarry came racing towards the spot. Too late the junior leaped up and jumped for the hedge! A swift hand shot out, and he was hauled, struggling desperately, back again.

With an oath the man wrenched the junior round and glared into his face, while the second man hurried to them, his features dark and savage.

"Who is it? So! He was—"

"Let's have a look at you!" snapped the other, shaking Glyn furiously. "You were—" He broke off with an oath as he recognised the amateur detective. "By James! It—it's that kid—old Glyn's kid, Krassin!"

"What?"

"So you did see me in the grounds just now, you little spying rat!" hissed the pimply-faced young man. "I knew it! You see, I was no fool, after all for not risking it, Krassin! He saw me and followed—dogged me, the young bound!"

"Let me go!" panted Glyn, beginning to struggle again. "How dare you assault me! Let go!"

"Let the kid go, Stockley, you fool!" snarled Krassin. "It will only make matters worse—"

"Cut it out!" snarled Stockley, his curiously white and pimply features enraged. "I felt certain the kid had seen me, and I was right in not risking it. He trailed me here—"

"But who—"

"It's Glyn's son, you fool!—Can't you understand?" snapped Stockley savagely. He glanced about him sharply, but the woods seemed deserted save for themselves. "This—this is a stroke of luck, after all, Krassin!" he went on after a pause. "This kid will know where the durned things are, if anyone does, I guess! If we can't get what we want one way we can another, perhaps!"

"You—you mean—"

"We'll see which old Glyn prefers to keep—his son or something else!" said Stockley significantly. "I fancy it will be his son; but we'll see! Into the durned car with him, Krassin! Look lively!"

The dark foreigner nodded, and his eyes glistened as he understood. But Bernard Glyn understood also what Stockley meant, and before either had expected trouble they got it.

Glyn lashed out backwards with his heel, and then he butted Krassin in the waistcoat with a force and fury that brought a terrific yelp from the dark-faced crook. That unexpected and vigorous hack almost doubled up Stockley; and as he clutched his shin Glyn leaped away and tore along the ride, running as he had never run before.

Stockley gave a strangled sort of roar, and went in pursuit, limping along desperately, his face red with rage. Krassin began to follow, urged by Stockley's curses and threats.

But Glyn had a good start, and though he knew he would stand a better chance of shaking off his pursuers in the woods, Glyn knew also that the risk was greater as regards getting help. If he could only reach the public footpath that cut across the ride higher up he knew he would stand a good chance of getting help. The path led from the village to St. Jim's, and at that time of the evening there was certain to be someone following it on his way back to school.

With this wild hope in his heart, Glyn raced on, stumbling and tripping over the rough, lumpy grass. The thudding feet of his pursuers sounded terribly close now. They were men, and he had little hope of outdistancing them in a straight run. He wondered if he should not risk it, and yet he felt certain that before he could scramble through the hedge they would be upon him.

The sight of the distant stile gave the junior courage, however, and he stuck it desperately, putting every ounce he had into the race. Stockley and Krassin had stopped shouting now; they realised the danger of that as they sighted the stile. Would they dare to attack him on the public footpath? Glyn wondered, and hoped against hope that someone was at hand—someone who would see the struggle if unable to help, even.

And suddenly Glyn's heart leaped. Ahead of him, just clambering over the stile, was a fat, familiar form. It was the form of Baggy Trimble, and the fat youth gave a gasp and stood stock-still on the stile as he heard Glyn's frantic yell.

"Help!"
"Gug-good lor!" gasped Trimble. The high hedge was between him and the three racing figures, but Trimble could see it all, and he backed over the stile again. Trimble was not a hero—far from it. Glyn had obviously been up to something—up to one of his usual funny tricks, reflected Baggy Trimble. And it occurred to the crafty Baggy that quite possibly the victims might want to vent their wrath on a school-fellow of Glyn's, failing Glyn himself!

With this thought in his fat mind Baggy slipped hastily back on to the field path, ready to run if it was necessary.

But a moment later Baggy was far too terrified and astounded even to think of running.

He saw Glyn suddenly stumble and fall, and the next moment the two men were upon him, with savage oaths. They had obviously not seen Baggy at the stile, but Glyn had, and he gave a desperate, strangled yell for aid.

"Help, Trimble—help!"
The next second a rough hand was clapped over the junior's mouth, stifling his cries. Trimble saw one of them whip a length of cord from his pocket and, stooping, swiftly tie the junior's hands and feet, his desperate struggles availing him little.

They finished, and then, after gagging the junior with his own handkerchief, they lifted him and bore him through the nearest gap in the hedge. The three, captors and captive, vanished amid the trees of the wood, and their footsteps died away.

"G-good lor!" gurgled Trimble, fairly trembling with fright.

What it all meant he could not imagine. Obviously, it was not just a case of men who were wanting Glyn over a thoughtless, schoolboy jape. There was something sinister, grim, about the whole thing. The men were well enough dressed, but their evil faces and language was more than enough to tell Trimble that he had witnessed something serious and unlawful, to say the least of it.

"G-good lor!" repeated Baggy, trembling, and too terrified still to move. "It—it looks as if they've kidnapped him! Oh dear! I—I suppose I ought to have gone to help him. But—Oh dear!"

The very thought of such a thing made Baggy shiver. He stood still, reflecting dimly on the amazing position, when suddenly his ears caught the sound of a purring engine, and a car came in sight along the ride, bumping and jerking over the hummocks.

Trimble dodged back into cover with a gasp. He was thankful he did so the next moment, for he

instantly recognised the white face, spotted with pimples, of one of the men who had attacked Glyn. The car hummed softly past the stile, but the curtains of the saloon were drawn, and he could not see inside the car.

It passed, and disappeared along the grassy ride, making for the end where it joined the Rylcombe Lane.

"Oh dear!" panted Trimble, beads of perspiration on his fat brow. "Oh dear! Wha-what shall I do?"

For several seconds the junior stood, palpitating, until the sounds of the motor died away, and then, quite suddenly, Baggy decided what to do. He clambered over the stile, gave one terrified glance in the direction the car had taken, and then, darting across the ride, he gained the far stile, clambered over that, and made for St. Jim's along the woodland path beyond as fast as his fat little legs would carry him.

CHAPTER 8.

Sign!

"LOOK out!"

"Bai Jove! Why, what— Oh ewikey!"

Crash!

Baggy Trimble had arrived.

And Tom Merry & Co. were made aware of the fact. The Terrible Three had just been to the school tuckshop for a supply of eatables for tea, and they stopped to chat in the hall doorway with Blake and several other fellows.

Then Tom Merry had suddenly sighted Baggy Trimble, as that fat youth came rushing up the School House steps. But Tom's warning came too late. Baggy barged into the

(Continued on next page.)



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group, and juniors, tarts, and cakes were scattered over the hall floor.

"You raving fat chump——"

"You clumsy fat owl——"

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus, rubbing the back of his noble head, which had come into violent contact with the doorpost. "You fearful wuffian, Twimble——"

"Yarroooop! I say—— Leggo! I didn't see you!" almost exploded Baggy, his voice sounding like a spluttering squib. "Leggo! I've got news—— Glyn! Glyn! Glyn! Glyn!"

"You fat idiot!" gasped Tom Merry, shaking the panting fat youth. "What the thump are you rushing about like a madman for? Look what you've done, blow you!"

"Ow-ow-ow! Never mind that!" gurgled Trimble, perspiration streaming from him. "Glyn! Glyn! Kidnapped! Glyn! Groogh!"

"What the thump——"

"What on earth is the matter?" exclaimed Blake, staring at Baggy. "Glyn—— What is the matter with the fat ass?"

"Glyn—Glyn! Groogh!" Trimble began to choke. He leaned up against the doorpost, utterly spent and exhausted.

The fellows, on the point of rushing at him and smiting him, pulled up and stared at him instead.

"Keep off, you chaps!" grinned Tom Merry. "The fat man looks all in—done up! What's the matter, Baggy? What's that you're gassing about Glyn?"

"Glyn! Glyn! Groogh! Kidnapped!" gurgled Baggy, his gurgle bursting suddenly into an excited yell. "I saw him! He was collared and—groogh!—taken away in a car! Two awful-looking ruffians!"

"Glyn! Kidnapped!" stuttered Tom Merry.

Trimble nodded, striving desperately to get back his wind.

But he did get it back at last, and, somehow, he managed to gasp out his startling story. The juniors stared at each other. Tom Merry and Blake exchanged startled glances. But the majority were not impressed—only by Trimble's powers as a romancer and spoofer.

"Gammon!" grinned Lumley-Lumley. "This is about one of the best yarns he's spun us for a long time, chaps!"

"It's true, I tell you!" almost shrieked Trimble. "Four fearful brutes they were! I knocked two of them down, but it was no good!"

"You said there were two, old fat man!" pointed out Digby. "And now they're four! Go on—we're good at mental arithmetic, Baggy!"

There was a laugh, but Tom Merry and his chums did not laugh. Baggy was undoubtedly adding a little to the story from his vivid imagination. None the less, there was a great deal of truth in it—with recent events in their mind they could not help feeling that.

"Tell us again, Baggy!" said Tom Merry quietly. "But keep to the facts, you silly fool! This is serious!"

"You didn't hear what those men said?" asked Blake.

"No; I was too far away!" gasped Baggy.

"Not even when you knocked two of them down?" asked Cardew innocently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all true, anyway!" panted Trimble, glaring. "You'll see! Took him off in a car, and Glyn was fighting and struggling like billy-ho! I say, I'm going to tell old Linton!"

And Baggy rushed away, to spread the tidings far and wide that Bernard Glyn had been kidnapped.

