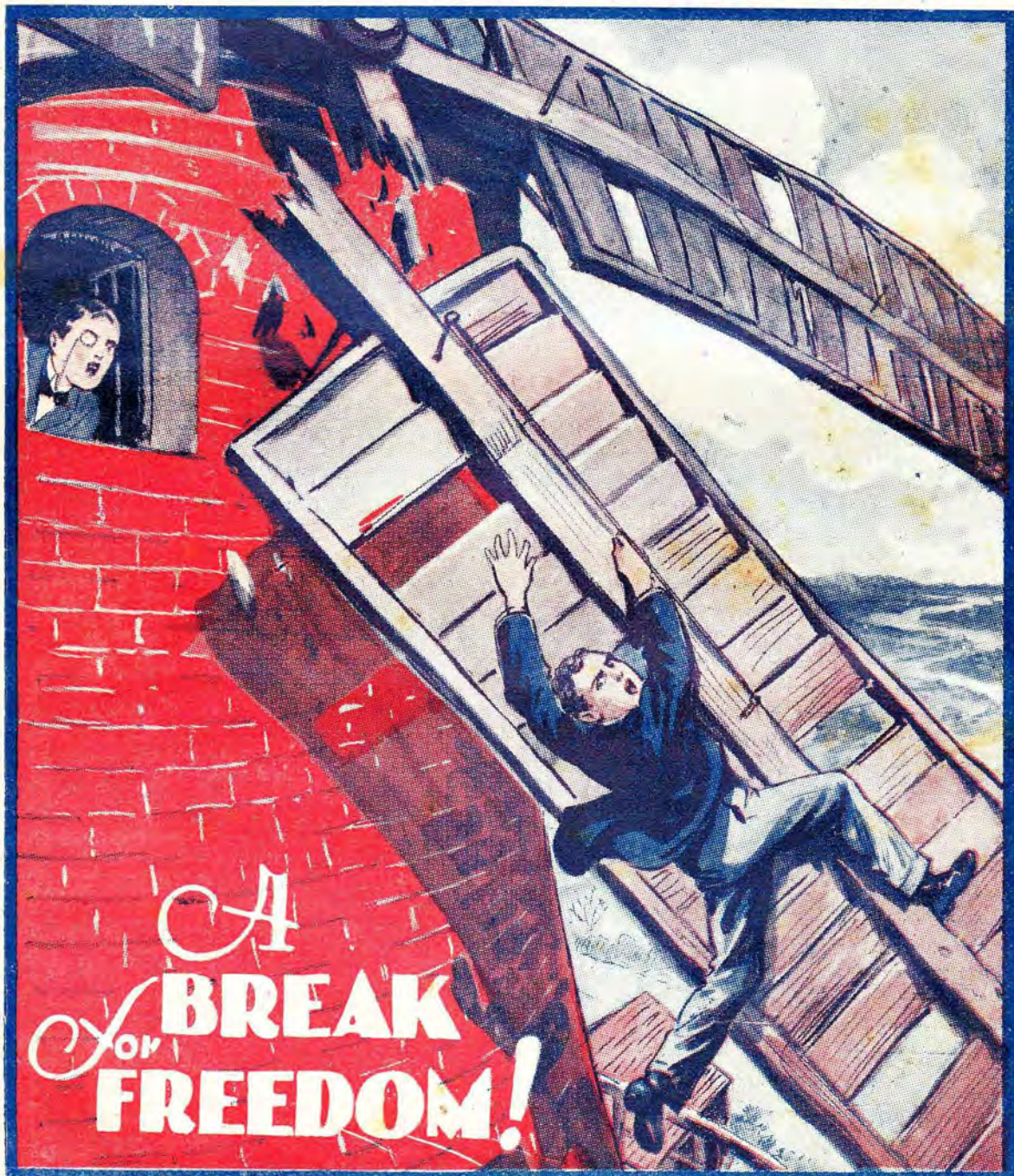


“THE FLYING FUGITIVE!” THRILLING LONG COMPLETE
SCHOOL YARN INSIDE.

The GEM

2^D



GRUNDY'S COUSIN A CONFIDENCE MAN! ARTHUR AUGUSTUS—

CHAPTER 1.

Corn in Egypt!

"STONY!"
Tom Merry, of the Shell at St. Jim's, uttered that word lugubriously.

"Hearts of oak, completely and absolutely!" supplemented Jack Blake. "Seven of us with a spare half-hol, and not a bob to spend! Jevver know anything like it?"

"Never!"

"Well, hardly ever!" grinned Monty Lowther.

Seven juniors were gathered together in Tom Merry's study—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, and Jack Blake, Digby, Herries, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth.

Not one of the seven looked very cheerful. That was hardly to be expected in the circumstances. It was just before dinner-time on Wednesday—and Wednesday was a half-holiday at St. Jim's. After dinner, within limits, they could go where they would, and do what they liked. And with that happy prospect before them they had just made the disconcerting discovery that they were all short of that very necessary commodity—cash!

"Of course, it has happened before," remarked Tom Merry, with a rueful grin.

"Dare say it'll happen again," grunted Blake. "But it couldn't have happened at a worse time than this."

"I say, you kids—"

George Alfred Grundy of the Shell poked his pugnacious jaw round the door of Study No. 10 and thus saluted the occupants.

Tom Merry and his chums heeded not. They were fully occupied with the matter in hand. Grundy was not half so important as that; Grundy, in fact—except in his own rather prejudiced opinion—was of no importance whatever.

"We could have had a loan from Hancock," said Tom Merry.

"But the silly ass got special leave to go to London after morning break," snorted Herries. "Suppose he hasn't left any fivers knocking about the study, Merry?"

"'Fraid not," grinned Lowther. "He's rolling in 'em, but he doesn't treat 'em quite like that!"

"You kids!" repeated Grundy, advancing into the study.

"There's Cardew!" murmured Manners, thoughtfully.

"Yaas, but Cardew happens to be temporarily em-bawwassed, too," said D'Arcy. "I happen to have approached him already."

"So that's that!" said Blake, with a grimace. "Blessed if I know why you yourself want to run short at a moment like this, Gus. You know how we rely on you in times of stress!"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Let's bump him!" suggested Herries. "Won't do much good, but it'll relieve our feelings!"

"Why, you sillay duffah—"

"You kids!" hooted Grundy.

"Good wheeze!" grinned Lowther. "We'll bump Gussy! Grab him!"

"Bai Jove! If you dare—yawoooooh!"

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The FLYING

Splendid New Long
Complete Story of
TOM MERRY & Co.
at St. Jim's.

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.



"Bump him!"

Bump!

"Yawooooop! You feahful asses—"

"'Nother for luck!"

Bump!

"Whooooop! Wefuse me! Ow!"

"Look here—" roared Grundy, above the din.

The juniors still paid no attention to Grundy. For a moment they were all intent on backing away from Arthur Augustus, who was scrambling to his feet in a state of great excitement and indignation.

"You uttah wottahs!" hooted the swell of the Fourth.

"How dare you—"

"Perhaps you'll remember now never to run short of cash when your pals are in need," said Blake severely.

"Nothing to get cross about, either, Gus! Keep calm—like us, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I uttably wefuse to keep calm!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus heatedly. "I shall thwash you heah an' now for that wuffianly assault!"

"What, all of us?"

"Ewery one of you!"

"Mercy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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—SPOTS THE TRICK—AND BAGGY TRIMBLE TURNS UP TRUMPS!



"Look here, you idiots!" howled Grundy, whose rugged face was rapidly assuming the colour of a beetroot.

"Pway put them up, you wottahs!"

Arthur Augustus, his noble face a study of righteous indignation, made a rush.

Tom Merry & Co. dodged. After their fruitless conference a little rag came as a welcome relief, and they dodged round Study No. 10 with great good will, Arthur Augustus in pursuit.

In the limited confines of Tom Merry's study there was not a lot of room for such activities. Grundy soon found that out. In the space of ten seconds Blake trod on his feet, Lowther jabbed him in the chest, and Digby cannoned into him from the rear.

"Yarooooop!" roared Grundy.

"Wottahs! Stand up an' take your gwuel!"

"Mercy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here——" shrieked Grundy.

D'Arcy gave it up at last in disgust and halted in the middle of the room to brush himself down and glare balefully at his humorous chums. And Tom Merry & Co. acknowledged Grundy's existence at last.

"Why, if it isn't Grundy!" exclaimed Lowther, with an elaborate pretence of surprise. "Where did you spring from, old chap?"

"How long have you been here, Grundy?" asked Blake. Grundy choked.

"You—you—— Five minutes at least, of course!" "Then why didn't you tell us you'd arrived?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You howling fatheads!"

hooted Grundy. "Mean to say you didn't hear me?"

"Come to think of it, I did hear a sort of whisper floating round the room," said Lowther brightly. "Was that you, Grundy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy's big fists clenched, as though he felt tempted to wade in and start a wholesale massacre in Study No. 10. But he overcame the temptation, and unclenched them again.

"Idiots!" he snorted. "Good mind to bash you! But there's no time. I've come to ask you——"

"Sorry, old chap! We're all in the same boat!"

"Eh?"

"We're all stony, too!" explained Tom Merry.

"Ass! Think I've come to ask you for oof, then?"

"Well, didn't you?"

"No, I jolly well didn't!" hooted Grundy.

"I came to ask you if you'd all like to come to Wayland with me this afternoon——"

"Eh?"

"And meet my cousin and have tea out in the town——"

"Wha-a-at?"

"At my expense. Sorry?"

"Well, my hat!"

The juniors stared at the great man of the Shell open-mouthed.

"But—but——"

"Dear old bean——"

"Why?" asked Lowther.

"What's the idea? You're offering us tea in Wayland—meaning a proper tea, of course——"

"Naturally—as much as you like, and anything you like!"

"Then where's the catch?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy frowned.

"There's no catch, of course. I want you to come to tea——"

"Yes, but why?"

"Because my cousin, Jack Grundy, is coming to Wayland this afternoon!" snorted Grundy. "I want you all to meet him. Nothing funny in that, is there?"

"Oh!"

"It's rather a special occasion, you see," explained Grundy. "My cousin has been out in Australia ever since he was a tiny kid, and I want to kill the fattest calf for him. Hands across the sea, and so on. Get me?"

"But——"

"It's not that I care about inviting the likes of you kids out to tea, but in this case it's a different matter entirely. I'd like you to meet my cousin, that's all."

"Oh!"

The juniors thought they "got" Grundy. They grinned. "You mean you want us to back you up and give your cousin the idea that you're a pretty big noise at St. Jim's?" asked Herries, with his customary candour. "That it?"

"Weally, Hewwies——"

Grundy blushed.

"You silly ass! My cousin knows all about me, without getting ideas from you. I've told him already!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dashed if I know what you're cackling about! Are you coming along, anyway?"

"Well, it's very kind of you, old scout," said Tom Merry.

Grundy nodded.

"I know it's kind of me. Not everybody would invite a lot of fatheads like you to

meet his cousin from Australia."

"Hem! Well, if the rest of you feel like going——"

The rest smiled.

"Case of corn in Egypt!" remarked Blake. "Not often that Grundy does the right thing at the right moment. But I think we can fairly say that he's done it this time!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Weally, Blake, that is hardly a polite way of acceptin' Gwunday's gwacious invitation——"

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CONFIDENCE IN HIMSELF SET
GRUNDY ON THE TRAIL OF
A FORTUNE . . . A TRAIL
THAT HAD BEEN CUNNINGLY
LAID BY A CONFIDENCE
TRICKSTER!

"Good enough for me, anyway!" grinned Grundy. "Then you'll all come?"

"What-ho!"

"Good!" said the great man of the Shell, with satisfaction. "Mind you clean the inkstains off your fingers for once. And be ready soon after dinner. That's the bell, by the way!"

And Grundy quitted the study, leaving Tom Merry & Co. asking themselves whether, despite their acceptance of his invitation, they ought to mop up the floor with their host. As the dinner-bell was going, they decided to postpone consideration of the matter. So Grundy ate his dinner in peace, and the Shell passage remained unmopped!

CHAPTER 2.

Gussy's Startling Adventure!

"FIVE minutes, deah boy!"

"Five nothing, dear idiot!" retorted Jack Blake cheerfully. "You've already spent half an hour over that tie."

"And if you're not ready now, we're buzzing off without you," added Herries. "Here are the rest!"

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther looked in the doorway of Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage, where Jack Blake & Co. had been getting ready for their trip to Wayland. The Terrible Three were in best bib and tucker in honour of Grundy's colonial cousin.

"Fit, kids?" asked Tom Merry.

"Fit as fiddles, old fogey!" grinned Blake. "Bar Gussy, who's all behind, as ever, of course!"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Well, Grundy's waiting," said Tom Merry. "Ready, or going to be left at the post, Guss?"

"Neithah, deah boy! It's uttably imposs for me to go to Wayland to meet an honabed guest f'rom the Colonics without awwangin' my tie pwopahly. I've just told Blake that I shan't be more than five minutes—"

"And I've just told you that you've already spent half an hour over the dashed tie, my pippin. And if half an hour isn't enough, you'll have to finish it off on your own. Ready, chaps?"

"Ready, ay, ready!" grinned Herries.

"Then march!"

The Terrible Three led the way out, grinning, and Blake and Herries and Digby marched.

Arthur Augustus paused in his tie-tying operations to give them a worried and rather indignant look.

"Bai Jove! Don't go yet, deah boys; if you'll only wait five minutes—"

"Rats!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Just time to catch the train at Rylcombe!" remarked Blake. "You can jolly well walk it on your own, Gus. Ta-ta!"

"Pway hold on, deah boys! If you'll wait—"

Slam!

Arthur Augustus didn't trouble to complete his sentence after that slam. He rightly inferred that his colleagues had positively decided not to wait.

The footsteps of Tom Merry & Co. echoed away down the Fourth passage, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, after frowning at the door they had slammed behind them, reverted to his tie.

Nearly ten minutes elapsed before he was able to complete the job to his satisfaction. Then another ten minutes was taken up with drawing on his brand-new kid gloves and putting on his shiny silk topper.

After that, Arthur Augustus decided that he was in a fit condition to meet Grundy's cousin. Certainly the swell of the Fourth looked a thing of beauty and a joy for ever as he strolled away from Study No. 6 at last.

As it was now a matter of impossibility to catch the train at Rylcombe, D'Arcy made for the bike-shed. Cycling to Wayland would involve his collecting one or two specks of dust, which was regrettable, but it was the only way left for him to get there in time.

The swell of the Fourth got out his expensive "jigger," set his topper firmly on his head, and got into the saddle. Within a couple of minutes he was whirring along the Rylcombe Lane en route for Wayland.

In the succeeding quarter of an hour D'Arcy made up for lost time. He fairly scorched through the quiet lanes and across Wayland Moor, until the first houses of the town came into view. Then, a glance at his gold hunter informing him that he was in good time, he slackened speed and pedalled towards the railway station in a more leisurely manner.

Little dreaming of the startling adventure that was just about to befall him, Arthur Augustus dismounted outside a barber's shop in the High Street, with the intention of

having such dust as he had collected removed from his person by professional hands.

Before he set foot on the pavement, however, his attention was attracted by a sudden shout from the other end of the street.

"Stop, thief!"

Arthur Augustus looked up.

What he saw made him jump.

It was the figure of a young, well-dressed man, running like a hare down the centre of the street.

Behind that flying figure were two uniformed men, one of whom the swell of the Fourth recognised as Inspector Skeat, the local police official, while bringing up in the rear were several interested members of the public.

Arthur Augustus jumped.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped.

"Stop that man!"

The injunction came from Inspector Skeat.

D'Arcy halted and stared. Temporarily, he felt himself rooted to the ground. The sight of a fugitive fleeing from the police in the quiet old town of Wayland was so unexpected and remarkable that D'Arcy felt incapable of action for a moment.

Meanwhile, the well-dressed young man was racing down the High Street.

D'Arcy realised suddenly that he was coming straight towards him.

"Stop him!"

"Stop, thief!"

The police officers were shouting as they ran. Other cries were ringing out from their supporters in the rear.

"Old 'im!"

"Fetch 'im one, young 'un!"

"Tackle him low!"

"Mind your bike, lad!" came in warning from Inspector Skeat's voice.

D'Arcy started. The warning gave him the clue to the fugitive's aim. The man was making for him with the intention of taking his bicycle and getting away on it!

"Oh ewikey!" gasped the swell of the Fourth.

Then he became suddenly galvanised into activity.

Regardless of the possibility of injury to the frame of his bike, Arthur Augustus dropped it, allowing it to fall with a crash at his feet. Stepping over it, he advanced to meet the man. Who he was, and what he had done, there was no time to find out. It was sufficient for D'Arcy, anyway, that the man was after his jigger for the purpose of evading the police. Quite evidently the man was a crook of some kind—by the look of him, a ruthless and unscrupulous type of man.

"Stand away, you!"

It was a snarling command from the fugitive. He was upon the swell of the Fourth now. Arthur Augustus had a swift impression of a twisted, venomous face, and a pair of glittering eyes.

"Stand away, I say!" repeated the man furiously.

"Wats!"

Then Arthur Augustus dodged as his assailant lunged out fiercely. A moment later, the St. Jim's junior, no novice at boxing despite his elegant ways, landed out himself, and caught the fugitive a blow on the jaw.

The crowd shouted approval as they ran.

"Good for you, kid!"

"It 'im again!"

"Hold him!" panted Inspector Skeat, only a few yards in the rear.

For a moment, it looked as if Arthur Augustus would succeed in doing so. The blow he had landed would certainly have delayed the average man.

But in this case the man was desperate. It was touch and go, and he had to act like lightning to make good his escape. With an oath he swung round on the swell of the Fourth and struck him fairly and squarely in the face, sending him spinning. A fraction of a second later he had seized D'Arcy's bike, and was leaping into the saddle.

A truncheon came whizzing through the air from the hand of the constable accompanying Inspector Skeat. But the man seemed to swerve instinctively, and the truncheon merely grazed his arm and fell into the road without achieving its purpose. Another instant, and he was flying down the Wayland High Street.

"Oh! Bai Jove! Oh deah!" gasped Arthur Augustus, dizzily.

He sat up and blinked dazedly after the retreating figure of the man who had given him the knock-out. His head was whirling, but the swell of the Fourth would have given a lot for a chance of renewing the encounter. The possibility of that, however, appeared to be remote. The well-dressed young man was already disappearing round the bend of the High Street, and although one or two passers-by challenged him on the way, he rode so recklessly that they hurriedly jumped out of the way before he reached them.

Inspector Skeat and his colleague were jumping into a motor-car to resume the chase. It appeared highly probable, however, that their quarry, having made a favourable start, would be able now to dodge them altogether.

A chorus of solicitous inquiries was directed to D'Arcy as a crowd began to assemble round him.

"Urt, young 'un?"

"My eye! That was a oner he give you on the chivvy!"

"Any bones broken?"

"Call the ambulance, somebody!"

Arthur Augustus hastily intervened.

"Bai Jove! Pway don't do that, deah boy. I'm quite all wight, I assuah you. Owl!"

The last as he rose painfully to his feet again.

