

AMAZING STORY OF THE ROYAL NAVY—INSIDE!

**THE GEM**

2d

EVERY WEDNESDAY.







CHAPTER 1.  
Baggy Butts In!

"ALL Gussy's fault!"  
"Of course—absolutely!"  
"Weally, you fellows—"  
"Just like Gussy to muck things up like this!"  
"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Trust Gussy to let us down!" grunted Digby. "I shouldn't be surprised if he didn't do these things on purpose!"

"Bai Jove! I uttally wewudiate that wotten suggestion, Dig!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"I wouldn't suggest that, Dig!" said Jack Blake, shaking his head. "It's just Gussy's unfortunate habit of mucking up everything he puts his silly hand to! And that's due to his having a vacuum where his brains ought to have been put. He was overlooked when brains were dishd out, and it's hardly his fault."

"Weally, Blake, you wottah—"  
"It's all right, Gussy, old man!" said Blake soothingly. "I'm not blaming you—I'm blaming your people for having sent you to a Public school instead of a home for idiots!"

"You—you feahful, unjust wottahs!" shouted Arthur Augustus in great wrath. "I wefuse to admit that it was my fault at all. How was I to know that beastly measles would bweak out at home—"

"You should have anticipated that, and suggested an

alternative plan for the holidays," said Blake severely, winking at Herries and Digby. "Now here we are, dishd and done, two days off breaking-up and nowhere to go—"

"And all your fault, Gussy, you silly owl!"  
"Your footling fathead!"  
"Bai Jove! You—you—"  
Arthur Augustus fairly spluttered with wrath and indignation.

Then he suddenly intercepted a wink between Blake and Digby, and noted the grinning features of his chums.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped, his noble brow clearing. "You are pullin' my leg, you wottahs; you are not weally blamin' me at all for this wotten pesish!"

"Go hon!"  
Blake, Herries, and Digby chuckled.

"All serene, Gussy!" laughed Blake. "We're not blaming you really, old sport—only just tugging your leg a little to cheer us up!"

"I should wefuse to weward you any longer as fwends of mine if you were so unjust as to blame me, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus, a trifle

stiffly. "When I invited you fellows to spend the vac with me at Eastwood House ewewythin' was quite all wight."

"True, O king!"

"Then the patah w'ote to say that measles had bwen out in the village," said Arthur Augustus. "My two young cousins who are stayin' at Eastwood House have contwacted the beastly disease. He wewasted me, in the circs, not to bwing you fellows, aftah all!"

"Quite so. Now let's have it in verse, old chap!"

"It is nothin' to laugh at, Blake! The mattah is weally

**Ye Gods! Trimble the Impecunious,  
Trimble the Boaster, Borrower, and Yarn  
Spinner, actually springs an invitation  
on his pals! But what an invitation  
it turns out to be!**

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

# Baggy Trimble's Guests!

BY MARTIN  
CLIFFORD

the fault of nobody; it is just an unfortunate occurrence!" said Gussy severely. "It is more unfortunate still that it has happened at the last moment like this. However, it cannot be helped, and I would suggest," added Gussy cuttingly, "that, instead of either gwousin' or cacklin', you fellows might concentrate on the problem of what is to be done."

"Or who!" said Herries, who never could let well alone. "We've already been done—dished—and done brown—"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Oh, don't start again!" said Blake, with a rueful grin. "Gussy's quite right. The position's jolly serious, and we've got to put our nappers together. I wonder if those silly Shell-fish have thought of anything?"

"Those what?" said a voice from the doorway.

It was the Terrible Three of the Shell at St. Jim's. Tom Merry and Manners were looking very depressed and grim, but Monty Lowther was chuckling to himself as he came in.

"Hallo! Here you are!" said Blake, wisely deciding not to answer Tom's question. "Well, have you chaps thought of anything?"

Tom Merry shook his curly head as he took a seat on the window-sheaf.

"Nothing, unless we trot along to Margate, or Brighton, or Mudsplash-on-Sea, and chance getting rooms," he said dismally. "It's too late to make arrangements for a caravan tour, or anything like that now, isn't it? Blessed if I can suggest anything better, anyway!"

"Nor can I," said Blake. "It's rotten! What the thump are you cackling about, Lowther?"

"A fellow's just met us in the passage and given us a ripping invite—a fortnight afloat in a magnificent motor-cruiser, with a luxurious and splendid country house sort of thrown in as make-weight!" said Lowther. "He says we seven can all come if we want—the more the merrier! How's that?"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Bai Jove!"

"It'll be a holiday for our imaginations only, though!" said Monty regretfully. "You see, both the cruiser and the house only exist in the fellow's imagination! Ain't that a pity?"

"Oh! You—you frightful ass, Lowther!"

"You mean that footling idiot Trimble, of course?" snorted Blake.

"Exactly! Sorry you're disappointed!" chuckled Lowther. "But Baggy's getting quite original, isn't he? It's usually invitations to Trimble Hall, or Trimble Towers, or to stay with the Duke de Trimble at Trimble Court, he slings about right and left."

"I suppose there can't be anything in his gas," said Tom Merry, smiling. "It almost sounds this time as if the blessed house and cruiser on the Norfolk Broads really do exist. Wildrake says he had a letter from his giddy uncle at noon, and that there's something in it this time."

"What rot!" sniffed Blake. "The fat ass is spoofing, of course! He's been gassing about his holiday on the Norfolk Broads for weeks, and everybody knows it's spoof!"

"Sheer spoof!" said Herries witheringly. "The fat rotter dishes out invites right and left, and borrows half-crowns on the strength of them. Then, when the time comes, the fat fibber spins a yarn and backs out. Any idiot who's ass enough to swallow his gas will get let down, of course!"

Tom Merry laughed and nodded, feeling himself an ass

for even thinking for one moment that there could be anything in Trimble's invitation to a holiday on the Norfolk Broads. All the Fourth and Shell had heard Baggy swanking about his uncle's country mansion on the banks of Oulton Broad, and about his uncle's magnificent motor-cruiser, and the ripping holiday the fellows, lucky enough to receive his kind invitation, would enjoy on the Broads.

Certainly the prospect seemed an enticing one. But it was not a prospect ever likely to be borne out in fact and reality. Everybody realised that, or believed it so. Nobody believed a word of Baggy's "gas" and "hot air." The mansion and the cruiser, likewise Baggy's uncle, only existed, in the general view, in Baggy's fertile imagination—the only place where Trimble Hall and Trimble Towers and Trimble Court, not to mention Trimble Grange and Trimble Castle, existed.

But Arthur Augustus was looking thoughtful.

"I am not so sure that Twimble is talkin' wot, deah boys!" he remarked reflectively. "If it had been only fiction, the fat fibbah would have changed it for another yarn long ago to twy on us. But he still sticks to it, you know. It is wathah stwange!"

"Well, there's something in that!" grinned Tom Merry.

"It is quite possible that Twimble has an uncle who lives on the Bwoads," argued Arthur Augustus. "I think it is wathah bad form to disbelieve ewevythin' the fellow says, y'know. And a ewise on the Bwoads would be vewy nice!"

"Ass!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"It's all bunkum, of course!" snorted Blake.

"Vewy likely, Blake! Extremely likely, in fact! But if Twimble can furnish pwoof that the invitation is genuine then I see no reason why we should not accept it!"

"Wha-at?"

"Twimble is wathah a toad, and I do not like him!" said Gussy. "But one should not look a gift horse in the mouth in our pwsent circs. Aftah all it is wathah decent of Twimble to ask fellows who tweek him so vewy badly!"

"You silly owl—"

"And aftah all, Twimble has been our guest often enough—far too often, in fact!" said Gussy, shaking his head. "It is time Twimble took a turn at bein' our host. Yaas, I think I shall accept Twimble's kind offer, deah boys!"

"But it's all spoof, you idiot!" hooted Blake.

"That remains to be seen, Blake! If Twimble can furnish pwoof— Bai Jove! Heah he is now!"

A fat form loomed in the doorway, and Baggy Trimble of the Fourth rolled into the study. He was looking eager and excited, and he gave them a cheery smile.

"Hallo, all you fellows here! Oh, good!" he exclaimed. "I say, is it quite true that your trip to Eastwood House is off?"

"Yaas, Twimble!"

"Good! I thought as much," grinned Trimble. "I knew you'd back out and let these fellows down at the last moment, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove! Twimble, you feahful—"

"Not the sort of thing I could do, of course!" said Baggy cheerfully. "Still, I'm glad you've done it, Gussy! Now you fellows will be free to come along with me. Practically every fellow in the Fourth and Shell, besides some of the Fifth and Sixth, want to come, but I've turned em' down in favour of you fellows!"

"You think you can get better terms from us, what?"



asked Lowther, with kindly interest. "Bigger loans, and so on?"

"Eh? Don't talk rot, Lowther! I hope I'm not the sort of man to borrow from my guests!" said Trimble.

"Are we your guests?" demanded Blake.

"Of course! I've settled everything. We're travelling up the day after to-morrow, and the cruiser—Yarroooop! Leggo, Blake! Why, what—Yarroooop!"

"You're travelling now, Baggy!" grinned Blake, planting a second kick behind the yelling fat youth. "Travel—off you go!"

"Yarroooop!"

Bump!

Baggy Trimble travelled. He shot through the open doorway of Study No. 6, and he landed in the passage outside with a resounding bump. Blake shut the door, and then he stooped and picked up something from the floor. It was a photograph, and it had obviously fallen from Baggy's fat fist. Blake stared at it. For it was the photograph of a smart, up-to-date motor-cruiser, moored against the wooded banks of a large stretch of water. Underneath was the inscription: "The Viking, Oulton Broad. Owner: Mr. Joseph Whimple, Fenreed Grange." And the name of boat, owner and house were familiar to him—to every fellow, in fact, who had heard Trimble's "gassy swank!"

## CHAPTER 2.

### Fixed Up!

JACK BLAKE stared at the photograph.

Many times and oft had Baggy Trimble spoken of his uncle's motor-cruiser, the Viking; many times had he also spoken of his "Uncle Joe Whimple," and of his magnificent home, Fenreed Grange, of late. But everyone knew the extent of Baggy's fertile imagination. Nobody had believed, for one moment, that such a craft, such an uncle, and such a house existed.

Yet Jack Blake gasped and wondered as he blinked at that photograph now.

On the deck of the cruiser was a middle-aged gentleman with a plump, good-natured face. There was something remarkably familiar about that face. It resembled Baggy Trimble's face—very vaguely, it is true. But—

"Phew!" gasped Blake. "Look at this, you fellows!"

The fellows looked at it—and gasped, as Blake had done.

"Bai Jove! Then—then Twimble is weally speakin' the twuth," remarked Arthur Augustus. "I think I told you fellows that it was possible, though not likely, you know! In fact, if you will wemembah, I told you so!"

"Fathead!"

"That looks genuine enough, anyway!" said Tom Merry, in some astonishment. "Did you ever! Fancy Baggy speaking the truth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But—but it can't be Baggy's uncle!" said Digby. "If Baggy's uncle does own a boat it must be a coal-barge!"

"Oh, really, Digby, you awful beast!"

"Hallo, here he is again!" grinned Blake, as Baggy appeared in the doorway, rubbing himself, and glaring at them. "I say, old fat bean, you dropped this when you travelled!"

"I know I did, you awful beast!" spluttered Trimble. "Just you gimme my photo back, Blake. After this ungrateful treatment I shall refuse absolutely to take you with me on the Broads! My invitation's off! You can go and eat coke, you rotters! Yah!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Twimble—"

"Unsay those cruel words, Baggy!" sobbed Lowther, wiping away an imaginary tear! "Forgive our ingratitude and heartless conduct, old fellow! Overlook our transgressions, dear old chap! If that's your uncle's cruiser, old man, then we're your dearest friends for life—your devoted pals!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I jolly well wou't!" snorted Trimble. "So you're singing a different tune now you know it isn't spooof, you rotters!" he sneered.

"Then this is actually your uncle's craft?" ejaculated Herries, eyeing the fat youth blankly.

"Of course it is!" said Trimble warmly. "Am I the sort of fellow to tell untruths and swank without reason?"

"Oh, my hat! Not—not at all! Oh dear me, no!" gasped Tom Merry. "You've such a reputation for telling the exact truth, haven't you, Baggy?"

"Look here, you beasts—gimme my photo back! I think I'll ask Kildare and Darrell's crowd to come with me after all. When they see my uncle's ripping cruiser—"

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"But that isn't your uncle's cruiser, you fat fibber!" said the still doubting Herries.

"It jolly well is!" bawled Trimble wrathfully. "The best boat on the Broads! A magnificent craft! It'll hold ten at a pinch—"

"Only ten?" exclaimed Lowther innocently. "Why, I thought any ordinary coal-barge would hold twenty or thirty tons at least!"

"Can't you see it's a motor-cruiser, you beast?" shrieked Trimble.

"Oh, yes, that craft on the photo is, of course—a ripping cruiser! But I thought you were talking about your uncle's coal-barge!"

"Beast! I tell you—"

"But never mind your uncle's coal-barge—we're not interested in that, Baggy!" said Lowther seriously. "We want to know whom this ripping motor-cruiser belongs to. We'd like to hire it—a cruise in that would be top-hole! If you happen to know who the owner is—"

"Aren't I telling you my uncle owns it—my Uncle Joe Whimple?" howled Trimble. "Why can't you fellows believe a chap? I've a jolly good mind to cancel my invitation now, you cheeky rotters!"

"Bai Jove! Give Twimble a chance, you fellows!" said Arthur Augustus, eyeing his chums severely. "I am quite confident now that Twimble is speakin' the twuth!"

"Of course I am!" hooted Trimble. "And if you fellows want further proof here it is, you beasts! This letter came with that photograph at dinner-time. I was just bringing it to show you. There, ain't that proof enough?"

He handed a letter to Tom Merry, who whistled as he scanned the close, business-like handwriting. The letter was headed Fenreed Grange, Oulton Broad, and it ran as follows:

*"My dear Nephew,—Thank you for your last letter, in reply to mine. I am very glad to hear that you and your friends have quite decided to spend your holidays on the Viking, and I trust you will have fine weather, and have a most enjoyable time on my craft. The boat is now in perfect order and all is in readiness for you and your friends to take over on your arrival. You do not say if any of your friends or yourself are used to managing a craft of this nature. Perhaps you will ring me up on the phone regarding this, as, of course, an attendant must be engaged if otherwise; this will be an extra cost, as you will readily understand.*

*"I feel quite sure that you will thoroughly enjoy a holiday on the Broads, which is undoubtedly one of the cheapest, as well as one of the healthiest and most fascinating ways of spending the vacation.*

*"Please ring me up soon so that I can engage a skilled attendant in time, if necessary.*

*"Your affectionate uncle,*

**"JOSEPH WHIMPLE."**

"Well, my only hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "That's genuine enough, anyway! And you've arranged it all already, Baggy?"

"Of course!"