"Think there's anything in it?" demanded Cardew, eyeing Tom Merry rather fixedly. "I've heard there's trouble at Glyn House——"

"Yes, I do!" snapped Tom Merry soberly. "Baggy's added to the yarn, of course—it wouldn't be him if he didn't! But the essential facts are pretty clear, I think. I'm going to report the matter to Railton, anyway!"

And Tom Merry hurried away to the Housemaster's study. If there was truth in Trimble's strange story, then the sooner the authorities were made acquainted with it the better.

He found Mr. Railton just about to begin his tea, and Tom plunged into the story at once, telling as much as he felt was true of Trimble's amazing yarn. He also told of their adventures at Glyn House on the Wednesday.

"This is very serious, Merry!" exclaimed the House-

master, looking alarmed. "Please bring Trimble here without delay!"

Tom soon found Trimble. He was surrounded by a laughing, hilarious crowd, and had not got as far as Mr. Linton's study. Apparently, nobody there dreamed of believing Baggy, but they stared when Tom took him off to the Housemaster.

"Now, Trimble," said Mr. Railton calmly, "kindly tell me the story you have told to Merry! I want only the facts, of course!"

Trimble gasped out his story eagerly enough. And



As Glyn made a grab at one foot the man lashed out with

though he added a few artistic touches, the Housemaster did not waste time questioning them. He seemed to grasp at once what was fact and what was fiction. He nodded at last.

"Very well, Trimble! You may go now! I will see to this without delay!" he announced gravely.

Trimble scuttled away, anxious to get busy again with his story. Tom Merry hesitated.

3 GRAND NEW FEATURES START

"You—you think it is all true, sir?" he ventured to ask. "I am afraid I do, Merry—amazing as the story seems!" said the Housemaster grimly. "While you were fetching Trimble I got on the phone to Glyn House. Mr. Glyn was very alarmed indeed at the news; he appears to have good reason to believe it is true, at all events. He states also that Glyn started for the school half an hour ago, and should have been here to report to me long ago."

And the Housemaster hurried away to the Head's study, leaving Tom to his own devices.

Tom made his way to Study No. 10, his face grave and



other, and his boot caught the junior just under the chin!

anxious. The Housemaster's statements had removed all doubts from his mind, and his chums stared as he told them.

"But we're not standing idle, chaps!" said Tom. "Look here, we're his pals, and it's up to us to do what we can, anyway!"

"What on earth can we do, Tom?" demanded Manners.

"We can get on the job before the police can, if we're

slippy!" retorted Tom Merry. "Never mind tea! Let's get hold of Trimble again and get what we can out of him. Did you notice that he was one of the men who had a pimply face?"

"Bai Jove! So he did, Tom Mewwy!"

"Blessed if I can see what we can do, though," insisted Manners.

"But perhaps Wildrake can, if we can't!" said Tom, his eyes gleaming with excitement. "We've got to get to know first the exact spot from Trimble—"

"Scarcely need to do that," pointed out Lowther. "The tyre marks will show on that grass, I bet!"

"That's so! Anyway, let's tackle Wildrake about it!"

Tom hurried out without waiting for an answer. But his chums had got some of his excitement now, and they followed eagerly enough. They were Scouts, and such a task appealed to them keenly. As Tom Merry expected, it appealed to Wildrake still more. The boy from British Columbia was a born Scout and an expert in woodcraft, and he nodded as Tom explained.

"I thought of the idea the moment I really grasped the fact that there was truth in Trimble's rambling, I guess!" he said crisply. "Yes, I'm on, Tom. Should be easy finding the tracks, but following them up along the roads—well, I reckon that won't be so easy! Nope!"

"If only that fat ass had taken the number of the car and a description of it—" began Tom. "Though they could easily change the—"

"A number can soon be changed, sure!" agreed Wildrake. "But a description might have helped the police, if not us, I guess!"

"What about vanking Trimble along to show us the exact spot?" remarked Manners.

Wildrake nodded, after a pause.

"It would save time, at least!" he grinned. "I guess Baggy won't want to come but conscription's necessary and justified in war. And I guess we're at war now—with the galeots who've kidnapped Glyn!"

Trimble agreed. As a matter of fact, he had little choice in the matter. At a word from Tom Merry, the fat youth was collared and rushed, yelling, through the gates and on to the Rycombe Lane.

Grumbling and panting, the reluctant Baggy trotted with them after that, and very soon they had reached the path, and Baggy led the way along to the grassy ride.

Wildrake's eyes seemed to be everywhere, and he scarcely needed Baggy's help at all. So the fat youth, with thoughts of tea, took himself off home. He soon picked up the trail, a blank patch in the faintly-visible tyre-treads, and in a few moments he was keenly examining the ground where the car had passed along the ride.

He followed this up until he reached the spot where the car had been standing, and where Glyn had been caught. For some moments Wildrake closely examined the sign.

He turned his back on the spot where the car had stood, and started off along the ride, his keen eyes scanning the ground. Now he had pointed out the blank patch in the faintly-visible tyre treads on the ground, Tom Merry & Co. found no difficulty in picking up the trail with him.

When they reached the high road however, it was nothing like so easy. But Wildrake pressed on, never at a loss for long; in fact, he scarcely troubled to read the sign since they had discovered which way the car had turned.

"I calculate it's only necessary to keep on until we reach a lane branching off!" he remarked.

"Bai Jove! That is quite true, Wildrake!" remarked Gussy sagely. "The car could not turn off if there was no turning, could it, deah boys?"

"Hardly!" grinned Blake. "What a brain Gussy has!"

"Weally, I see nothin' at all to gwin at, you fellows!"

But the fellows could, and did grin. At the first lane that branched off they were serious enough again, however. After a few moments Wildrake nodded, and they went on along the main road. At last they reached the cross-roads where three roads branched off—one leading to Wayland, the other to Abbotsford, and the third to Latchford.

Here, even Wildrake was stumped. Since the car had passed, numerous cars, lorries and farm-carts had crossed and cross-raked the roads there, and all sign was wiped out.

NEXT WEEK!

"ONE-TON WILLY!" "PROFESSOR PIMPLE!"

"THE WIGGA-WAGGA BOYS!"

They spent fully half an hour at work, but it resulted in nothing. The Latchford road had been recently concreted over, and scarcely a tyre-mark showed on its smooth surface. Nor could they find a trace of the now familiar tyre-tread on either the Wayland or Abbotsford roads.

"Stumped!" grunted Herries.

"I guess so!" admitted Wildrake, frowning. "A giddy Red Indian couldn't pick up sign on this billiards-table! We can go on, though, if you like—may have luck!"

Tom Merry glanced at his watch and shook his head.

"Already past calling-over!" he remarked, with a whistle. "Better get back—sharp! Take us a good ten minutes to trot back, as it is! Though—" He paused and frowned. "I don't like being beaten, Wildrake! In the circumstances, I think Railton would overlook it!"

"I think so, too!" said Blake. "I vote we go on!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

All were ready to go on, though it did seem hopeless. But it seemed a pity to give in while there was a chance. The matter was taken out of their hands, however. A car came speeding along the road from the direction of Wayland, and it drew up abruptly when opposite to them.

In the car were Mr. Glyn, Bernard's father, and Mr. Railton.

"Boys!" exclaimed the Housemaster, in some anger. "What are you doing here at this time? It is already past call-over!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Lowther. "That settles it!"

"We were trying to track down the car that took Glyn off!" stammered Tom Merry.

"Bless my soul!" Mr. Railton stared at them. "What do you mean, Merry? If you have made any discoveries—"

"We've examined the spot where Glyn was attacked, sir!" explained Tom. "Wildrake got on the trail at once—he's an expert at tracking, sir! We've followed up the tyre-treads to this spot. But we've lost the trail here—there's been too much traffic since, for one thing!"

The Housemaster's expression changed instantly.

"You have accomplished more than the police have done, then!" he said with half a smile. "I am glad to learn that you have shown such initiative and have acted so promptly, boys."

"Yaas, wathah, sir! We'll vewy soon—"

"None the less, you must now return to school without delay!" went on Mr. Railton sternly. "Without permission from the headmaster, I cannot allow you to break school rules. I shall expect you back in your House within twenty minutes, boys!"

The car shot on, Mr. Glyn nodding kindly to the juniors. But though pleased at the juniors' keenness, Mr. Railton, very obviously was not impressed with their statement that they had "got on the trail" of the kidnappers.

"Blow!" said Tom Merry, with a rueful grin. "That settles it of course. Still, we've done something, and I vote we have another go to-morrow!"

"Not much chance then, I guess!" grunted Wildrake. "More traffic will have passed—"

"Can't be helped! Railton's ordered us home, and we've got to go!" said Tom. "Let's get a move on!"

And not a little disappointed, the juniors hurried back to school.

CHAPTER 9.

Caught in the Act!

BERNARD GLYN lay motionless on the floor of the closed car as it sped along the highway. He knew it was useless to struggle—in fact, he was incapable of struggling. The instant the door had been banged upon them Krassin knelt upon him, and, despite his desperate wriggles, twisted his wrists together and tied them with cord. Then he flung a rug over the boy's head, wound it round, and secured it into position with cord also.

Glyn could scarcely breathe, much less struggle to escape.

He lay still, and his thoughts regarding Baggy Trimble were not pleasant ones.

He was a prisoner, helpless in the hands of ruthless kidnappers.

Glyn was at no loss to understand what they wanted him for. He had heard the brief conversation between the two, and he knew what it meant. Yet he was astounded. If Stockley and Krassin hadn't the plans, then who had them? The thought that Turton had double-crossed the rascals came to him again with redoubled strength. He had no doubt that that was the explanation of the mystery. Yet it was clear that the men did not suspect how matters stood—or how Glyn supposed they stood! Their intention was clear. They intended to hold him to ransom—to keep him prisoner, and to hand him over to his father in exchange.