The crowd regarded him with considerable admiration. "You're a plucked 'un, you are, young gent!" remarked the man who had suggested calling the ambulance. "Real marvel, the way you went for that cove!"

"Weally, deah boy, it was nothin' at all. Gwreat pity the wotah got away with my jiggah, though. I twust the police will wecovah it for me."

"They'll be lucky to

cop that man,"

another of the crowd

opined. "They say the

police in London have

wanted him for

months."

"Who is he, deah

boy?"

"Name of Plum-

mer, I fancy—Julian

Plummer. They say he

swindled an American

gent of thousands of

pounds last summer,

and hasn't been seen

since—not till last

night, that is. Then

Inspector Skeat spot-

ted him in Wayland

and nabbed him."

"An' was pwesum-

ably takin' him to

London when he

escaped?"

"Just about that,

guv'nor! I know I

saw him come out of

the police station with

a couple of bluebottles.

Two ticks later one of

'em was lying at the

bottom of the steps,

and this Plummer chap

was bolting."

"Well, I sincerely

twust the police will

catch him. Bai Jove!

I must go now!"

exclaimed Arthur Augustus, starting, as

he observed the time from a street clock. "I've just

wemembahed an appointment."

"Quite sure you're not 'urt, guv'nor?"

"Quite suah, thank you, deah boy. Good-day, ewevy-

body!"

And the swell of St. Jim's raised his topper elegantly and

hurried off from the scene of his encounter with the escaping

prisoner.

He arrived at the railway station late, rather breathless

and slightly less immaculate than he had been when he

started out.

Fortunately, he was little the worse for his adventure, and

by the time he reached the barrier the important matter of

his engagement to join his chums in Grundy's cousin's

reception was already driving the recollection of the

desperate Julian Plummer from his mind.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, however, had not seen the last

of Julian Plummer. The time was soon coming when he

was to be reminded of that unscrupulous character in the

strangest possible manner.

CHAPTER 3.

Grundy Sincerely Regrets!

"JUST in time!" remarked Grundy, with satisfaction, as they passed through the barrier on to the platform to find a train just steaming in. "Keep your eyes out for him, chaps!"

"All serene. What's he like?" asked Tom Merry.

Grundy started.

"Dashed if I know, come to think of it!"

"Eh?"

"Matter of fact, I haven't the faintest notion what my

cousin looks like. He was taken to Australia when he was only a kid, you see. I've never even seen a photograph of him."

"You've come to meet someone you won't be able to recognise?" yelled Jack Blake. "Well, of all the fat-heads—"

"Half a mo'! It'll be all right, anyway," said Grundy confidently. "Even if we don't recognise him, he'll recognise us as St. Jim's fellows by our caps."

"He's expecting you, then?"

Grundy nodded.

"I wrote him at the Southampton hotel he'd booked up at, and told him I'd turn up here. Anyway, it shouldn't be hard for us to pick him out from the other passengers. He's a Grundy, you know!"



The man seized D'Arcy's bike and leapt into the saddle. A truncheon flung by the constable narrowly missed the desperate fugitive!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's a strong family resemblance running through the Grundys," said the great man of the Shell gravely. "Better look out for a healthy, good-looking chap with a strong face, full of intelligence and character—"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Lowther. "I thought perhaps you were going to say, look out for a big pair of feet to begin with, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you silly ass—" roared Grundy, his rugged face turning an art shade of pink.

"Pax!"

"Here they come!"

The train had come to a standstill and the passengers were descending; and in the circumstances George Alfred Grundy forbore and turned his attention to the problem of finding Cousin Jack Grundy.

Grundy and his guard of honour, consisting of the Terrible Three, Jack Blake & Co., and Grundy's study-mates, Wilkins and Gunn, scanned the passengers with great interest.

They did not, however, succeed in discovering anybody who could be said to possess completely the characteristics of good looks, a healthy appearance, and a strong face full of intelligence and character. They did not even find anybody with particularly big feet. If Mr. Jack Grundy really did possess those qualifications, then he was conspicuous only by his absence.

Grundy took his stand at the head of the St. Jim's juniors near the barrier and subjected each of the male passengers to a minute scrutiny, which earned him in return a number of frigid stares.

Frigid stares naturally had no effect on Grundy. He carried on the scrutinising process regardless. Fat men, thin men, tall men, short men, prosperous tradesmen, and seedy artisans alike passed under his eagle eye, and were one by one dismissed as non-members of the tribe of Grundy.

"Nothing doing, old bean?" asked Tom Merry, as the stream of passengers thinned out and the last half-dozen shuffled towards the exit.

Grundy shook his head.

"Dashed if I can understand it! It's not like a Grundy to fail in an appointment; but he's not here, that's a cert."

"Sure he didn't say Rylcombe, or some other station?" asked Gunn.

Grundy sniffed.

"Don't talk out of the back of your neck, Gunny! I should have thought by now you'd known me better than to think I'd made a fatheaded mistake like that! Here's the blessed letter, if you want to satisfy yourself."

Gunn took the proffered envelope and abstracted a sheet of notepaper containing a spidery scrawl not unlike that of Grundy of the Shell. Then, after a couple of minutes during which he was apparently deciphering the message, Gunn uttered a yell.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Something wrong?" asked Blake.

"Oh, great pip! I should jolly well think there is something wrong! Ha, ha, ha!" concluded Gunn, in a sudden roar of laughter.

"What the thump—"

"Man's mad!" declared Grundy.

"Oh dear! This is funny!" gurgled Gunn. "After all these preparations— Ha, ha, ha!"

"Kick him!" suggested Herries, putting his own suggestion into practice.

"Whoooop! All right, you idiots; I'm just going to tell you. The fact is— Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, what is it?" howled Grundy.

"The fact is," gasped Gunn, "that Grundy's cousin didn't say Wednesday at all. What he said was Saturday—next Saturday; but the writing's like old Grundy's—not too clear. Grundy misread it, you see. Ha, ha, ha!"

"M-m-my hat!"

Tom Merry & Co. looked at Gunn, then looked at each other, their faces expressive of dismay. If Gunn was right, Grundy's cousin was undoubtedly "off" for that day; and in that case, the probability was that tea out at Grundy's expense was also "off." Grundy was, on occasions, a lavish fellow. But the reason for celebrating having gone, the chances were that he would "jib" at paying for a spread for nine hungry colleagues.

Grundy himself, after staring incredulously at Gunn for a few seconds, took the letter from Gunn's hand and read it through.

His jaw dropped as he did so.

"Gunn's right, then?" asked Blake.

Grundy nodded.

"I'm sorry, you chaps. I took it for 'Wednesday,' but I can see now that it's 'Saturday'!"

"Well, of all the silly asses—" said Digby disgustedly.

"Not my fault. My cousin ought to have written it more plainly," said Grundy. "Anyway, I've taken you fellows out of your way, so I'll express my sincere regrets."

"You will, will you?" said Herries grimly. "And what about the feed?"

"That's off!"

"Oh!"

"You see, it was to have been a celebration in honour of my cousin," explained Grundy. "Now that he's not turning up, you can hardly expect me to lash out in the same way, can you?"

"Um!"

"I tell you what," went on Grundy genially. "Just to make up for your disappointment. I'll let you all come along next Saturday instead. That do?"

Tom Merry & Co. closed round Grundy. From the expressions on their faces it looked as though the proposed Saturday celebration would not do.

"Now!" said Tom Merry.

Grundy regarded the leader of the School House juniors with a frown.

"Look here, Merry, no larks! I've already expressed my sincere regrets—"

"Exactly. And now we're going to make you feel 'em as well as express 'em!" said Tom grimly. "Collar him, chaps!"

"What ho!"

Grundy let out a yell.

"Wilky! Gunn! Back up!"

Wilkins and Gunn hesitated. As Grundy's study-mates, it was up to them, if to anybody, to stand by their leader in his hour of need. After a little hesitation, however,

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Wilkins and Gunn, fulfilling the old adage that he who hesitates is lost, discreetly backed away and were lost—in the crowd on the other side of the barrier!

A moment later a series of yells rang out across the station.

"Ow-wow! Yarooooop! Leggo my arms! Whooooop!"

Grundy, in accordance with Tom Merry's prognostication, was being made to feel regretful; and he evidently found the process rather painful.

Tom Merry & Co. bumped him, then stood him on his head, then rolled him over and over in the dust on the platform, and finally stretched him out and marched over him on their way to the exit.

"That's that!" remarked Tom Merry. "Now, Grundy, perhaps apart from expressing regret, you'll really feel it!"

Grundy apparently experienced difficulty in replying to that remark. His reply, when it did come, was something that sounded like:

"Gerooooosh!"

And from that the juniors assumed that Grundy really did feel full of the most sincere regret!

CHAPTER 4.

Grundy's Cousin!

"HALLO, hallo! Here's Gustavus!" remarked Monty Lowther, as the Co. arrived outside the station.

"Wherefore the worried brow, Gus?"

"And what's happened to you, old bean?" asked Tom Merry, with a critical glance at D'Arcy's disarrayed clothing. "You've actually got a speck of dust on your bags!"

"And your tie's not straight!" gasped Jack Blake.

"Brave yourselves for the blow, you men! The glory has departed from our one-and-only Gus!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus blushed.

"Weally, deah boys! I considah that you're not showin' vewy good taste in chippin' a fellow who has obviously met with an accident."

"Then the glory hasn't departed after all?" asked Blake anxiously.

"Certainly not—I mean, pway don't wot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm afwaid I see nothin' whatevah to gwin about, deah boys!" remarked the swell of the Fourth stiffly. "Since I saw you I have been through a vewy remarkable expewience. By the way, where are Gwunday an' his cousin?"

"Grundy's lying on the platform, and his cousin seems to be on the high seas still," answered Tom, with a smile. "But what about this experience of yours?"

"The guest has not awvived, then? Thank goodness for that! I was simply dweadin' meetin' him in this feahful state!" confessed Arthur Augustus, looking considerably relieved. "With weward to the expewience I mentioned, it consisted of bein' attacked with gweat violence by a fwightful wottah of a cwook who was wunnin' fwom the police."

"Eh?"

There was an incredulous yell from the Co.

"Draw it mild, old chap!" urged Herries.

"You mean after we left you, you sat down and dreamed it?" suggested Dig.

"Weally, Dig! I wepeat that I was attacked by a cwook who was wunnin' fwom the police. Julian Plummah, I undahstand his name is, a w'etched confidance twickstah, you know."

"My hat! I seem to have seen that name in the papers somewhere," said Manners. "Didn't he swindle some American visitors, or something?"

"Quite twue, deah boy. Well, this wottah Plummah has escaped fwom the police this aftahnnoon—on my jigga!"

"On whatter?"

"Sure you're feeling all right, Gus?" asked Dig. "No pains in the head, or anything like that?"

"Pway don't be widic, deah boy! It happened just down the High Stweet, where you see that cwod of people still talkin'. I will tell you pweecisely what happened."

And the swell of the Fourth proceeded to relate the story of his encounter with the fleeing confidence trickster.

The Co. listened with interest, and there was a whistle when he had finished.

"My hat! Sounds as if Plummer is the kind of chap to steer clear of on a dark night!" commented Jack Blake.

"And you say he got away?"

"I'm vewy much afwaid so, deah boy! The inspectah continued the chase in a car, but fwom the fact that he has not returned, I gathah that he can't have found the wottah yet."

"And you've lost that diamond-studded jigger of yours

in the bargain!" said Tom Merry, with a faint smile. "Hard cheese, Gus! Still, that doesn't matter so much as being untidy!"

"Exactly, deah boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I weally fail to see anythin' to laugh at! Howevah, the harm's done now, so it's no good ewyin' ovah it. I wish I could meet that wottah, though, to tell him just what I thought of him."

"Let's take up the chase on our own and see if we can beat Skeat at his own game!" suggested Manners brightly.

"Good wheeze! Ten to one the Plummer bird is hiding off the road just outside the town," said Tom Merry. "All game?"

Needless to say, the juniors were all quite game. They set off down the old High Street with great enthusiasm.

That enthusiasm, sad to relate, waned considerably in the course of the next hour. Searching for the elusive Mr. Plummer in the fields and woods outside Wayland was like searching for a very small needle in a very large bundle of hay.

Several policemen had taken up the search by the time the St. Jim's juniors got out into the country, and the men in blue seemed to be equally at sea.

Eventually the juniors gave it up and returned, tired and hungry, to catch their train back to Rylcombe. Their efforts, unavailing as they were, had been thorough and businesslike. Nobody took seriously a suggestion of Lowther's that the earth had opened and swallowed up Julian Plummer, but they felt, in the light of their experience, that the confidence trickster would prove an exceedingly difficult customer to run to earth.

The days that followed seemed to confirm that opinion, for although D'Arcy's bicycle came to light in a ditch near the town, no trace was found of the man who had abandoned it.

So far as the St. Jim's juniors were concerned, the affair of D'Arcy and the crook looked like being nothing more than a nine-days' wonder—less than that, in fact, for by the end of the week they had almost forgotten the matter.

Then Saturday came, and something happened which resulted eventually in Plummer being brought more to the attention of the St. Jim's juniors than any of them had previously thought possible.

The "something" in question was the arrival of Grundy's much-heralded cousin from Australia.

On the Saturday afternoon Tom Merry & Co. observed Grundy tramping towards the gates when they were on their way to Little Side for a pick-up game at cricket. They were mildly amused to note that this time he was unaccompanied. Apparently Grundy had decided, after his exciting experience on the platform of Wayland Station, that he was better off without an escort.

A vigorous game quickly dispelled from the minds of Tom Merry & Co. all thoughts of Grundy, Julian Plummer, and, in fact, most other things except the game itself.

Then, as the game ended, and the players streamed off the field towards the pavilion, they were reminded of Grundy again. And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was reminded, in the strangest and most-unlooked-for manner, of the fugitive who had attacked him in Wayland High Street.

Grundy was standing outside the pavilion as the juniors approached it. With him were two gentlemen. One was a rotund, middle-aged man whom several of the fellows recognised as Grundy's celebrated Uncle George. The other, a youngish man, they assumed to be the celebrated cousin from Australia.

Grundy greeted the cricketers with a genial nod. His face was slightly flushed, and his chest was expanded to an unusual degree. The cricketers judged that Grundy had been enjoying himself in describing to his guests the glories of St. Jim's—or, more probably, the glories of George Alfred Grundy!

"Spare a minute, you fellows!" he called out, as Tom Merry and his followers drew near him.

"Two, if you like, old bean!" replied Tom cheerfully. "Hold on, chaps!"

Manners and Lowther and Blake and several others halted. Grundy turned to his guests.

"Uncle, you've met some of these fellows before; but, of course, Jack hasn't. I'll introduce you, Jack. They're all good chaps; not over-brainy, you know, but good-hearted."

"Hem!" coughed Uncle Grundy, while Cousin Jack Grundy, whom Tom Merry found, on inspection, to be a well-dressed, rather sleek young man, looked rather blank.

"This is Tom Merry," rattled on Grundy cheerfully. "Thinks he knows all there is to be known about cricket; but I fancy I can give him one or two pointers!"

"Well, my hat!—I mean, how do you do, Mr. Grundy?" corrected Tom hastily.

"This is Jack Blake; not a bad chap, but rather small beer, of course; Fourth, you know!"

"You—you—" gasped Blake. But he managed, somehow, to overcome his first impulse to tweak Grundy's nose, and shook Grundy's cousin by the hand instead.

"Here's Gussy—D'Arcy, his real name, but known as Gus!" went on Grundy. "Quite a decent sort of ass—Hallo, what's the matter with him?"

Arthur Augustus had suddenly stopped short, his arm half-raised to greet Grundy's cousin. His monocle dropped from his eye unheeded.

In Jack Grundy the others saw nothing but a languid, rather sleek young man. But the swell of the Fourth saw something else—something that took his mind back in a flash to his adversary outside the railway station at Wayland three days before.

He found himself staring into a pair of dark, restless eyes that were at once familiar to him. For not more than a fraction of a second he was puzzled to know why. Then he knew.

They were the eyes of Julian Plummer!

CHAPTER 5.

Doubting Thomases!

"Bai Jove!"

Temporarily, D'Arcy's customary sangfroid deserted him; he was overwhelmed.

"What's up, Gus?" asked Blake, in surprise.

"Yes, what's the game, D'Arcy?" demanded Grundy warmly. "If you're going to start being funny with my cousin, now—"

"Bai Jove!" The swell of the Fourth, with an effort, pulled himself together and extended a slim hand. "How do you do, sir? Sowwy if I appeahed to be wude; I came ovah a little queeah for a moment."

"Then in that case there is nothing to excuse," responded the visitor, with a smile. "I was just beginning to think you had taken me for a ghost!"

"As a mattah of fact you did wemind me of a gentleman of my acquaintance at first, but I wealise now that I must have been mistaken. I twust you are not offended, Mr. Gwunday."

"Not in the slightest, my dear D'Arcy. You are feeling a little better now?"

"Much bettah, thank you. Pway cawwy on with the intwoductions, Gwunday, deah boy."

Grundy concluded the formalities, and the strained atmosphere which had fallen on the group vanished in a buzz of cheery talk.

Grundy's cousin seemed a sociable young man, and soon got the juniors talking about the all-engrossing topic of cricket at St. Jim's. Grundy was not averse to giving his views on that subject, and the result was that in the course of a few minutes quite a warm argument had developed outside the pavilion. D'Arcy's peculiar behaviour at the introduction was quickly forgotten in the excitement of that argument.

"Tea!" said Uncle Grundy, putting an end to the talk at last. "Your guests crave the hospitality of the study, George!"

"Then we'll make a move right away," said Grundy. "I'll give you the rest of my views another time, Merry. Ready, Cousin Jack?"

Jack Grundy nodded.

"I'm ready. Aren't your friends coming along to tea with us, George?"

"They could if we made the study three times as big!" grinned Grundy. "Can't be did as it is."

"In that case, perhaps they'd like to come over to Red Gables to tea next Wednesday afternoon," said Uncle Grundy. "I think I can keep you amused, boys, with my stamp collection and big-game trophies and wireless set and what-not. Feel like it?"

"Bai Jove! It will be a gweat pleasuah, Mr. Gwunday!"

"Luckily it won't conflict with a fixture. We'll all be pleased to come," said Tom Merry. "I take it I can speak for the rest?"

"Oh, rather!"

"Then that's fixed!" smiled Grundy's cheery uncle. "Au revoir, then, all of you!"

And the three Grundys went off in the direction of the School House, while the cricketers returned to the pavilion.

There was a thoughtful frown on D'Arcy's face as he changed. Now and again the rest heard him murmur "I wondah—" and "Suahly—" The swell of the Fourth was evidently very deep in thought.

Blake brought him out of his reverie on the way out of the pavilion by the simple process of administering a hearty thump on the back which sent Arthur Augustus staggering.

"Now, what's it all about?" demanded the leader of Study No. 6.

Arthur Augustus miraculously righted himself and glared. "Bai Jove! What evah did you do that for, you wuff wottah?"

"To prevent you slipping off into a complete state of coma, old bean!" answered Blake severely. "For the last ten minutes you've done nothing but gasp like a blessed landed fish and talk to yourself, and if you think I'm going to allow that—"

"Pway don't wot! I decline to believe that I bore any wesemblance to a landed fish! Unless I weceive an apology you will force me to administah a feahful thwashin!"