"Before you'd even got some fellows to accept your invite?" grinned Tom.

"Ahem! I—I thought the fellows—I mean you fellows—would jump at such a chance!" said Trimble, with a snort. "Blessed if I know why everyone should think it was all spooof! Anyway, now you've seen that letter and photo, I hope you'll apologise and be decently grateful!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Twimble, I am vevy sowwy I doubted you, for one, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus gracefully. "But you are usually such a frightful fibbah, and a w'etched, spoofin' worm, y'know!"

"Look here, D'Arcy—"

"Howevah, it is now quite all wight!" said the noble Gussy cheerfully. "I am quite suah that my friends will join me in acceptin' your vevy kind invitation. I have always longed to explore the Broads, and I am vevy gwateful for the opportunity you are givin' us, deah boy!"

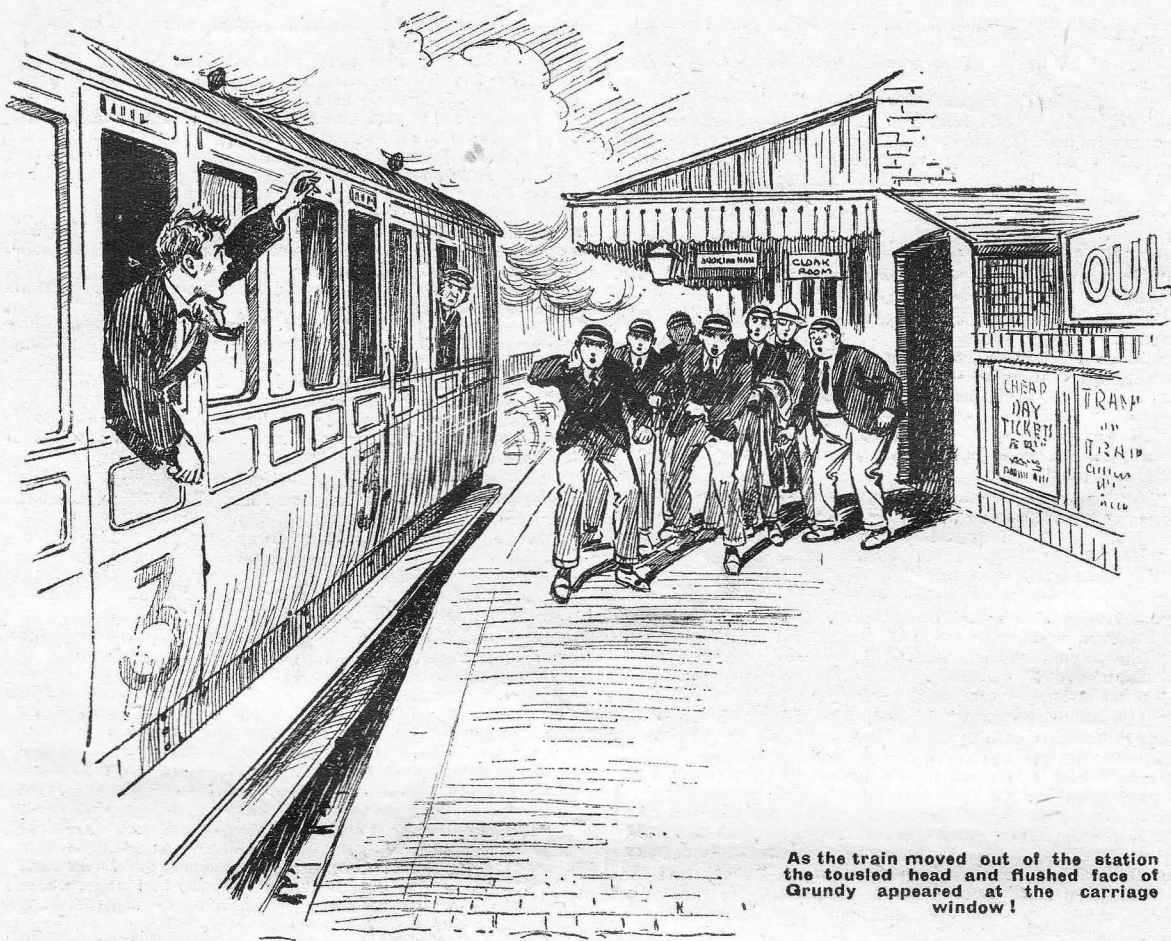
Trimble brightened up wonderfully. It was rather remarkable what a forgiving fellow Trimble could be at times. Perhaps it suited him to be forgiving, however!

He grinned round cheerily now.

"All serene now, what?" he said. "Now, you fellows come along with me and we'll ring the old jossor up!"

"Old jossor! Weally, Twimble—!" Arthur Augustus was quite shocked. "Howevah, I trust you fellows will now agree to accept Twimble's kind invitation in the pwobah spiwit, deah boys!"





As the train moved out of the station the tousled head and flushed face of Grundy appeared at the carriage window!

"Ahem!"

The fellows looked at each other—even Lowther was looking rather excited now. The photo and letter were undoubtedly genuine. But they knew Baggy Trimble. On the other hand, the Viking looked a ripping craft, and they already fancied themselves in charge of her. Moreover, the very thought of a holiday spent on the wide, fascinating Broads appealed to them strongly—they wondered why they had never thought of that way of spending a holiday before. Also—they were desperate. In two days they were breaking up, and—what else could they do?

"I'm game," said Blake, his eyes gleaming, though he eyed Baggy Trimble rather suspiciously still. "It—it would be ripping, of course! But—"

"Tophole!" said Herries. "But—"  
 "Ripping!" agreed Digby and Manners together. "But—"

"I could get some spiffing snapshots of the Broads," said Manners, with some enthusiasm. "But—"

He looked at Trimble—they all looked at Trimble. That worthy grinned cheerily.

"Still doubting—what?" he said, quite affably. "Then I'll soon settle any doubts, you fellows! I'll overlook your low, suspicious minds for once!"

"Weally, Twimble—"  
 "I can soon prove it!" grinned Trimble. "I'll let you speak to my uncle on the phone—here's his number on the letter! How's that? Will that convince you?"

Tom Merry nodded, and smiled.  
 "That will convince us, I fancy!" he laughed.

"And you'll agree to come, then?" said Trimble eagerly.  
 "Yes—I think so," said Tom slowly. "You fellows agree to that?"

"Yaas, wathah!"  
 "Quite!" chuckled Blake. "In any case, Trimble's certain to tack himself on to us wherever we go, so what's the odds! We may as well put up with him on the Broads as anywhere else!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
 "He, he, he!" Trimble decided to treat that as a joke,

also. "Right, you fellows! Come along, then—I'll bag Lathom's phone—I know he's out!"

He led the way cheerfully to Mr. Lathom's room. After making sure the coast was clear the juniors went inside and closed the door. Tom was soon on the phone, and after a long wait they got through to Fenreed Grange.

"So there is such a place!" gasped Blake.  
 "Yes—shush!" murmured Tom. "Hallo! Are you there? That Fenreed Grange? Good! What? That Mr. Whimble speaking?"

A deep, fruity voice came over the wires. All the fellows heard it, and stared at each other. To find out that Trimble was actually speaking the truth, for once, seemed to overwhelm them with growing astonishment.

"Yes!" said the voice. "Mr. Whimble speaking! Is that my nephew, Bagley?"

"He's here, sir!" gasped Tom Merry. "But this is a friend of his speaking—from St. Jim's! I—I understand—that is, Trimble has told us about your very great kindness, sir!"

"What, what?"  
 "About the motor-cruiser, Mr. Whimble!" said Tom, pulling himself together. "It is very kind of you indeed to let us have your cruiser for a fortnight, sir!"

"Not at all—very pleased, I am sure!" said the fat, fruity voice. "I am quite sure you will be delighted with the Viking. A splendid craft—splendid! I hope you will have good weather, and that you will thoroughly enjoy the Broads. But you have rung me up in regard to the question of an attendant, I presume? Have you had any experience of motor craft, my boy?"

"Oh, yes, sir! We once spent a whole summer vac in a sea-going cruiser," said Tom confidently. "You need not be afraid on that score, Mr. Whimble. I understand motor engines, and can carry out running repairs—as can one or two of us for that matter. We shall take every care of the boat, of course, sir!"

"Good!" Mr. Whimble's tone sounded very relieved. "Then it will not be necessary for you to engage the



services of an attendant, which would be, of course, extra!"

"Extra? What!" Tom was a trifle bewildered. "You mean—"

"An attendant's wages have to be paid, of course!" said Mr. Whimple. "His food also must be found—unless that is made inclusive! However, if you can manage the craft yourselves all the better, of course. Well, that is all, I think. I am looking forward to seeing Bagley—I have never seen my nephew yet!"

"No, sir?" Tom wondered if he would look forward to seeing Baggy Trimble a second time when he had once met him. He doubted it.

"However, I shall see him soon now," resumed Mr. Whimple. "Well, good-bye, my boy!"

"Good-bye, sir—and thank you very much indeed!" said Tom.

And as a feminine voice interrupted just then, asking if another three minutes was wanted, Tom rang off.

"Well?" he exclaimed, turning a flushed face to his chums. "That—that settles it! It's genuine enough!"

"Of course it is!" snorted Trimble, though his eyes were gleaming with joy. "You fellows are satisfied now?"

"Oh, quite!"

"You've done something you've never done before, Baggy!" said Lowther admiringly. "You'll soon be able to speak the truth regularly if you keep at it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Lowther—"

"Never mind, it's genuine enough this time, and we'll come, Baggy!" laughed Tom Merry. "Is that understood and agreed upon, you men?"

"Bai Jove! Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

"What-ho!"

"And so it was settled, and Tom Merry & Co.—with Baggy Trimble, their host-to-be—went along to No. 6 again to discuss the forthcoming holiday on the Norfolk Broads. And when St. Jim's broke up two days later Baggy Trimble's fat face was beaming as he accompanied the chums of the School House towards the station en route for Fenreed Grange—and the motor cruiser that was to be their floating home for the next two weeks—unless, as Monty Lowther couldn't help murmuring, "there was still a nasty snag somewhere!"

### CHAPTER 3.

#### The Man from South America!

"GET a move on, you fellows!"

"Look here—"  
"Don't gas! Now, Gussy, don't slouch along like a blessed yokel! You're my guest, remember, and you don't want to disgrace a fellow!"

"Weally, Twimble—"

"Dry up—you're all chin, Gussy! I say, don't you fellows make so much dashed row! I suppose you're net used to travelling with a fellow like me! Try to remember you're St. Jim's chaps, for goodness' sake. Like a lot of hoodlans on a Bank Holiday!"

"My hat!" groaned Tom Merry. "We've let ourselves in for something! I shall kill that insect in a minute!"

"Eh? What did you say, Merry? Why the thump can't you speak up when you're out with a fellow? I say, who's got half-a-crown to lend a chap? Must have packed my wallet in my trunk, you know!"

"Weally, Twimble—weally—"

"I'm hungry," said Trimble. "And the train will be going in a minute or two! Buck up, and don't wag your chin, Gussy!"

"Weally, Twimble, you have already bowed two half-crowns since we left St. Jim's—"

"If this is the way you're going to treat your host, D'Arcy," said Baggy, with dignity, "then the sooner you pack up the better!"

"Oh, deah!"

Arthur Augustus dropped his bag, and felt in his pocket. He produced a florin and a sixpence, and dropped them into Baggy Trimble's fat palm. Baggy scuttled off towards the refreshment buffet.

Tom Merry & Co. eyed each other eloquently and boarded the waiting train that was to take them to Lowestoft. They had just placed their bags on the racks and were selecting seats when Baggy's fat face appeared again.

"I say," he gasped breathlessly, "I forgot to bag my seat. That's the one you're sitting on, D'Arcy! Move up—look lively! Good! I'll shove my bag and cap on it, and you fellows can look after it for me!"

Baggy dropped his bag and cap on the corner seat and

bolted again towards the refreshment buffet. The juniors looked at each other.

"Isn't he a coughdrop?" groaned Tom Merry. "I suppose it's too late to back out now. I feel I can't stand much more of Trimble as a host."

"Wathah not!" said Gussy dismally. "Howevah, it is too late to draw back now, deah boys!"

Obviously it was. They had to make the best—or worst—of it. But they were already regretting having agreed to being Baggy Trimble's guests. At St. Jim's Baggy was a nobody—the most insignificant member of the Fourth. As a host, and the kind provider of a holiday on the Norfolk Broads, Baggy was proving to be domineering, officious, autocratic, and overbearing.

Still, he was their host, and they had to give him his head to some extent.

As they settled down three fellows in flannels came along the corridor of the train and looked into their compartment.

"Hallo! Grundy!" ejaculated Blake.

It was Grundy, Wilkins, and Gunn, of St. Jim's.

Grundy gave them a careless nod.

"Here we are, you fellows!" he said, addressing Wilkins and Gunn. "Room for one here! You two can stand in the corridor."

Grundy grabbed Baggy Trimble's bag and cap and pitched them on to the luggage rack. Then he settled himself in Baggy's seat.

"Well, my hat!" said Tom Merry, staring. "Here, that's Trimble's seat, Grundy! He's already bagged it!"

"Eh? Blow Trimble!" said Grundy. "Who's Trimble—a blessed fag in the Fourth! Think I'm going to stand while a fag sits? Check!"

He settled himself in the corner seat. Wilkins and Gunn eyed each other, and then they moved on, looking for another compartment. Possibly they felt it wisest to move on in the circumstances. It was a pity Grundy did not feel the same.

Tom Merry & Co. rose, as if moved by the same spring.

They were not fond of Trimble. But he was a member of their party, and it was up to them to keep Trimble's end up in his absence. Grundy's little ways did not appeal to them.

"The same old Grundy, even on holidays!" remarked Tom Merry pleasantly. "Now, George Alfred, old chap, are you going quietly, or shall we have to hoof you out?"

"Eh? Now don't you kids be cheeky! I shan't stand cheek from you here any more than at St. Jim's. Mind, I'm warn— Here, what—"

Grundy roared in surprise as seven pairs of hands grasped him. He roared still more as those hands rushed him, struggling vainly, through the doorway, and along the corridor to the nearest door.

"Altogether!" sang out Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Out you go, Gwunday!"

"Yarroop! Why, I'll—I'll— Leggo— Yooooop!"

Crash!

Grundy landed on the platform in a sprawling heap.

Tom Merry and Blake grabbed his luggage and pitched it out on top of him. Grundy howled as a handbag struck him on the nose. He fairly shrieked as a suitcase hit him in the waistcoat and bowled him over again, just as he was scrambling up.

Tom Merry closed the carriage door, and they resumed their seats, Tom Merry replacing Trimble's cap and bag on the corner seat.

He had just done so, and was sitting down again, when a man came along the corridor and looked into their compartment. He sighted the vacant seat, entered, and lifted a big, heavy-looking travelling-bag on to the rack. This done, he calmly grasped Baggy's cap and bag, and tossed them roughly on to the opposite rack.