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change for the precious plans. As yet Glyn had not troubled to ask his father what the plans were. But he could not help wondering now.

The car gave a rather violent turn, and soon it was bumping over rutty ground at a slow pace—almost a crawl. Glyn kept his ears open, though he could hear very little indeed.

It stopped at last, and after a moment or two he was lifted out, the rug still half-smothering him. He tried, by jerking and moving his head, to get a glimpse of where he was, but he was held too tightly for that.

He heard a door crash back, and then he felt himself being carried up uncarpeted stairs, and then he was dropped roughly on to a bare floor, and the rug was whisked from his head.

Glyn found himself in a bare, attic sort of room, with a rickety door, and a small-paned window high up in a wall from which cheap, aged wallpaper hung in dismal strips. It struck him instantly that he was in an empty cottage, and from the stillness outside he guessed he was in the open country still.

While he was still gasping in deep breaths of air, Krassin examined the cord round his wrists, and then passed another length of cord round his ankles, securing them.

"You—you brutes!" panted Glyn, getting his voice at last. "You'll pay for this!"

Krassin shrugged and led his accomplice out, slamming and locking the door after him.

Silence fell on the room after that for a long time while the shadows deepened in the small, cheerless room. Dusk was falling, and Glyn knew that it would soon be dark, and he shuddered at thought of spending a night there—and possibly many nights. That the men were in deadly earnest—that they were ruthless scoundrels who would stick at nothing, he did not doubt. And his heart sank as he reflected on his position. His one hope lay in the fact that Trimble had seen him captured—or he believed and hoped that he had. Trimble would tell the story—nothing was more certain than that.

But would he be believed? The sudden doubt in that respect came to Glyn, and he groaned. Still, there was hope? Tom Merry & Co., he knew, would not rest until they had done all they could to find him, he knew? Yet how could they find him?

And Turton! Glyn gritted his teeth at thought of him. Where was he? Had he the plans—it seemed impossible to doubt that now. For a long time despair gripped the unfortunate prisoner. But his courage and high spirits could not be kept under for long, and gradually the junior began to feel renewed hope.

He was not done yet. He would make a fight for liberty at all events. As yet he had not thought of escape, but now he set to work with a will, wrenching and struggling desperately to loosen the thongs that bound his bruised and aching wrists. They had been tied with cruel tightness, and every movement made the junior set his teeth to keep back a cry of pain.

But he did not pause. Somehow he had to get out of the cottage, if cottage it was. He could imagine the additional worry his absence would cause his father—more, if the rascals had written to him, then the news that he was a prisoner in their hands would be the last and most awful blow for him.

He was just about to give up the struggle through sheer exhaustion, when his eyes fell upon the boards at his feet. At some time or other linoleum, or a carpet, had been nailed to the floor, and some of the nail-heads, rusty now, showed above the boarding. One or two were well up above the level, and the sight of them brought inspiration to the junior.

The next moment he was crouching down, sawing desperately at the nearest nail with the cord round his wrists. It was tiring work and terribly slow. But he tugged and tore at the nail, though his wrists and fingers bled from constant contact with the nail heads.

But he gained his reward at last. The friction was not without its effect, and presently an extra vicious tug snapped one of the frayed cords.

With his heart beating fast with hope now, the plucky junior renewed his efforts, heedless of hurt, and at last his wrists were free—the frayed cords snapped apart.

It was then the work of a moment to get out his pocket-knife and cut the bonds round his feet. He stood up at last, rubbing and stretching his aching, cramped limbs.

He was free from his bonds now. But he was still far from escape. The window was too small—a glance at it soon convinced him of that. And the door—

Glyn crossed to it hopefully. It looked a rickety affair, and the junior saw with a sudden thrill of thankfulness that

(Continued on page 18.)

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HELD TO RANSOM!

(Continued from page 16.)

the lock was only a cheap, rusty affair, screwed on the inside and not let into the woodwork of the door itself. If he could only get out the rusted screws—or, better still, the slot into which the lock fitted—

Full of hope now, the imprisoned junior set to work with a will, using the blade of his pocket-knife as a screwdriver. It was slow, depressing work, for the screws were rusty, and all his efforts to move one even seemed unavailing. The big blade of his knife suddenly snapped close off to the handle, but now he found that it made a better grip of the screw heads.

He had the first screw out at last, and was just beginning work on the second, when he halted suddenly, his heart in his mouth.

Somebody was coming up the stairs, slowly, as if carrying something carefully.

The thought came to him that it might be one of his captors bringing food, and a groan came from Glyn. He would be found free from his bonds, and he would be tied more securely the next time.

Glyn gritted his teeth, and a gleam came into his eyes. He was not done yet—he would make a fight for it, at all events.

Pocketing his knife, the junior took up his stand where he would be behind the door when it opened, his fists clenched and ready for anything.

The footsteps sounded on the little landing outside, and then stopped outside his door. The moment had come.

He heard something placed on the uncarpeted floor outside, and then a key grated in the lock, and the door opened slightly. A couple of seconds passed while Glyn's heart thumped madly with the excitement that gripped him.

Had the man guessed something was wrong. Or—

The door suddenly swung open, and Krassin came in, bearing in one hand a plate on which was a hunk of bread and a piece of cheese. In the other hand was a jug of steaming coffee.

He suddenly halted, when once inside the room, and his mouth opened as if to cry out. In that second Glyn bunched his muscles and acted.

He leaped like a tiger, and there was a startled yell as the man went down, the jug and plate flying from his hands, where they crashed to the floor with their contents.

Glyn did not stay to do more—he leaped for the doorway and raced down the uncarpeted stairs, a bellow from the fallen Krassin following him.

"Look out, Stockley!" the man bellowed, with a string of furious oaths. "The kid—stop him!"

Glyn was half-way down the stairs when a sudden movement sounded below, and a man rushed out from the room into the tiny passage. It was Stockley, and Glyn fairly jumped upon him, sending him crashing against the front door.

This proved the junior's undoing, for though the door was unfastened, Stockley's burly form prevented him from tearing it open. And before he could turn to try another way, Stockley was up again, and had closed with him.

Bernard Glyn's heart sank, but he fought desperately, struggling with the fury of despair. It was useless, however. Krassin came bounding down the rickety stairs, his face aflame with rage. He came to Stockley's aid, and it was over in an instant then.

The junior was held fast, and then flung down and pinned there with Stockley's knee grinding in his back. Krassin rushed off for fresh cord, and the junior was trussed up again, this time with vicious and thorough security.

"Just in time, Krassin!" snarled Stockley. "You fool, man! How did it happen?"

"He was free—leaped upon me the moment I opened the door!" said Krassin savagely, panting. "I did not dream—"

"Confound the slippery young whelp!" snarled Stockley. "It was a damned near thing. This is your confounded carelessness, Krassin! You couldn't have tied him properly dunn you! But we'll see he doesn't get another chance! Into the kitchen with him, and we'll keep our eye on him after this. Was that the grub went west?"

"Yes!"

"Then he gets no more! He can go to sleep hungry after this!"

And Glyn, his heart sick with disappointment, was flung savagely into the stone-floored and damp kitchen, and his captors left him to his own bitter thoughts. The attempt had failed, and he knew he would not get a second chance.

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CHAPTER 10.

Mr. Glyn Explains!

TALBOT?"

"Hallo! Want me?"

"I shall want you to take my place on the field this afternoon," said Tom Merry. "It's only a scratch match, and you can easily do without me."

"We shan't even miss you," said Talbot, with a laugh. "And I want Wildrake, Blake, Lowther, Manners, Digby, and old Gussy," said Tom Merry briefly. "You've got Clive and Levison, and Noble and—"

"And Trimble, and Mellish, and Skimpole," ended Talbot, with smiling sarcasm. "And there's always old Taggles to fall back on. If he can wield a broom, he ought to be able to wield a bat."

"Ass!" said Tom, smiling. "Seriously, though, we've got something important on this afternoon, Talbot. You'll have to manage without us."

"Getting a team up to play the Sixth?" asked Talbot, with mock curiosity.

"Not quite. The fact is we're going to hunt for old Glyn."

"Oh!" Talbot's face changed. "I see, old man. Right-ho!" he went on quietly. "Good luck to you, then! But—but I'm afraid—"

"So are we," cut in Tom, rather glumly. "Still—"

"The prefects were out last night," pointed out Talbot. "And all the Sixth and most of the Fifth were scouring the countryside this morning. What chance have you, Tom?"

"A better chance than they have, I fancy," was Tom's cool answer. "We've already been on the trail of the car Glyn was taken in. We know which way to look, anyway, and we know the merchants who kidnapped poor old Glyn. We're going to have a good try to pick up the trail again."

"The police have failed—"

"We may have better luck," said Tom. "I'll back scouting methods against old Skeat's, anyway. You'll see to the match, then?"

"Certainly! I wish I was coming with you, though," said Talbot. "Hope to goodness you have luck, Tom."

Tom Merry left him and joined Blake & Co., and Manners and Lowther who were standing on the steps waiting for him.

"All serene!" called Tom. "Talbot's seeing to things, so we might as well get off right away. Figgy's team's not up to much, and Talbot should pick a team good enough to lick their heads off. Come on!"

"Hold on!" said Herries eagerly. "What about taking old Towser? You know what a splendid tracker Towser is. There isn't a dog—"

"We know what a splendid tracker of red herrings he is," said Blake. "And we know how he'll lag behind for a mile, and want to be carried for the rest of the way, old chap. You'll leave Towser at home, Herries."