"How shall I do it?" asked Blake. "On bended knees, eating the dust?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Uttahhah widic!" sniffed the swell of the Fourth. "You know vewy well that I only want you to say 'I'm sowwy!'"

"Right-ho, then!" grinned Blake. "I'm sowwy! That do?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus nodded, though still a little suspicious.

"Vewy well. Undah the cires, I accept the apology. Pway be more careful in futuuh, deah boy!"

"Rely on me! Next time I want to thump you I'll use a feather duster!" said Blake solemnly. "Now let's hear what's worrying you."

D'Arcy polished his monocle thoughtfully.

"I was not awah that I had a wowwied appeawance; but I must admit that I am feelin' a little perturbed. As the mattah is wathah confidensh, pewwaps we had bettah wun up to the studay befoah I talk about it."

"All serene!"

"Count us all in, Gus!" grinned Lowther, and the Terrible Three went up to the Fourth quarters with Blake & Co., and adjourned to Study No. 6 to hear what was disturbing the serenity of D'Arcy's placid demeanour.

"Now tell your uncles!" commanded Blake, when they had reached the seclusion of his celebrated apartment.

"It's about Gwunday's cousin," said Arthur Augustus. "You may have noticed that I betwayed a certain amount of surpise when I was introduced to him."

"Just a trifle!" nodded Lowther. "My impression was that you looked as if you were being introduced to some American gangster!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, deah boys, I assuah you this is no mattah for laughtah," remarked Arthur Augustus seriously. "As a mattah of fact, Lowthah is not vewy fah fwom the twuth. For a moment that was pwecisely how I felt."

"Eh?"

"Natuwally you are puzzled. But I had a vewy good weason for feelin' like it."

"What the thump—?"

"How on earth could Grundy's cousin remind you of crooks?" asked Tom Merry, in astonishment.

"I am just about to tell you, deah boy. The fact is, that on first seein' him face to face I thought that Jack Gwunday was the man who sowapped with me in the Wayland High Street last Wednesday. An' on thinkin' it ovah I feel suah that my first impression was wight!"

"You—you mean Julian Plummer?" stuttered Blake.

"Exactly, deah boy! What I am sayin' amounts to this—that Jack Gwunday and Julian Plummah are one an' the same person."

"M-m-my hat!"

For a few seconds the juniors stared breathlessly at the swell of the Fourth. Then there was a yell.

"Impossible!"

"Out of the question!"

"You're dreaming, old bean!"

"Must be!"

D'Arcy shook his head.

"Natuwally it seems wathah fah-fetched to you at first. But I pwide myself on my powahs of observation, an' I feel suah I have not gone off the wails this time."

"But—"

"My dear old Gus—"

"I wealise, of course, that it is a vewy sewious an' delicate mattah. But with a full wealisation of the sewiousness of what I am sayin', I wepeat that in my opinion Gwunday's cousin is the vewy man that stwuck me in the High Street."

"Well, my hat!"

Tom Merry scratched his curly head.

"This is the giddy limit, and no mistake! Personally, I don't quite see how it's possible."

"Nor I!"

"Same here!"

"It's—it's fantastic!" gasped Blake. "Surely, Gus, you can see for yourself that it's altogether beyond belief."

Grundy's cousin has only just arrived from Australia, to begin with."

"I am awah of that."

"Well, that puts the kybosh on it at once," said Herries. "Apart from that, Plummer is supposed to be clean-shaven, whereas this chap wears a moustache."

"That is so, deah boy."

"Then how in the name of goodness—"

"Pway don't ask me to explain it, Dig. I admit fwely that the ideah seems pwepestowous. Nevahtheless, I cannot get away fwom the fact that there is somethin' about Gwunday's cousin that makes me positive he is Plummah."

"But it can't be—simply can't!" hooted Blake. "Plummer is wanted for frauds committed in England months ago. Jack Grundy has only just landed. Look at the facts for yourself!"

"I have looked at them, deah boy. My impwession still weains."

"Then your impression must be wong!"

"It is just poss. But I feel that it is not w'ong!"

"But can't you see—"

"My poor, dear old bean—"

"Gus, old chap—"

Jack Blake & Co. and the Terrible Three joined forces in quite an imploring chorus. But Arthur Augustus remained adamant.

"I am sowwy, deah boys, but all you say cannot ewadicate the impwession I have weceived," he said firmly. "While appweciatin' your arguments, I must still adhere to my first opinion."

"Then you are an ass!"

"I beg to diffah, Blake!"

"A crass, crazy ass!" said Blake. "And if you're fathead enough to call in the police—"

"I do not pwopose to do that, deah boy. The posish is fah too delicate for such pwecipitate action."

"Well, if you had done so, I should have said you were a fit candidate for the nearest mental home!" growled Blake. "But you still think you're right?"

"Undoubtedly, deah boy!"

"Well, it'll have to go at that, then."

"Nothing more to be said!" grinned Dig. "You Shellfish stayin' to tea?"

"Pleasure!"

And the juniors set about preparing tea. Tea in Study No. 6 was usually a jolly meal; but there was a slightly strained atmosphere noticeable on this occasion. D'Arcy himself remained convinced that he was right. He had taken up his stand on the subject, and once Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had taken up a stand, wild horses would not drag him away from it. But D'Arcy's chums, to a man, continued to be Doubting Thomases.

CHAPTER 6.

What Baggy Overheard!

"I SAY, old chap!"

"Scat!"

Thus Bagley Trimble and George Alfred Grundy respectively.

Trimble had poked his head round the door of Study No. 3 at the very moment when Grundy and his guests had sat down to tea. Trimble had a habit of doing things like that.

"I've come—" said Trimble.

"Just so," nodded Grundy. "Now go!"

Trimble didn't go. Instead of going, he ingratiated his podgy presence into the study, and closed the door behind him.

"Lucky I understand my pals!" remarked Trimble, with a podgy grin. "Some fellows might have taken you seriously. But I know better. I knew, of course, that you'd want me to meet your Australian cousin."

"Friend of yours, George?" asked Uncle Grundy.

"No, he's jolly well not!" snorted Grundy. "And if he doesn't jolly well buzz off quickly—"

"He, he, he! George will have his little joke, you know, sir!" confided Trimble. "You're his uncle, of course. We've all heard of you. Most of the fellows call you Old Moneybags."

"What?" roared Uncle Grundy.

"Not me, of course. I'm too polite to say what I think," said Trimble cheerfully. "Pass the cake! And you're the cousin he's been boosting for weeks, sir? Well, you'll find I've got a lot in common with you."

"Indeed!" remarked Mr. Jack Grundy, looking far from flattered by the suggestion.

"I've got an uncle in Australia myself," explained Trimble, helping himself to half a cake. "Not that I think much of Australians, mind you! Not my class, if you ask me!"

"Look here, Trimble," said Grundy, in measured tones,

"I don't want to kick you down the passage before my guests, but if you don't get out—"

"I say, sir, you won't allow anything like that, will you?" asked Trimble, appealing to Grundy's uncle. "He's a fearful bully when you're not here—"

"What—what?" gasped Uncle Grundy.

"But I'm sure you'll keep him in hand until you're gone, won't you? Pass the ham!"

"Bless me!" exclaimed Uncle Grundy.

"Glad you barred those fatheads, Wilkins and Gunn, this time," went on Trimble, between mouthfuls of ham. "Second-raters, both of 'em! Just met 'em in the Hall, by the way. They told me they wouldn't come to tea now if you begged 'em to on hands and knees!"

"You silly ass!" roared Grundy.

"Oh, and they said they hoped you and your guests would choke yourselves!" said Trimble, as an afterthought.

"Shouldn't take much notice of that, though, old chap. They're jealous, that's all!"

"You—you—" stuttered Grundy.

Mr. Jack Grundy looked at him.

"Is your friend remaining, George?" he asked. "Don't let me interfere, of course, but you remember I said I wanted to talk business with your uncle, if we had time."

"So you jolly well will!" snorted Grundy. "Why, that was the very reason I asked Wilky and Gunn to take tea out. Look here, Trimble—"

"Pass the bread-and-butter, old chap!"

"I'll give you five seconds—"

"Can't congratulate you on your hospitality in this study!" sniffed Trimble. "So far, I've had to help myself to everything. Sit down and see to your guests, Grundy!"

"One!" said Grundy.

"He, he, he! I know it's just your little joke, old chap!"

"Two, three—"

"I—I say, old fellow—"

"Four, five—"

"Look here—"

"Now you'll go out on your neck!" hooted Grundy. "I've stood you so long for the sake of my guests. Now I'm through! Get up!"

"Whoooooop!" said Trimble.

What happened after that seemed like an earthquake to the Falstaff of the Fourth.

He felt himself grasped in a grip of iron by a pair of hands, then yanked out of his chair, then whirled into the air, then flung through space, and finally deposited, howling, some yards down the Shell passage.

"Yaroooooooh! Ow-wow-whoooooop!" shrieked Trimble.

"Now keep away, unless you want to be slaughtered!" roared Grundy.

After which dire threat the great man of the Shell retreated into Study No. 3, slammed the door, and locked it.

Trimble sat up, still howling.

"Ow! Beast! Whoooooop! Rotter! Yah!"

Then he rose to his feet, groaning at the effort, and stood cogitating for a moment.

There was a gleam in Trimble's little eyes now.

The free feed he had hoped to obtain in Grundy's study had vanished like a beautiful dream. But it occurred to him that he might possibly obtain something which to Trimble ranked second in importance to tuck—namely, private and confidential information.

Curiosity was Trimble's besetting sin. He had pricked up his podgy ears at Jack Grundy's reference to his intended discussion of private business. Now that he was deprived of physical comfort in the shape of tuck, it occurred to him that he might console himself with spiritual comfort in the shape of private knowledge of the affairs of the Grundy family.

After a cautious look round to see that he was not observed, he tiptoed back to Study No. 3, and quietly bent down till his ear was level with the keyhole.

Grundy's cousin was speaking, and Trimble caught the phrase: "Australian tin mines." That didn't sound very exciting. But he listened on.



So engrossed was Tubby at the keyhole, that the first intimation of the Terrible Three's presence was a kick he received from Tom Merry!

"All that's needed, you see," Mr. Jack Grundy was saying, "is a little more capital." I've sunk forty thousand pounds in the venture, but the whole scheme is coming to nothing unless I get another twenty thousand."

"Then you'll have to float a company," Uncle Grundy remarked.

"Exactly! I have already taken all the necessary steps in Melbourne. In fact, I am authorised to raise up to a hundred thousand by an issue of shares. I could get that to-morrow in London for the asking."

"Don't doubt it for a moment, my boy," Trimble heard Uncle Grundy say. "Sounds a pretty good thing to me."

"That hardly describes it, uncle." The man from Australia was speaking again. "Wangawella Tin Mines are more than a pretty good thing—they're the finest money-making proposition that was ever put up to an investor."

"Good chance for you, uncle," George Alfred Grundy put in. "You've lost a lot that you want to make up."

"Exactly what I was thinking, George."

Trimble's eyes opened wide. The Falstaff of the Fourth

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was the most impecunious youth at St. Jim's. Schemes for making money had a tremendous fascination for him, and Jack Grundy's scheme sounded particularly attractive.

"You see, it's not known yet," explained Grundy's cousin. "So far, I've managed to keep my secret, in the hope that I could manage on my capital. But that's not possible; so the profits will have to be shared, and somebody's going to make big money out of it."

"Why not keep it in the family?" asked Grundy.

There was a laugh from the Australian cousin.

"Well, that's up to you. A twenty thousand investment to-day may be worth fifty thousand in a couple of months. If you want to come into it—"

"My hat! It's too good to be missed, uncle!"

"Then do you mean you're seriously prepared to let me take up shares in the concern?" asked Uncle Grundy.

"That is just what I do mean. But you'll have to be quick about it. The need is urgent, you see. If you can let me have an open cheque by, say, next Wednesday—"

"I think I can do that, Jack. Naturally, I shall want to go into details first, though."

"Naturally. You'll find I can satisfy every—"

At that point the conversation ended suddenly for Trimble. So engrossed had the Falstaff become in the affairs of the Wangawella Tin Mines that he had not heard the approach of the Terrible Three, just back from tea with Blake & Co. The first intimation he received of their arrival was, therefore, a well-aimed kick in the rear portion of his anatomy from Tom Merry.

"Whoooooop!" said Trimble, not for the first time that afternoon.

"That'll teach you not to go in for eavesdropping in these parts, fatty!" said Tom severely. "Now buzz!"

Trimble "buzzed" as fast as his little fat legs would

carry him. He paused at the corner of the passage to deliver an elegant valediction in the shape of:

"Yah! Beasts!"

Then he vanished in the direction of the Fourth quarters, groaning at intervals, but visualising in his mind the amount of money that was to be made out of the tin mines of distant Australia.

CHAPTER 7.

Fishy!

"Gussy, old chap—"

Trimble rolled into Study No. 6 a few minutes later, and thus addressed Arthur Augustus. The swell of the Fourth, who was now alone in the study, looked up from his book with a frown.

"Weally, Twimble! How many more times am I to remind you that I permit that familiawity only to my friends?"

"Well, I am your friend, ain't I?" asked Trimble, parking his podgy person in the armchair by the fire. "When you've heard what I've come for, I fancy you'll be only too glad to admit it, too."

"I am afwaid, my deah Twimble, that—"

"Don't interrupt me, old chap. I want to talk business," said Trimble briskly. "How'd you like to make ten thousand pounds or so quickly?"

"What?"

"Thought I'd make you sit up and take notice!" grinned the Falstaff of the Fourth. "I suppose your family are like all us aristocrats—taxed out of existence, and so on. Your pater would be jolly glad to make ten thou without any trouble, I know. Well, I'll show him how to make it."

"Bai Jove! You—you'll show my patah how to make ten thousand, I'm putting it very moderately. It may be pottay, Twimble?"

"Not a bit of it! I mean it. What's more, when I say ten thousand, I'm putting it very moderately. It may be thirty or forty thousand—anything. That'll depend on you. Anyway, it'll be big money."

"Gweat pip!"

"Now let's get down to brass tacks," said Trimble. "I'm not putting you up to this out of sheer kind-heartedness, of course. True, we've a lot in common. Blood tells, doesn't it, old fellow? But, naturally, I shall expect something out of the deal. Do you think the old hunks would go fifty-fifty over it?"

"B-b-bai Jove! Arc—are you wefewwin' to my patah, Twimble?"

"Exactly. If you think he would—"

"In that case, you diswespectful young wottah, I would advise you to weter to him in a different mannah befoah I am tempted to give you a feahful thwashin'!"

Trimble jumped.

"Oh! Sorry, old chap! Naturally, I shouldn't have called him that to you. Anyway, do you think he'll dish out fifty per cent of the profits when they're made?"

Arthur Augustus stared.

"I fail to see what pwofits you are talkin' 'bout, Twimble. So fah, my impvession is that you are suffewin' fvwom a bwainstorm or a mental collapse."

"Why, you silly ass—"

"Eithah that," said the swell of the Fourth severely, "or else you are invitin' me to participate in a dishonest twansection. I twust, Twimble, that it is not the lattah?"

"Oh, really, Gussy! It's all fair, square, and above-board, of course!" answered Trimble, with a sniff. "If it wasn't, I wouldn't be in it, anyway—that's a cert." The podgy Fourth-Former sank his voice to a thrilling whisper. "In confidence, old chap, I'll tell you straight away that friends of mine are going to invest scores of thousands in it. There!"

"But—but what are you talkin' about, you duffah?"

"Tin mines!" said Trimble. "Tin mines in Australia that are going to be one of the best money-making propositions that was ever put up to an investor! See?"

D'Arcy shook his head.

"I'm afwaid I don't. If you will kindlay explain—"

"That's what I'm doing, only you're too soft to understand!" snorted Trimble. "I've got first-hand information about some tin mines in Australia that just need a little extra capital to turn 'em into gold mines—figuratively speaking, of course! This is where you come in, or, rather, your pater—savvy?"

Arthur Augustus gazed at the Falstaff through his monocle.

"You are sewiously suggestin', Twimble, that my patah should invest thousands of pounds in some Austwalian tin mines on your advice?"

"Just that!" grinned Trimble. "Just that and nothing



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"Bai Jove!"

"For whatever he likes to invest—say, twenty thousand pounds—then I'll take it over and turn it into forty or fifty thousand in a couple of months or so. Get the idea?"

"Gweat pip!"

"It'll be putting money into his pocket and doing me a good turn at the same time, you see," explained Trimble. "That's what I call business. Now, Gus, what about putting it up to him?"

Arthur Augustus rose from his seat, frowning.

"I am unwillin' to believe, Twimble, that you are deliberately twyin' to wob my patah—"

"Eh?" gasped Trimble indignantly

"Your pwoposition is fah too ewide to be a delibewate attempt at wobbewy, anyway. Since you have cawwed the mattah to this point, however, I intend to inqiah into it. What is the name of this tin mine concern you are interestwed in, Twimble?"

Trimble snorted.

"Like your cheek, insulting a chap who's here to put you on a winner! But I don't mind telling you the name of the firm, of course. It's the Wangawella Tin Mines."

"The—the what?"

"The Wangawella Tin Mines," repeated Trimble. "Don't ask me to spell it; Grundy's cousin didn't tell 'em—"

"Gwunday's cousin?" asked Arthur Augustus sharply. "How does Gwunday's cousin come into the mattah?"

Trimble bit his fat lip. His tongue had run on too far, as it usually did.

"D-did I say Grundy's cousin?" he stammered. "That was a slip of the tongue, of course. He doesn't come into it at all. Perish the thought, old chap! Now, look here—"

Arthur Augustus grasped the fat junior by the shoulder and shook him.

"I demand to know at once, Twimble, how Gwunday's cousin comes into this affaih!"

Trimble gasped.

"Ow! Leggo, you rotter! You're sh-sh-shaking me! I tell you G-G-Grundy's cousin d-d-didn't—"

"The twuth, Twimble! How did you find out about this biznays?"

"Ow! It's private; I'm not allowed to tell!" hooted the Falstaff of the Fourth. "If you imagine for a single moment that I listened outside Grundy's door—"

"So you have been eavesdwoopin', eh?" remarked Arthur Augustus grimly. "What you have told me then was what you ovaheard?"

"Nothing of the kind. If Tom Merry tells you I was listening outside Grundy's study, he'll be fibbing!" babbled Trimble. "Don't run away with the idea that I got the information that way; I didn't!"

"Gwunday's cousin, I undahstand, was discussin'—"

"He wasn't! He didn't mention the blessed mines, and he didn't try to get Grundy's uncle to put twenty thousand into 'em!" roared Trimble desperately. "Anyone who tells you he wants old Grundy's cheque by next Wednesday is pulling your leg!"

Arthur Augustus released the Falstaff and sat down again. His face was very grave.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured.

Trimble's revelation, coming on top of his suspicions concerning Grundy's cousin, had set D'Arcy's brain fairly buzzing.

Twenty thousand pounds! It was a large amount. So that was what Grundy's cousin was after! Arthur Augustus forgot Trimble altogether, and stared into the fire, his heart fairly thumping.