Then he sat down and produced a newspaper.

The juniors stared at him. He was worth a second glance, perhaps. He was tall and well-built, and he had a sharp, keen face that was deeply lined and sunburned—almost swarthy. His nose was big and hooked, and his eyes were small, black, and beady.

Altogether he was not at all handsome or agreeable-looking. Tom Merry had already caught a glimpse of the label on the bag, and he noted the name on it was "Quirk," while the label bore the name of a South American port.

Obviously he was a foreigner, or a man who had lived long in foreign parts. None the less, his actions were rude and unreasonable, and Tom set his lips.

"Excuse me, sir," he exclaimed, "but that seat is engaged! The fellow who has claimed it will be back in a moment."

Quirk—if that was the man's name—looked at him. It was not an affable look. The eyes were like those of a snake, and Tom could not help a shiver.

But the man did not speak. He just glanced at the junior and then turned his attention to his paper. Tom



Merry flushed, but somehow he could not bring himself to speak again. And just then George Alfred Grundy, dusty, dishevelled, and crimson with wrath, appeared suddenly in the doorway.

"Now, you rotters!" he began thickly. "I'll jolly well— Here—what—"

Unfortunately Grundy trod on Mr. Quirk's foot as he rushed in to do battle. The next moment a fierce, powerful grasp closed on Grundy. Without even rising from his seat, the man from South America shook Grundy until that worthy's teeth fairly rattled in his head. Then he sent him crashing back into the corridor, and calmly slid the door shut.

"Exit Grundy!" murmured Lowther, with a chuckle.

It proved to be Grundy, roaring with rage and astonishment, scrambled to his feet, and tore at the handle of the sliding door. But while doing so he suddenly caught the eyes of the man from South America, and the glitter in them made even Grundy pause.

Fortunately he paused long enough to think better of his warlike intentions. And, dropping the handle, George Alfred scowled at Tom Merry & Co., and tramped away in search of other quarters—like a dog with its tail between its legs, as Lowther put it.

"Wonder where Grundy's bound for?" remarked Blake, with a chuckle. "Perhaps we'll see something of the dear old chap again. I say, that fat ass is going to miss the train if he doesn't buck up. Phew! There's the whistle now!"

The guard's whistle went. But Trimble was not the fellow to miss a holiday train. There was a sudden yell outside, and a rush of feet. Then a door slammed, and the next moment the fat, jammy face of Baggy Trimble appeared outside the glass of the compartment door. It opened, and Baggy, looking fat and satisfied, stumbled in.

He stared in growing wrath and indignation at Mr. Quirk. That gentleman ignored him.

"Check!" gasped Baggy. "Check if you like! He's collared my seat! Look here, I told you fellows to look after it for me. I say, make the fellow give it up, you chaps!"

"All serene, Baggy!" said Tom Merry hastily; he did not want any further trouble with Mr. Quirk. "You can have my seat—it's a corner seat, you fat ass! Here you are!"

"But I'm jolly well going to insist—"

Baggy paused, having just caught Mr. Quirk's snake-like eyes fixed upon him. Quite abruptly Baggy decided not to insist.



The bucket flew from Lowther's grasp and the contents swamped over Gussy and the bedclothes of the nearest bunk!

Mr. Quirk "I understand you boys are bound for the Norfolk Broads?"

"That's so!" admitted Tom curtly; he did not like the man, and was not disposed to be unduly pleasant.

"I also propose to make a tour of the Broads," said the swarthy man. "As a matter of fact, I wish to look up a very old friend of mine who lives on the Broads—a gentleman I knew years ago, before I went abroad. Unfortunately, beyond knowing his name and the name of his house, I am at a loss to know where to look for him!"

He paused, and eyed them eagerly.

"Possibly you boys know the country well and may be in a position to help me?" he suggested. "The house is—"

"I'm afraid we don't," said Tom, smiling. "The Broads are pretty extensive—"

"Possibly you have heard of the house, though," insisted Mr. Quirk. "The name is Fenreed Grange, and it—"

"Fenreed Grange!"

Tom Merry jumped—they all jumped; even Baggy Trimble opened his eyes wide and blinked in astonishment at Mr. Quirk.

"I say," he gasped. "That's my uncle's house, you know!"

"What? You—you know it?"

It was almost a snarl from the hook-nosed man.

CHAPTER 4.

Trouble—for Baggy!

"EXCUSE me!"

For some time the train had been speeding northwards towards the lakeland of East Anglia. Tom Merry leaned against the carriage door, and the juniors chatted cheerily on cricket and various school matters, while Baggy Trimble snoozed comfortably



"I should jolly well think I do know it—at least," amended Baggy loftily, "it happens to be my uncle's house—my Uncle Joe Whimple!"

"That is the name!" said Mr. Quirk. "Whimple! But—but—"

He seemed utterly taken aback—as, in fact, were the other juniors.

"If the house you are seeking is Fenreed Grange, then we certainly can help you," said Tom, eyeing the man curiously. "We are going there now, in fact. It is owned by this chap's uncle. It is on the banks of Oulton Broad, and you get off at Oulton Station to reach it. We shan't be long before we reach there—next station after Lowestoft, I think!"

"That's it!" said Blake.

"You can come along with us, if you like," said Tom Merry. "I think Mr. Whimple is meeting us—"

"Oh, really, Merry—"

"Shut up, Trimble—"

"But I think it's for me to say whether that chap can come with us or not!" snorted Baggy. "Am I in charge of this party or—"

"Cheese it, you fat clam!" said Tom.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pway dvy up, Twimble!"

"Shan't!" snorted Baggy, glaring at the juniors. Baggy hadn't forgiven Mr. Quirk yet for his "cheek" in bagging his seat, but he felt that even such an unpleasant-looking gentleman might be good enough for a tip. "You shut up! Like your cheek to shove your oar in without asking me. Uncle Joe's my uncle, not yours, you cheeky asses!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Twimble—"

"Shut up, Gussy! I say," said Baggy, turning to Mr. Quirk with a fat, ingratiating smile, "I'll take you along to my uncle's place—you leave that to me!"

But Baggy need not have worried. Though Mr. Quirk's eyes had gleamed with satisfaction on learning where Fenreed Grange was situated, he did not seem wholly pleased. He certainly did not appear to be grateful to the juniors for saving him a possible tour of the Broads in search of that mansion, and the friend of his younger days. In fact, he scowled almost savagely at the juniors.

"Be quiet, you tattling young fool!" he rasped out at Baggy. "I have no intention of accompanying a pack of schoolboys anywhere."

"Oh!"

"Bai Jove!"

"But—but I thought—" stuttered Baggy.

"Never mind what you thought!" snapped Mr. Quirk.

"You—you wanted to meet my uncle—"

"I have no desire whatever to meet your uncle, boy!" rasped the hook-nosed man angrily. "If the house you name is on Oulton Broad, then it is certainly not the house I am seeking."

"But you said—" snorted Baggy.

"Be quiet!"

It was a snarl. Mr. Quirk seemed to have more than recovered his ill-humour. He snatched up his paper and resumed his reading. Apparently the conversation was at an end—so far as he was concerned.

Baggy became quiet. Once again he did not like the look in the beady, snake-like eyes of the man from South America. The juniors exchanged astonished glances, but did not speak again as the train roared on towards Lowestoft.

Baggy could not remain silent for long, however. He was wide-awake enough now.

"I say, I'm hungry, you fellows!" he grunted.

"You always are," said Lowther sympathetically. "It's a wonder you don't start eating yourself up, old scout! What a blessing if you did!"

"Oh, really, Lowther! I say, Gussy, what about that chocolate in your bag—you promised me some, you know!"

"I said you could have some when we reached our destination, and I had unpacked, deah boy," said Gussy. "I cannot get my bag down and open it now, just to get some beastly choc out, Twimble!"

"What rot! Look here, I'm awfully hungry! Think I can wait until we reach the Grange?" hooted Baggy.

"I say, I'll get your bag down, Gussy!"

He stood up and reached for the bag on the rack.

Arthur Augustus gasped and jumped up. Gussy had packed that bag most carefully, and he was not likely to

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,172.

allow a clumsy, careless fellow like Trimble to tamper with it.

"Twimble, you dare to touch that bag, you young wuffian," he shouted, and made a grab at Baggy's arm.

That did it. Baggy's grasp was already on the handle of the bag, and Gussy's grab only served to help Baggy to drag the bag off the rack.

It did more than that, however.

Mr. Quirk's bag was next to it, and it was a very big bag—much too big for the rack, in fact. Tom Merry had eyed it uneasily when the hook-nosed man had stacked it there, feeling that a sudden jolt might easily bring it crashing down.

Now, Baggy Trimble, aided by Arthur Augustus, provided the jolt.

Tom saw the sudden danger, and gave a yell:

"Look out!"

Next moment the heavy, shabby bag toppled over the edge and fell full on top of its owner, and Tom Merry being too late to prevent it.

Crash!

"Yarooop!"

Mr. Quirk gave a strangled howl, and plunged forward with his head between Herries' legs. There was another howl, this time from Digby, as the heavy bag ended its fall by dropping on that worthy's feet.

Crash!

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Trimble, you awful ass!"

"Wasn't my fault!" snorted Baggy warmly. "I say—"

I say— Yarooop! Oh, my hat! Yooop! Draggim off! Murder! Police! Fire! Help! Yarooop!"

Slap, slap, slap! Biff, biff, biff!

Mr. Quirk was going strong.

He had leaped up, his face crimson with rage, and was letting Baggy know what he thought of his clumsiness. He slapped him, and

he thumped him, and he boxed his fat ears as if he were doing it for a wager.

Baggy shrieked and struggled.

Finally, Mr. Quirk proceeded to show his displeasure by using his boot.

That was enough for Tom Merry & Co.—a trifle too much, in fact.

"Here, stop that, you brute!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Half a dozen hands grasped Mr. Quirk, and dragged him off Baggy Trimble. That yelling youth, finding himself free, bolted through the sliding doorway and fairly flew along the corridor.

"Let me go!" fumed Mr. Quirk, his swarthy features aflame with passion. "That—that young hound! I—I— Let me go, confound you!"

The juniors released him, eyeing him warily as they did so.

Mr. Quirk panted. Undoubtedly he was hurt, and undoubtedly Trimble had been careless. The bag had been heavy, and it had almost swept Mr. Quirk's head from his shoulders. Like the ancient individual, he did well to be angry. None the less, he was showing a little too much passion for the liking of Tom Merry & Co.

"We're sorry for this—that fat idiot needed walloping," said Tom Merry quietly. "But you've given him enough! Start again, and you'll have us to deal with!"

Mr. Quirk did not start again. He gave the juniors a bitter, savage glare, and picked up his bag. Then he tramped out into the corridor.

The juniors watched him. But he did not attempt to go after Baggy, who seemed to have vanished into thin air. He dropped his bag at the end of the corridor, and stood there staring savagely out on to the landscape of East Anglia.

Apparently they had done with the man from South America—the man who was seeking Fenreed Grange, but who didn't seem to want it now he had found it, which was very queer!

## CHAPTER 5.

### Mr. Whimple!

"B AI Jove! A vewy stwange fellow, deah boys!"

"Yes, rather!"

"It's queer!" said Tom Merry, as they returned to the compartment. "He said it was Fenreed Grange he wanted, right enough, and he said the name was Whimple. But—"



"Why should he deny it afterwards, and why should he get so waxy when we told him we were going there?" demanded Blake. "I don't like the chap, I must say."

"A bit of a mystery, if you ask me!" yawned Herries. "Anyway, blow the chap! Wonder if he'll get off at Oulton, though? His bag was labelled 'Passenger to Great Yarmouth,' I noticed."

"I'm wondering if dear old Grundy will get off at Oulton!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "What a lark if he does! We ought to see something of him."

"I heard something about those chaps going on the Broads, too!" said Tom Merry, smiling. "Just like Grundy to do that—I mean, to bag somebody else's idea for the hols. He's heard Baggy gassing about it, of course, and it's put the idea in his fat head!"

"May be only going to Lowestoft," said Blake. "We'll soon know."

The juniors were rather interested in Grundy, and they kept a sharp look-out when the train ran into Lowestoft. But Grundy & Co. did not get off there. Somebody else did, however. It was Mr. Quirk.

He got off the train and took a seat on the platform, as if he was going to wait there for another train. He gave the juniors a savage look as he spotted them at the window.

"He's not going to call on his old friend at Fenreed Grange, by the look of things," remarked Manners.

"Nor going to Great Yarmouth, to where his bag is labelled," said Tom Merry, wrinkling his brow. "I'd like to know what the chap's got on. Hallo, we're off!"

The train moved on, and just then Baggy Trimble came along the corridor. He came very cautiously indeed.

"I—I say, you fellows," he gasped. "Has he gone—that awful brute, I mean?"

"Yes, he got off!" chuckled Blake. "He declines to visit Fenreed Grange, after all, old fat man. I suppose it was the thought of you being there that's frightened him off. I don't wonder he's changed his plans!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really. I say, you fellows, I'm frightfully hungry! What about that chocolate, Gussy? If you're going to be mean—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"After me bringing you on a ripping holiday!" snorted Baggy. "I never knew such meanness and ingratitude in my life! Any of you fellows got any toffee?"

"None, old bean!"

Nobody had, and Baggy gave a disgusted sniff.

"Soon be in Oulton now, Baggy!" laughed Tom Merry. "Tighten your belt for a bit longer, old chap! If one quarter of the yarns you've told us about the luxury and hospitality at the Grange are true, you're in for the time of your fat life!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The reminder did not seem to cheer Baggy up much. He growled and grumbled until the train ran into Oulton Station. There was a rush for bags at once.

"Here we are at last!" called Tom Merry cheerily. "Mind you don't get stuck in the doorway, Baggy. Here's your bag, old fat man!"

In high spirits the juniors made for the platform. Three fellows in flannels came along the corridor, carrying their bags, as the eight St. Jim's fellows scrambled to get out.

"Hallo, dear old Grundy again!" chuckled Lowther. "He's getting off here, then!"

Grundy glared.

"Out of the way, you fags!" he snorted. "Can't you see you're blocking the thumping doorway and passage up? Get a move on, blow you!"

"Same old Grundy—even on hols!" remarked Manners. "So polite and well-mannered!"

"You shut up, Manners! I'm going to give you kids the licking of your lives when I get you on the platform!" vowed Grundy. "Get a move on, can't you?"

The juniors took it easy. Possibly Grundy's dark threat caused them to take things easy; possibly they objected to his manner. Tom Merry, Blake, and Manners jumped out, and the bags were handed out. Lowther, Digby, and Herries remained, blocking the doorway. It almost seemed as if they were doing it on purpose.

Grundy seemed to think so, at all events.

"Get a move on!" he roared. "You silly owls, train will be going on soon, blow you! Why, you—Yarooop!"