"Yaas, wathah! Towser has no regard for a fellow's bags, eithah. If Towser comes, then I remain," said Gussy firmly.

"Blessed if I know what to say to that!" said Blake. "I'm not sure which is the bigger nuisance, you or Towser, Gussy."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Towser remains at home," said Tom Merry warmly. "If we follow Towser he'll only land us at the cat's meat shop in Rylcombe."

"Look here—" began Herries warmly.

"Don't be an ass, Herries! Come on!" snapped Tom.

"One moment, deah boys!" It was an anxious request from Arthur Augustus, who had just taken out a pocket mirror, and was looking at his noble self in it. "One moment! Pway wait while I wush back to change this necktie. I have weached the conclusion that it does not quite go with these fawn socks atfah all."

"I guess grass will have grown over the trail before we get on the job at this rate," groaned Wildrake. "If we wait much longer—"

"Not a second longer!" said Tom Merry. "Come on! If Gussy wants to change the colour of his necktie he must rub mud on it, or remain behind. Now march!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus blinked indignantly after his chums as they marched away towards the gates, and suddenly decided that his necktie would have to remain as it was, either of Tom's alternatives not appealing to the swell of the Fourth.

He hurried off after his chums, catching them up at the gates.

"First stop, Glyn House," announced Tom. "We'd better inquire first if anything's been heard yet."

It was scarcely likely anything had without the news reaching the school; but there was just the chance, and, leaving his chums at the Glyn House gates, Tom ran down the drive to the house to inquire. He was soon back again, his face rather puzzled.

"Mr. Glyn's just gone out," he announced. "Old Chambers says that news has been heard of Glyn—"

"It has?" yelled Blake.

"Yes. But Chambers couldn't tell me anything beyond the fact that Mr. Glyn has had a message regarding Bernard, and he's just rushed off to see about it," said Tom breathlessly. "I can't quite make it out—"

"Phew! Looks rummy!"

"I guess it does," assented Wildrake grimly. "Let's

"One of those men—the one driving—had a spotted face!" said Blake excitedly. "A white face, covered with curious pimples. And you remember what Glyn told us—"

"I guess you've need to get excited, Blake," said Wildrake coolly, pointing to the car's tracks which showed clearly in the dust. "That was the car Glyn was taken off in, my pippins."

"Bai Jove!"

"I guess a one-eyed coyote couldn't miss seeing it," said Wildrake crisply. "Look at it!"

"My hat! You're right, Wildrake!"

The juniors looked at each other with sudden excitement. The car had vanished round the bend in the road



Glyn lashed out backwards with his heel and then butted Krassin in the waistcoat with a force and fury that brought a terrific yelp from the dark-faced crook.

hope— He paused, and they grew grave, knowing well what he meant.

"It can't be anything serious, though," said Tom Merry.

"Why should those scoundrels harm Glyn?"

"May have discovered something about them?" suggested Manners.

"I guess he has," said Wildrake. "But let's get on. Luckily, it's a Saturday afternoon, and there isn't much traffic about."

The chums started off, Wildrake looking as glum as any of them. He knew well enough the difficulty of the task before them. His one hope was that the car they were trailing might have turned off into a lane where the ground was softer, and would show up the wheel treads better. They soon reached the spot at the cross-roads where the trail had failed them before, and Wildrake led the way, his sharp eyes scanning the ground. Once or twice they sighted tyre-marks that were familiar, but not once did they pick up that tell-tale patch where the tyre had been torn—according to Wildrake.

"But I'm certain they came this way," said the Canadian junior. "Otherwise, we should have picked it up on either of the other roads. I guess—"

He paused as there came a sudden exclamation from Blake, who had looked round on hearing a car behind them. The next instant a car flashed past the juniors—a big closed car. In it were seated two men.

"You—you saw?" breathed Blake.

"What—"

ahead now. But that scarcely mattered. The trail was there for them to follow. And a moment later Wildrake was leading the way at an easy walk, scarcely troubling to scan the ground now. And, suddenly, as they turned the bend, they all stopped dead.

Some little distance ahead two cars were drawn up on the Latchford road. One was the car that had just passed them; the other was the Rolls-Royce—Mr. Glyn's car. Mr. Glyn was standing by his car talking earnestly to the two men.

"Jerusalem crickets!" gasped Wildrake. "You see who it is?"

The juniors were quite startled. Now they were nearer they easily recognised the second man as the man they had chased out of the study the previous day, while the man with the pimply face—

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry, breathing hard. "Mr. Glyn is talking to them. We can't butt in. But we'll stand by—"

"The merchants have spotted us already," said Lowther. "Hallo! They're sheering off!"

The second car was moving off, its occupants glaring back at the juniors, and went racing off towards Latchford. Mr. Glyn waited in the roadway for the juniors to come up.

"Mr. Glyn!" exclaimed Tom, as they rushed up, panting and bewildered. "You—you know who those men are, sir?"

"Yes; I only know too well, my boy," was the heavy answer.

"They—they're the men who must have kidnapped Bernard," said Tom. "One tried to break into your study the other day, sir."

"I know that, Merry," said Mr. Glyn, in a low, agonised voice. "They are the scoundrels who hold my son a prisoner." He shook his fist after the fast-disappearing car. "They hold him a prisoner, and I—I am helpless."

"But—but, sir, why—"

"They are holding Bernard to ransom," said the millionaire, his face baggard. "They swear they have not the plans, after all—"

"Plans—"

"I am forgetting—you can know nothing of that!" went on Mr. Glyn slowly. "You have heard of the burglary, of course—"

"Oh, yes, sir! Bernard told us before he hurried home! He said that so far as he knew nothing had been taken, Mr. Glyn!"

"Bernard was wrong, unfortunately!" said the millionaire. "Something was taken—the plans of an invention which were entrusted into my care by the inventor, a friend of mine. They are of great value, and it is those the men were after."

"Yet those men swear—"

"They swear they did not find them. It is an astounding affair. It is obvious that they are speaking the truth, or why should they remain in the vicinity—more, why should they kidnap my son and hold him to ransom?"

"To ransom, sir? Good heavens!" exclaimed Tom.

"They wrote to me this morning, making an appointment here. They warned me to come alone, or evil would befall Bernard. I did so, when they informed me—a few minutes ago—that unless the plans were placed in their hands to-day I should not see Bernard again!"

"Good heavens!"

"I have told them the truth—that the plans are gone—and I believe now that they have taken my word! Yet they refuse to hand Bernard over until they have the plans—all my pleading was in vain. Yet what can I do? The plans are gone—vanished!"

"Have—have you thought of Turton, sir?" asked Tom Merry hesitatingly. "It is queer that he is missing, in the circumstances. Bernard suspected him from the first—"

"I am beginning to wonder if Bernard was not right!" said Mr. Glyn quietly. "I trusted the young man—he knew of the plans, and was entrusted with the task of guarding them. But I must hurry away now, my boys! I am afraid I shall be obliged to confide everything to the police after all."

He climbed into the car.

"You are not returning schoolwards, I suppose? No. Well, good-bye, boys! I trust I shall have better news for you soon!"

And, starting the engine, Mr. Glyn drove back towards Glyn House at top speed, disappearing in a cloud of dust.

"Well, my hat!" said Tom Merry. "It's jolly serious, you fellows!"

"He never dreamed we were on the job!" said Wildrake. "I guess we shall have news for him before he has any for us! We know something now!"

There was subdued excitement in his voice, and the juniors eyed him.

"Blessed if I can see how we're any better off!" said Blake, staring along the road to Latchford. "That is, unless we can pick up those tyre-tracks and follow them!"

"It's possible we shall do that!" said Wildrake coolly. "But we now know one thing—that they're still in the district, and not so jolly far away."

"How the thump do you know that?"

"The car had scarcely any dust on it. I guess that if it had come far it would have heaps!" explained the Canadian junior. "It looked as if it had been cleaned recently, and as I saw it had scarcely any—"

"They might have cleaned the dust off since coming this far!"

"Not likely, I guess! Possible, but hardly probable! They'd allow for the intelligence of the police, but I guess they didn't allow for the cuteness of Boy Scouts—and not of a fellow from the giddy backwoods of Canada. We're going on, pards, and if we don't run down those merchants before the sun goes down I guess I'll eat my hat!" said Wildrake.

And he led the way towards Latchford, his keen eyes at work in a moment.

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CHAPTER 11.

The Smallholding I

THEY had already noted that the marks left by the tyre treads were the same—though the knowledge was scarcely necessary to them now Mr. Glyn had satisfied them in that respect.

"You noticed that the car had turned there—evidently before Mr. Glyn turned up!" said Wildrake.

"I'm afraid I didn't, old chap!" confessed Tom. "Still, we know they're on the Latchford road and we can see the treads fairly well now. We've got them, Wildrake!"

"Not yet!" said Wildrake. "We may lose the trail in Latchford—though I sort of reckon we shan't get so far!"

"You think they've turned off somewhere?"

"I guess I know they haven't yet! But they may, and I'm hoping so. This is easier than falling off a log!" grinned Wildrake, still scanning the ground as they walked along quite comfortably now. "I guess it'll be easier still once we're off this concrete. A one-eyed coyote couldn't miss this trail!"

"Bai Jove! I wealdy do not see any weason why we should twouble to keep our eyes on it, deah boy!" remarked Gussy. "We have only to keep on until we weach a lane bwanchin' off, you know, and then—"

"Supposin' the galoots are a bit cuter than you, though, Gussy?" grinned Wildrake. "And supposin' they turned off through a field-gate, or supposin' they turned round and went back—just to throw old Glyn off the scent, or anyone who might be after them?"

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that, you know!"

"You wouldn't, old top! We've already passed several gates, and they could easily have turned in at one. They haven't, of course, or we should have spotted the move! But I'm takin' no risks, old bean!"