It was possible, of course, that everything was in order. Quite conceivably Cousin Grundy was offering his uncle the chance of investing some money in a genuine concern. But—

D'Arcy remembered his deep suspicions that Jack Grundy and Julian Plummer were the same person—remembered also that Julian Plummer was "wanted" by the police for practising the "confidence trick."

It was fishy—very fishy indeed, from D'Arcy's point of view.

Suddenly the swell of the Fourth reached out for pen and notepaper.

Trimble, who had been recovering his breath in the arm-chair, blinked at his host rather hopefully again.

"I say, Gussy, if you're going to write to your pater, be sure to tell him— Whoooooop! Wharrer you doing?"

"Thwovin' you out of the studay, deah boy!" replied Arthur Augustus grimly.

But by that time the explanation was really superfluous for Trimble was well out of the study and reposing on the floor of the passage!

D'Arcy returned to the table and quickly scribbled out a letter. The letter was to his brother, Lord Conway. This is what D'Arcy wrote:

"Dear Conway,—A very important matter has cropped up on which I need urgent information. Can you possibly make inquiries in the City immediately regarding a company working the Wangawella (?) Tin Mines in Australia, and let me know by return whether it is a going concern, who is behind it, and what are the prospects of the company? I have no time to explain my reason for asking these questions, but give you my personal assurance that it is a matter of great seriousness.

With kind and respectful regards,

"Your affectionate brother

"ARTHUR."

Arthur Augustus sealed the letter and went down to the School pillar-box to post it. Then he returned to the House, smiling grimly.

The swell of the Fourth felt that he was on the verge of a startling discovery.

CHAPTER 8.

Gussy's Resolve!

"B USAY, old scout?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy put his head round the door of Study No. 3 in the Shell passage, and asked that question.

It was on the Tuesday morning following the visit of the Grundys to St. Jim's and the juniors had just come up from breakfast.

The swell of the Fourth had stopped in the Hall to read a letter that was awaiting him on the rack. Having read that letter he had gone straight to Grundy's study.

"Not exactly," said Grundy, in reply to his visitor's question. "Got to get down into class in five minutes, though, like everyone else. What do you want?"

D'Arcy closed the door after him.

"I twust you won't think me an interfewin' boundah, Gwunday—"

"You're certainly not that in the ordinary way," remarked Grundy, with a stare. "What's the idea?"

Arthur Augustus coloured a little. He found his mission rather a delicate one.

"Afiah you have heard what I have to say, deah boy, you may possibly think I am interfewin' in mattahs which do not concern me. Pway accept my assuance that what I have done has been done with the sinceah desiah to pwotect your interwests."

"Dashed if I understand what you're talking about!" exclaimed Grundy. "Still, go ahead."

"It's about your cousin."

"Jack Grundy, the Australian chap?"

"That's the man I mean, deah boy. I undahstand that neithah you nor your uncle have evah seen him befoah, an' that you did not even know what he was like till you met him last Saturday."

"Quite right," nodded Grundy. "But what the thump—"

"Supposin' by some mischance your cousin failed to awwive last week, isn't it just feasible that an impostah could make you believe that he was the gentleman you were expecting?"

George Alfred Grundy fairly blinked.

"Blessed if I can see what you're getting at. It's just possible, I suppose, but—"

"Vewy well, Gwunday. Havin' got so fah, I will get down to bwass tacks. My firm belief is this; that the gentleman you entahtained heah last Saturday was not Jack Gwunday at all, but a w'etched impostah!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"That sounds surpwisin' to you, natuwally, deah boy." Grundy gasped.

"Surprising? It's more than that. It's incredible! Downright impossible, in fact! Look here, D'Arcy, if you're trying to pull my leg—"

"I assuah you I am twyin' to do nothin' of the kind. Let me tell you who I think your guest of last Saturday weally was."

Then Arthur Augustus related his experience of the previous Wednesday in Wayland, and told of the dark suspicions he had felt on meeting the supposed Jack Grundy outside the football pavilion.

Grundy listened in open-mouthed astonishment.

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"Then—then you're actually suggesting that my cousin is that crook Plummah?" he stammered at last.

"Hardly that, deah boy. What I am suggestin' is that your cousin has not turned up yet, an' that this wottah Plummah is posin' as the weal Jack Gwunday."

"Impossible!"

"I don't agree, Gwunday."

"Completely and absolutely impossible, I tell you!" roared Grundy, excitedly. "It's the pottiest, balmiest, craziest idea I ever heard in my life!"

"I wish I could think so, deah boy; but I'm vewy much afwaid that it's by no means so wild as that. Now there's somethin' more—"

"Bosh! Bosh and piffle!" hooted Grundy. "If the chap that came here last Saturday is not my cousin, how the thump do you explain his having all my cousin's papers?"

Arthur Augustus started a little.

"He did pwoduce some papahs, then?"

"His pockets were bulging with 'em, fathead!" snorted the great man of the Shell. "He'd the letters I've written to him when he was out in Australia and a passport—"

"Bai Jove! You saw his passport, deah boy?"

"I did. And stacks of papers concerned with his tin mines in Australia, too—"

Arthur Augustus polished his monocle thoughtfully.

"Vewy well. In that case, I can only conclude that the impostah you are dealin' with is even more clevah than I had pweviously thought."

"You still stick to it, after that?" howled Grundy.

"Why, you must be daft! How the thump do you explain his passport—with his own photo stuck in it?"

"I can only conclude that that was wangled, deah boy. Vewy pwobably it was your weal cousin's genuine passport with the original photo taken out an' the impostah's stuck in."

"Well, my hat!"

"It sounds fantastic, possibly, but I want you to believe, Gwunday, that I have excellent weasons for thinkin' it is twue."

"If you call your potty imagination an excellent reason—"

"My imagination, deah boy, is not the only weason."

Arthur Augustus paused for a moment. "Once again, I ask you not to think I am interfewin' in mattahs which do not concern me, but I must tell you that quite by chance I happened to heah of the investment which your supposed cousin offahed your uncle. I have taken the liberty of inqwin' into the affaih!"

"You have, have you?"

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"My bwothah, Lord Conway, as you may possibly know, is wathah well up in City mattahs. I wote him last week about the Wangawella Tin Mines—"

"Why, you cheeky ass—"

D'Arcy blushed.

"I should not dweam of doin' such a thing in the ordinawy way, I assuah you; but with the possibility of your uncle losin' a vast sur of monay I considahed I was justified."

"But he's not going to lose money, you crass ass!" howled Grundy. "As you seem to know about it, there's no harm in my telling you that he's going to make money, not lose it—make money by the thousand! You hear me?"

Arthur Augustus placed on the table the letter, which he had brought up with him.

"I heah you, deah boy. Pwewaps when you wead that lettah you will change your mind about the thousands he is going to make. Wead it!"

Grundy picked up the letter, and read:

"Dear Arthur,—Your letter naturally surprised me, but since you tell me the matter is serious, I have looked up the Wangawella Tin Mines without waiting to learn your reason for asking about them. At present these mines are owned by a Mr. J. Grundy, who has applied for permission to float a private company in Melbourne. No sanction has yet been granted, and no shares therefore exist. Anyone who asks you to invest money in them is therefore bent on one thing only—robbery! Beware of the confidence trickster! Let me know if I can help you further."

"Your affectionate brother,
"CONWAY."

"Well?" asked Arthur Augustus.

Grundy snorted.

"Well, it's all right, of course. This letter proves it!"

"Bai Jove! My ideah was that it pwoved the weverse, deah boy!"

"Owned by Mr. J. Grundy." The thing's as fair and square as it jolly well could be!" growled the great man of the Shell. "Dashed if I know what you're arguing about!"

"But don't you see, deah boy," exclaimed D'Arcy, in exasperation, "that nobody has any authority to waise monay in connection with the mines? Can't you undahstand that this impostah—"

"He's not an impostor!"

"Can't you see that he's twyin' to swindle your uncle out of ewery penny he thwows into the concern?" demanded the swell of the Fourth. "Isn't it cleah to you that the wottah is goin' to disappeah as soon as he has obtained the cash?"

"No, it isn't—and, what's more, I'm getting fed-up with the way you're slandering my cousin!" roared Grundy.

"If you don't shut up—"

"I wefuse to withdraw what I pwactically know to be the twuth." Arthur Augustus pocketed his brother's letter. "Then I take it, Gwunday, that you do not intend to warn your uncle on the stwength of what I have told you?"

"Dead right!" snorted Grundy. "Think I want nunky to get the idea that I've gone off my rocker? That's what he'd jolly well think, and I wouldn't blame him, either!"

D'Arcy nodded.

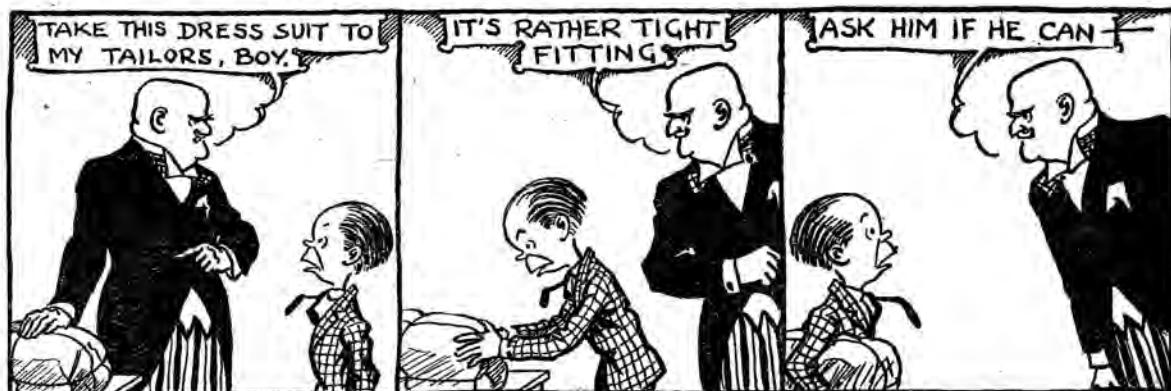
"Vewy well. That bein' so, deah boy, there is only one thing left for me to do—that is, to see your uncle myself."

"Why, you potty idiot—"

"Pway don't use oppwbowious expwessions, Gwunday! When I came heah I thought I should be able to make you see sense. I have failed, but I am wesolved that your uncle is not goin' to lose twenty thousand through your stupidity. I will see your uncle to-day. Pwewaps latah you will realise how sillay you have been!"

With that Arthur Augustus quitted Grundy's study, his cheeks burning. It had caused him a great effort to go to Grundy's study and confess to having concerned himself

Potts, the Office-Boy!



in that junior's private affairs, and he felt keenly humiliated at Grundy's failure to see it in the right light.

In spite of his humiliation, however, he was more than ever resolved now to see the thing through to the end.

The bell for classes was ringing as he went down the Shell passage, but D'Arcy did not go to his Form-room. Instead, he made his way to Masters' Passage and tapped on the door of Mr. Railton.

The Housemaster of the School House was in. He looked up in surprise as Arthur Augustus walked in.

"Well, D'Arcy? Time you were in the Form-room!"

"I realise that, sir; but a mattah of gweat importance has cwopped up. I have come to ask your permish to take the aftahnoon off."

Mr. Railton elevated his eyebrows slightly.

"This is rather an unusual request, D'Arcy. You are prepared, of course, to give me your reason for it?"

D'Arcy hesitated.

"I would wathah you did not ask, sir. I have no wish to be diswespectful, of course, but the mattah in its pwesent stage is confidential, an' a little peculiar to explain, anyway."

Mr. Railton hid a smile.

"Really, D'Arcy? In that case, are you prepared to tell me where you intend to go?"

"There is no harm in that, sir, certainly. I intend to visit Gwunday's uncle at his wesidence, Wed Gables, Bwamleigh."

The Housemaster scratched his chin in perplexity.

"But surely, D'Arcy, you already have permission, with other juniors, to go there to-morrow afternoon?"

"That is so, sir. Nevahtheless, a mattah of weally urgent, sewious importance has cwopped up which demands that I go there to-day also."

Mr. Railton drummed his desk thoughtfully.

"Well, D'Arcy, it is very unusual, but since I know you to be a well-conducted lad, who would not ask a favour unless there was a genuine reason behind it, I feel inclined to grant your request."

"Bai Jove! That's weally good of you, Mr. Wailton, an' I deeply appweciate it! As one gentleman to anothah—"

"That will do, I think!" interrupted Mr. Railton, with a smile. "I will acquaint your Form master of my decision, and, subject to his consent, you may consider yourself at liberty from morning lessons until look-up to-night."

The Housemaster rose, and Arthur Augustus went to the Fourth Form room, rejoicing.

Had he foreseen what was in store for him when he reached Bramleigh he would perhaps have postponed his rejoicing. Fortunately for his peace of mind, however, that knowledge, for the time being, was hidden from him.

CHAPTER 9.

Trapped!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY left St. Jim's on his bike, which was none the worse for its misadventure at the hands of Mr. Plummer, soon after morning lessons that day. His chums were astonished at his departure, but he had to go without relieving their astonishment. There was no time to stop for explanations at St. Jim's.

D'Arcy pedalled away down the Rylcombe lane in great good spirits. He had a long ride before him, but it was

a fine brisk day, ideal for a cycle run—and the swell of the Fourth liked fresh air. Apart from that, he was glad that the puzzling affair of Julian Plummer and Jack Grundy seemed to be reaching a climax at last. Once he had convinced Grundy's uncle of the truth of his allegations, the police would be called in and the whole mystery cleared up. Only when that happened would his own line of conduct be justified.

Pausing only for a hurried lunch at Westwood, Arthur Augustus cycled on tirelessly towards the Hampshire border. The miles slipped away steadily under his whirring wheels, and early in the afternoon he found himself nearing the village of Bramleigh, Uncle Grundy's country retreat.

The swell of the Fourth knew he was near his destination when he came in sight of a derelict windmill, which stood on the brow of a hill overlooking the village, and which he remembered having seen when previously in the district.

A pedestrian was just turning off the road on to the footpath that led to the windmill. Arthur Augustus slowed down to inquire the way to Red Gables, and the pedestrian faced round. As he did so, the St. Jim's junior recognised him.

"Bai Jove!" gasped the swell of the Fourth.

It was the very man he had come to Bramleigh to expose!

Mr. Jack Grundy—or, as D'Arcy suspected him to be, Mr. Julian Plummer—started violently on recognising the newcomer. Then he rapidly regained his composure and smiled by way of greeting.

"Why, if it's not Cousin George's young friend!" he exclaimed. "I thought you weren't due here till to-morrow?"

Arthur Augustus dismounted. His instinct was to ride on, but he realised that by doing that he would arouse suspicions in the mind of the impostor. That possibility he wanted to avoid at all costs.

"Quite twue, Mr. Gwunday," he said, as carelessly as he could. "I twust I shall be heah with the west, as awwanged. In the meantime, havin an aftahnoon fwee, I cycled ovah with a view to findin' out whethah it's a pwactical pwoposition for us all to come by woad to-mowwow."

"Your energy is most commendable, my friend!" laughed Grundy's supposed cousin. "And now you've got here, I assume you will come up to Red Gables and see uncle?"

"Yaas, I intend to do that. Pewwaps I had bettah push on."

"No need to do that, Mr. D'Arcy. Take the short cut across the footpath with me; it's much nearer."

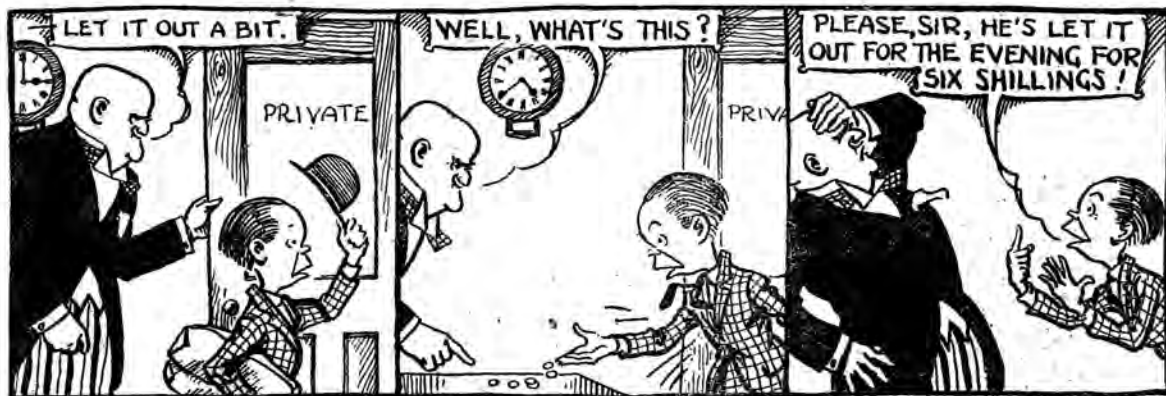
D'Arcy hesitated; but he could think of no reasonable excuse to dodge the man's company, so eventually he nodded and wheeled his machine through the gate.

They walked up the footpath side by side. D'Arcy's host seemed to be in a most amiable mood; he chatted freely about cycling, the English countryside, windmills, and quite a number of topics. Arthur Augustus, on the other hand, felt awkward and ill-at-ease. Doubts were beginning to assail him as to whether, after all, he might have made a mistake. The bare thought of that, after the uncompromising way in which he had committed himself on the subject, was sufficient to make D'Arcy's hair stand on end.

They drew level with the old windmill, and D'Arcy looked at it with a certain amount of interest.

"Fine old building," remarked Grundy's supposed cousin.

Hardly Suit-able!



"Untenanted, of course. Perhaps you'd like to look inside, Mr. D'Arcy?"

D'Arcy looked at the speaker sharply. He thought he detected a sudden change in the tone of voice.

"I'd wathah not, thank you, Mr. Gwunday," he replied briefly.

"Jack Grundy" stopped.

"One moment. I am particularly keen on your seeing the inside of the place. I shall insist, in fact."

"Bai Jove! Insist?"

"Exactly; insist!" repeated the man, placing one hand on D'Arcy's shoulder. "You will kindly accompany me inside the building at once."

"Gwcat pip! An' suppose I wefuse?"

D'Arcy's guide laughed.

"You won't refuse! See this?"

Something glittered in his hand, and Arthur Augustus started.

"Bai Jove! You feahful wottah, are you thwateenin' me—"

"Threatening you and prepared to carry out the threat if you are fool enough not to take warning! This is an automatic; and I'm a desperate man. See?"

"Bai Jove! Then I was wight?" gasped the swell of the Fourth. "You are Julian Plummah, as I knew you were all along!"

The man with the automatic smiled.

"Dead right! I congratulate you on your perspicacity! Last Saturday I thought I had hoodwinked you; but as soon as I saw you to-day I knew that something had gone wrong with the works! Now, I'm afraid, you'll have to suffer the inconvenience of spending twenty-four hours in this interesting old windmill!"

"Bai Jove! You can't—"

"Pardon! I can!" interrupted Julian Plummer, with a mocking smile. "The proof of that statement lies in the fact that I have already had one man locked up here for the best part of a week."