Whether by accident or design—most likely the latter—Lowther dropped his bag, and it alighted on Grundy's foot. Grundy roared.

"Like us to help you cut—like we did before, old chap?" asked Lowther kindly.

Grundy did not answer in words. He dropped his own bag and went for Lowther, getting that youth's head in chancery before that joker realised his intention.

Lowther roared and Grundy punched.

"Chuck it, Lowther, you ass!" called Tom Merry, from the platform. "The train'll be going in a sec!"

Lowther would have "chucked it" could he have done so. Wilkins and Gunn discreetly moved back to another exit, leaving Grundy to it. Seven to three were not odds that appealed to Grundy's pals, if they appealed to Grundy. Digby and Herries threw their own bags and Lowther's out on to the platform, and piled in to help Lowther.

A wild and whirling struggle followed.

But it did not last long.

"Hurry up there, please! Why, what—"

The guard yelled. Tom Merry, Manners, Blake, Wilkins, and Gunn yelled. The whistle shrilled, and doors banged.

Only Lowther, Digby, and Herries seemed to hear, however. They wrenched themselves free, Lowther ramming Grundy in the waistcoat in his desperate attempt to break free.

The ruse succeeded. Grundy yelped and staggered backwards. His heels came against his own travelling-bag, and Grundy sat down with a terrific bump on the corridor floor, his legs resting on his bag.

Lowther, Digby, and Herries tumbled out of the train one after the other. The guard banged the door, and the train moved on.

"Grundy, you ass!" bawled Wilkins.

"Grundy, you born idiot!" shrieked Gunn.

The tousled head and flushed, wrathful features of Grundy appeared suddenly at the window. But by that time the train was gaining speed. Grundy tore at the handle desperately, but by that time the train was past the platform.

It vanished round the bend, and the face of George Alfred Grundy, crimson with wrath and dismay, vanished with it.

"Oh, my only hat!" gasped Wilkins, in utter dismay. "Ho—he's gone!"

"The—the burbling jabberwock!" stuttered Gunn. "And he's got our tickets, and he's—he's—" Words failed Gunn.

"Never mind!" said Lowther, holding a stained handkerchief to his nose. "Serves the born idiot right! Ow, do now?"

"He'll be able to get back on the next train up!" laughed Tom Merry.

"Be able to sample a Yarmouth bloater before coming back. Grundy likes new experiences!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you rotters!" gasped Wilkins. "What are we to do now?"

Not knowing, Tom Merry & Co. were unable to enlighten Grundy's dismal pals on that point. They made for the exit, and gave their tickets up cheerily.

"So Grundy was going to get off here," laughed Blake. "We may see something of him again. I bet he'll be rather angry with us for this."

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

The juniors looked about them for their host and the car.

"Blessed if I see any car!" remarked Blake, his eye running over the few vehicles waiting outside.

"There it is!" said Trimble excitedly. "And there's my Uncle Joe! Good!"

"Oh, that!" said Blake. "And I thought it was a chocolate machine."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The St. Jim's juniors walked towards the waiting car, which was certainly not the luxurious limousine Trimble had led them to expect. It was, in fact, rather a ramshackle vehicle of very uncertain age.

Standing by it was a plump figure in yachting attire, a middle-aged gentleman whose face faintly resembled Trimble's. Yet it was a genial, good-humoured face, and the juniors took to Mr. Joseph Whimple at once.

He greeted them heartily, but appeared to be rather taken aback when he sighted Baggy. Evidently his hopeful nephew did not come quite up to expectations.

"So you are Bagley," he remarked, with a chuckle, after shaking hands all round. "Humph! You resemble your father as regards circumference, at all events. Well, jump in, boys, and I'll soon get you fixed up! I expect you're all impatient to see the Viking—what?"

"I say, uncle, is it far?" demanded Baggy.

"Not far, Bagley, my boy. Why—"

"I'm hungry," said Baggy. "Famished, in fact. Can't we have a feed somewhere?"

"Weally, Twimble—" began Arthur Augustus reprovingly.

"Hungry—eh?" chuckled Mr. Whimple. "That's all



right. I'll give you tea at the Grange, and then you can see about getting your stores aboard afterwards."

"St-stores aboard?" repeated Blake, rather blankly.

"Yes. You can buy all you want in Oulton, of course. Better to get a good stock in at once, as it's not always easy to get foodstuffs when cruising. The boat's all shipshape, and you'll be able to start off early in the morning."

"In—in the morning!"

"Exactly! No navigating at night, of course. That is against the by-laws, boys. And it's too late, I'm afraid, for you to start on a cruise now. Well, all aboard!"

Mr. Joseph Whimple took the wheel of the ancient car, and they started for the Grange—Trimble remaining hungry.

## CHAPTER 6.

### The Snag!

THE juniors were in high feather. The sight of Oulton Broad, gleaming brightly under the late afternoon sun, dotted with white sails and motorcraft, was a pleasant one, and filled them with excited anticipation. So far all was going well. Until the last they had felt vaguely suspicious that the whole business might be spoof after all, despite the letter and the phone chat with Mr. Whimple. They could not quite get over their suspicions of Baggy Trimble, the spoofer of the School House.

But all seemed serene; all was working out as Baggy claimed. Certainly the car was not a magnificent limousine

He laughed as he dismounted from the ancient car. The juniors got out and took charge of their baggage.

"Bring your baggage along," said Mr. Whimple. "You can stow your things on board, and leave the bags in the garage. They'll be safe enough there until your trip's ended. No room on the boat for empty trunks and such like, of course. What? Yes, that's the old craft. Fine, isn't she?"

The Viking certainly was a fine craft. The eyes of the juniors glistened as they sighted it, moored at a small jetty. Mr. Joseph Whimple's remarks were mystifying them more and more. Yet the sight of his motor-cruiser banished them. It was all that Baggy had claimed it to be.

The Viking was a roomy and comfortable cruiser, with decks and woodwork spotlessly clean, and brass-work glimmering in the sunshine.

"Ripping!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "A jolly fine craft, Mr. Whimple!"

"All ready and shipshape," said Mr. Whimple cheerily. "The last party that had it left the boat in rather an untidy state, but it's—"

"Last p-party?" ejaculated Blake.

"Yes. But I'll take you over her and explain things, boys. And this evening I'll take you for a trial run. That's usual, of course, unless you engage an attendant."

"U-usual!" stammered Tom.

"Quite! She's a valuable craft, you know. I'm stretching a point in allowing you to take her without an experienced man, as you are friends, of course. Now come aboard."

# The Queerness Of Quirk Will Be Solved

in the "Mystery of the Broads," next week's great yarn!

—far from it. But Mr. Joseph Whimple was undoubtedly real and very substantial, and he was undoubtedly Baggy's uncle. And they were now on their way to the Grange where they were to spend their time as honoured guests in between trips in the magnificent motor cruiser.

The programme, so far, was coming up to the expectations Baggy had led them to anticipate.

Yet they were puzzled. Certain features about the whole business struck them as rather odd. What had Mr. Whimple meant when he spoke on the phone about the "attendant" being an "extra"? What did he mean now about their getting their own stores aboard? When Lord Eastwood invited them on a cruise in his yacht—as he had often done—they had not expected Gussy's noble pater to ask them to purchase their own "grub." Moreover, they had expected a stay at Fenreed Grange, with tennis, etc., before starting out on any cruise, much as the prospect of a cruise pleased them.

Certainly it was odd. Apparently Mr. Whimple expected them to "shove off" early the next morning.

The fact that Baggy was beginning to look a trifle uneasy now, also made them curious.

Still they did not allow vague thoughts to disturb their cheerfulness.

They arrived at the Grange at last.

It stood amid trees some distance back from the banks of the Broad, and as they sighted it they got their first real shock.

Fenreed Grange was nothing like the magnificent mansion Baggy had led them to visualise. Still, it was a rambling old house in its own grounds, and once it had been pretty, undoubtedly. It was not so now, alas! The whole place looked gloomy and forsaken. The grounds were desolate and overrun with weeds. Many of the windows were shuttered; many were unshuttered, but had broken panes, and seemed covered in grime. Only one or two windows at the front of the house, overlooking the Broad, were clean and curtained. The whole place had a sad air of neglect and desolation.

"Oh!" gasped Baggy, as he sighted it.

Even Baggy seemed astonished and dismayed.

"Is—is that the Grange?" asked Blake.

"Yes, that's my home, boys," said Mr. Whimple, his face clouding a little. "Fine place once. Going to rack and ruin now. No money to keep it going, you know. Still, I'm fond of the old place, and nobody will persuade me to part with it. But I fancy it's the old Viking you boys want to see—eh?"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,173.

The juniors went aboard, and had a good look over the Viking. They were delighted with the boat. It was when they jumped ashore again that they got their second and final shock.

"Well, you like her, boys?" asked Mr. Whimple cheerily.

"She's ripping!" said Tom.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good! The weather looks like being decent, and you should have a good holiday, boys. And now about business!"

"Business?"

"Yes," said Mr. Joseph Whimple, with a plump, good-humoured smile. "I wish it were not necessary to bring business into the affair, of course. Ha, ha, ha! But—well, you are aware of the conditions on the Broads?"

"Nun-nunno!" gasped Tom. "I—I don't quite understand you, Mr. Whimple."

"I'll explain, then. As you were my nephew's friends, I have waived the usual deposit."

"D-deposit!"

"Exactly! But, as you probably know, it is usual—in fact, necessary—for owners on the Broads to—er—ahem!—insist upon the hire money being paid before embarkation. You understand that, of course?"

Tom Merry & Co. jumped.

They hadn't understood it, but they were beginning to understand quite a lot now.

"Oh, gweat Scott!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Is there anything the matter, boys? Possibly my nephew did not make everything clear! If it is not convenient for you to hand me the cheque for forty pounds at the moment—"

"F-fuf-forty pounds!" almost yelped Blake. "Oh, my stars!"

"That is my reduced price for the fortnight's cruise—reduced because you are my nephew's friends!" said Mr. Whimple, with portly dignity. "You will see, I am sure, that it is most reasonable! In fact, my charge to ordinary hirers is considerably more—very considerably more. For eight boys it runs out at two pounds ten each per week. You cannot get much cheaper holidays than that—not at the seaside, at all events. Of course, you will have to provide your own food, and all other expenditure, including petrol for the motor. But my charge is absurdly cheap, none the less! Ahem!"

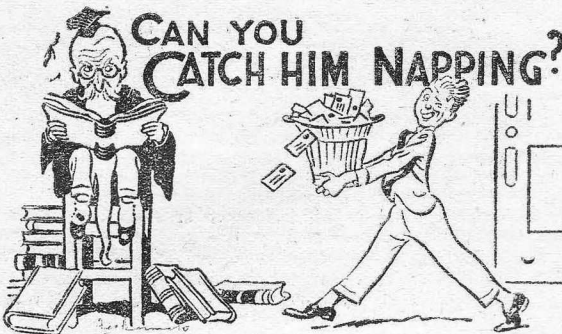
"Oh, my only hat!"

"That—that fat burglar!"

"So—so that's the snag!"

"The—the awful spoofer!"





Here each week the Editor puts the Oracle through his paces, answering Readers' questions. He tries to be funny sometimes, but he's never failed to answer a question yet. If you want to know anything, ask him!

**W**E'VE been having a bit of a spread in the office, chums, and your old friend, the Oracle, is bursting with brains and birthday cake, too full for words, believe me. The old dentals have been working overtime this week on the almond icing, the Editor having decided to have a birthday, just to liven things up.

When we heard about it, I was elected by the staff to compose a little poem, expressing our appreciation of our Editor's kindness, cleanliness, and courtesy during office hours. When I had finished it, I told the office-boy to copy it out in his best handwriting, and the young idiot headed it "Birthday Bloatings from the Staff, composed by Whiskers," and put it on the Editor's desk.

The old Ed. didn't like it at all, but things soon smoothed themselves out when he read the thrilling lines I had penned, which were as follows:

"This Editor of ours, lads, is one of Britain's best,  
He wears beneath his waistcoat, lads,  
A shirt and then a vest;  
And underneath that vest of his, in  
weather warm or cold,  
He wears, throughout the seasons four,  
a heart of solid gold."

Rather pretty, I thought, and when I tripped into the sanctum he was beaming all over his face. "Come along in, my lad," he said genially. "Sit down, make yourself comfortable, and we'll run through the readers' queries together. First of all, James Blair, of Jedburgh, wants us to tell him something about gutta-percha?"

"Gutta-percha is a gum obtained from the percha tree," I said. "These trees grow in Malay, and gatah is the Malay word for gum. An incision is made in

the tree, and the gutta, or gum, flows from it in a greyish, milky fluid. This fluid, known as latex, is boiled in open pots over wood fires and then cooled off. The resulting substance is called gutta-percha, and is used for insulators, and so on."

"Harry West, of Wicklow, wants to know if it is true that lizards and snakes are eaten in certain parts of the world?"

"In the East lizards and snakes are used as food. The flesh of the buffalo, the cat, the dog, the field rat, and the fins of sharks are among some of the strange foods the Easterners enjoy."

"Harry Lane, a Devonshire GEMITE, wishes to know what is meant by the hawse of a ship?"

"The hawse of a ship are in the bows, this being where the hawse-holes are made. The hawse-holes are two holes made for the cables to pass through, and in bad weather they are blocked up with hawse-plugs."

"The next letter asks, 'Is a fire-hose made of rubber?'"

"No, sir. There is no rubber in a fire-hose. Fire-hoses are made from flax."

"What is a sebundy?"

"That's an Anglo-Indian word, from the Hindu, sibandi. A sebundy is a native irregular soldier who is employed on police duty."

"Well, well," said the Editor, "we live and learn. The queries this morning are like your whiskers, my lad, there seems no end to them. Percy Potts, of Lyme Regis, wants us to tell him what a pangolin is?"

"Easy," said I. "Pangolin is the name of a scaly ant-eater found in tropical Asia and in Africa. Its body is from one to three feet in length, and it has short legs, no teeth, a long worm-like tongue, and a body covered with broad, horny scales that overlap each other."

"What is fireproof paint?"

"Paint mixed with a proportion of asbestos or borax. Asbestos is practically incombustible, which means that it cannot catch fire, and paint with asbestos in it will keep woodwork from burning."

"Have you ever heard of a game called 'Pall-Mall'?" George Hayes,

who lives at Wimbledon, says he thought it was the name of a street in the West of London."

"Pall-mall," I explained, "is the name of an obsolete English game that resembled croquet somewhat. It was played in an alley, at either end of which was an iron arch. The idea was to knock the ball with a mallet through the arch. The famous street in the West End of London called Pall Mall got its name from an alley near by, where this game was played."

"What is the correct way in which to describe a number of whales, swimming together?"

"The correct word is 'herd.'"

"What is the 'Jolly Roger'?"

"The name of the flag flown by pirates in the old days. It was black, and was ornamented with a skull and cross-bones in white."