"Gweat Scott! Wathah not, deah boy! It is wathah wemarkable how you notice things, Wildwaks!"

"Isn't it, old bean?"

"Yaas; I had nevah wegarded you as vewy intelligent, you know!" said Gussy innocently. "Vewy wemarkable, indeed!"

"You—you chumheaded moose!" gasped Wildrake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I see nothin' whatevah to laugh at, deah boys!"

Nor did Wildrake. He plodded on, not allowing his eyes to leave the road for many seconds together. The treads, however, were fairly clear in the dust—no traffic had passed, nor had the wind had time to obliterate them yet. And suddenly Wildrake halted, and glanced about him.

"Here we are!" he said, his eyes gleaming with sudden excitement.

"Blessed if I see anything amiss!" remarked Herries.

"Nothing is amiss!" said Wildrake coolly. "But the car turned off here!"

"Through that field gate, you mean?"

"Yep!"

Tom Merry frowned, and gazed down at the hard road. He moved over quickly to the side of the road and examined it, moving about slowly, his sharp eyes scanning the grass and dried mud. Then he looked up, his face showing blank astonishment.

"You're wrong, Wildrake!" he said firmly. "It didn't turn off here!"

"I guess it did!"

"But there isn't a sign!"

"Not here; but I guess we'll find it farther along that cart-track leading to that cottage across the fields yonder!"

"What do you mean? The thumping car hasn't wings, and it couldn't jump over from the roadway. This ground before the gate shows no sign of car wheels, and I defy you to find any, old sport!"

"I'm aware of that!" grinned Wildrake. "But notice the hay scattered about and see if you can figure it out."

"Bai Jove! You are speakin' in widdles, Wildwaks!"

"Supposing those galoots suspected being followed!" said the Canadian junior. "Supposing they thought of anyone getting on the trail before the track could be wiped out? It isn't likely they'd dream of anyone but the police getting on their trail. Still, if they were taking no chances, what would they do?"

"Try to wipe out the track, of course! Though—"

"They couldn't wipe it out all the way along the road!" said Wildrake calmly. "But they could see that it didn't show where they turned off—and especially in soft ground where the wind wasn't likely to obliterate it."

"But—"

"There's a haystack in the corner there," said Wildrake, pointing through the hedge. "You can see where hay's been carried here and scattered about! Most of it's been picked up and taken back again—you can see a heap of

(Continued on page 22.)

GREAT NEWS!

This is where your Editor puts you wise to the wonderful features that make up next week's NEW Programme.



Now, boys! This is where you sit up and take notice, so to speak. In fact, I shall expect loud cheers to come from you in less time than it takes to say: "Pass your uncle the tarts, Tommy, you greedy young hog!" or something like that.

But seriously. I want all your attention for the next few minutes.

Next week a grand new programme starts in the old GEM. I gave you some idea in my last week's chat of the wonderful things to come. But to those of you who missed that announcement, let me say this much: "That the new programme is

Mr. Clifford was short and sweet about his views on the matter.

"Good stuff?" says he.

"Yes!"

"Pep?"

"Yes!"

"Thrills by the million?"

"Yes!"

"Funny stuff?"

"Yes!"

"Startlers?"

"Yes!"

"Watch my smoke!" And he left his pipe blazing like a furnace, leaving me to not only watch his smoke, but trying to get rid of it before I choked.

But he did all he said in that story he turned in to me some time later. It had enough thrills, funny moments, startling seconds, breathless half hours, and gripping hours, to make a complete day of wonderful reading.

To start with, the title of this story is: "BRAINY GRUNDY!" That gives you something to think about, I bet! Perhaps you want to know how Wild Man From Texas is to be brainy. Well, a good many other people would like to know, too! But your curiosity will be satisfied when you read this yarn.

Wild Man From Texas!

Besides Mr. Martin Clifford, another visitor came into my editorial sanctum, some little while ago, when I was in the throes of getting the new programme together.

I was busy, believe me, and I did not want to see strangers very much at that moment. But this little stranger wanted to see me, and he did! The first indication I had of his arrival was the sound of a terrific report in the outer office. At first I thought the office-boy had exploded under the consumption of too many toffee lollipops! But—no!

The door of my room opened. I should say, my door developed convulsion suddenly, shook with ague, fairly hurled off its hinges, and leaned like a broken thing against the wall. In the doorway stood the most extraordinary figure I have ever seen—a wild figure, complete in stetson, pink and green striped shirt, chaps, high-heeled shoes, and about a couple of dozen guns. Under his nose (and what a nose!) resided a large size in moustaches. At a glance, I guessed he

was a gentleman from the West. He was!

Pop-gun Cassidy, of some township the name of which I can't pronounce, introduced himself thus:

"Ed. of Gem?"

"Ye-e-es!"

"Meet me—Pop-gun Cassidy. Author, fighter, bright boy, your friend!" he roared. "This is a batch of yarns 'bout 'nother pal o' mine, way back in Texas. Good stuff! You read it. You'll like it; you'll print it. 'Bout my pal One-Ton Willy. Good chap! You'll send dollars on, eh? Goo'bye!" Crash! Bang! Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!

It was five minutes later that I came round. Two dogs' biscuits and a pint of tea brought my scattered mind to peaceful rest once again, and I locked the door, and put a big armchair across it.

Then I picked up the batch of yarns that had been dumped on the desk. My author visitor had been so, so un-author-dox (excuse the pun), that I had to settle down right away, and read what he had left behind him.

One-Ton Willy.

Never before have I read such stories! Never before have I had such a long laugh. I am breathless even when I think of the time I had reading Pop-gun Cassidy's manuscripts 'bout his pal, One-Ton Willy.

Oh dear—they're great!

You'll scream when you read them—yes! You're going to have the opportunity of reading stories of real Western life, written by a real he-man of the land of guns and chewing-gum.

Other Items.

Other items in this wonderful programme are, firstly, the misadventures and adventures of Professor



Poor old gee! Fancy having to run around with One-Ton Willy perched on its backbone!

going to be a winner—a scorcher—a terrific triumph!"

Now let's get an idea of these wonderful things. We'll take them in their positions of importance. That means we must say a few words about this grand, long, complete story of St. Jim's. Yes! St. Jim's will still be here!

St. Jim's for Ever!

What would the GEM be without the St. Jim's stories? Eh! Well, we'll let that remain unsaid. We know, you and I, how much the stories of Tom Merry & Co. are enjoyed every Wednesday. We know what would happen if they were suddenly no more.

Bang! Crash! Poooff!

This illustrates, in words, what would happen—to the GEM. However, as these stories are not going to disappear, we will continue.

The main item on the new programme, then, is the long complete St. Jim's story. I had Mr. Martin Clifford up in the office the other day. As a matter of fact, I've had all my authors up concerning the new programme, and after many cups of tea, dogs' biscuits, and fish-paste sandwiches, I have instilled in their minds that they've got to be even more brilliant than they have been in the past with the new stories for the

Stairs next week, new programme.



Two merry mirthmakers—Wigga and Wagga. The long and short of it is they're going to give you something to laugh about next week.

Pimple and his pupils on their amazing tour round the world, a set of comic pictures in which the Wigga-Wagga Boys give all Gemites a long loud laugh, and The Oracle's page.

That, my merry chums, is that!

I have now given you an idea of what to expect for next week. You know what to do now, eh? Order next week's Gem to-day!

YOUR EDITOR.

Held to Ransom!

(Continued from page 20.)

dirty hay there if you look. There's a trail of hay from the stack, through the hedge to here!"

"Phew! I—I'm beginning to see what you mean, Wildrake!" said Tom.

"You've hit it!" breathed Manners. "My theory's this!" said Wildrake. "They stopped here—you'll see the faint sign ends suddenly. Beyond that are scattered bits of hay, leading right up to the gate."

"They got armfuls of hay and made a track for the car—to hide the wheelmarks, Wildrake?"

"Just that!"

"Bai Jove!"

The common sense in Wildrake's theory made the juniors gasp.

Keen Scouts as they were they had never thought of that. Yet it was a simple expedient. The hay was at hand, and it would be the work of a few moments to lay the track of hay and then remove it—only leaving stray bits about.

But those stray bits had given the game away to Wildrake. Had they continued, he might have supposed they had fallen from a farm-cart. But they had not continued.

"I believe you're right, Wildrake!" confessed Tom Merry. "I wouldn't have thought of it, and I'm jolly sure the bobbies wouldn't, either. They'd suppose the car had turned back—even supposing they dreamed of trailing the car at all!"

He paused, and looked across the fields in the direction in which the cart-track wound. The cottage was surrounded by old, tumbledown buildings, and appeared, from the distance, to be deserted and a ruin.

"An old smallholding!" said Tom Merry. "It's empty, and just the sort of place—"

"We've got to find that out!" said Wildrake crisply. "Come along! I think it's safe to keep in the open for a bit. The ground dips just before the house, and it isn't likely they'll be at the top windows."

"Risk it, anyway!" said Blake, almost shaking with excitement.

They passed through the gate, closing it after them. The field beyond was tilled, and they guessed it could not belong of the smallholding. Wildrake walked along quickly until the scattered bits of hay and straw came to an end. Then his eyes gleamed.

"I guess I was correct!" he remarked calmly. "Look!"

Deep indentations of motor-tyres showed in the soil. At a glance they recognised the criss-cross style. Wildrake followed it up for fifty yards or so, and then, after a sharp glance at the cottage, he called a halt.

"I reckon we needn't follow it up any farther, old scouts!" he remarked, with satisfaction. "In fact, it's asking for trouble to go on!"

"I think so, too. They may be keeping a look-out!" said Tom. "What do you suggest, Wildrake?"