"The weal Jack Gwunday!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"Really, my friend, your perspicacity is amazing! If you were as good a liar as you are a thinker you might even have convinced me of the innocence of your motives in Bramleigh to-day! But enough of this gossip! Get in!"

"I wefuse!"

"Get in, I tell you, if you value your life!" snarled the confidence trickster, the last vestige of his insincere politeness vanishing now. "Think I'll stand for nonsense from a schoolboy in the game I'm playing? Wheel that bike through the door—now!"

Arthur Augustus made to turn away, as though obeying, then, with a suddenness that might well have taken his opponent by surprise, dropped the bike and hit out.

It was a move that deserved to succeed. But, unhappily, Plummer was well on his guard. Perhaps it was that his encounter with D'Arcy in the Wayland High Street had given him a wholesome respect for the swell of the Fourth. Whatever the reason, he was ready, and dodged the blow easily.

Another instant, and a cold rim of steel was pressing into D'Arcy's neck.

"March, you young fool! You can't pull off that stuff with me!"

"Oh! Bai Jove!" gasped the swell of the Fourth.

And this time he marched, without further attempts to get away. Plummer's automatic was not to be argued with.

He wheeled his bike through the low doorway leading into the windmill, and deposited it on a pile of rubbish inside, then, with his captor keeping well beside him, ascended the stairs.

Right at the top of the building was a locked door. This Plummer unlocked and opened.

D'Arcy walked in. In the dim light he could at first see nothing; then, as his eyes became accustomed to the gloom, he perceived on the floor the bound and gagged figure of a man.

He turned to the confidence trickster, his eyes fairly blazing.

"Soundwel! Can't you see this man must be suffewin' tortuah, twussed up like this?"

Plummer laughed harshly.

"Unfortunate. But it can't be helped. Anyway, by this time to-morrow he should be free again. My work comes to an end then, you see. Your hands, please, Mr. D'Arcy!"

"Wuffian—"

"Thank you!" smiled Plummer, pinning D'Arcy's arms together and slipping a length of cord round them. "Now, do you mind sitting down, so that I can do the same with your ankles?"

"I uttably wefuse—"

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"Then I must use force!"

The man's foot shot out and curled round his prisoner's ankles, and Arthur Augustus crashed to the floor with a bump and a yell.

Within a couple of minutes he was secured just as surely as the real Jack Grundy.

Plummer then went to a little cupboard and produced food in the shape of bread and cheese and apples, after which he took the gag from his prisoner's mouth and released his hands.

"Now, Mr. Grundy! Eat well, for this may be your last meal before to-morrow afternoon!"

Jack Grundy looked up with a glare that reminded Arthur Augustus very much of the Grundy he knew at St. Jim's.

"You dirty toad!" he roared. "What's your game now? Who's this boy?"

"A friend of your schoolboy cousin whom I have found it necessary to keep here for the short time that remains before I leave England!" replied the crook, with a smile. "Perhaps you would like to talk to each other now; as I shall be compelled to gag you again, you won't get the chance after I leave you."

"Bai Jove! There are certainly one or two things I should like to know, Mr. Gwunday," remarked Arthur



For a second or two the huge car zigzagged wildly, then, as Jack

Augustus. "I am D'Arcy, of St. Jim's. This soundwel, in case you are not already awah of it, is impersonatin' you."

"I know that much!" growled Jack Grundy. "And when I do lay hands on the dirty, low crook—"

"Yaas, but what I want to know is how the wottah got you beah."

Grundy's cousin helped himself to bread and cheese and answered, eating.

"That's easily told. I arrived at Southampton earlier than I had anticipated. I hired a car and drove towards St. Jim's, hoping to be able to collect Cousin George and bring him on to Bramleigh for a family reunion."

"Bai Jove! An' this soundwel held you up?"

"Asked me for a lift!" corrected Jack Grundy. "I wish he had held me up; I'd have knocked him senseless then! But he simply asked me for a lift, got to know something about me as we talked, and then knocked me over the head. That's all I remember till I woke up here!"

D'Arcy nodded.

"That makes ewerythin' as cleah as daylight. The wottah saw the possibilities when he heard your stowy an'

decided then an' there to change his identity an' bring off a great coup in the bargain."

"Well spoken, Sherlock Holmes junior!" said Plummer, with a cynical laugh. "I must say it has been easy. Fortunately, Mr. Grundy, you carried enough papers on you to tell me everything I wanted to know. The job has been simplicity itself."

"Bai Jove! But it hasn't come off yet!"

"It will have come off completely within twenty-four hours from now," chuckled Julian Plummer. "Hurry up with that meal of yours, Mr. Grundy. I shall leave a message telling your uncle where you are when I disappear."



Jack Grundy took command, it leapt forward across the 'drome!

but you'll undoubtedly have a long wait before you eat again."

Jack Grundy growled like a caged lion, but waded into the food.

Plummer waited till he had finished. Then he slipped the cord over Mr. Grundy's wrists again and gagged both his prisoners, and quitted the little room.

The door closed behind him, and the two helpless captives heard his footsteps echoing down the wooden stairs.

They were trapped—trapped, it seemed, without a hope of escape. And the confidence trickster was free to bring to a successful conclusion the amazing coup he had planned.

CHAPTER 10.

Missing!

"WHERE'S Gussy?"

That was the question that was being asked among the juniors in the School House that evening.

Jack Blake & Co. had been asking it ever since dinner-time. They knew nothing of Lord Conway's letter, and

nothing of their chum's interview with Grundy after breakfast, so they were not in a position even to guess at the answer.

The Terrible Three heard of D'Arcy's mysterious disappearance at tea-time and could throw no light on the matter, though they had heard from Kildare that the swell of the Fourth was absent by permission till locking-up time. The only thing left to do was to wait until the wanderer returned, and to get the explanation from the fountain-head, so to speak.

But locking-up time came and Arthur Augustus did not put in an appearance. D'Arcy's chums began to wonder still more.

After prep, Jack Blake and his study-mates went down to the Junior Common-room. The Terrible Three had already arrived. They looked up inquiringly as the heroes of Study No. 6 came in. Blake shook his head.

"Nothing doing yet. What can have happened to the ass?"

"Give it up," said Tom Merry. "There'll be a row."

"Naturally. Railton will be waxy, after giving the duffer a free afternoon."

"Dashed if I can understand it at all," remarked Manners. "Gussy's not the sort to play games with the jolly old Housemaster. Bad form, from his point of view."

"Exactly. Makes me wonder if he's met with an accident," said Blake anxiously. "He went out on his bike, and the roads are jolly dangerous nowadays."

"Yet we'd soon hear if there had been an accident. First thing the police would do would be to ring up the school."

"Something in that. Then he's simply delayed at the place he went to."

"But where the thump did he go?" demanded Herries.

"Surely someone can tell us something!"

"Where's Baggy?" grinned Lowther. "Baggy's bound to know. Oh, here he is!"

"Look here, Lowther—"

"Whose keyholes have you been patronising lately?" asked Lowther solemnly. "Surely some keyhole in the House has yielded the secret of what's happened to Gussy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dashed if I see anything to cackle at!" snorted the Falstaff of the Fourth. "If you want to know anything about D'Arcy, I advise you to ask Grundy. They seemed to be having the dickens of a row after brekker, and I know D'Arcy went straight off to Railton afterwards."

"Sounds interesting," remarked Blake, with a frown. "I wonder—"

"My hat!" exclaimed Digby. "Surely it can't have anything to do with that fatheaded notion Gus had about Grundy's cousin?"

"Just what I was going to say," said Blake. "But—but—"

"Ask Grundy."

"Grundy wanted!" called out Tom Merry.

George Alfred Grundy looked round from the front of the fire, where he was engaged in his favourite pastime of laying down the law to Wilkins and Gunn.

"Want me, Tom Merry? If you're going to ask my opinion of your cricket team for next week—"

"I'm not!" laughed Tom. "What I want to know is, where D'Arcy has got to? Know anything about it?"

Grundy snorted.

"That idiot? He's gone to see my uncle, I fancy."

"What!"

"Fact!" said Grundy. "The loony has developed a crackpot notion that my cousin is an impostor, you know; he says my cousin's Plummer—the fellow the police are after. Of all the daft ideas—"

"My hat! Then that's what it is!" breathed Blake. "He's gone to lay that balmy theory before Grundy's uncle!"

"Great pip!"

"Well, that's that; but why is he so late?" asked Tom Merry. "That doesn't solve the question."

"I know!" said Trimble excitedly. "The rotter's jolly well double-crossed me! He's probably gone home to raise money to invest in Grundy's cousin's tin mines!"

"How the thump—" gasped Grundy, staring at the Falstaff in amazement.

"That's the thanks I get for putting him on to a jolly good thing!" roared Trimble. "After I told him Grundy's uncle was going to invest twenty thousand in 'em!"

"What's that?" asked Tom Merry in astonishment.

"The rotter chucked me out on my neck! And now he's sneaking behind me to buy some shares, and make profits he ought to divide with me!" almost wept the Falstaff of the Fourth. "Look here, you chaps—"

"Well, my hat!"

Tom Merry and Blake exchanged startled glances. This was something new to them. They began to see something more behind D'Arcy's disappearance than they had been able to see before.

"How did you get to know all this, Trimble?" asked Tom Merry.

Grundy joined the group, his eyes gleaming.

"That's what I want to know! If you've been listening in, Trimble—"

Trimble backed away hurriedly.

"Oh eriky! Nothing of the kind, old chap; I wouldn't dream of it. After I came out of your den the other day I went straight back to the Fourth passage. I didn't come back and tie up my shoelace outside your study!"

"Why, that's just where we found you!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Remember my kicking him, chaps?"

"What—ho!"

"So that's it, is it?" roared Grundy. "Eavesdropping outside my study when I'm entertaining my guests! Come here and take your gruel, you fat rotter!"

"Ow! Keepimoff! I say, you chaps—"

Bump!

Trimble crashed as George Alfred Grundy flung himself at him. Another instant and Grundy was industriously engaged in banging Trimble's head on the floor, while a series of wild howls proceeded from the Falstaff of the Fourth.

Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud!

"Ow-wow! Whoop! Yoooop! Look here—" shrieked Trimble.

Then he was saved from further damage by the sudden arrival of Mr. Railton. There was a warning buzz of "Cave!" and Grundy jumped to his feet hurriedly, while Trimble crawled away and took refuge in a corner.

Apparently Mr. Railton was preoccupied, for he did not appear to notice the commotion. He signalled to Grundy.

"Grundy, I understand that D'Arcy was visiting your uncle this afternoon. I presume the reason for his visit was known to you?"

Grundy's rugged face creased up into a smile.

"Yes, sir."

"Is there any reason why he should have been delayed to this late hour?"

"None whatever; I shouldn't imagine he'd be likely to stay long, sir."

Mr. Railton nodded.

"Very well. What is your uncle's telephone number?"

"Bramleigh 15. Are you going to ring him up then, sir?"

Mr. Railton nodded.

"I shall do so at once. If D'Arcy left Bramleigh at a reasonable time, he should have arrived back long before this."

The Housemaster hurried out and quite a crowd of juniors followed him to the Masters' room and waited outside to learn the result.

Mr. Railton emerged eventually, his face puzzled and grave.

"Any news, sir?" inquired Blake.

"Very extraordinary news, Blake," replied Mr. Railton. "D'Arcy never arrived at Bramleigh!"

"Oh!"

And that, as Monty Lowther put it, was that.

Bed-time came and still no D'Arcy.

The juniors went up to their dormitories looking serious and troubled. What had happened to their chum was a mystery. But that something serious had happened was almost beyond dispute now.

CHAPTER 11. Plummer's Coup!

MORNING came without any news of the missing junior. Anxiety as to his fate was general now. D'Arcy was a popular figure at St. Jim's and everybody hoped that nothing serious had befallen him; but their hopes were mixed with a great deal of fear.

After breakfast, Mr. Railton visited the Head to confer with him on the matter. During morning break P.-o. Crump from Rylcombe was observed tramping up from the gates with stately tread, which indicated that D'Arcy's disappearance was now the subject of official investigation—not that P.-o. Crump's investigations were likely to lead to very successful results.

The anxiety of D'Arcy's chums remained unallayed.

"What about Bramleigh?" asked Grundy, after dinner, as a crowd of juniors gathered in Hall to discuss the affair.

"We're going, in spite of Gus," answered Blake.

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"Or rather, because of Gus," corrected Tom Merry. "Bramleigh, after all, was Gussy's destination yesterday."

"He didn't get there," objected Grundy.

"It's my opinion, all the same," said Tom quietly, "that the solution to this mystery will be found near Bramleigh, rather than near St. Jim's. I, for one, am going with the intention of clearing up the question of what has happened to Gus."

"Same here!" said Blake grimly. "And if he has met with foul play—"

"What foul play is he likely to meet with in a place like Bramleigh?" demanded Grundy.

"Well, we won't go into that, just now. But if he has I shan't rest content till I lay hands on the one who's responsible."

"Hear, hear!"

"All serene!" said Grundy. "I'm as anxious as any of you to find D'Arcy, if it comes to that, but I'm dashed if I think he met with foul play in a sleepy village like Bramleigh. Anyway, we're going?"

"All of us!"

"Good enough, then. Wilkins and Gunn are coming along, too, and if you chaps can be ready in time, we'll all catch the two-thirty from Wayland. Agreed?"

The arrangement suited Tom Merry and his party all right, and after going upstairs for coats and caps, they met again in Hall and marched off in a body to Rylcombe Station.

Mr. Railton met them in the quad, and stopped them for a moment.

"You are visiting Bramleigh as arranged, then, boys?"

"Yes, sir!" answered Tom Merry, replying for the lot.

"No news of D'Arcy yet, I suppose, sir?"

The Housemaster shook his head.

"None whatever. The whole thing is very mystifying and disturbing. The police have the matter in hand and Inspector Skeat reports that D'Arcy had lunch in Westwood yesterday. After that, they have been unable to trace his movements."

"We are going to do our best to find out what's happened, anyway, sir."

Mr. Railton smiled faintly.

"You can hardly be expected to succeed where the police have failed, Merry. Nevertheless, I wish you success. I rely on you to remain together."

"We will, sir."

"Very well. Don't be late for call-over."

And Mr. Railton returned to the House, while the juniors proceeded to the gates.

They caught the two-thirty from Wayland without difficulty and after a somewhat tedious journey, broken by many stops at country towns and villages, eventually arrived at Bramleigh.

Here they alighted, and George Alfred Grundy led the way down to the village.

"Queer old windmill!" commented Blake, pointing to the building where, had he known it, his missing chum was imprisoned.

"Been disused for ages," Grundy said. "Matter of fact, it belongs to my uncle, with the land it stands on. They're going to pull it down one of these days, I believe."

And the subject of the windmill was dropped—rather unfortunately, for if the juniors had been interested enough to explore it they would quickly have ended the mystery of D'Arcy's disappearance!

The St. Jim's party reached Red Gables, a handsome, modern house standing in well-wooded grounds, and Grundy proudly led his guests up the drive to the house.

"Nunky runs a pretty decent show, by the look of things, Grundy," remarked Herries.

"You ought to see it in summer-time!" grinned Grundy. "Hallo! Car's outside, I see."

They entered the house and were met by Uncle Grundy in the hall. Grundy's genial relative was looking a little worried for once.

"How do you do, boys?" he greeted them. "Good journey?"

"Not bad for the district, sir," answered Tom Merry, with a smile. "You are well, I hope?"

Uncle Grundy nodded.

"Well—but worried. I want to know all about this business of young D'Arcy. He is still missing?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

"But why was he coming to see me?" demanded Mr. Grundy.

"Well, it's a funny business, uncle," replied Grundy. "Dunno whether I ought to tell you now or not. Where's Cousin Jack?"

"Just preparing to go. We have completed that deal that was discussed last Saturday, George, and Jack is running over to Westwood in my car to deposit the bonds I have handed him for those shares."

Grundy scratched his head. He had no doubts himself, in spite of D'Arcy's sensational statements, as to the genuineness of the transaction between his uncle and cousin, but his slow brain was rather occupied by the problem of whether he ought to hold up the affair for a little while.

"You've got the shares, uncle?" he asked.

Mr. Grundy laughed.

"Not yet. Things can't be done so swiftly as that. Naturally I have documents drawn up by my lawyer protecting my interests."

Tom Merry and Blake exchanged glances. They did not know enough of the tin mines transaction to understand all that had been said, but it occurred to them both that legal documents were not exactly full security for the safety of bonds. They remembered again D'Arcy's suspicions that "Jack Grundy" was in reality the swindler, Plummer. But neither knew quite how to interfere in this private matter, which, after all, was no concern of theirs.

"Jack Grundy" himself came on the scene just then, carrying an attache-case. He shook hands warmly with the St. Jim's visitors and inquired anxiously after D'Arcy.

"Well, I must leave you for half an hour or so," he remarked then. "We'll see what can be done about D'Arcy when I get back."

"You'll be back for tea, Jack?" inquired Mr. Grundy.

"Undoubtedly."

"Half a minute—" exclaimed Tom Merry.

But Uncle Grundy's guest did not appear to hear, and in all the circumstances, Tom did not feel that he was warranted in using force to detain him.

The unsuspected confidence trickster got into the car, with a final farewell wave of his hand to the group on the steps. He pressed the self-starter and released the clutch, and the big car rolled down the drive and through the open gates. "Jack Grundy," alias Julian Plummer, turned into the road and accelerated.

CHAPTER 12.

Escape I

"HELP!"

It was a cry from the little room at the top of the old windmill at Bramleigh.

Plummer's two captives, after endless efforts, had ridded themselves of their gags at last and were shouting in unison to attract attention.

Time had passed slowly for the prisoners of the mill. They had watched the darkening shadows of night, slept fitfully through the silent hours, and then wakened again as daylight streamed through the solitary window of their prison once more.

Hours of fruitless struggling with the bonds that Plummer had tied so securely had passed, leaving them weary and exhausted. Then, in the afternoon, first Jack Grundy and then Arthur Augustus had worked away their gags, so they were at least free to shout.

Apparently, however, they had achieved little by doing that. When Plummer had told D'Arcy that the footpath past the windmill was a short cut to the village, he had been guilty of a considerable misstatement. In point of fact, the footpath did not extend beyond the windmill itself, and the only passers-by were "hikers," who were rare birds at this time of the year.

Not once did the prisoners hear a footstep near the mill, and after almost shouting themselves hoarse, they began to realise that only by sheer luck could they hope to attract attention.

"Bai Jove! It weally seems hopeless!" remarked Arthur Augustus at last. "I'm afraid we shall have to find another way!"

"Looks like it!" growled Jack Grundy. "By gum! When I do lay hands on that scoundrel I'll—"

"Yaas, but I must again point out, Mr. Gwunday, that threats alone won't release us. Bai Jove! I wonder—" finished Arthur Augustus, a sudden idea occurring to him.

"Wonder what?"

"Gweat Scott. Now that our mouths are free, it might be done! Are your teeth strong, deah boy?"

"Strong as elephants!" said Mr. Jack Grundy. "Though what that has to do with us just now—"

"Let me tell you. Suppose I woll ova as fah as I can, do you think it poss for you to weach my hands with your teeth?"

Jack Grundy uttered a shout.