"Here's a corker for you," said the Editor, grinning broadly at the thought of catching me out. "Is rice paper made from rice?"

"No, it is not!" I replied firmly, but kindly. "And the explanation is this. Years ago everybody in Europe, except myself, thought that it was made of rice, though actually it is made from the pith of a small tree that grows in the swampy forests of Formosa, and has no connection with rice in any shape or form, O, sir!"

The Editor glared, and I thought he was going to chuck me out of the room; but, instead, he fired another round off:

"What is a moidore?"

"A moidore," I repeated, to gain time while I thought about it, "was the name given," I continued, as if I had known all the time, "to a gold Portuguese coin that was in currency from 1640 to 1732. It was worth, roughly, 13s. 6d. The word is a corruption of the Portuguese 'moída d'ouro,' which means money of gold."

"Here's a nice letter from a girl reader," said the Editor.

He picked up another letter and his face assumed a joyful expression.

"Dear Mister Editor, having heard that you are celebrating your twenty-first birthday this week I would like to wish you many happy returns, and will you please tell me what to do with my chickens, because they keep falling ill."

"Now, my lad, can you tell our girl reader what to do about it?"

"Yes, sir. Tell her to read 'The Sick Chick, and how to make it better,' by 'Henry Viver.'" At that moment the office-boy fell down in the passage with the tea-things, so, gathering up my whiskers in both hands, I rushed to his aid.

## BAGGY TRIMBLE'S GUESTS!

(Continued from previous page.)

The remarks of Tom Merry & Co. were involuntary but expressive.

They understood all now. The odd points of the whole affair were now clear—absurdly clear. They were not to be honoured guests of Trimble's Uncle Joe Whimple, but paying guests.

Paying guests!

So that was it!

Mr. Whimple was staring at them. He seemed just as perplexed as they were enlightened. There was a deep, deep silence. Mr. Whimple spoke at last.

"There appears to be a misunderstanding!" he remarked. "You appear to be surprised. Possibly my nephew has not made things clear to you. If it is the question of payment in advance—"

"Nunno!" gasped Tom Merry faintly. "You—you see, it is—"

"It's a question of paying at all!" gasped Blake, rather bluntly. "You—you see—"

"I am afraid I do not see, Master Blake!" said Mr. Whimple with a great deal of dignity. "My terms are,

surely, not very excessive. As a matter of fact, as I have already told you, I regret very much indeed that I am obliged to charge anything. I should like to be in the position to lend the craft to you free as you are my nephew's friends. And, in fact, if it were earlier or later in the season, I would not hesitate to do so. But during the busiest month on the Broads that is impossible—quite!"

"We—it's not the question of payment in advance, Mr. Whimple," gasped Tom Merry again. "But—but—"

He paused. It really was very difficult to explain.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus in great distress. "This is vewy awkward indeed, deah boys! Howevah—"

"That—that fat spoofer—" gasped Herries.

"If my nephew has led you to suppose that my terms were lower, boys—" began Mr. Whimple again.

"It—it's not that either, sir!" said Tom, determining to get it out at last. "The—the fact is we—we were led to suppose we were just ordinary guests, not paying guests. We—we're awfully sorry—"

"Bless my soul! Did—did Bagley actually lead you to suppose that?" ejaculated Mr. Whimple. "The—the young



rascal! I—I cannot understand why he should do such a foolish thing. His father, at all events, is well aware that I am only enabled to keep the Grange and to keep things going at all by hiring out my cruiser in the summer months. My income is a very small one, and I am obliged to augment it in some manner! This—is this very annoying!"

"We—we are extremely sorry, sir—"

"I do not blame you at all, my boys—I blame that young rascal!" said Mr. Whimple, his brow clouding. "It is especially annoying in view of the fact that I have turned down several applications for this fortnight, and it is now too late to fix up again. It is a serious loss to me personally, but I do not wish to insist in any way upon you taking the boat, of course. You are entirely free, in the circumstances, to cancel your proposed holiday."

"Bai Jove! Wathah not, sir!" said Arthur Augustus quickly. "I see no reason why we should not go just the same, deah boys," he added, turning to his dismal-faced chums. "My patah pwomised to stand us our holidays as we were pwvented fwom goin' to Eastwood House. I considah it a vevy weasonable pwice indeed, and the patah is bound to stump up, you know!"

"Well—"

"Ye-e-es! But—"

"I have no desire to influence you in the matter at all!" said Uncle Joe, forcing a genial smile. "But why not take a little walk and talk it over? You can then let me have your decision!"

Mr. Whimple left them and boarded the motor-cruiser "Come on!" said Tom Merry.

They walked a little way into the trees.

"Well, what's to be done?" demanded Tom. "I'm inclined to do as Gussy suggests—go ahead with it! After all it'll be a jolly cheap holiday, and shouldn't cost us more than four quid a week each, even with grub and luxuries."

"It would not do that, deah boys!" said Gussy firmly.

"The patah would be wathah upset if you did not agree to allow him to stand all expenses, you know! Aftah all, he invited you to Eastwood House—"

"But if Mr. Whimple wants the cash now—"

"I'll wush off to Oulton and wire the patah for some more cash wight away, deah boys!"

There was a silence. But it did not last long—the chums were not long in making up their minds. Through the trees they caught glimpses of white sails on the sparkling waters of Oulton Broad, and the rustle of the reeds and splash of rising fish brought the glamour of the Broads to them. It would be a big—a very big—disappointment to them to have to cancel the holiday now. Moreover, the worst aspect of the case in their view was the loss to the good-natured Uncle Joe. It was certainly not his fault.

"Makes a jolly nice picture!" said Manners, referring to the view. "Look at those water-lilies, and those ripping clumps of yellow irises, and those bulrushes! My hat! With my camera I could take some ripping snaps here. I say, we've simply got to do it, chaps!"

"Yes, we jolly well will!" said Blake.

"Hear, hear!"

"That's settled, then?"

"Yes—yes!"

"Bai Jove! Yaas, wathah!"

And so it was settled, and the juniors started back for the cruiser.

"But we'll make that fat rotter squirm for this!" said

Blake. "Spotted us, after all! Made us and his uncle look fearful idiots! The—the—"

"We'll smash him!"

"And now's our chance!" grinned Monty Lewther.

"There he goes!"

He pointed through the trees. Mouching dismally along twenty yards from them was a fat figure. It was Trimble, and he seemed to be making his way, very, very cautiously, back towards the motor-cruiser. If they had doubted his guilt in the matter they had no need to do so now. Whether Baggy had actually acted in all innocence or not, he certainly looked guilty and apprehensive now.

He looked more apprehensive when he heard a rush of feet, and sighted Tom Merry & Co. bearing down upon him.

"Yarooop! I—I say, you fellows. Here, it wasn't my fault, you beasts! Loggo! I tell you—yarooooooop!"

Bump!

A wild, prolonged howl of anguish echoed and re-echoed over the wide waters of Oulton Broad.

"Let the fat twister have it!" gasped Blake. "Give him socks!"

"Yaroooooooop!"

Bump, bump, bump, bump!

In the next few minutes, if such was not the case already, Baggy Trimble had good cause to regret having spoofed Tom Merry & Co. with his kind invitation to spend part of their vacation with him on the Norfolk Broads!

## CHAPTER 7.

### Mr. Quirk Again!

"HALLO! Look! See who that is?"

Tom Merry called a halt.

It was later on in the evening. The juniors had given their decision to Mr. Whimple, and that gentleman had brightened up wonderfully, and expressed his great pleasure when he heard it. They paid part of the hire money right away, and Gussy explained that he had wired to his noble pater for the rest, and Mr. Whimple was entirely satisfied with the arrangement.

Since then the juniors had been busy, packing away their belongings, and making everything, as Gussy expressed in nautical terms, taut, trim, and shipshape. Then came a run over to Oulton for stores, and when these were packed away, Mr. Whimple turned up again to give them the promised trial run.

It was not a long run. Before the cruiser had been travelling far, Mr. Whimple discovered that the juniors knew quite as much about motor-engines and the handling of a boat as he did himself.

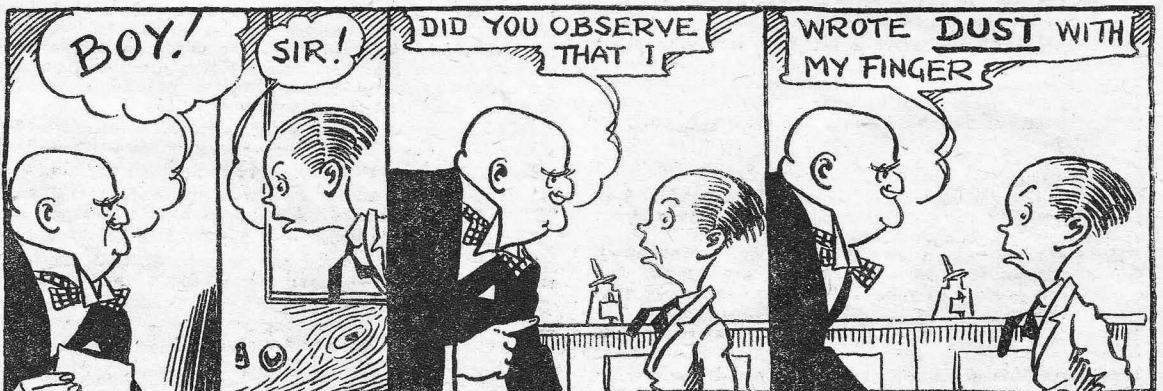
The discovery was a great relief to Trimble's uncle, and his podgy face was full of good-humoured satisfaction when the boat was moored again at the jetty.

Leaving Baggy Trimble in charge of the boat, the juniors had then gone for a stroll before bed-time. Now they were returning, tired but chirpy, when suddenly Tom Merry sighted a familiar figure among the trees surrounding Fen-ree Grange.

"See who it is?" repeated Tom in a whisper.

The summer dusk was deepening under the trees, but Blake and the rest soon made out the sharp features of the man, skulking under the shadows before the wall of the house.

## Potts, The Office Boy



Maybe he's got plenty of brains!



"That hook-nosed johnny!" breathed Lowther. "Phew!"  
 "Bai Jove! That wuffian Quirk!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"What's he up to?" whispered Tom. Quiet as the juniors had been, some slight sound seemed to reach the prowler's ears, and he wheeled round and sighted them.

He stood a moment, hesitating, and then, with a glance of bitter hatred at the juniors, he walked quickly away and was lost among the dark trees.

"Phew! What's the fellow up to?" demanded Blake, eyeing his comrades in some alarm. "What's he hanging round the house for? If the merchant wants to see Baggy's nunky, why doesn't he visit him openly?"

"Wathah stwange, deah boys!"  
 "We'll mention this to Mr. Whimple," said Tom, frowning. "As a matter of fact, I intended to do so before, but clean forgot the merchant. I say, let's stroll round the house and see if he's still hanging round. He's up to no good, I'm afraid!"

Things certainly seemed suspicious, as the juniors agreed. They walked round the neglected grounds of the old house—looking pretty now, with its gabled roofs outlined against the glow of the setting sun—and kept a sharp look-out for the man from South America.

But he had vanished. As they were making their way round to the front gates they met Mr. Whimple, jovial and genial as ever.

"Having a last stroll round before turning in, lads? Good!" he said, puffing at his pipe. "You'll have a busy day to-morrow!"

"We're looking forward to it no end, sir," smiled Tom, who had taken a great liking to the good-natured owner of Fenreed Grange. "I say, Mr. Whimple, there's something we wanted to mention to you!"

"Nothing wrong, I hope?" demanded Mr. Whimple. "That young rascal not devoured all your stores yet, I hope?"

"Not quite!" laughed Tom. "It—it's about a man we met in the train, Mr. Whimple. I forgot to mention it before."

He told of their meeting in the train with Mr. Quirk from South America.

"Quirk?" repeated Mr. Whimple, staring. "Never heard the name before!"

"He claimed to be an old friend of yours, sir."

"Hook-nosed fellow, with a swarthy face and black eyes," said Mr. Whimple, repeating their description. "Never met the man, to my knowledge! But stay. You say he is from South America?"

"He spoke of being abroad, and there was the name of a South American port—Buenos Ayres—on his luggage label."

"Ah! Then possibly it was my brother he knew—"

"Your brother, sir?"

"My elder brother, Gilbert Whimple," said Mr. Joseph Whimple, frowning thoughtfully. "He was in business in Buenos Ayres for some years until his death. As a matter of fact, he inherited Fenreed Grange on my father's death, and it was while returning to England to take over the property that he met his death in a railway smash. The property—for what it is," added Mr. Whimple, with a grim smile—"then, of course, reverted to me. But it is very strange. If this man was in search of my brother, then why didn't he visit

the house openly? And his attitude to you boys was certainly queer!"

"We thought so, at all events, sir!"  
 "However, I don't think we need worry about the fellow," said Mr. Whimple, with a cheery laugh. "He'll call and state his business in his own time, I suppose. At all events, he isn't going to cause me any sleepless nights. Ha, ha! But you did quite right to mention the matter, boys. Well, good-night! Mind you don't sleepwalk and fall overboard! Ha, ha!"

And, with his cheery laugh, Uncle Joe went indoors. Though a trifle puzzled, Mr. Whimple obviously did not attach any great importance to Mr. Quirk from Buenos Ayres.

"Well, if he doesn't think much of it, then I don't see why we need worry," grinned Jack Blake, as they made for the Viking. "Jolly old sport, ain't he?"

"Fancy Baggy having such a decent old chap for a nunky!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "Hallo! Looks as if the fat joker's asleep."

A harvest moon was rising, shedding a golden radiance over the shimmering expanse of Oulton Broad. But all was dark aboard the motor-cruiser, and all was silent save for the rustle of the wind in the trees and rushes, and the faint "plop" of a rising fish.

As they neared the boat a new sound reached them, however—a strange, moaning sound, that rose and fell rhythmically.

"What the thump—" began Lowther.  
 "Only Trimble singing his bed-time song!" chuckled Blake. "He sings it all night through, and we're used to it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors boarded the Viking. They switched on the electric light in the saloon, and found that Trimble had turned in, having selected the best bunk. It was a double bunk, and Trimble was sprawled across it, his mouth wide open, and his face smeared with chocolate. From his mouth came that rhythmical but unmusical snoring.

"Talk about the sleeping beauty!" murmured Lowther. "He's been scoffing chocolate—belonging to someone else, I bet!"

"Bai Jove! I hope the young wascal hasn't boned mine, deah boys! He's been aftah it evah since we left London!" said Gussy. "He's already had most of my supply—"

"That reminds me," said Tom. "What about a cup of cocoa before turning in? Get some water, Monty—plenty in a bucket on deck."

Lowther went for the water, and the rest busied themselves getting something ready to eat, Tom Merry mixing sugar and cocoa in cups. Arthur Augustus eyed Trimble thoughtfully, and then he went to his locker. It was at the bottom of his locker that Gussy had hidden the supply of chocolate which he had brought from London. That chocolate had already caused quite a lot of trouble between Gussy and Trimble.