"I'll leave it to you now, Tommy!" grinned Wildrake. "My job's done, I guess! You're the man to lead!"

"Then we'll scatter, and close in on the place!" said Tom grimly. "Wildrake, you take the lead from the far side; take Manners with you. Blake, you and Gussy move in on the left; watch Gussy doesn't put his silly hoof in things, as—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Digby, you and Herries move in from the right, and Monty and I will walk up boldly to the front door. Savvy? If there's trouble, a yell will soon bring us together. If we all march up by the front, as if we're paying a call, they may do a moonlight by the back. There's eight of us, remember!"

"They won't mind that if they're armed, old chap!" said Manners.

"We're chancing that, of course!" replied Tom grimly. "It isn't going to be a picnic; we didn't expect it to be!"

"I'm not funky; but why not get the bobbies on the job?" said Digby.

"Take too long. The birds may get wind of us and bolt!" said Tom. "Our game is to take 'em by surprise—if we can! The sight of two schoolboys won't frighten them, though! Now, cut off. I'll give you three or four minutes to get near."

"Right-ho!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

At the next hedge facing them the juniors separated, only

Tom and Monty Lowther remaining at the open gateway separating that field from the next. Tom watched until all had disappeared, like Red Indians on the trail, and then, after another wait of two or three minutes, he gave the word to Lowther.

They walked boldly through the gateway, and followed up the cart-track which obviously led to the cottage—for it was little more than a cottage.

The building, and the buildings around it, were in a tumbledown state, and the garden was overgrown with weeds. The two daring juniors looked about them very keenly as they approached the cottage. They approached it boldly, feeling fairly safe with the knowledge that speedy help was at hand in the form of their six chums. Even yet, though, Tom could not help wondering if they were on the right trail. Possibly it was not the cottage where the men—

Tom's reflections ended there. His sharp eyes had caught a glimpse of polished coachwork—the coachwork of a closed car—just showing through the partly-open double doors of a rickety shed that had once been a cart-shed.

"That settles it, Monty!" he breathed. "There's the car!"

"I—I fancy I saw a movement behind it—"

"I don't think so!" said Tom, his eyes fixed on the cart-shed. "Only the car there! Now get ready for fireworks, in case!"

And Tom led the way boldly up to the front door of the cottage, the rickety gate of the garden swinging to after him. Through the corner of his eye he had spotted a school cap over the hedge, and he knew his chums were ready.

CHAPTER 12.

Warm Work!

TOM MERRY'S look was grim as he approached the front door.

From the distance he had noted that it was slightly open, yet now he saw that it was closed.

They had been seen coming—he felt certain of that. He gave a warning mutter to Lowther, and went up to the door boldly. He knocked loudly. There was no answer. He knocked again, and yet again. Still all was silent in the cottage.

"Well, we'll have to break a way in!" said Tom loudly. "I know someone's at home—I spotted a face at that window."

As he spoke, Tom's hand gripped the door catch. Instantly the door opened a few inches, and a man's face, red with rage, appeared in sight. It was the dark man—Krassin—and Tom recognised him at once.

"What do you want?" he snarled.

"We want the chap you're keeping a prisoner here, old bean!" said Tom coolly. "And, what's more— No, you don't!"

The man tried to slam the door, but Tom was too quick for him, and jammed his foot in the opening. Then he gave a heave at the door, while at a word, Lowther also lunged his weight upon it.

The door flew open then, quite suddenly, and scarcely had Tom stepped inside, when Krassin flung himself in a fury upon him, bringing him crashing to the floor.

At the same moment there came running footsteps behind the two, and the garden-gate was sent crashing back as a man came pelting across from the cart-shed. It was Stockley, and in a flash Tom knew he had been right—they had been seen coming. None the less, he had not expected to be taken in the rear by the second man. Obviously Lowther had been correct in fancying that he had seen someone in the cart-shed where the car was parked.

It was not going to be a picnic. The sudden thought that possibly there were more than two, not to mention the chance that Turton was here in with the gang, came to Tom in a flash, and he gave a startled yell as he struggled to his feet and closed with Krassin.

"Rescue, St. Jim's! Rescue, Blake! Quick!"

The next moment a wild and whirling struggle was taking place in the tiny hall of the cottage. Lowther had closed with Stockley, and they were fighting furiously on the floor, while Tom and Krassin were at grips, Tom being crushed with his back on the stairs by the heavy ruffian.

But by this time Blake and Arthur Augustus had rushed up, while other racing feet sounded outside.

"Find Glyn, someone!" shrieked Tom Merry. "Release him—quick!"

He did not doubt that Glyn was in the cottage somewhere, and he realised that they would need all the aid they could get. Both men were big and powerful, and Tom still had the fear that there might be more than two.

In the tiny hallway the struggle went on furiously, Krassin and Stockley fighting like wild-cats amidst furious

eaths and imprecations. Manners came rushing in just in time to hear Tom's wild order, and he acted upon it instantly.

Lowther was on the floor now, half-stunned, and, leaping over him, Manners neatly dodged a vicious blow from Krassin, and leaped into the front room. It was empty, and Manners was just darting out again when his eye fell upon a key on the box that served the men for a table.

Manners was a quick-witted youth, and promptly he grabbed the key and tore out again. How he got through the melee at the foot of the stairs he did not know. Several wild blows caught him, but he struggled through, desperately eager to find the missing junior, realising only too well, as he did, why Tom had given the order.

The thought of looking in the kitchen at the back did not occur to the junior; he imagined he would find his kidnapped chum upstairs, and, once through the struggling heap, he tore up them two at a time.

One of the doors at the landing above was swinging open, and a glance showed that the room was untenanted. He jammed the key into the lock of the door next to it, hoping against hope that it would fit.

It did fit, and even as he turned the key he heard the sudden tattoo of heels on the floorboards from within the room. It came to him that it was a signal from Glyn, and, with wildly-beating heart, he wrenched at the key and flung wide the door. Then he stopped dead in his tracks at what he saw within the room.

The figure seated on the floor, gagged and bound helplessly, was not Glyn at all.

"Turton!" gasped Manners, starting back. "You—a prisoner! My hat!"

Turton jerked his head up and down desperately, and, grasping his meaning, Manners whipped out his pocket-knife, and soon had him free. Obviously, whatever his position, Turton was an enemy of the men downstairs, and would be a good ally in the fight still going on.

Having done so, Manners didn't stop to ask questions—he tore out and downstairs again. But Turton was soon after him. The young fellow's eyes were glinting, and he went down the stairs after Manners like a whirlwind.

He came only just in time. Lowther was knocked out altogether, and Blake and Herries were lying half stunned by the look of them. The two men were fighting like wild beasts, ruthless and heedless of where their vicious blows and kicks landed.

But for the arrival just then of Manners and Turton, it is more than possible that the men would have won the game—the fight, at all events. For just then Tom Merry himself, looking a battered wreck, was sent whirling away before a vicious swing under the chin, and he dropped, his head reeling, and lay in a heap.

Manners arrived just then, and Stockley, who had knocked Tom down, took Manners' fist in his partly-open mouth, with a force that sent his head cracking against the banister-post behind him.

But Krassin was free at the moment, and he struck at Manners—just as Turton came leaping downstairs three at a time.

Smack!

It was a drive like the kick of a mule, and Krassin reeled, dropped, and did not move again. He was knocked out.

"Good man, Turton!" panted Digby, scrambling up, about the only junior on his feet now. "Back up—Oh!"

A gasp came from Digby as he saw Stockley, an oath on his lips, snatch something from his pocket and strike at Turton in sudden rage.

It was an automatic, gripped by the short barrel, and the blow took Turton full on the forehead, and felled him like a log.

"You brute!" hissed Digby.



The next moment a wild struggle was taking place in the tiny hall. Lowther had closed with Stockley, while Krassin had Tom with his back crushed on the stairs!

He leaped at Stockley, and once again Stockley swung the weapon aloft. But it never came down. Digby's wild leap was too quick—he leaped in low, grabbed the man's legs, and tugged with all his might.

Stockley stumbled backwards over the prostrate form of Lowther, and his legs fairly shot upwards as he went backwards with a thud that must have shaken every tooth in his head.

"Back up!" yelled Digby, leaping in again.

He knelt on the man, banging his head on the stone floor in a manner that must have made the pimply-faced rascal see more stars than he had ever seen before. And by this time Tom Merry, and most of the others, had recovered themselves.

In a flash they were swarming over him, and the half-stunned rascal gave little trouble after that. Arthur Augustus, crimson streaming unheeded from his aristocratic nose, came rushing from the front room with a length of cord, and in a flash it was whipped round Stockley's wrists and then his feebly kicking legs.

"Now the other merchant!" panted Blake. "Look lively—he's coming round!"

Krassin was coming round—he was stirring, and his eyes flicked open. He was recovering from the knockout the unfortunate Turton had administered to him.

From Turton's white, still face it was clear he was not likely to recover so soon.

In turn Krassin was trussed up, and he scarcely resisted at all, hardly seeming to be aware of what was happening to him. Stockley was cursing volubly now, and struggling desperately. But his struggles came too late to be of use to him.

"Nabbed 'em! That chap Turton came just in time—and you, Manners! But—my hat! What about Glyn? Look for him, someone!"

Tom turned his attention to Turton, his face grave. "A nasty knock and no mistake!" he said, examining the big bruise on the chauffeur's forehead. "The sooner we get him to Glyn House, the better! Hallo!"

There was a sudden shout from the kitchen, and a moment or two later Blake, Herries, and Arthur Augustus came rushing out, with Glyn between them. He was rubbing his wrists and grinning. But his grin faded abruptly as he sighted Turton's white face.