"By gum! You've got it! You mean me to chew at the cord round your wrists and get your hands free?"

"Pweicely! Is it poss, do you think?"

"It's a great idea, anyway! See how far you can roll."

Arthur Augustus rolled over as near to his fellow-prisoner as he could and forced his hands out to the last possible inch.

"Now twy!"

Jack Grundy strained until the veins in his forehead were standing out quite alarmingly. Nearer and nearer came his biggish mouth to D'Arcy's corded hands. His jaw moved and Arthur Augustus felt his teeth touching.

"Stick it, deah boy!"

A grunt was Jack Grundy's only reply. Quite evidently the Australian member of the family had all the doggedness of the English Grundys.

Anxious minutes followed, during which D'Arcy could feel his colleague's jaw working savagely against his flesh. The minutes lengthened into half an hour. Then at last perseverance was rewarded. One strand gave, then another, and another after that.

"Huwah!" shouted Arthur Augustus at last.

His hands were free. Victory was theirs!

At least, victory was temporarily theirs. One pair of hands being released, they were soon standing upright again, stretching their aching limbs and congratulating themselves on being able to move.

Then came the problem of getting out of the windmill.

It was no easy problem. They attacked the lock with pocket-knives, threw themselves against it, and even used the door of the cupboard as a battering-ram. All without result!

"We shall never budge it!" declared Jack Grundy, almost tearing his hair.

"The window!" said D'Arcy.

Both rushed to the window. At first escape that way seemed out of the question. Then Jack Grundy gave a whistle.

"The sails!"

"Bai Jove!"

"The only way out! And I'm going to try it!" said the Australian. "Stand clear, there!"

"But the danger—"

(Continued on the next page.)

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"Hang the danger!"

Jack Grundy, with a quick movement, flung back the window and scrambled out on the narrow ledge outside. Arthur Augustus watched, his heart in his mouth.

"Careful, desh boy!"

"I can do it; but don't you try. I'll come back for you later!"

Jack Grundy crouched for a spring. His muscles stiffened. A sharp movement; then he leaped.

There was a crash as the Australian landed on the sail, it smashed off at the axle, and hurtled to the ground!

For one awful moment Gussy feared that the broken sail would crash on top of Grundy's cousin and crush him to death. But luck was with him.

The sail landed on the ground, wavered for a moment, and then fell forward so that the man on it landed on top, shaken, but not badly hurt. In a second he was on his feet.

A moment later Arthur Augustus was out on the ledge.

There was a shout from below.

"Don't do it, you young fool!"

But a D'Arcy was not to be left behind, risk or no risk. Arthur Augustus ignored the plea and jumped.

He was lighter and more agile than his companion, and risky as the feat was, the swell of the Fourth merely regarded it as a specially difficult gymnastic trick. He timed his jump beautifully, and came down on one of the sails with effortless ease, and it bore his weight.

The prisoners were free with a vengeance now!

"And now for Red Gables!" said Jack Grundy. "You were a young fool, though!"

"Wats!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "Let's get down to the wood!"

They raced down to the road, inquired the way from a staring farm labourer, and then ran full-pelt into Bramleigh village.

"There's Wed Gables!" gasped Arthur Augustus, as Uncle Grundy's fine house came into view.

"And there's Plummer, driving out on his own!" panted Jack Grundy. "Hurry!"

GUSSY!"

It was a yell from the crowd on the steps of Red Gables.

"Gus, old chap! Thank goodness!"

"But who—"

"What the thump—"

"Huwwy!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Has that man taken the money?"

"What—what—" stuttered Grundy's uncle.

"What does it all mean?" yelled Grundy.

"It means that we've come to stop your uncle bein' wobbled of twenty thousand—"

"And by the look of things we're too late!" snapped the real Jack Grundy. "Has that man taken the money?"

"You mean my nephew?"

"No; I mean a rotten swindler named Plummer. Your nephew is standing in front of you now! I am Jack Grundy!"

"What!"

It was a horrified yell from George Alfred Grundy and his uncle.

Tom Merry and the rest gasped.

"Then Gus was right!"

"Of course I was wight—"

"But—but you're mad—must be!" declared Grundy, still partly incredulous. "Yet there's something about you that's like the Grundys—"

"I am a Grundy, I tell you! But we've no time to argue. Has that man taken your money?"

Grundy's uncle passed his hand across his head dazedly.

"What—what— Yes, of course he has! But—"

"Then get out your car at once! We must catch him!"

"But he has taken the car!" roared the St. Jim's Grundy.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Then we must borrow one! Though where on earth—"

"What the thunder—" yelled Tom Merry suddenly, looking towards the road.

The rest followed his glance. Then there was a shout.

"Trimble!"

"Oh, ye gods! Trimble in a car!"

The juniors could hardly believe their eyes. Reposing in a sumptuous open car, which had just drawn up outside the gates, was Trimble of the Fourth. Trimble, for reasons best known to himself, was looking a little uneasy as he glanced across to the juniors.

"I say, you chaps—" he called out.

"It's Baggy!" almost sobbed Blake. "Baggy in a car that will do seventy! I knew there must be a reason why he was born somewhere. This is it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, who can lend me a couple of quid to settle this hire service man with— Ow! Wharrer you doing, you idiots?"

"Taking over the hire of this car!" replied Tom Merry, leading a rush into the car. "For once, Baggy, you're lucky; we'll pay."

"Oh, good! But, I say, am I too late to invest a thousand—invest a thousand in this oil bizney? Your cousin will let me have tick for a week or two, I suppose, Grundy?"

The juniors grinned, enlightened now as to the reason for Trimble's amazing but opportune arrival. Grundy did not reply. He was on the footboard in front, describing the fugitive's car to the hire service driver.

In a matter of seconds the car was off. George Alfred Grundy and his cousin from Australia sat in front. Crowded in the back were Uncle Grundy, Tom Merry, Blake, D'Arcy, Lowther, and Trimble. Manners, Herries and Digby, and Wilkins and Gunn, to their regret, were left behind; it would have been absurd to overload on an expedition like this.

The powerful car rolled through the village and gathered speed along the lane beyond it. Soon they reached the main road leading to London, and were quickly covering its smooth surface at between fifty and sixty miles an hour.

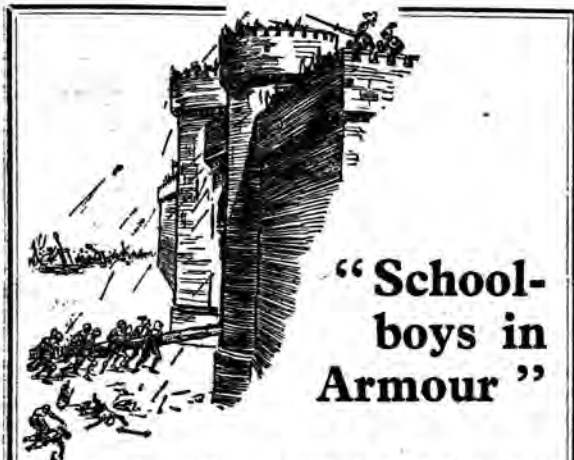
The driver, an old hand, knew his car and knew the road. It seemed almost providential that Trimble's obtuseness and cupidity should have brought him.

They had covered about twenty miles, and had just swept over the brow of a hill that gave them a clear view of several miles of the road before them, when there was a sudden shout from Grundy in the front.

"There he is!"

The juniors were on their feet in an instant. About three miles down the road they could see a long, yellow saloon car turning off the road into a huge field.

"Meadhalt Aerodrome!" shouted Grundy's uncle, his jaw dropping. "He's taking to the air—probably has a plane waiting for him!"



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"Bai Jove! I fancy I can see one already outside the hangah! Huwwy, dwivah!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

Uncle Grundy's prognostication was correct. Even as D'Arcy spoke the juniors saw a figure, carrying an attache-case, jump out of the yellow car and hurry across to the plane.

It was touch-and-go now with a vengeance!

For the first time, the driver of the car took a risk, racing down the steep hill at a really dangerous pace. Nobody minded that—nobody, that is, with the exception of Trimble. Trimble yelled loudly that he had suddenly remembered an appointment and wanted to get out. But nobody heeded the Falstaff at this critical moment.

The entrance gates of the aerodrome loomed ahead, and the driver applied his brakes, reducing speed with such accurate judgment that not one second was lost unnecessarily.

They swept through the gates. As they did so there was a sudden roar from the direction of the plane.

Emerging round the side of the aerodrome buildings they saw the plane. A goggled pilot was in the cockpit, his eyes on the controls, while in the passenger seat was someone whom they all recognised.

"Plummer!" gasped Tom Merry.

"And he's off!" said Blake between his teeth. "We're just too late!"

It certainly seemed so for a moment, for the plane had certainly begun to move.

But there was just one chance left. Jack Grundy, from Australia, was the man to take it. He didn't stand on ceremony. To have explained what he wanted to the driver might have meant provoking an argument, and every moment was valuable now. So the Colonial acted instead.

With a sudden movement he pulled the driver bodily from his seat and took his place, jamming his foot on the accelerator as he did so. For a second or two the car zigzagged wildly; then, as Jack Grundy took command at the wheel, it leaped forward.

Instantly the juniors saw his idea. He was going to drive straight into the path of the plane and compel it to stop!

If it didn't, or couldn't—well, something sudden and violent would happen. Unless, that was, Grundy's cousin was a superman at the wheel—which, despite his obvious ability, the juniors doubted.

There was a shout of alarm from the mechanics standing near the hangar as the car whizzed past them. A good many shouts of alarm arose also inside the car from the lips of Bagley Trimble. But Jack Grundy heard none of them. All his attention was concentrated on the job in hand.

Car and plane raced towards each other at an angle.

The car reached the apex of the angle first, to the accompaniment of a cheer from the excited juniors. Then Jack Grundy turned and slightly slackened speed directly in the line of the oncoming plane.

The juniors, looking backwards, saw a startled face peer out of the cockpit. Then the roar of the plane stopped. The pilot was pulling up.

"Done it! Hurrah!" howled Blake.

"Well done, Mr. Gwunday! Marvellous work! Bai Jove!"

"Look 'ere—" said the hire service driver, who was just beginning to sit up and take notice again.

But nobody had ears for him. As the plane slackened speed Jack Grundy drew out the car and slowed up himself, and the juniors were already jumping out and running towards the plane.

"Look out!" shouted Tom Merry suddenly.

Julian Plummer was just climbing out of the plane. He was cornered now; but he was still prepared to put up a fight for the valuable burden he carried, and as he dropped

to earth, still holding the attache-case, he levelled an automatic.

"Back, or I shoot!" he snarled.

"Wush him! He won't dare now!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

The blood of the juniors was up. They took a chance and "rushed" him.

There was a sharp crack as the automatic spat fire. But nobody was hit; and an instant later half a dozen juniors were upon the cornered crook.

"Down with the rotter!" sang out Monty Lowther.

Plummer was already down, his revolver lying harmlessly on the grass yards away from him.

It was all over! Jack Grundy and his schoolboy helpers had won through by the skin of their teeth.

Half an hour later the police were conducting Julian Plummer, handcuffed, to a closed car in front of the aerodrome. The look which the confidence trickster directed to D'Arcy as he went should have shrivelled up the swell of the Fourth on the spot. But D'Arcy was quite cheerful about it; he remained quite unshrivelled, and even smiled back.

"Well, really, boys—" Uncle Grundy paused to mop his perspiring brow. "I—I hardly know what to say. I can see now that I've been the world's prize idiot!"

"Weally, Mr. Gwunday, I—"

"On the other hand, D'Arcy, you have been wonderful! You've saved me the loss of a very large sum of money, and you've exposed the dangerous scoundrel who came near to robbing me of it."

"By gum! Seems to me, D'Arcy, that I owe you an apology," remarked George Alfred Grundy, his rugged face expressive of deep contrition. "What a mug I was not to listen to you in the first place!"

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"Pway don't wowwy about it, deah boy. I am only too pleased to have been able to put a stop to the capahs of that wottah Plummah!"

Grundy grinned.

"Well, you did that all right! It was thumping good of you, anyway, to see it through after the way I treated you! What say you, nunky?"

Uncle Grundy smiled.

"Without making invidious distinctions, I'll say that D'Arcy is as fine a boy St. Jim's has ever known. The happy termination of this affair calls, if I may say so, for real and heartfelt thanks to Gussy. Who says three cheers for him?"

Everybody said it, with the exception of Trimble, who seemed to think that he himself, and not D'Arcy, deserved any honour that attached to the affair. But Trimble was in a minority of one, and the cheers were given with a will.

After that Trimble suggested tea, and, for once, a suggestion from the Falstaff of the Fourth was received with acclamation. The entire party returned to Red Gables, where Uncle Grundy showed his gratitude by providing quite a sumptuous "spread." And under the soothing influence of hot toasted scones, tinned salmon, ham-and-tongue sandwiches, and cakes of all kinds, even Trimble had to admit that there was, after all, justice in extending thanks to Gussy!

In the cheeriest of moods Tom Merry & Co. returned to St. Jim's. But it was late that night before the last of them dropped off to sleep.

THE END.

(That was a jolly good yarn, eh, chums? Next week the GEM will contain a rattling good cricket story called "THE MIDNIGHT CRICKETERS!")

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ROGER de VILLE.

CHAPTER 1.

Lovell's Little Game!

"ASS!"
"Fathead!"
"Chump!"

Three members of the Fistical Four made these remarks in withering tones. Jimmy Silver was responsible for the "ass." George Raby originated the "fathead," and Arthur Newcome delivered his opinion in the one word "chump."

As usual, they addressed these compliments to Arthur Edward Lovell.

Really, it was exasperating. It was a half-holiday at Rookwood, and as there was no cricket match to be played and won, Jimmy Silver & Co. had decided to take a double-scuttling skiff up the river as far as High Woods and have a picnic amid the trees. It was a bright summer afternoon, with warm sunshine and blue skies, and the river appealed to them strongly.

But just when they were ready to start out they discovered that Lovell was absent. He had unaccountably disappeared since dinner, and there was nothing for it but to search for him. So Jimmy Silver & Co. searched for him, with their thoughts growing more sulphurous every minute.

He was not in the Common Room, not in Big Hall, not in the box-rooms, and not in the Modern House. Just when the other three were thinking of abandoning him to his own pleasures they ran across Conroy, and from the Australian junior they learnt that Lovell was frowning with Pons in Study No. 3.

Greatly surprised and exasperated, his three chums stamped up to Conroy's study, and looked in.

There was Lovell. He was bending over the table, watching Pons, who was writing on a dirty piece of paper. Jimmy Silver & Co. stared at them, and then gave vent to the exclamations already quoted.

"Oh, buzz off, there's good fellows!" snorted Lovell. "I'm busy!"

"Busy!" howled Raby. "Why, you—you—"
"Aren't you coming out on the river?" bawled Newcome. Lovell started.

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"Oh, I forgot that!" he observed carelessly. "All right! I'll come! Wait for me."

"How long are you going to be?" demanded Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, not long—about a quarter of an hour."

"What?"

"Not longer," added Lovell airily; "or, at any rate, not longer than twenty minutes."

Jimmy Silver & Co. stared at him.

"You—you silly ass!" hooted Raby. "Do you think we're going to hang about all the afternoon for you?"

"I suppose you can wait a few minutes, can't you?"

"No, we can't. It's a fairish pull to High Woods. We don't want to be stuck indoors for hours on end."

"Look here, Raby—"

Pons lifted his head from his work, and looked at it complacently.

"I think that'll do," he remarked to Lovell.

Lovell stared at the paper. Jimmy Silver & Co. stared at Lovell.

It was not a clean-looking piece of paper. The edges had turned yellow with age; the surface was coated with dust, and it seemed to be crumbling away in places. But evidently it afforded Arthur Edward Lovell great satisfaction. He blinked at it approvingly.

"Good!" he said. "That's done well, Pons, old man!"

"Well, I rather think it's all right," nodded Pons.

"What the dickens are you doing?" asked Jimmy Silver, greatly perplexed. "What's that paper, you ass?"

"Nothing to interest you, old top," replied Pons. "Buzz off, and don't bother."

"You silly goat—"

"If you must know, it's a jape," said Lovell, grinning.

"A jape!"

"What-ho! My own idea, too."

Jimmy Silver suppressed a groan. Raby and Newcome looked at each other despondently.

Lovell had a propensity for thinking out ancient wheezes, and claiming them as original japes. Many times in the past had it happened, and it invariably brought trouble—for Lovell's schemes were two-edged swords—they were as likely to wound Lovell as anybody else. When Lovell started on one of these escapades no amount of argument would stop him. It usually ended up with high words between the Fistical Four, and a show of obstinacy by Lovell.

So Jimmy Silver sighed dolefully.

"What's the idea now?" he groaned. "Whom are you japing—the Moderns?"

"Bother the Moderns! It's a jape on Muffin!"

The three chums stared.

"What the thump are you japing that fat bounder for?" demanded Raby.

A RICH JAPE!
A "French Penny" jape on Tubby Muffin brings him an accidental gift of fifty pounds!

"Well, you were saying only this minute that he needed some exercise to reduce his fat," returned Lovell. "I'm going to give him the exercise."

"Well, my hat!"

"Are you potty, Lovell?"

"Rats!" Lovell picked up the paper and passed it across. "Have a look at this. Pons has done it with his giddy chemicals. Looks good—what?"

Jimmy Silver & Co. blinked at the document handed them by Lovell. Besides being very yellow, dirty, and dusty, the parchment was written in a kind of faded, brownish-violet ink that was quite impressive. Evidently the ink had been manufactured by Pons—who was the only Classical fellow who knew anything about chemistry.

Undoubtedly Pons had done his work well—if his task had been to make that document look old. Anybody would have sworn that the message inscribed on the paper had been written quite two hundred years ago.

But it was the inscription itself that interested the three juniors. It ran:

"Ye ROOKWOODE Treasure.

"Ye treasure of Rookwoode, in Hampshire, is buried at ye foote of ye great wych elm, at corner of Gylbert's Ryse. It is six feet down on ye river syde of tree.

"Syned,

"ROGER DE VYLE."

There was a silence in the study as Jimmy Silver finished reading that interesting document. Lovell's three chums blinked at him.

"Well?" demanded Lovell.

"Ahem!" Newcome coughed. "Are you—are you feeling all right, Lovell?"

"Eh? Of course I'm all right."

"Well, it doesn't seem like it," grunted Raby. "I should say that you were a bit potty."

"Look here, you silly fathead—"

"Shush!" chipped in Jimmy Silver. "Peace, my infants! What's the little game, Lovell?"

"It's plain enough," answered Lovell, with a slow grin breaking out over his features. "We leave this paper in our study, and make Tubby Muffin discover it. When Tubby finds it he'll get a spade, rush off to Gilbert's Rise—old Colonel Pope's place—and begin digging for the treasure. Then—Ha, ha, ha!" Lovell roared.

"Then what, you ass?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Lovell. "He'll find the money! It's in a sack!"

"Is it?"

"Yes, rather! Ha, ha, ha!"

Silver, Raby, and Newcome looked at Lovell in amazement.

"How do you know the money's buried there?" asked Jimmy.

"Because I buried it there this morning," grinned Lovell.