It was going to cause more. There was a sudden roar as Arthur Augustus opened his locker. Inside all was disorder. Socks, natty ties, cambric handkerchiefs, spotless soft collars, and such-like articles, were mixed up together in an untidy, rumpled heap. Arthur Augustus did not need to look to see if the packets of chocolate were still at the bottom where he had hidden them. He knew they were now inside Trimble, or most of them.

(Continued on next page.)

Not so dusty, eh?



—But he ain't got the sense to use 'em!



"Gweat Scott!" gasped Arthur Augustus, nearly speechless with wrath. "That feahful wuffian has been at my lockah!"

"Ha, ha! I thought he must have been!" chuckled Blake. "It is nothin' to laugh at, you feahful ass!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "Just look at my things! I left them all neat and tidy, and now they are all wumped and covahed in beastlay chocolate! Look! Oh, the—the—"

"Oh, really, Gussy!" Trimble wakened up and sat up in his bunk. He was about to complain about the row Gussy was making, but he paused as he saw what the matter was.

"I—I say, Gussy, it wasn't me!" he gasped, rather apprehensively. "If you—you think it was me bagged your choos—"

"You—you fwightful wascal!" shrieked Gussy. "Oh, really, Gussy! I say, perhaps it was mice, or more likely rats!" said Trimble. "Water-rats, you know! I never even knew you had any chocolate! I wasn't watching you through the skylight hide it there—nothing of the kind! We—we'll have to do something about these awful rats, you— Here, keep off, you— Yarroooooop!"

Bump!  
Trimble landed on the floor in a tangled mass of bedclothes, with a most fearful bump and a howl that fairly rang across the Broad.

"Yarrooooooop!"  
"Hold on, Gussy!" said Blake. "Those floorboards are only made of wood, you know. Dash it all, go easy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"I am going to give this fat wuffian a feahful thwashin'!" roared Arthur Augustus.

But Baggy did not want a fearful thrashing at that time of the night. He leaped up like a jack-in-a-box and bolted round the cabin. Gussy started after him, but got his feet entangled in the bedclothes, and came a fearful cropper.

Once again a fearful howl rang over the Broad. But that was not all. As Gussy went headlong, Monty Lowther happened to come down the companion-way with a bucket of fresh water. Gussy plunged forward, tackling Lowther low like a Rugby forward, in a desperate attempt to save himself. With his legs clutched in a deadly embrace, Lowther also plunged forward on his face, the bucket flying from his grasp.

Its contents swamped over Gussy and the heap of bedclothes and the nearest bunk.

Swooooosh!  
"Oh, great pip!"  
There was the sound of hurrying feet on the deck, and then Mr. Joseph Whimple's startled face appeared on the cabin steps.

"Hallo! What in thunder is happening here? Someone being murder— Bless my soul!"  
He stared blankly at the grovelling forms and the swamped bedclothes and floor.

"It's Gussy's way of taking a cold bath, sir!" explained Blake chokingly. "Nothing serious, Mr. Whimple!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
Despite the damage done, Blake and the rest roared. Arthur Augustus and Lowther roared in a different manner entirely. They were hurt and they were wet.

Tom Merry laughingly explained what had happened, and Mr. Whimple's grim face relaxed into a grin.

"That—that young rascal Bagley again!" he stuttered. "Oh, really, uncle—" groaned Baggy.

"Well, you'd better clear this mess up before turning in!" said Uncle Joe Whimple. "That bunk won't be fit to sleep in to-night, at all events! As for those bedclothes—"

"I certainly cannot sleep in that bunk—it is swimmin' with watah!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "Blake, I shall have to take your bunk, I am afraid!"

"You jolly well won't! You chose that bunk, old bean, and you can stick to it now!"

"Bai Jove! Tom Mewwy, I shall have to—"

"You're jolly well not having mine, either!" said Tom Merry. "You and Trimble have wet that bunk between you and you must make the best of it, Gussy!"

"That's it!"

"Look here, you beasts, what about me?" hooted Trimble. "I'm jolly well not going to sleep in a wet bunk with wet bedclothes, you awful beasts!"

"I uttably wefuse to do so, eithah!" shouted Gussy indignantly.

"You'll jolly well have to sleep on deck, then, or in the galley!" said Blake unfeelingly. "You shouldn't act the goat."

"There's no need for either of them to do that!" exclaimed Mr. Whimple, with a grim laugh. "Accidents will happen—especially, it seems, where my nephew is! You'd better come along to the Grange and I'll fix you up there for the night, both of you!"

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"Bai Jove! Thank you vewy much, sir!"  
"Not at all!" said Mr. Whimple, with a chuckle. "Luckily I always keep a spare bed-room ready for visitors, and you can have it. You'd better clear this mess up and come along to the house. To-morrow you can dry the bedclothes in the sun!"

So it was settled—fortunately for Arthur Augustus and Trimble. Those two worthies, in a far from friendly state, trudged off together a little later to the house among the trees, while once again darkness and silence settled down upon the cruiser as Tom Merry & Co. turned in for the night.



CHAPTER 8.  
The Night Bird!

**B**EAST!" It was Baggy Trimble, of course, who made the exclamation.

He did not make it aloud, but under his breath—very much under his breath, though it was none the less emphatic.

For the hour was late, and Trimble did not want Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to know what a beast he was just then—at least, he did not want Arthur Augustus to wake up and hear his opinion of him.

It was a double bed, in a small bed-room at Fenreed Grange, and Baggy and Gussy had the bed between them. Arthur Augustus had soon dropped asleep—he knew that if he didn't Baggy's dreadful snore would keep him awake all night. So, postponing his settlement with Trimble over the unfortunate affair on the cruiser, Gussy lay down, determined to sleep—and, luckily, he did sleep.

Trimble remained awake. The fact was that his long

snooze aboard the cruiser, followed by his exciting adventures on waking, had made Baggy very hungry. Baggy, indeed, had awakened famished. He simply could not go to sleep, try as he would.

"Beast! repeated Trimble. "It's all this beast's fault for being so beastly mean about the beastly chocolates! I—I wonder——"

Trimble sat up cautiously in bed and pondered, while the gnawing pangs of hunger grew and grew. He had watched Gussy pack his packets of chocolate in his locker, and he remembered seeing Gussy shove a couple of packets into his blazer pocket.



Tom Merry seized Baggy's outfitting arms and hauled him aboard the cruiser!

Baggy was sure of that. But the question was, were the packets in the blazer pocket still? That was the important question, Gussy was very fond of chocolate, but he was very abstemious indeed, and usually only took a nibble at a time, reflected Baggy. Therefore, it was quite possible—more than possible, in fact—that there was still some chocolate reposing in Gussy's jacket pocket.

It was certainly worth investigating. On the other hand, if Gussy woke up and found him at his pockets——

Trimble hesitated. But he decided it was well worth the risk, at last; and very, very cautiously he wormed his way out of the big double bed.

Outside the golden harvest moon shed its radiance over the sleeping countryside; but the bed-room window was small and only a stray shaft of moonlight slanted across one corner of the bed. The rest of the room was in deep darkness.

Baggy crossed the shaft safely, and moved towards the corner, where he had seen Gussy carefully hang his blazer across the back of a chair.

But it was dark, and before Baggy had moved a couple

of yards his big toe connected abruptly against the bed-post castor, and a strangled yelp escaped the fat junior. He clutched his foot in dire anguish and hopped about desperately—until he barged into the chair he was hunting for, overbalanced across it, and went crashing over.

Crash!

"Yoop! Yow-ow-ow!"

"Bai Jove! What—what——"

Gussy was awake.

He sat up in bed and blinked into the darkness of the room.

Trimble lay, on the floor, quite still, and his heart palpitated.

Arthur Augustus could not see him, but suddenly he seemed to become aware that the bed was occupied only by himself.

"Bai Jove!" Trimble heard him murmur. "Where can Twimble be? How vevy wemarkable!"

Arthur Augustus sat up in bed and cogitated the remarkable absence of Trimble. Had Trimble been spirited away in the night by some ghostly visitant? Had Trimble run away rather than face Gussy's dire wrath in the morning? How happy they would all be if he had run away—and did not return! But no such luck, reflected Gussy drowsily. More likely he was out on a grub-raiding expedition—he had been known to get up in the night on such an errand, many times and oft.

Then Gussy suddenly remembered his chocolates.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped. "That's it!"

He could not see Trimble, but he felt sure he must be in the room—probably hiding behind the curtain over the door.

Gussy leaped out of bed, and remembering where the electric-light switch was, he made a rush across to switch the light on.

Unfortunately, Baggy was right in his line of march, so to speak.

Gussy ran right into him, tripped over his fat, prostrate form, and came a fearful purler over him.

Crash!

Bump!

"Yoooooop! Yawooooop!"

Gussy's aristocratic nose connected with the carpet, and his forehead connected with the foot of the washstand.

Trimble scrambled up.

"Oh, crikey!" he gasped. "I—I say, Gussy, are you hurt?"

It was, really, an absurd question in the circumstances. Gussy was hurt, and now he knew how and why he was hurt and who was responsible for his hurt. But he was not too much hurt to want aid before vengeance.

He leaped up and rushed blindly in the darkness towards Baggy's fat, dimly-seen form. But Baggy had anticipated such a move—he dodged desperately aside, and Gussy ran right into the bedpost.

"Yow!"

"He, he, he!"

Baggy was hurt enough himself, but he could not resist a chuckle. None the less, he knew that his position now was a perilous one. Gussy was a most forgiving fellow, as a general rule, but there was a limit. Gussy, in fact, was in such a towering rage that neither considerations of time, place, or behaviour, would have any effect upon him.

He gurgled out something Trimble failed to hear, and then he rushed again at Trimble's fat form. Trimble bolted for the door, tore it open somehow, and then he flew.

There was a passage going to right and to left, but Trimble did not stay to select—he took the one to the left, reached the head of the staircase before he knew it, and only saved himself from going headlong downstairs by grabbing convulsively at the banisters.

But Gussy was hard on his heels, and Trimble fairly flew downstairs, two at a time.

"Stop, you fat wottah!" hissed Arthur Augustus. "I am goin' to flay you alive, you fat wascal!"

The inducement to stop was not good enough for Baggy. He did not stop, and Arthur Augustus raced down the stairs after him, the light of vengeance in his noble eye. Luckily there was a tall landing window at the head of the stairs, and the moonlight gave plenty of light.

But down below, on the ground floor, it was different. The passages were dark, and the doors of the rooms were closed—and Baggy could not see them in the dark. As a matter of fact, Baggy did not dare to stop—he tore on blindly, gasping and panting, stumbling and bumping as he met unexpected obstacles and corners. The house was old and rambling, and suddenly Baggy pulled himself up, breathless and gasping.



"Ow! Ow!" he gasped. "The—the awful beast! Serves him right!"

He had heard a sudden crash behind him, as if Gussy had collided with something—a crash and a strangled howl.

"He, he, he!" giggled Baggy feebly. "Serve the beast right!"

He listened intently.

Where he was he had not the faintest idea. He remembered rushing along at least three corridors, and it was only now he realised how dark it was. Moreover, he was now on bare, uncarpeted flooring, and there was a peculiarly musty smell in the air. In his blind panic he must have rushed into the unoccupied and closed part of the Grange.

"Oh!" gasped Baggy. "Oh—oh dear!"

A new terror took possession of Baggy then as he blinked about him in the velvety darkness. With the raging Arthur Augustus hard on his heels, Baggy had thought of nothing but escape. Obviously the beast had had no intention of leaving their settlement until morning! Flight had been imperative. But now—

No sound reached the listening Baggy! Arthur Augustus was either waiting for him, ready to pounce upon him when he returned, or else had gone to bed.

Supposing he had gone back to bed! Baggy would then be alone downstairs in that horrible, desolate house. The very look of the place in the darkness had given Baggy the creeps. Now he had the creeps very badly indeed as he realised that it was close on midnight, and that he was most probably alone.

"Beast!" groaned Baggy. "Oh dud-dear!"

He started to feel his way back. Better far to risk Gussy's terrible wrath than remain alone there in that ghostly, creaking darkness. Trimble was no hero at the best of times, and now his terror grew and grew. How he had managed to travel along so fast before he could not imagine now. It was as much as he could do to see a foot before him, and the darkness seemed to be engulfing him. He had been feeling his way for several minutes before the dreadful truth began to dawn in upon him.

Where were the stairs? He ought to have reached them by this time. Somehow he must have missed the right turning. He was lost in that creaking, horrible house!



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"Oh d-dud-dear!" groaned Baggy again.

The passages seemed endless, and more than once he smothered a sneeze as the dust got up his nostrils. He halted at last.

Ahead of him he spotted a gleam of light—and it did not seem to be wholly moonlight.

He crept on, breathlessly. He reached the end of a passage and found himself standing before a half-open door. It was creaking slightly, as if moved by the breeze from an open window—Baggy, indeed, smelled the fresh night air now. And then Baggy got the shock of his fat life.

He found himself blinking into a rather large room, the window of which was wide open to the night air. It was a big window, stretching almost from floor to ceiling, and the room was almost flooded with moonlight. Round it were shelves of books—hundreds of books. He was blinking into the library—now given over to dust and cobwebs. That evening Baggy had peeped inquisitively into several of the disused rooms of the Grange, but this was his first peep into the old library.

The next moment Baggy Trimble was wishing devoutly that he had chosen a more suitable time to visit that room.

For it was occupied now. Standing by the ancient, carved fireplace was the figure of a man, tall and well-built. On the mantelpiece, close by him, lay an electric torch, and the bright, white light from this shone partly on a square hole in the panelled wall and partly on the profile of the man, showing it up in bold relief.

It was a strong face, and the nose was hooked like the beak of a bird of prey. Baggy knew the face at a glance.

The face was the face of Mr. Quirk, the man from South America!

## CHAPTER 9.

### The Ivory Casket!

**B**AGGY was too terrified to move—too terrified almost to breathe.

His heart seemed to stop beating. A queer, prickly sensation ran up his spine and over his scalp.

At first glance into the room he had supposed that it was his uncle. But he knew who the occupant was now. And Baggy had good cause already to be afraid of Mr. Quirk.

The fat junior stood quite motionless, far too afraid even to think of bolting then. His bare feet had made no sound on the dusty floor. The mysterious intruder had not heard him—yet. Baggy's one frantic determination at that moment was that he should not hear him!

He stood watching, fascinated.

The hole in the panelled wall was, obviously, a secret cupboard. From that cupboard Mr. Quirk had just taken something; he had it in his hands now. It was a small ivory box, oblong and elaborately carved—or so it appeared in the bright light from the torch.

The man's eyes glittered as he strove to open the box with his fingers.

With a muttered exclamation he gave it up at last. Placing the ivory casket carefully on the wide window-ledge, he felt inside the secret cupboard. Apparently finding it empty, he withdrew his hand and closed the sliding panel.