"Turton!" he gasped. "You here? What—" "Knocked on the head!" said Tom. "I don't think it's serious, though. Hallo! He's coming round now!"

To their intense relief, the second chauffeur moved, and his eyes opened a little. The juniors did what they could for him, and he soon began to come round in earnest.

"Thank goodness!" said Glyn. "But—but Turton, this beats me! Well, I'm jolly glad to see you chaps, anyway! How on earth did you find us?"

"Wildrake you've to thank for that, I fancy!" said Tom Merry, glancing at Wildrake, who was busy attending to his own hurts, which were many. "He tracked the merchants down. But for him we should never have got on the trail, Glyn!"

"Good man, Wildrake!" said Glyn. "These brutes must have spotted you coming—Stockley rushed in and gagged me a few moments beforehand, and he rushed upstairs and, I suppose, did the same to Turton here."

"What's Turton doing here?" asked Blake curiously. "Looks as if he isn't in league with them, after all."

"Goodness knows what it all means!" said Glyn, frowning, as he eyed Turton. "It's pretty clear he's on our side, anyway."

"Looks like it. But—" "I jolly nearly got away yesterday!" said Glyn, still

rubbing his aching wrists. "Jove! Those rotten cords did cut! What the thump are we to do now? Better get Turton home soon—we can talk things over when we get there."

"And what about these chaps?" said Blake, nodding to the scowling, cursing Stockley and his accomplice. "Better take 'em to the police station at Wayland—that's nearest."

"We can leave them trussed up here—sooner we get Turton into good hands the better, Glyn," said Tom soberly. "Hallo! Feeling better now, Turton? You had a nasty knock on the head!"

Turton nodded, but did not speak. He looked sick and giddy still, though he was quite conscious now. The juniors did not venture to question him. That could wait until he was fully recovered.

"Might have been worse, I guess!" commented Wildrake dryly, as he picked up the automatic from the floor. "I reckon I'll take charge of this. Hold on!"

He went through the pockets of both of the raging rascals; but no further weapons save knives came to light. Wildrake tested the cords, and was satisfied at last.

"Safe enough here until the bobbies come!" he announced. "What about using their giddy car, Glyn?"

"Good idea!" assented Bernard Glyn, with a faint grin. "I can drive, and we can ring up the police from home. Fit to move yet, Turton?"

Turton nodded, and Glyn hurried out and made for the cart-shed which Tom pointed out. He soon had the car out, and brought it to the garden gate across the bumpy ground.

Tom Merry, aided by his chums, made a swift, thorough search of the cottage, but they found nothing that would help in the mystery of the missing plans. By the time they had finished Turton had been helped to the waiting car by Glyn and Wildrake. In the circumstances they said nothing to Turton regarding the affair, nor did they ask any questions. And for his part Turton remained silent, though his gratitude to the juniors was obvious.

More than once during that ride back to Glyn House the juniors looked at Turton and wondered. But he seemed calm and undisturbed, though he must have realised that he was still an object of suspicion among the juniors.

Glyn felt baffled. He knew now that Turton was not in league with the rascals. Yet the plans had gone, and it seemed that only Turton could know how they had gone.

He was soon to know.

CHAPTER 13.

Al! Clear!

"BERNARD!"

"Cheerio, dad!"

Bernard Glyn grinned as he ran up the entrance steps at Glyn House. The sound of the car had been heard, and as old Chambers flung wide the door, Mr. Glyn hurried out of his study, anxious to hear news, if any.

His eyes instantly fell upon Bernard Glyn, and his joy was overwhelming. His voice shook as he greeted the schoolboy inventor.

"Thank Heaven! You had better hurry to your mother and sister, my boy—though I fancy they have seen you already from the drawing-room window."

"I bet they have!" said Glyn, with a chuckle; and not wishing his chums to see the family reunion, Glyn rushed for the drawing-room, the door of which was just opening.

Tom Merry & Co. helped Turton out, and aided him up the steps—he was still in a half-dazed state, but he insisted upon seeing Mr. Glyn.

"You—you have found Turton, as well?" articulated Mr. Glyn, in wonder. "What—what does this mean? Bring him inside, boys—into the study!"

"We found both Bernard and Turton trussed-up at a cottage just outside Latchford, sir!" explained Tom Merry cheerfully. "Wildrake here tracked them down—just after we left you, in fact. We followed the tyre-marks in the dust!"

Tom explained all that had happened while the juniors helped the chauffeur on to the couch in the study, and Mr. Glyn stared, hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels yet. But he soon showed his deep gratitude as he grasped the story.

"You should not have taken risks, of course!" he said at last, with a grim smile. "But I thank Heaven that you did, for all that! Turton, I will not question you now; you had better let Chambers help you to your room, and I will phone for the doctor. In fact, you all look as if a medical inspection would be advisable!" he added grimly.

Turton sat up looking considerably better.

"I'm feeling much better now, sir!" he stammered weakly. "It is not necessary to call in a doctor for me!" He glanced round rather meaningfully at the juniors standing

WHO SAYS A DOSE OF LAUGHING MIXTURE?

IT'LL DO YOU THE WORLD OF GOOD!

"Pat, I'll give you eight in pence for a shilling," said an Englishman to his Irish friend. "Eighteenpence!" murmured Pat. "Done!" The coins changed hands, and the Englishman watched Pat's face as he slowly counted the eighteenpence. "Not bad, is it?" he smiled. "No," said Pat. "But, begorra, the shilling is!"

"Think of a number." "Yes." "Double it." "Right!" "Add six to the total." "Done!" "Take away the number you first thought of." "Yes." "Three remain." "No, you're wrong." "I can't be." "But you are!" "Then what number did you think of?" "Next week's number of the GEM!"

Pat was hard at work digging a post-hole, when the boss strolled up. "Well, Pat," he said, noting the progress the Irishman had made, "do you think you will be able to get all that dirt back again?" Pat looked doubtfully at the pile of earth, and then scratched his head. After some time deep in thought, he said: "No, sor; sure I don't think I've dug the hole deep enough!"

On his way home the other day, Smith met a married friend of his running homewards at top speed, with a curious-looking parcel under his arm. "Hallo, Jim!" he yelled. "Why this hurry?" Jim did not stop, but shouted over his shoulder. "New hat for my wife! Running home before it is out of the fashion!"

Schoolmistress: "You dirty boy! Why don't you wash your face, and not let everybody know what you had for breakfast this morning?"

Small Boy: "What did I have for breakfast, then?"

Schoolmistress: "Eggs!"

Small Boy: "You're wrong! Eggs was yesterday!"

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YOU CAN START THIS SERIES TO-DAY!

CHICK CHANCE—Adventurer!



Chick and his pals get a taste of what's coming to them in their amazing flight over Central Africa!

again. Once more the monoplane quivered and lifted, only to flop back into the yellow tide. The young airman realised that there was only one hope left, and that was to catapult the machine over the edge of the cataract, and trust to Providence to do the rest.

What lay beyond that wall of spray he did not know. They might drop like a stone, or crash headlong into a barrier of solid rock that would shatter the plane to fragments and hurl their mangled remains into the thundering whirlpool below.

"Any more for the water-chute?" yelled Herbert, with a brave attempt at a smile as he clung to the side of the cockpit. "Mind you don't lose your hat, Horace! Whoopee! Away we go!"

A noise like a thousand thunders boomed in Chick's ears as he blinked the spray from his eyes and watched the foaming lip of the falls rushing towards him at a dizzy pace. For a fraction of a second the plane seemed to poise on the verge of a bottomless gulf of space. The floats left the water cleanly as he jerked back on the stick, and a ghastly sensation of falling jolted his heart up into his mouth.

Far below he caught a momentary glimpse of tumbling waters and rearing pinnacles of rock. He hugged the stick close against his chest, feeling the machine shudder from end to end as the wings gripped the air, and the nose slowly tilted up in response to the groaning elevating-planes, and the steady pull of the powerful motor.

It was sheer instinct—flying sense—that prompted Chick to kick hard on the left rudder-bar and swing the stick in the same direction. The machine went into a half-roll, and the almost vertical right-wing tip missed by inches a rugged granite wall that loomed suddenly through the clouds of hissing spray and water vapour.

He levelled out and zoomed for altitude until the danger of stalling forced him to ease forward on the stick. At the same instant he was almost blinded by a sudden blaze of sunshine that struck full in his eyes as the plane flashed out into the clear air and the roar of the Falls of Tombi sank to a distant murmur.

It seemed to Chick that he had lived a lifetime in those last few seconds. He felt suddenly weak and dizzy as he sagged back in the seat and unclamped his cramped fingers from the control-stick. The plane was riding smoothly a thousand feet above the jungle, and the River Ogopo was once more a winding ribbon of gleaming water where it emerged from the rocky gorge, from which, by some miracle, the machine had climbed unscathed.

"By gosh! I thought my number was up that time!"

It was Horace who spoke, and his hand was trembling as he removed his precious monocle and polished it on the sleeve of his coat.

"Yes, it was a pretty near thing," agreed Herbert casually. "Tricky bit of flying that, Chick. There wasn't much room to spare when you turned that last corner by the Rock o' Gibraltar. Good job you kept to the left."

Chick grinned. The cheerfulness of his two chums acted like a tonic to his wrenched nerves. They had stared death straight in the eyes within the last ten minutes, but they were still smiling.

The plane had not suffered the least injury. The motor was running like a clock, and the blazing sun had already sucked the last drop of moisture from the wings.

"Take the stick over for a while, Horace," Chick instructed, as he slid from the pilot's seat. "I'm not certain of our course until I've consulted Lobula, but keep her nose due north-east for the time being."