"Oh crumbs!"

"It's in a sack, you know—wrapped up in paper—heaps of paper, miles of paper, rolls of paper," sniggered Lovell.

"Real money?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, you silly owl!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver, "what are you giving that fat porpoise money for?"

"As a reward for the trouble he will have in digging for it," explained Lovell.

"Oh dear! What money is it?"

"A French penny."

"Wha-at?"

"A French penny!" roared Lovell, vastly entertained. "He'll have to dig for about an hour, and, instead of the fortune, he will get a French penny! Ha, ha, ha!"

Now that he had explained his wonderful scheme Lovell fully expected his three chums to roar with laughter. Jimmy Silver looked at him witheringly, Raby shook his head sadly, and Newcome was apparently wiping away a tear.

Lovell became serious.

"Well?" he snorted.

"Is that what you call a joke?" asked Jimmy.

"I call it a jolly good joke!" snapped Lovell warmly. "Better than anything you could have thought of, and chance it."

"My dear old bean, that chestnut is as old as the hills," explained Jimmy patiently. "For one thing, Tubby will know it is a joke; and, even if he doesn't, there's nothing very funny in it."

"Rot!"

"Look here, Lovell—"

"Rot!" repeated Lovell forcibly. "Tubby is going to find this paper, and he is going out to dig for the treasure. It will give him exercise. You admit that he needs more exercise?"

"Yes, but—"

"Rubbish! You talk too much, Jimmy. I haven't been to all the trouble of burying that French penny for nothing. Follow your leader, and you'll see the fun."

With that Lovell caught up the paper and marched out of the study, followed by a grinning glance from Pons and an exasperated snort from Jimmy Silver.

"The silly ass!"

"Oh, give him his head!" sighed Newcome. "After him."

"But what about the picnic?" demanded Raby.

"Bless the picnic! We shall have to stick to Lovell until he's done playing the giddy ox."

"After all," smiled Jimmy, "I suppose it will be rather a lark if Muffin's fathead enough to be taken in by the paper."

"If!" grunted Raby.

The three juniors followed in the wake of their chum. They arrived at the end study just as Lovell put the paper in a prominent position on the table.

"Tubby can't help seeing that, if he comes to this study," said Lovell, with a grin in their direction. "Now let's spoof that fat bounder, and make him come up here. Come on!"



With perspiration pouring down his fat face, Tubby drove the fork furiously in the ground!

Lovell marched down the passage. Jimmy Silver sighed. "Come on!" he said. And the three juniors again followed Lovell.

CHAPTER 2.

Tubby on the Track!

TUBBY MUFFIN was sunning his fat form against the Classical House doorway. His round face wore a somewhat discontented look, for he was hungry. It was nearly two hours since dinner, so Tubby felt that he had not eaten anything for months.

He blinked hopefully at the Fistical Four, as they sauntered by him. Many times in the past he had managed to "touch" the good-natured Jimmy Silver for a little loan, and he wondered if it was possible to repeat the process.

"I say, Jimmy—" he began.

Jimmy Silver waved his hand.

"Sorry! Stony!" he replied laconically.

Tubby's face fell.

"Lovell, old chap—"

"Roll away, fatty!"

"But look here, old bean—"

"Nothing doing! Broke!"

Tubby grunted, and turned his attention to Newcome.

"I say, Newcome—"

Newcome did not reply in words. He pulled out the linings of his trousers pockets and grinned. That demonstration was a complete reply to Tubby.

"By the way, Jimmy," said Lovell, in a stage whisper, "do you think anybody will bone that bag of tarts in our cupboard?"

"Ahem! I think not!" answered Jimmy—and he was quite in earnest.

As the cupboard door was locked, it did appear improbable that the tarts would be "boned."

Tubby Muffin pricked up his fat ears as he heard Lovell's remark. A bag of tarts in the end study! Tubby felt that this thing needed his most earnest investigation. He sidled carelessly into the house.

"Hallo! Whither away, Tubby?" called out Lovell.

"Just—just going in for my cap," replied the fat junior, as he hastily disappeared.

Lovell grinned triumphantly at his comrades.

"He's gone up to the study, you men," said Lovell.

Jimmy grunted.

"Let's get on the river, then."

"Rate! I want to see whether he finds the paper first."

The other three juniors sighed patiently, and waited about in the sunny quadrangle with Lovell.

Meanwhile, Tubby Muffin clambered breathlessly up the stairs. Judging from Lovell's remark, there was a bag of tarts in the cupboard of the end study, and no doubt the door was unlocked—or Lovell wouldn't worry whether or not they would be taken away. If such was the case, Muffin intended to settle Lovell's fears once and for all by removing the cause of his anxiety. Tubby echoed Sir Philip Sidney's sentiment—with a slight difference. "My need is greater than thine," was Tubby's motto.

He opened the door of the end study, and peered inside. Then he crossed to the cupboard and tried to open it.

It was locked.

"Rotter!" grinned Tubby dismally. "He was pulling my leg. Beast!"

He was about to roll moodily out of the study, when he paused and glanced at a paper upon the table. Something in the appearance of the paper interested Tubby. He carried it to the window, and carefully read out the message written in faded brown ink. When he had finished it, he put it down and gasped.

"Gug-great Scott!" gasped Tubby breathlessly. "The Rookwood treasure! Gilbert's Rise! My aunt!"

Like every fellow at Rookwood, he had heard of the great treasure supposed to have been buried somewhere in the neighbourhood. Many times in the past he had hoped vainly that he might have the good fortune to discover it. Now—Tubby panted with excitement. He knew the secret of the treasure cache.

Evidently the paper was the property of the Fistical Four; but Tubby didn't worry much about that. The beasts had pulled his leg about the tarts, and he would have his revenge by dishing them out of the treasure. That was quite all right. All is fair in love and war. None but the brave deserve the treasure.

Almost gasping with excitement, Tubby stuffed the paper into his pocket, and tore downstairs as fast as his bulk would permit. He saw the Fistical Four lounging about

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in the quadrangle, and he hurriedly made his way to the toolshed at the back of the school. A general grin from Jimmy Silver & Co. followed him.

The toolshed was, fortunately, unlocked, and Tubby was able to take therefrom a fork and spade, with which to dig up the treasure. Holding these implements in a careless kind of way—as though he had found them in his hands by accident and couldn't understand how they got there—Tubby scuttled through the tradesman's entrance and puffed his way along Coombe Lane towards the river.

Near the main gates he ran into Jimmy Silver & Co. For a moment fear smote into Tubby's fat heart; but the Fistical Four pretended to be elaborately unconscious of his presence, and they walked serenely down the lane towards the river. Tubby, gasping with relief, turned into a footpath leading towards Bagshot School.

He made a wide detour, and then struck the river bank a little above the Bird-in-Hand. From here it was an easy walk to Gilbert's Rise.

Gilbert's Rise was the name of Colonel Pope's house and park on the south bank of the Croft Brook. Tubby knew the spot mentioned in the document. It was where a corner of the park came right up to the river. Several large trees overhung the bank and made it a very pleasant spot for shady picnics in the summer.

But Tubby was not interested in picnics just then. He laid his spade and fork on the grass and drew the ancient document from his pocket.

"Wych elm!" he muttered, blinking at the writing. "Wych elm! Which elm is the wych elm?"

He glowered at the trees surrounding him. They were all large trees, and, though Tubby knew that some were different from others, he could not have stated the name of any one of them. Elms, beeches, oaks, chestnuts, planes, birches—they were merely trees to Tubby. He did not know the difference between an elm and an oak.

"Better select the oldest-looking one, I suppose," grunted Tubby, showing slight glimmerings of sense. He roamed around for a while, and then came to rest beneath a hoary old tree which might have been anything up to a thousand years old.

"This is the one for a pound," murmured Tubby, blinking at its leaves and branches. "So this is an elm, is it? Blessed if I know how they tell the difference between 'em!"

He selected the river side of the tree, and, planting his fork firmly in the earth, he set to work to bring to light the great fortune which he was sure lurked beneath the mould.

He dug.

Undoubtedly, if he had needed exercise, he was getting it—plenty of work. The perspiration streamed down his fat face as his fork continued to eat into the ground. His cheeks were glowing as though they were on fire.

"Grooogh!" murmured Tubby, resting on the handle of his fork. "It's warm! Oooogh!"

He struggled out of his jacket and turned up his sleeves. Whether he found the treasure or not, Tubby would undoubtedly benefit from his exertions. It must have been years since he had worked so hard.

After digging hard for over half an hour Tubby paused discontentedly.

"Nothing there!" he grumbled, mopping his fat brow. "I must be digging in the wrong place."

He drove his fork savagely into the earth, and then jumped. Undoubtedly he had struck something.

He now let loose a burst of furious energy, and in a few moments he had uncovered the side of a bulging sack.

"It—it's the treasure!" stuttered Tubby, wild with delight. "I've found the Rookwood treasure! Great pip!"

Probably Tubby had only a faint hope, even when he was digging, of finding the treasure. The fact that he had now struck something uncommonly like a secret hoard nearly sent him wild with delight. He dug frantically at the earth until the sack was loose enough to be lifted out of its tomb. Then Tubby Muffin, with a great heave, pulled the sackful of treasure on to the grass beside him.

"Hurrah!" he panted, beside himself with excitement. "I'm rich! I've found the treasure! It's all mine! It's no use Jimmy saying it's his, because I found it!"

Then he opened the sack.

CHAPTER 3.

All for Tubby!

HE'S swallowed it," murmured Raby. "No doubt about that," nodded Jimmy Silver, grinning. "He had a spade and fork in his silly paws. He'll be spending the afternoon near Gilbert's Rise."

"Now perhaps you'll say it wasn't a good jape?" put in Lovell sarcastically.

"I do say it," agreed Jimmy. "Apart from the fact

that the jape has whiskers on it, and that nobody but Muffin would be fool enough to be taken in by it, the time and trouble is wasted on merry old Tubby. It's not much fun pulling Tubby's silly leg. Why can't you try to dish the Moderns? More sense in it."

"Rot! That was quite an original jape, Jimmy Silver. I thought it out myself."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Never mind about Tubby. Let's get on the river," snorted Raby. "We've wasted quite enough time watching Lovell play the fool!"

"Do you want a thick ear, Raby?"

"B-r-r-r!"

The four juniors, having watched Tubby sneak off, turned their attention to the river. Obviously, it was too late to voyage all the way to High Woods. They would have to be picnic nearer home if they were to be at Rookwood in time for call-over.

They chose a secluded spot near Stuckey Croft for their picnic. There was a slight difference of opinion with one of Stuckey's gamekeepers; during which that worthy man pointed his gun at them, and informed them politely that he was the best shot in Europe, and could blow a rabbit's tonsils off at five hundred yards.

Not feeling inclined to argue the matter with a gentleman of that description, Jimmy Silver & Co. tactfully jumped back into their boat and put off once more upon the vasty deep. Which enabled them to reach Rookwood in good time for call-over.

The Fistical Four tramped merrily into the quad, and Lovell called out to Rawson who was passing by:

"Is Tubby Muffin in yet?"

"Haven't seen him," answered Rawson.

"Oh, good!" murmured Lovell. "I want to see his face. I bet it will be a sight for gods and men and little fishes."

"Poor old Tubby!" chuckled Jimmy Silver. "All that exertion for a French penny."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the merry joke?" asked Putty Grace, coming up with Higgs. "Why this unseemly mirth?"

Lovell explained. Putty and Higgs stared at him. When Lovell concluded Higgs burst into a roar of laughter. Putty looked solemn.

"What's that?" asked Putty. "Is that what you call a joke in the end study?"

"Yes, it jolly well is!" snorted Lovell.

"I thought it was," said Putty sympathetically. "I rather imagined you'd got a weird idea of fun in your old doss-house. I say, Silver!"

"Well?" growled Jimmy.

"You really shouldn't let Lovell run about loose!" urged Putty. "You should keep him on his chain. You never know what might happen if you allow a born idiot to run about just as he likes."

Raby and Newcome chuckled. Lovell glared.

"You funny duffer—"

"Look here, Putty—"

"Do you really mean to say," demanded Putty, "that Tubby Muffin was taken in by that wheeze?"

"Yes, he jolly well was!"

"Then I'll give him a jolly good hiding when he comes back!" snapped Putty. "He's lowering the honour of our study. Why, I don't believe that Gunner would be sucked in by such an ancient wheeze!"

"That's right enough!" growled Higgs. "That fat bouncer is giving the study a bad name. Nobody but a born fool would take in that rot!"

"Why, I don't believe even you would be taken in by it, Higgs!" said Putty seriously.

"What?"

"It's a fact. I believe even you would be able to see through a— Yaroooh!" roared Putty, as Higgs smote.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Jimmy Silver & Co.

They went into call-over, leaving Putty to nurse a damaged chin.

Just in the nick of time a fat figure slid into his place and answered "Adsum" to his name. It was Tubby Muffin—home from the hunting field.

Lovell gave him a grinning glance, and then puckered his brows in surprise. Tubby was not frowning. He was not looking glum. On the contrary, he was looking particularly cheerful. In fact, his round face was beaming like a full moon.

Several times Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at him with surprise. As a matter of fact, quite a number of fellows were looking at Tubby, for the news of Lovell's jape had spread around the Form. And most of the Fourth wore puzzled expressions. If there was one fellow in the kingdom who did not look as though he had spent the whole



There was a stupefied gasp from the fellows gathered round as all manner of treasures shot out from the sack!

afternoon digging for a French penny, that one fellow was Tubby Muffin.

When the juniors came out of call-over, Tubby was the centre of an interested crowd. He blinked around him unceasingly.

"Look here, Tubby, we've missed a paper from our study," growled Lovell fiercely. "Did you take it?"

"I—I say, you know—"

"Did you take it?" demanded Jimmy, concealing a smile. "The—the fact is, you know," stammered Tubby, "I didn't know it was yours. I—I found it in the passage."

"You fat fibber! It was on our table."

"Then the wind must have blown it into the passage, you know," explained Tubby apprehensively. "I noticed the wind as I came upstairs. It was blowing furiously. Quite—quite a gale, you know."

"There's not been a breath of air all the afternoon," chuckled Mornington. "Think again, old fat bean!"

(Continued at foot of next page.)

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(Continued from previous page.)

"Have you found the fortune?" scowled Lovell dramatically.

"Nunno!" I—I mean—I—I dug there, but the sack wasn't there. Somebody had taken it away."

"How do you know it was in a sack?"

"Eh!" Tubby jumped. "Oh, I—I didn't—"

Lovell winked at the grinning juniors.

"In the circumstances," he said, "I think we are all agreed that Tubby has snaffled the treasure. Well, I'll forfeit my claim. He can have the treasure as far as I'm concerned—providing he shows it to us. What do you fellows say?"

Jimmy Silver & Co. nodded solemnly.

"You can have all the treasure for yourself, Tubby," said Lovell magnanimously. "We don't want any of it. You found it, and you shall have it."

Tubby gasped.

"Honest Injun!" he asked eagerly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, Honest Injun!" nodded Lovell seriously.

"What-ho! He, he, he!" chortled Tubby.

"Did you find it?"

"Yes, rather! He, he, he!"

"Show us, then!"

"Right-ho, old beans!" smirked Tubby. "Follow me!"

A hilarious crowd of juniors followed Tubby into his study. From under the table Tubby produced an earthy, damp, unpleasant-looking sack. A score of eyes were fixed upon it, waiting for the French penny to make its appearance.

"Open it up, Tubby," chirruped Lovell.

"Right-ho! Stand clear! I'll empty it out on the floor."

"Good!"

The juniors backed away. Tubby grasped the sack, and, with a mighty effort, up-ended it.

Clank! Bang! Tinkle-tinkle! Glang!

There was a stupefied gasp from the fellows. A large silver salver hit the floor; a massive embossed dish followed it; a diamond-studded snuffbox, a gold cigarette-case, a string of pearls, several plates and dishes, about a hundred spoons and forks, and several heavy gold seals spread themselves around the salver; a gold filigree-work clock came to rest on top of the pile, and gold ear-rings, gold sleeve-links, pearl tiopins, and diamond brooches fell around it in a kind of shower.

"There!" chortled Tubby happily. "That's the lot!"

CHAPTER 4.

Amazing!

"GUG-GREAT pip!"

"Oh, crikey!"

"I suppose I'm dreaming this!"

The crowd stared in a dazed sort of fashion. Gasps of stupefaction arose from the juniors. Jimmy Silver blinked in amazement; Raby kept his mouth open in a foolish fashion, and Newcome looked positively ill with astonishment.

But their feelings were nothing to Lovell's.

"Wh-wh-where did you get this?" he choked.

Tubby stared at him.

"Why, I dug it up," he replied. "It was under the—the sycamore, you know."

"The what?"

"I—I mean the tree—whatever it was," said Tubby. "I followed the directions in the plan, and dug up the treasure. And now you've given it all to me, haven't you? You're not trying to make out that it's still yours?" exclaimed Tubby, in alarm.

"Oh, rats!" snorted Lovell.

Jimmy grinned slightly.

"Look here, you ass," he said good-naturedly to Tubby, "where did you get that stuff? This is serious, you know."

"Where?" echoed Tubby. "I told you. I dug it up, as the paper said."

"Look here," growled Lovell, "which tree did you dig under?"

Tubby thought furiously.

"Lemme see! It was the fourth from the park fence," he answered.

"You hopeless jabberwock!" hooted Lovell. "That's not an elm—it's an oak!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say!" Jimmy Silver bent down and picked up a silver dessert plate. He looked at the crest, and whistled.

"This is Colonel Pope's crest, you fellows!"

"What?"

"Great pip!"

"What?" ejaculated Tubby. "I say, Jimmy, this is the Rookwood treasure."

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"Fathead!" snapped Jimmy. "I can tell you what it is, if you want to know. It's stolen property."

"Wha-at!"

"You must remember, you chaps. Three months ago the colonel's house was burgled, and all his plate and jewels were stolen. They arrested a footman for the giddy burglary, but they never recovered the loot. The merry old footman must have buried it under that tree until he comes out of chokey. And now Tubby's found it."

"Phew!"

"Great pip!"

"I say, that won't do!" howled Tubby desperately. "This is the Rookwood treasure, and I've found it. I'm keeping it, too. So I'll thank you fellows," added Tubby with dignity, "to leave my study and not try to take my treasure."

"Kill him!"

"Squash him!"

"You'll have to give this stuff back to the colonel, Tubby!"

"I won't!" roared Tubby. "It's mine. I found it. Finding's keepings, you know!"

"You fat jabberwock!"

"Half a sec!" chimed in Putty Grace. "I happen to know that there's a reward of fifty pounds for the recovery of this stuff, old fat man."

Tubby's face glowed.

"Fifty pounds!" he ejaculated. "Oh crumbs! I—I say, you know, that fifty quid is mine, you fellows."

"Nobody wants to take it away from you, old bean," grinned Jimmy. "You can regard it as a present from Lovell."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—" roared Lovell.

Tubby grinned.

"Thanks, Lovell, old chap," he said, chortling. "Much obliged to you, old bean! He, he, he!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell's face was scarlet.

"Lemme gerrat him!" he roared. "I'll burst him!"