Then he turned to the window again. But Baggy's relief was short-lived.

Outside the breeze was rustling the foliage of the trees, and just then a sudden gust swept through the open window, caught the creaking door, and slammed it back against the wall.

Instantly Mr. Quirk wheeled, startled. Possibly he had closed the door before beginning his lawless work, but the catch had failed to grip, and the draught had swung it open again. At all events he was startled, and as he swung round he sighted the hapless Baggy at once.

He muttered a savage oath. Baggy turned to fly, his wits returning with a rush in that terrifying moment.

But it was a case of more haste, less speed.

As he whirled round the sleeve of his pyjama jacket caught in the door-catch, and he was pulled up short with a jerk. It was only for a second—the next Baggy had torn himself free. But that second was enough for the man from South America.

In a flash he had leaped across the uncarpeted floor, and his savage grasp was upon the terrified fat youth.

"No, you don't!" he panted. "Here, let's have a look at you!"

Baggy strove to yell, but no sound came, so great was his terror. Mr. Quirk held him with one hand and reached to close the door.

This gave Baggy half a chance, and he made the most of it. Before he had been too scared, too terrified to move

an inch; now terror seemed to sharpen his fat wits and lend him resource and agility.

As Quirk grasped the door-knob, Baggy wrenched himself free, and leaped desperately for the open window.

He reached it and swarmed over the low sill, knocking over the small ivory casket—though Baggy was far from doing that intentionally. The next second Baggy had followed the box. A furious oath came from behind him.

Baggy's fat wits had told him that he must be on the ground floor, and that the drop could not be a dangerous one. Fortunately it wasn't. None the less, Baggy dropped heavily into a flower-bed below the window, and he howled as he felt something rammed into the small of his back.

It felt like a brick, and then in a flash of inspiration Baggy realised just what it was. Almost unconsciously his podgy hand closed upon the ivory box, and he leaped to his feet.

There was another savage oath above his head, and a scraping of feet. Baggy waited not a second longer. With a strangled howl, he bolted for his life, crashing through bushes and tangled weeds in the unkempt garden.

Quirk shouted hoarsely.

"Stop! Come back, you young hound! Stop, or I'll fire, hang you!"

"Yarrooop!"

Baggy did not stop. Whether the gentleman from Buenos Ayres had a firearm and would have kept his word he did not know—he was just too terrified to stop. And he was going strong, the ivory box clutched convulsively in his fat fist. As a matter of fact, Baggy scarcely realised he had it. Possibly, had he paused to reflect, he would have dropped it like a hot brick rather than have Mr. Quirk on his track.

But he did not stop to reflect—he just flew as if he were being chased by a raging tiger.

And Mr. Quirk certainly resembled a raging tiger in many ways.

He thudded in pursuit, cursing and threatening luridly in English and in Spanish.

Baggy tore on, gasping, panting, shaking like a great fat jelly, with fear, and with a heart thumping like a hammer.

Luckily it was moonlight. Baggy glimpsed a large gap in the fairly high wall enclosing the grounds. He made for it, and fairly flung himself over the broken fencing that filled the gap. Beyond were the trees, and through them he glimpsed the glimmering waters of Oulton Broad—a sheet of shimmering gold and silver in the moonlight.

"Yarroooooop!" shrieked Baggy. "Help! Murder! Police! Fire! Yarroooooop! Help! Merry—Blake—Digby—Help!"

Baggy had sighted the cruiser, dark and shadowy, at the water's edge.

But Mr. Quirk was perilously close. He had ceased his raging now, and Baggy could only hear his thudding, ominous feet. But they were enough.

Baggy was shrieking incoherently now. A light suddenly flashed on the cruiser. Never had a light been so welcome to Baggy Trimble. Figures appeared on the deck of the cruiser. Never had the figures of Tom Merry & Co. been so welcome to the fat youth!

The boat was near now. He was on the jetty, well out of the dark trees.

"What the thump——"

"It's Trimble!" yelled Blake.

"Great pip! Trimble——"

"Yarroooooooh!" choked Baggy. "Help! Stop him! He's going to shoot—— Yarrooop!"

The cruiser was moored a yard or so away from the jetty, and Baggy made one last frantic leap.

His feet slipped on the wet jetty, however, just as he leaped, and but for Tom Merry he would have dropped between the boat and the balks.

As it was, Tom grabbed his outflung arms, and Baggy landed, half on the cruiser and half off it, with a thump that sent the ivory box flying from his grasp, and brought a strangled howl from Baggy.

Splash!

There was the dull splash of something falling in the water.

Tom Merry and Blake hauled the quaking, panting Baggy Trimble aboard the cruiser. He dropped on the planks, panting and gasping like a punctured balloon, in a state of collapse.

Tom Merry stared hard into the blackness under the dark trees. There was no movement ashore apart from the waving foliage. From somewhere in the wood sounded the hoot of an owl, otherwise all was silent.

Yet Tom had glimpsed that figure hard on Trimble's track.

"There was someone after him—a man!" gasped Tom Merry. "This beats the band, Blake! Trimble's in his bare feet and pyjamas! Trimble——"

"Grooogh! Ow, ow, ow! Grooogh!"

"What's happened, you fat idiot?" breathed Herries.

The juniors crowded round Baggy in their pyjamas as he sprawled on the deck, utterly spent.

He sat up at last, hugging his feet and groaning. A spinney is not an ideal spot for steeplechasing in one's bare feet—as Baggy had discovered. While fleeing from Mr. Quirk, Baggy had been far too terrified to feel anything. But now he felt quite a lot.

"Ow, ow, ow!" he gurgled. "Yow, yow, yow! My fuffet! Grooogh!"

"What's happened, Baggy?" demanded Tom, with another curious glance ashore. "Who was that after you?"

"Grooogh! That beast Quirk!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Quirk? That rotter?"

"Yow! Yes—the awful beast! Yow! My feet are cut to pieces! Grooogh!"

"But—but what was Quirk after you for?" demanded Tom, suddenly remembering their glimpse of him in the wood.

"He—he's a rotten burglar! Yow!"

"A—a whatter?"

"Burglar!" gurgled Baggy. "Grooogh! I—I caught him in the act! He was just——"

Trimble paused.

In certain matters Baggy Trimble was very cautious. He suddenly became cautious now as he remembered the ivory box. That strange and mysterious box now lay at the bottom of the Broad. But it was close in shore and could easily be regained again—or so Baggy reflected.

"Go on!" urged Tom Merry, his eyes gleaming with excitement. "What happened? You say you caught that merchant Quirk burgling——"

"Yow! Yes—caught him in the act!" Baggy decided there was no harm in telling that—in fact, he had to give some good reason for his headlong flight and his fright. But there was no necessity to mention the ivory box! "I'll tell you all about it. Ow, ow!"

He told of his adventure with Arthur Augustus—or, at least, as much as he wanted to tell. And what he wanted to tell was not so truthful as it might have been. Chocolates did not come into it. He had, it appeared, got up because he heard a noise outside, and that awful beast D'Arcy had jumped out of bed and rushed at him; all for no reason at all, the beast!

"And then you got lost in the passages?"

"Yes; it was awful!"

"And you found that merchant rooting about in the library?" said Tom Merry, staring.

"Yes!" Baggy had decided not to mention the sliding panel and secret cupboard. That was not necessary! "What he was up to goodness knows! But just as I got in the doorway he rushed at me, and I had to fly for my life, I can tell you! If he hadn't been armed, of course, I should have tackled the brute!"

"Of course you would—I don't think!" murmured Lowther, with a soft chuckle. "And now let's have the whole truth, Baggy!"

"Eh? I have told you the whole truth!" snorted Baggy.

"You're keeping something back, you fat ass!" said Blake.

"I'm jolly well not!" hooted Baggy.

And that was all they could get out of Baggy Trimble—though more than one of the juniors rather suspected he was keeping something back.

"I just glimpsed the merchant through the trees!" said Tom Merry, exchanging glances with his chums. "It's pretty clear the brute's tried to burgle the place! What's it mean?"

"Goodness knows! Better yank Baggy back and rouse Mr. Whimple. It's a marvel Baggy's yelling hasn't roused him already!" said Blake.

"I think that," agreed Tom. "Hold on, by the way. I heard something drop in the water when you jumped aboard, Baggy! Did you drop something in?"

"I—I—— Oh, no—nothing at all!" stammered Baggy.

"That—that is, it was only a stone!"

"A stone?" said Tom, staring curiously at Baggy.

"Yes. You—you see, I grabbed up a stone when he chased me," gasped Baggy. "I—I was determined to sell my life dearly, you know! If he'd caught me up, I should have brained him with it!"

"Oh!"

"Luckily for him he didn't! And when I jumped on board I knew I was safe, and chucked it away, of course!" said Baggy. "That was it exactly! Just a stone, you know!"

"Oh. It didn't—— Well, we'll let it go at that!" said Tom Merry gruffly. "Come on, you fat idiot! We'll take you back and explain to your uncle."

"Oh dear! I'm not jolly well going back to that awful house again!"

"All right! We'll leave you alone on the boat, then!"



"Yarrop! Here, hold on, I'm coming!" yelped Baggy in dire terror.

There was a chuckle. And in their canvas shoes and with coats over their pyjamas, Tom Merry, Blake, Lowther, and Herries accompanied the quaking Baggy to the Grange, leaving Digby and Manners in charge of the boat. Baggy made another attempt to stay behind, but it was necessary for him to explain to Mr. Whimple; and they forced him to go. And Baggy went.

### CHAPTER 10. Very Curious!

**L**IGHTS were flashing at the Grange when the juniors tramped up to the house, and it was clear that Mr. Whimple had been roused by the commotion after all.

He appeared in the hall, fully dressed. Behind him was Arthur Augustus, likewise dressed. It was Gussy, in fact, who had heard Trimble yelling first, and he had roused Mr. Whimple after some trouble, that gentleman being rather a heavy sleeper.

They fairly blinked at Baggy as Tom Merry & Co. yanked that reluctant junior into the hall.

"Bless my soul! Here is Bagley now!" exclaimed Uncle Joe blankly. "What, what—"

"Gweat Scott!" gasped Gussy, eyeing Trimble's dishevelled and dismal form blankly. "What happened to you, Twimble? I went to bed, thinkin' you would follow, and I must have drooped asleep again. Then I woke up heahwin' somebody yellin'. I suppose it was you, you feahful young wascal!"

"Yes, it was Baggy right enough!" grinned Blake. "Let your uncle hear the tale, Baggy!"

Baggy told his story—a trifle more carefully and cautiously this time. Baggy had had time to prepare it now. Mr. Whimple's eyes opened wide as he listened. Not knowing his hopeful nephew as well as did Tom Merry & Co., he never thought of questioning statements or suspecting omissions.

"Good gad!" he ejaculated blankly. "That—that fellow you told me about again, eh? But what in thunder does he want in the library—or anywhere else in the house, for that matter? Some of the furniture and pictures might fetch a bit, if I chose to sell them—or were forced to sell them, for I won't sell 'em unless—but a burglar isn't likely to come after furniture and pictures, eh?"

"It's no end queer, Mr. Whimple! But the chap's after something, obviously!"

"Unless Baggy dreamed it all," chuckled Lowther. "I spotted somebody chasing him, at all events!" said Tom Merry quietly. "Look here, Baggy—you're sure you've told us all?"

"Absolutely!" said Baggy. "I hope you fellows don't suspect that I'd knowingly hold anything back," he added with dignity, "or tell anything but the truth?"

"Oh, no—not at all!" grinned Blake. "We don't suspect, we just know you would!"

"Oh, really, Blake, you beast—"

"Well, never mind now," said Uncle Joe hastily. "It is all very strange and unaccountable. But we can do nothing to-night, and to-morrow I will ring up the police in case the rascal is still prowling round. I shouldn't think he would dream of returning to-night! Bagley, you and your friend had better return to bed."

"But I'm frightfully hungry!" groaned Baggy. "I simply couldn't sleep without something to eat, you know! After saving the house from burglars—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's nothing to cackle about!" said Trimble warmly. "But for me, Uncle and Gussy might have been murdered in their beds! Fat lot you'd have cared if they had, Blake!"

"You fat ass—"

"Look here, I'm going to sleep on that boat!" said Baggy with determination. "You can sleep with Gussy, Tom Merry, can't you? Of course I'm not afraid of that chap coming back—"

"Bai Jove! Not weally, Twimble—"

"Certainly not! But I'm aching all over, and I think the—the rippling splash of water may lull me to sleep, you know! But what about something to eat first, Uncle Joe?"

"I'll get you some biscuits," said Uncle Joe, with a chuckle. "After saving the house by running away from it like you did—"

"I—I was running for help, you know—"

"Oh, quite!"

Mr. Whimple chuckled again, but did not argue the matter with Baggy. He gave the fat youth some biscuits, and then Blake, Lowther, and Herries escorted Baggy back to the cruiser, Tom Merry good-naturedly agreeing to sleep for the rest of the night with Gussy at the Grange.

Both Tom and Arthur Augustus were a long time getting to sleep again, but they dropped off at last, and the early morning sun was streaming in at the windows when they awoke.

They dressed hurriedly and went downstairs, anxious in case there had been further alarms. But Mr. Whimple, plump and smiling, assured them that all was well.

He insisted upon them taking breakfast with him, and then the juniors made tracks for the cruiser.

Tom Merry was looking very thoughtful.

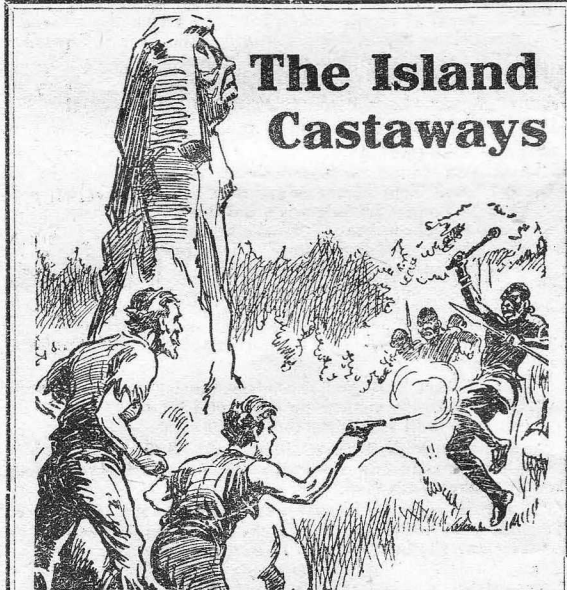
The events of the night had more than added to the mystery which seemed to surround Mr. Quirk, and his strange interest in Fenreed Grange. What was the man from South Africa after? That it was merely an ordinary burglarious attempt, Tom could not credit. There was more behind it than that. And Tom felt sure that Trimble could have enlightened them, had he wished.