The sensational trip over the Falls of Tombi did not seem to have affected Lobula in the least, but Burk Roscoe was looking white and shaken as he sat huddled in one of the swing-seats, staring into the muzzle of the automatic pistol that the big native still had trained upon him.

Over the Falls!

CHICK opened wide the throttle and kept his eyes fixed on the needle of the tachometer.

The river now ran dead straight and less than a mile ahead he could see the creaming lip of the falls, and a huge cloud of spray that hung like smoke on the air. Beyond that was a sheer drop to the churning whirlpool, with its bristling fangs of rocks and jagged scarps of granite, that would chew an oak log to shreds in a matter of seconds.

"We've got just one chance in a thousand."

This was Chick Chance's unspoken thought as he clamped his feet on the rudder-bar and hugged the stick between his knees. Travelling with the fierce current, he realised that it was well-nigh impossible for the engine—powerful as it was—to lift the heavy plane clear of the water.

It was impossible to turn the machine. Any attempt to do that could only result in swift disaster. The plane would capsize and collapse like a cardboard box.

The needle of the tachometer now showed fifteen hundred revolutions per minute. Chick relaxed, and eased back on the stick. The nose of the plane lifted, the floats fought against the fierce suction of the current, skimmed the surface, and dropped back with a sullen splash.

The brink of the falls was no more than a couple of hundred yards away. Showers of spray were drumming down on the taut wings. Horace and Herbert remained silent. Speech was of no avail, even if they could make themselves heard.

Chick pushed the stick slowly forward and drew it back

"Look here, Chance," he said indignantly. "The best thing you can do is to turn round and take me straight back to Lakola. What with this black brute sticking that gun in my ribs, and your crazy flying stunts, I shan't feel safe until I've got both feet on dry land again."

"You weren't asked to come, and I can assure you we don't want your company," retorted Chick grimly. "If I knew of an easy way of getting shot of you I wouldn't hesitate to take it. As it is, I guess you've got to stick here for the time being, and I'm taking dashed good care you don't pull any more of your dirty tricks."

Roscoe shrugged his shoulders.

"I know when I'm beaten," he said sullenly; but his eyes gleamed cunningly as he spoke. "You've proved too smart for me, Chance. But I'm dashed certain you'll never find a trace of old Latimer and his daughter, so it'll make things easier for all of us if I give you my word to sit tight until you've finished this crazy search."

"Your word."

"My word as an officer and a gentleman," said Roscoe haughtily. "It may surprise you to know that I also was a Flight-Captain in the Royal Air Force during the War."

Chick stared keenly at the man. He was not disposed to trust him. With a fortune of half a million pounds at stake Roscoe was likely to once again forget the fact that he was "an officer and a gentleman," and seize the first opportunity to turn the tables on his captors.

Roscoe seemed to read his thoughts. He smiled disarmingly, and held out his hand.

"Come, let's shake hands on it, Chance!" he said bluffly. "I'm willing to admit that I've behaved like a howling cad up to now, but it's never too late to mend. You saved me from being chewed up by those crocodiles a while back, and I shan't forget it."

Chick weakened, but he deliberately ignored Roscoe's outstretched hand. He had not forgotten the attempt to shoot Howard Paige, or the brutal assault on Lobula, let alone his own treatment at the hands of Major Vigon.

"I can't promise anything now," he said shortly. "I shall have to consult my friends first. But you'd be a fool if you did attempt any further treachery, Roscoe. So long as you keep to this cabin, and do as you're told, you won't come to any harm. Keep an eye on our friend, Herbert. I want Lobula to come out in front and pick out our course for us."

Reluctantly Lobula stuffed the empty automatic into the front of his shirt and wrenched his fierce gaze from Roscoe's smiling contemptuous face.

"That man no good; he all the same snake in the grass," he said gravely. "Much trouble come you no get ridum him quick."

Chick Chance was fated to remember the native's warning words before many hours had passed. At the moment he was too occupied with other matters to give them more than passing thought. The odds were four to one, and Roscoe was not likely to cause them any trouble while he remained unarmed, and under constant observation.

Lobula instinctively seemed to know what was expected of him, and the sensation of hurtling through the air at a hundred miles an hour, with the steady beat of the motor thundering in his ears, failed to disturb his stoical calm in the least degree.

His eyes glistened, and his flat nostrils quivered as he clamped his big black hands on the edge of the cockpit and gazed down at the reeling landscape three thousand feet below.

For at least twenty minutes he stood like an ebony statue, and spoke not a word. It was evident that he was trying to pick up some familiar landmark; but as far as eye could vision there was nothing to be seen save a monotonous expanse of forest, jungle, and stream, with occasional stretches of rolling grassland.

They saw no signs of human life, but of antelope and hartebeest there was plenty. Once Lobula grunted and pointed out a pachydermatous figure that stood immobile in a clump of bushes, with a number of birds fluttering over and around it.

"Rhino," he said briefly. "Heap bad fellow."

"The one I saw in the Zoo was harmless enough," observed Horace thoughtfully. "It ate two buns, a rock-cake, and half a ham sandwich."

The blazing sun was beating down with terrific intensity. The very dope on the wings was bubbling and blistering, and the metal cowlings were too hot to touch.

More and more Chick Chance came to realise the immensity of the enterprise they had so lightly and confidently undertaken. They were entirely dependent on the big monoplane that was now carrying them so gallantly over the unknown wastes of Central Africa. They were hundreds of miles from the nearest point of civilisation, and their chance of finding Eustace Latimer and his daughter alive was just one in a million. And even if they found him their task was only half accomplished.

Some miles to the south, Lobula suddenly sighted a chain of small lakes, strung together like puddles of blue dye.

"We go that way," he declared excitedly. "Beyond there the River Tabezi, and the place where elephant go die when life no more good to him. Much bone there—many skeletons."

"Sounds a cheerful sort of place," muttered Horace, as he altered the plane's course. "By gosh! Look at that spotted snake down there, running about on legs!"

"Snake be hanged! That's a giraffe!" grinned Chick.

"Bury their head in the sand, don't they, or am I thinking of ostriches?" Horace's zoological knowledge was evidently a bit rusty. "All the same, a neck like that would come in mighty handy at a football match."

Leaving Horace at the controls, Chick dived into the saloon to snatch a hasty meal. Burk Roscoe sat staring moodily through the window in the side of the fuselage, and drumming his fingers restlessly on the arm of his wicker chair.

"Look here, Chance," he said, after several minutes' silence. "Surely you must realise by now that you're risking your life for nothing. You haven't a dog's chance of finding Eustace Latimer."

"You think he's dead?"

"Of course he is—as dead as Queen Anne!"

"Well, if you think that why didn't you sit tight in London instead of troubling to come out here to try and put a spoke in my wheel?" asked Chick blandly.

Roscoe made a gesture of impatience.

"If you've got any sense you'll accept the proposition I'm going to make you," he said persuasively. "Turn this machine round and fly straight back to Lakola. After a week you can send a cable to Howard Paige and tell him that you couldn't find a smelt of Latimer. Tell him the old man's a sure goner."

"What for?"

"For twenty thousand pounds! I'll pay it to you as soon as I get my hands on that money. You've only got to—"

Smack!

Chick's open hand struck Roscoe fairly across the mouth, snapping his head back with a jerk that almost fractured his spine.

"Why, you dirty, double-crossing polecat!" flamed the young airman, furiously. "Try to bribe me, would you? Why, for two pins I'd grab you by the heels and dump you into the next river we come to!"

"Hear, hear!" approved Herbert enthusiastically. "That goes for me as well. And I don't doubt as Horace and Lobula would also vote in favour of them few remarks."

Roscoe's lean face had gone deathly white, and there was a venomous glint in his narrow eyes as he drew a trembling hand across his bruised and bleeding lips. The blow had gone deeper than mere physical contact. It had stung the man to the depths of his evil nature.

"By heavens, I'll make you regret this one of these days, Chance!" he whispered hoarsely. "This is the second time you've struck me unawares! You may hold the upper hand now, but as sure as there's a sun in the sky—"

"Cut the melodrama!" snapped Chick contemptuously, as he carved himself another slice of bully-beef and wedged it neatly between two biscuits. "I suppose you didn't take Lobula unawares when you cocked the poor beggar over the head with a gun-butt and left him for dead? The less you say, the better, Roscoe! You're nothing but a poisonous toad."

"And you can take it from me," continued Chick, reaching for the mustard-pot, "that I mean to find Eustace Latimer if I have to crawl from one end of Africa to the other on my hands and knees. And you're coming with me!"

(Burk Roscoe's out to get that half-million pounds. But it's no easy matter to deceive Chick Chance. Don't miss next week's gripping statement, whatever you do.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,161.

HOW THE STORY STARTED.

CHICK CHANCE, R.A.F., V.C., D.S.O., meets Howard Paige who asks him to fly to Central Africa to look for a Professor Latimer, who has come into a fortune of half a million pounds, but does not know it. If Latimer does not return within three months the money is to go to Burk Roscoe, an arrogant scoundrel. Chick agrees to go and to take his two chums, Herbert and Horace, late air-mechanic and pilot-sergeant of his old squadron with him. Reaching Lakola, the three chums fall foul of Roscoe, who, assisted by a squad of native soldiers, tries to steal their plane and murder Lobula, a native guide who alone knows where Latimer is. Chick and his chums escape, only to discover Roscoe clinging to the undercarriage of the plane. In consequence of this the airman are forced to descend on the River Ogopo, where, in the grip of a fierce current they are swept towards the foaming tip of a vast cataract known as the Falls of Tombi. Swinging himself out of the cockpit Horace clammers on to one of the floats and eventually succeeds in setting the steel-bladed prop in motion.

(Now Read On.)



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