"No you won't!" laughed Jimmy. "He's got the laugh on you, you ass. You shouldn't try to be funny, you know. You're quite funny enough at ordinary times, without straining yourself. Now come and do your prep."

And the Fistical Four settled down to preparation; three of them chuckling, and one frowning. As usual, Lovell's little joke had gone wrong, and somewhere under the shade of a giant elm-tree a French penny still reposed in Mother Earth.

The following day P.-c. Cobb came to Rookwood and took charge of Tubby's treasure. In the afternoon a pageboy came to Tubby with a polite note, requesting him to call upon Colonel Pope at Gilbert's Rise at his earliest convenience.

After lessons the juniors congregated in the Common-room, discussing the amazing discovery of the colonel's plate. In the height of the discussion the door opened, and Tubby Muffin walked in, his face scarlet with excitement.

Tubby sought his breast-pocket and drew out a handful of five-pound notes.

"Fifty quid!" roared Tubby ecstatically.

"Great pip!"

"Ye gods!"

"Phew!"

It was a gasp of amazement.

"Gentlemen," shrieked Tubby, red in the face, "the tuckshop is thrown open. Have what you like. Follow me. Doesn't matter what you have, I'll pay for it. This applies to friends, rotters, and enemies—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Tubby!"

"That's the style, Tubby, old bean!"

"Come on!" screamed Tubby. "This way to the tuckshop! The more the merrier! Eat until you bust! I don't mind!"

"Hurrah!"

And Tubby grinned, and led the way.

For a few blissful weeks Tubby lived on the fat of the land. Every day he came perilously near to bursting. Then his fifty pounds dwindled and vanished, and he once more found himself in that unhappy state known as "stony." And Rookwood was glad, in some respects. It seemed more natural to have to avoid Tubby's requests for a loan than to feed at his expense in the tuckshop.

As for Lovell, he had to admit that, whoever had been stung by his little jape of the Rookwood treasure, it was certainly not Tubby Muffin.

THE END.

(Tubby certainly scored that time! Don't forget, there's a new complete Rookwood yarn in the GEM every week!)

THRILLS ON A PACIFIC ISLAND!

THE ISLAND CASTAWAYS!

(Opening Chapters
re-told on page 26.)



Shocks!

IT was a ghastly moment, and I believe it was sheer funk that saved me. The pail dropped from my nerveless hand and fell with a terrific clatter, and at the same time, remembering how I had read that wild animals hate the light, I switched on the torch.

I only got a vague glimpse of the thing that was moving swiftly and silently away among the undergrowth, a glimpse of a fawn-and-black striped body and a long, swishing tail. I had guessed that the animal was a tiger or leopard, because of the catlike eyes, and the glimpse I got of him told me that it was a tiger of sorts. Not as big as the sleek beauties I'd seen in the Zoo or the big circus at Olympia last Christmas, but quite big enough to be decidedly unpleasant.

And then I laughed. I couldn't help it. It was clear that we'd scared each other stiff. The tiger, evidently off its usual track, had been staggered at the sight of me and my dog—probably something quite new to him—and before he could make up his mind what to do I had dropped the pail and switched on the light.

At the sound of my laughter Nigger somewhat feebly wagged his tail. But he was sniffing suspiciously, and was clearly relieved when, having hastily filled the pail, I made for the sand again.

The lights were on in our camp, and they looked mighty cheering, though they were only ship's lanterns, and we lost no time in making for them.

I got dad and my brother aside and told them about the tiger, and they both looked pretty much taken aback.

"But, hang it, man," cried Dudley, "if tigers have been breeding in this island since the year dot, you'd expect the place to be overrun with them. The tigers would keep down the goats. But what's kept down the tigers?"

Dad shrugged his shoulders.

"Possibly natives from some distant island who make periodical hunting raids, but more probably that mountain. You boys must have guessed that this island is volcanic, and an earthquake and a stream of boiling lava tend to keep down the population of a place."

A light meal was what the tiger wanted, but he didn't digest it when he got it—from an electric torch!

That didn't sound very cheerful, and I told dad that we'd seen no signs of lava.

"No," he agreed. "But, then, we haven't penetrated into the jungle to any depth. I don't profess to know a thing about volcanoes, except that upon occasion they can be very unpleasant neighbours."

Jill appeared at the door of our hut, which was dimly illuminated by a lantern on the wireless bench.

"Supper's ready," she said. "What are you three so solemnly discussing?"

Old Dad turned to her as calm as could be.

"We were just discussing whether you should be allowed to retain for your own personal use the two most comfortable chairs on the island," he said.

Jill looked very pretty standing there in the light of the lamp against the dark purple of the tropical night.

"But I bagged them!" she protested warmly. "Barry bagged the best bunk, and—"

"Let the law of the wilds suffice," said dad, with a rather awkward little laugh. "Run along to supper. We're coming."

I'm sure Jill scented something was up. But dad turned to us and said that we'd better say nothing about the tiger nor the volcano.

Dad put his hand on my arm as I was about to step out. "I'm quite sure our volcano isn't extinct. I'll swear I saw smoke coming out of it just as it was growing dark."

"Rot!" I said. "If the thing was getting busy we'd have terrific atmospherics on the wireless. It would be a sort of electrical disturbance."

"Well, you haven't had the wireless since last night," said Dad.

I went over to the set, put on one pair of headphones, whilst Dad picked up the other pair, then I switched on.

The sharp crackling nearly deafened me. I was tuned in on Daventry, the link with home, but I could not hear a word.

I switched off. Dad just grinned, and, with his hands in the pockets of his white ducks, stepped out into the darkness, where the surf was swishing gently up on to the sand, and strange cries came from the dark jungle beyond.

The next day was again devoted to what Dad called digging ourselves in and making a clearing for the sowing of wheat and potatoes. Jill had the monotonous job of separating wheat from the oats and maize in the poultry food. The oats we kept for the fowls, but we were going to sow all the wheat and maize, and dad seemed to think that by the time our supply of flour ran out we should have a good crop.

We were a bit doubtful about the threshing and milling, but we'd plenty of time to think over that problem.

The wireless was hopeless, for, although there seemed no thunder in the air, the crackling was incessant. On the long waves I could get nothing at all for the din, and on the very low ones all I got was a very faint call, which I thought must be Sydney, and some very distant Morse, all practically drowned by atmospherics.

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That night, after supper, Dud was full of a plan for the next day. That shoe with the skeleton foot in it, which we had found near Crocodile Creek, had rather fascinated him, and he was inclined to agree with Jill's theory that the owner of the shoe might have been a pirate, and where there was a pirate there might be buried treasure.

"Anyway, I vote we take the car to-morrow and have a nose round," he said.

I wasn't a bit keen. Buried treasure would be a fine thrill if you'd got a yacht lying off the island to take you home with it when you found it. But, I explained to Dud, all the treasure in the world would be no good to us now, and what with dad's cultivation plans, it looked as though we should have all the digging we wanted in that clearing on the edge of the jungle.

"But, hang it all, Barry," Dud said, "I don't want to spend the rest of my days on this island. I should go potty if I did. You never know when a gale may drive some ship within sight of the island, or, say, a millionaire's yacht cruising in the Pacific might happen upon us. In that case it would be comforting to have a fat slice of treasure to take off with you."

That rather bucked me up. I couldn't quite see why there should be any treasure on the island, except, of course, it is believed that untold treasure was buried by pirates on lonely islands, with, perhaps, the whole crew perishing afterwards, and their secret dying with them.

"It would certainly be sickening if there was a treasure here, and we were taken off before we discovered it," I admitted. "I remember, though, hearing a chap on the wireless saying that he spent weeks on an island where they knew treasure was buried, even knew approximately the place, but could not find it. It was a volcanic island like this, and his theory was that in an earthquake the whole formation of the land had been altered, that the treasure had gone into a chasm, and that a subsequent earthquake had piled a mass of stone and earth upon it. I wonder how many earthquakes have happened here since pirates may have buried some treasure."

"I'm not worrying about past earthquakes, old lad, but much more interested in one that strikes me as being likely in the immediate future."

"Oh, shut up about the blessed volcano!" I said impatiently. "I'll come skeleton hunting with you if we can wangle the time off."

Dud, sprawled outside our tent, laughed softly, and his cigarette glowed red in the moonlight.

"To-morrow is Saturday, and even on a desert island man has his right, and I shall demand a holiday!"

He leapt to his feet, took a plunge forward, and then turned a little shamefacedly and came back and sat on the sand again.

"No earthly hope of catching the beggar!"

I gripped his arm.

"What do you mean?"

"Jill's brown man!" said Dud, with a carelessness which sounded a bit affected. "I caught a glimpse of him creeping along the edge of the jungle. Shy bird!"

There was something pretty eerie in the thought of being watched from the jungle. We knew there was one man. There might be scores, and they might be waiting. Waiting for what? It was that thought which kept me awake quite a lot during the night.

In the morning it was pretty clear that dad was not in the least enthusiastic over Dud's idea, but my brother got his way. Dad was in a good temper, having gone off with his sporting rifle before breakfast and bagged a young goat which was to provide our Sunday's dinner.

After a morning of hacking away at vines with stems like ship's hawsers, and flowers so strongly perfumed that they made one feel sick, we got the car started on about half a pint of petrol, put spades and a pickaxe in the back, and set off over the firm sand towards Crocodile Creek. We'd put the accumulator on again just to give it a livening up, especially as it was hopeless to attempt to use the wireless whilst there was that strange atmospheric disturbance about. Going round the point before reaching our destination, Dud grinned and sounded his hooter.

The Moonbeam people fitted a jolly fine electric hooter. If you just touched the button the horn emitted a deep, low warning, a polite intimation of approach. If you pressed it fully in, it gave a raucous roar which would waken the sleepest of carters.

Dud let the hooter rip!

"That ought to startle Jill's brown pal!" he said, with a chuckle.

Suddenly a huge crocodile that had been basking on the sand some distance from the swamp ahead, came to life with a start and began to make hastily for the swamp.

"Take a pot at him, Barry!" cried Dud, laughing and slowing down the car.

I'd brought my revolver, remembering the crocodiles in the swamp, but I told Dud I wasn't going to waste a bullet. I was no crack shot, and at long range the chances against me hitting the ugly brute in a vital spot would be about a thousand to one.

Dud saw the sense of my argument, but he was disappointed. He said he thought it was the same sportsman who had given us such a scare the other day, and that he wished he'd sounded the hooter then. Thinking of my ride on the bonnet after that leap from those gaping jaws, I seconded that.

We pulled up at the spot Dud had marked, and got out our shovels. The engine had not warmed up in the short run, so we left it running sufficiently fast to show a charge on the ammeter, and then, keeping a wary eye on the swamp, we started digging in the sand.

It was hot work, and we soon stopped for a breather. I wasn't really a bit enthusiastic, and I told Dud that in shorts and tennis shirts we must look more like kids building castles in the sand, than hunters for a problematical treasure.

Dud had lit a cigarette, and he stared out to sea as he puffed at it.

"I'm not expecting to find the treasure in the sand, you ass!" he said. "I'm hoping to find the remainder of that skeleton which may give us a clue. That's why I wouldn't bring young Jill. I mean, a skeleton might rather upset her."

Remembering how I had felt when the bones, crumbling into dust, had fallen from the old silver-buckled shoe, I was not at all sure that it would not upset me, though I wouldn't have admitted that to Dud.

Then just as we were about to resume work we heard a gurgling, hissing sound, and saw a cloud of steam coming from the overflow pipe of the radiator, which reminded us that an engine built for use in England would not stand idling at a fair speed in the heat of a tropical afternoon, and Dud rushed to the car and switched off.

"We must watch out and see that we do not let her cool off too much to start on paraffin," he said, as we resumed our digging. "I wish I'd got a few gallons of petrol. It's rather rotten knowing that when the spare can is empty we shan't get another start."

With the knowledge that we were uncomfortably close to the crocodile swamp, I promised to remind him to start up the engine, and then we got busy digging again, piling up the sand on either side with our firemen's shovels, though it seemed to me a waste of energy.

And then suddenly my shovel struck against something hard.

Some Startling Discoveries!

MY brother had heard the sharp rasp of my shovel on something hard, and his eyes lit up excitedly.

"Shovel away, old lad!" he cried. "We may have only struck a skull, but it's possible you're on a box containing buried treasure."

Remembering that skeleton foot in the old shoe, I thought it most probable that it was the former, and certainly did not relish the job of exhumation. I set my teeth and determined to stick it, though I could not see what sense there was in raking up the bones of some poor wretch who might have been buried there a hundred years or so.

We worked feverishly, shifting the white sand, with the sun glaring down upon us.

"I'm on something hard, too," said Dud, perspiration rolling from his face. "It's not a skeleton, Barry, only a skull would stand a spade going down on it; the ribs would cave in."

"I wish you wouldn't be so beastly medical!" I growled. "It strikes me that we're getting down on to rock."

Dud's face fell at that, but we shovelled away sand, and then we saw that I was right, for we were clearing sand from a sort of yellowish green substance which chipped off under the shovels. I knew I felt disappointed. I'd not been keen on finding a skeleton, but to have worked so hard in the glaring sun merely to get down to a strata of rock was pretty rotten luck.

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

Young BARRY MAYNE is on his way to New Zealand aboard the *Maglo* with his father and mother. DUDLEY, his elder brother, and JILL, his sister, are also with them. During a terrific storm in the Pacific, the ship strikes a coral reef and the party are stranded on a strange island, which they christen Necessity Island. Salvaging a car, together with some provisions, Barry and Dud tour the island and discover a skeleton buried in the sand. After many fruitless attempts Barry gets Daventry on his wireless set, but has the misfortune to break his transmitting valve immediately afterwards. That same evening he is getting water from a nearby stream, when he suddenly stiffens at the sight of two green eyes staring at him from the opposite side of the bank!

(Now continue the story, as told by Barry.)

Dud had picked up a bit of the rock he had chipped off, and I saw him look up at the smoke from the mountain top which was certainly much more noticeable than it had been when we had first arrived on the island.

"In one sense this is rock and in another it isn't," he said. "At school we had a chap whose father had been governor or consul, or something, out on a volcanic island, and he had a bit of this sort of stuff mounted in gold and hung on his watchchain. He said it was lava which had come down from the mountain like molten lead, wiped out a village, and then cooled into rock. I don't think this looks really bright, old lad!"

I was digging feverishly again, for in the sort of sandpit in which we stood, I had caught the glint of steel, and, shovelled away some sand, I stooped. My fingers closed on a steel hilt, and I pulled up a cutlass, the sort of thing one sees being wielded by British seamen in the battle pictures of about Nelson's time. It was extraordinarily bright, save for some grim brown stains upon it which I felt quite sure were not caused by rust.

"There's a clue for you, Sexton Blake," I said lightly, handing the cutlass to Dud. "What do you deduce from that? Is it—"

I know my voice tailed off, and I was almost frozen stiff with horror. Intent on our discoveries, we had forgotten our danger from the swamp, and looking over Dud's shoulder, I saw two huge crocodiles almost upon us, moving swiftly and silently across the sand.

"The car!" I yelled.

Dud took one glance over his shoulder, and he was out of the hole before I was. He took a flying leap into the driving seat, and pressed the starter button as I tumbled in behind him, closed the door, and grabbed my revolver.

The starter was turning the engine over, but nothing happened; again he tried with the same result.

A huge ugly brute was almost upon us. I fired wildly through the open window. I hit the brute somewhere, but only to anger him. He made a rush.

Bang!

With the crocodile almost on the car, with those horrible, cruel eyes almost mesmerising me, I had fired point blank into the gaping jaws, and the great scaly thing rolled over writhing, the tail went like a flail, and I knew that if it hit the car it would wreck it.

And then came the other brute. I fired and missed. Dud leapt over the seat into the back; the great snout was level with the window. I was half blinded by acrid smoke, but I saw Dud slash at the snout with the cutlass I had found.

I jumped up, leaned out of the window, and fired straight into a wicked, rage-inflamed eye, and the brute

collapsed, its terrible tail hit against its still writhing companion, and that probably saved the car from being wrecked. Already a couple of hideous, dingy black vultures were scouting round.

Dud wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. "By Jove, we asked for it, Barry; but it was dashed unpleasant."

I looked back towards that ominous swamp.

"And we're not out of the wood yet," I said, as I saw hideous snouts rising on to the firmer sand. "Turn off the paraffin, Dud, and hand me the bottle of petrol. If we don't get going soon, the chances are that we'll never get going at all!"

The engine started all right with the petrol, but the question was whether she would be warm enough to carry on when Dud turned on the paraffin. Half a dozen hideous brutes were getting unpleasantly close to us, moving across the sand in an ungainly, but incredibly swift waddle.

I saw Dud stoop and turn on the paraffin as I stood by the open bonnet ready to whip the cover off the float chamber and give it another dope if the engine stopped. The engine roared as Dud opened the throttle. For a second it choked, then carried on, and with a yell of relief, I jumped into the car, and we moved off with the leading crocodile not more than six yards from us.

Dud looked pale and shaken, but he gave a ghastly sort of grin as he snicked into top gear.

Then we rounded a bend, and saw dad and Jill coming towards us, and we pulled up.

"What's happened?" asked dad anxiously. "We heard firing, so I got the rifle and came out to see if I could find you, and Jill insisted on coming, too!"

"You seen another crocodile?" asked Jill.

"With his sister and his cousins and his aunts!" said Dud lightly, and I envied his nerve. "Hop into the car and have a lift home."

Jill got in at the back and promptly spotted the old cutlass on the floor. There were some new bloodstains as well as the old upon it now, and she gave a little shudder.

"What's that?" she asked. "Where did you get it?"

Dud explained, but I noticed that he was careful to say nothing about the lava. His foot beside the clutch gave me a significant tap on the ankle.

"Next time we go treasure-hunting, we'll take you with us, Jill, to keep the engine from getting too cool, and to keep an eye on the swamp," he said cheerfully.

(The Island Castaways bump into more exciting adventures next week, chums. Make sure of your copy of the GEM by ordering it Now!)

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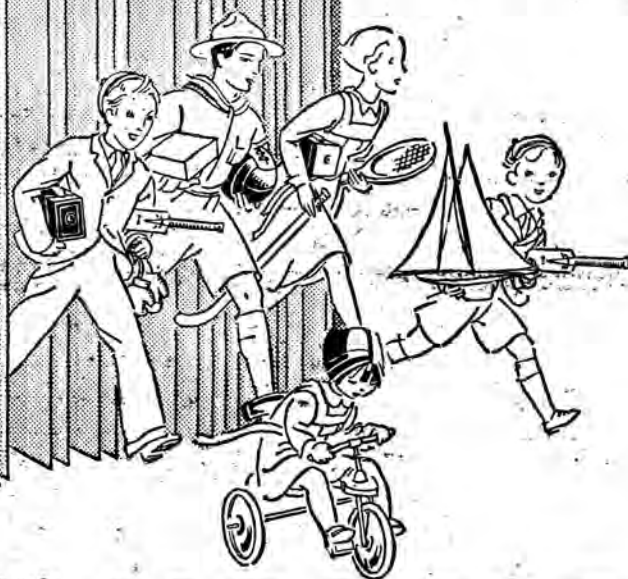
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