What had actually happened during the night? It seemed certain that Baggy actually had surprised Quirk at work in the library. But why had Quirk chased Baggy? One would have thought the intruder would have made himself scarce at the earliest possible moment, instead of wasting time on a fat idiot like Baggy Trimble.

Had Baggy told them all? Tom could not help wondering.

It looked, at all events, as if their holiday on the Broads was not going to be without adventure.

A delicious smell of frying bacon and sausages was wafted to them from the cruiser, and as Tom and Gussy



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scrambled aboard, they heard Trimble's voice raised in emphatic tones.

"I utterly refuse—I refuse point blank!" he was exclaiming firmly. "I decline to accompany you fellows on this trip after the scandalous and ungrateful way you've treated me."

"Well, my hat!" murmured Tom Merry.  
"Bai Jove!"

The two juniors entered the saloon. They found that Trimble had finished his breakfast, while Herries was just cooking the last few sausages. Blake, Herries, Digby, Lowther and Manners were looking very serious indeed, but they winked expressively at Tom and Gussy.

"A serious crisis has arisen, you fellows!" exclaimed Lowther gravely. "The whole trip looks like being mucked up. Trimble refuses to accompany us, after all!"

"Weally, Twimble—"  
"We'll have to persuade him to change his mind somehow, you fellows," said Blake, shaking his head seriously. "Would you agree to come if we knocked off the cleaning of brasses, and only insisted upon you doing all the rest of the work, Baggy?"

"It's useless talking," said Baggy, getting to his feet. "Sure there's no more sosses, Herries?"

"Not for you, old bean!" said Herries.

"Then I must rush off now—I want to speak to my uncle—something jolly important, you know!"

"You seem in a jolly old hurry to get rid of us," said Herries incautiously. "What's the game, you fat clam?"

"Eh? Oh, nothing—nothing at all!" gasped Baggy.

"I—I say, if you fellows feel you'll miss me so badly, I'll tell you what—I'll come on the next trip. Or I could join you somewhere later—to-morrow, perhaps. That's it. Where are you making for, Tom Merry?"

"We're cruising first to Beccles, old bean. Then on to Geldeston, and a run back to make for Somerleyton, Had-discove, Reedham, Buckenham Ferry, Bramerton, and Whittingham," chuckled Tom, glancing at the map. "Then we're visiting Norwich, and after that we'll probably cruise back and make for Great Yarmouth across Breydon Water, old scout. Then—"

"But—but that's an awful way!" gasped Baggy. "Look here—"

"Just fill in our fortnight nicely, taking things easy," smiled Tom. "That's if we come back here then. But we may take another week, if we can, and do Wroxham, Stalham, and those places, old chap. We'll wire to your uncle—"

"That's all right!"

"Is it?" ejaculated Tom.

"Quite! You can wire to me when you get to Beccles," said Trimble. "You should get there by Monday easy. Wait for me, and I'll join you there."

"Oh!"

"So that's all right," said Baggy. "You chaps shove off now. Looks like being a ripping day! Cheerio!"

And Baggy rolled up the companion-way and rolled ashore quite cheerily.

In the saloon of the motor-cruiser Tom Merry & Co. fairly blinked at each other.

"Has—has he really gone?" gasped Blake, jumping to the saloon windows. "My hat! Yes, he's going. Did you ever?"

"What's his game?" said Tom, almost dazedly. "It seems almost too good to be true. Won't it be simply too ripping—without Baggy? He was the only fly in the ointment."

"Yaas, wathah! But pway do not delay, deah boys."

"Right-ho!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Wire from Beccles—oh? You'll catch me wiring from Beccles. And if Baggy sees us again before the fortnight's up, it won't be my fault."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The next moment all was bustle on the motor-cruiser. The news that Baggy was not accompanying them seemed too good to be true. Yet it was true. Baggy had vanished amid the trees. They simply couldn't understand it, but at the moment they did not try to do so. They were far too anxious to get off before Baggy changed his mind.

Leaving the breakfast things still on the table, the crew of the Viking jumped to their various jobs, Tom and Blake attending to the engine. There was not much to be done. A few minutes at most, and they would be off without Baggy Trimble, their host.

But it was their host's own choice—his own desire that they should go without him. And their only fear now was that he might change his mind and come back before they could get off.

In a couple of minutes the engine was humming, and Herries, Digby, and Lowther jumped to the ropes and began to cast off.

## CHAPTER 11.

## No Luck!

"BEASTS!"

Baggy Trimble chuckled softly as he murmured that.

He was referring to Tom Merry & Co., of course. Somehow, Baggy had a suspicion that they were not so anxious to keep him with them as they had pretended to be.

But though he called them "beasts," he only chuckled now. He had something on far more important, in his opinion, than a cruise on the Broads. It was not a second breakfast at the Grange, either. For once Baggy had no thought at the moment of grub. It was not very long since he had had breakfast, and he was not feeling hungry yet. He was far too excited, in fact, to feel hungry.

All he could think of was—the ivory casket, which now lay at the bottom of the Broad.

At least, Baggy hoped devoutly that it did. He had hardly slept a wink on the cruiser. Had Quirk seen the box drop? He felt almost certain that he hadn't. Yet he trembled in case Quirk had, and so tried to recover it before he could do so. Since daylight he had kept an anxious, wary eye shorewards, but he had seen no sign of the man from South America.

Yet the sooner the box was recovered the better. That it contained something very valuable—treasure, most likely—Baggy was assured.

At the moment the great thing was for the cruiser, with Tom Merry & Co. aboard, to depart, and leave the coast clear for the dragging operations. Baggy was far more anxious for the cruiser to go without him than Tom Merry & Co. were, in fact.

Not that he intended them to spend the fortnight without him. Baggy had no intention of allowing that for one moment. He would get the ivory casket first, and see what was in it. Afterwards, he would follow Tom Merry & Co. up. The beasts should not escape him. If they failed to wire he could easily borrow cash from his uncle to follow. He knew his uncle had asked Tom Merry to wire from various villages to report if all was well.

Baggy wasn't troubling about that point at all.

Once in the trees Baggy settled down in the grass to watch for the cruiser's departure.

He chuckled as he watched from cover, the feverish preparations of Tom Merry & Co. to get away.

"Beasts!" he murmured. "I believe the awful beasts are glad I'm not going, and are rushing to get off in case I change my mind. Ungrateful beasts! I've a jolly good mind— Oh!"

Baggy broke off.

A slight sound in the ferns and grass behind him had caused him to look round.

Just behind him a man was standing—a tall, well-built man, with a swarthy face, and a hooked nose.

Trimble's fat heart almost ceased to beat.

He lay and panted and shook, his eyes fixed in stark terror on the black, beady eyes of Mr. Quirk, like a great, fat, frightened rabbit.

For a full half-minute the fat junior gazed, fascinated, and terror-stricken, and then the spell seemed to snap, and he leaped up desperately to escape.

"No, you don't, my young friend," hissed Mr. Quirk.

His arms went round Baggy in a flash, and one big hand choked Baggy's choking yell into a gurgling silence.

"You know what I want," said Mr. Quirk, in grating tones. "I want that casket you took upon yourself to run away with last night. Where is it? Quirk!"

Trimble's heart leaped. Even in that terrible moment of fear he felt a thrill of joy as he realised that the man from South America had not heard or seen the casket splash into Oulton Broad.

"Gug-gug-g-gug!" choked Baggy.

"I'll release your mouth so that you can speak," said Mr. Quirk, in cool, level tones. "If you attempt to cry out for aid, I will twist your neck as I would a rabbit's. Now, tell me where that ivory casket is?"

"G-grough!" choked Baggy, as the hand was taken away.

"You must have it!" hissed Mr. Quirk, his beady eyes aflame with fury. "If you wish to live—if you wish to see your friends again— Oh!"

He ended up with a strangled yelp as Baggy back-heeled and hacked his shin viciously. The next instant Baggy's

(Continued on page 28.)



RED HOT YARN OF ROMANCE IN THE DAYS OF OLD!

# Nick o' the Highway!

By Cecil Fanshaw.



## CHAPTER 1 An Arrest!

"WELL met, cullies!" Swift Nick laughed gaily as he reined up his famous horse Sultan. "'Twas a rich haul I and my young pal made to-night. Gather round, and we'll share out the spoils!"

"Ho, ho, ho! Hurrah for t' tobymon!" went up a delighted chorus.

Then the moonlit glade, deep in Hanley Woods, rang with whoops of laughter, as round Nick and young Roy crowded a merry crew of poachers and deer-hunters. The latter were known locally as the "Blacks," owing to their custom of blackening their faces with charcoal as a form of disguise.

Dressed in fur caps, battered cocked hats, ragged coats and knee-breeches, and mostly armed with cudgels and knives, though having a couple of blunderbusses between them, the Blacks looked a rascally crew.

But actually the worst crime they ever committed was the snaring of rabbits, and the shooting of pheasants and an occasional deer. Mighty useful allies they were to the two highwaymen, frequently giving news of Runners' movements, and receiving in return shares of plunder.

This night there was plenty of plunder to share, for Swift Nick and Roy had bid a wealthy nobleman's coach "Stand and deliver!" Dismounting, they flung their heavy saddlebags on the ground, amidst renewed cheers.

"Less noise! Share out swiftly and begone, cullies!" grinned Nick. "Folk say that Squire Hudson is on the prowl with a party o' Runners. And he vows to hang all my friends as fast as he can lay hands on them. Thus he thinks to scare my friends into betraying me and Roy."

"Drat t' squire!" rose fierce growls from the ragged

Blacks. "He shall never learn aught about you or your young pal from us, Swift Nick!"

"Faith, I know that!" Nick cried warmly. "But waste no time, cullies. You are all in danger if we have been trailed hither."

Well did the jolly Blacks know they were all in danger of hanging if caught in the company of Swift Nick and Roy. But there was no searing the Blacks, who delightedly crowded round the highwaymen as they undid their saddlebags.

But suddenly Swift Nick leaped to his feet and looked round.

"Hist, cullies!" he gasped. "What is yon sound?"

Instantly there was consternation in the glade. Round whipped the ragged Blacks, peering into the shadows and straining their ears. Nick and Roy drew bell-mouthed pistols from the deep pockets of their riding-coats.

"'Twas nought, Swift Nick!" growled the giant leader of the Blacks, a merry rascal named Bob Bankel.

"I vow I heard horses in the undergrowth!" snapped Nick. "We've been followed! Take this saddlebag, cullies, and run—"

It was too late. That very instant the night was rent by hoarse shouts of triumph, then a dim body of horsemen, who had approached the glade stealthily, came crashing through the trees. They were headed by a burly, red-faced man in a plum-coloured riding-coat, a laced cocked hat, and riding a fine grey horse.

He was Squire Hudson himself, leading a party of cloaked Runners; and in savage glee the squire thundered:

"'Tis Swift Nick and young Roy! Hobnobbing with the plaguy gang o' Blacks! Have at 'em, lads! Zounds! Every man-jack shall hang!"

Furiously Nick glared at the horsemen. Never had he

## IN PURSUIT OF THE YORK COACH!

### Headlong Race Across Country! Runners in Pursuit!

let down a friend. No intention had he of allowing any of the Blacks to be caught and hanged.

"Away to your secret cave, Bob!" he barked, flinging his saddlebag to the giant leader of the poachers. "I and Roy will draw off the pursuit."

The Blacks saw that Nick meant what he said. And, being ill-armed, they knew that they had small chance against the mounted Runners; so they broke and fled in all directions as Nick and Roy leapt at their horses. But first Bob Bankel discharged his blunderbuss.

Bang, bang!

As they swung to their saddles Nick and Roy blazed at the newcomers. Their pistols belched smoke and flame, and Nick's bullet grazed the flank of the squire's grey horse, causing the animal to shy violently and almost unseat its rider.

There ensued roars of rage, for the Runners had intended a surprise, had not expected resistance. Pistols flashed and thundered reply, and bullets whistled about the two masked highwaymen.

But the latter manœuvred skilfully in the dim light, galloping to and fro and firing, to give the Blacks time to escape. Nick saw a Runner tumble from his saddle, saw the whole of the squire's party flung into confusion for a second by the riderless horse. But he knew the unequal fight could only have one end.

"The Blacks ha' gone, cully!" he grinned boldly. "Now we must ride for it!"

"Whither?" gasped Roy, blazing into the smoke-filled gloom.

"Faith, we must separate!" snapped Nick. "We'll meet again at the Fox and Hound Inn ere midnight."

"Well said, cully!" chuckled Roy.

With that, the two highwaymen wheeled their horses, clapped home their heels, then galloped off in different directions, bent forward in their saddles. Shouts sounded in their rear, and in headlong pursuit came Squire Hudson and his five remaining Runners.

But Swift Nick's ruses had spoilt the tyrant squire's plans. All the Blacks had been given good time to escape. Moreover, in order to try to capture both Nick and Roy, the squire's party would have to split up, which they proceeded to do immediately.

"Get after yonder young cur, Davis!" thundered Squire Hudson, dispatching two Runners after Roy. "I'll catch Swift Nick myself. This time he shall hang at Tyburn, by thunder!"

"Will he, i' faith?" Nick laughed grimly.

But Nick had three well-mounted men after him in the squire and two Runners. He heard the other pursuers go crashing after Roy, reckoned Roy would soon slip them in the dark wood, and himself broke away for open country in order to keep the squire on his tracks.

Across three moonlit fields he led the furious squire and the Runners, clearing hedges and ditches at mighty bounds, his coat tails flying in the wind. He cleared five-barred gates, drummed past a farm, awaking dogs, past haystacks and barns.

At first bullets whistled close to Nick, but soon the pursuers reckoned they had better save their ammunition. Then the chase rushed across country in grim silence. But there was no horse in the county like Swift Nick's black Sultan, and, after half an hour's hard riding, Nick found himself alone.

He reined up on the edge of a dark copse, strained his ears, but could hear no sound of pursuit.

"Faith, I've slipped 'em!" Nick laughed delightedly. "I warrant Roy has escaped, too. You bloodthirsty squire will catch none o' my friends to-night."

Nick never dreamt that he laughed too soon; that, in fact, he was mistaken. But apparently there was nothing more he could do at the moment, except to ride to the meeting-place arranged with Roy. So he turned Sultan towards the Fox and Hound Inn, kept by burly John Dunn, a staunch pal of the two highwaymen. There was no knowing whither Roy had ridden.

At last Nick sighted the thatched, gabled old inn, with its creaking sign hung over the front door. It was a posting-inn whereat mail coaches changed horses, so there were stables a plenty all round the walled-in yard.

Nick saw lights at the inn windows. Quietly and boldly he rode into the yard, dismounted, and calmly put Sultan into one of the stalls amongst many other horses, hacks for hire, pack-horses, and coach-horses.

Sultan was not likely to be noticed in the full, dim-lit stables, and Nick chuckled as he fed his animal. Then he stole towards the inn, moving cautiously in his tall riding-boots.

But he decided not to announce his arrival to burly John, the innkeeper, in case the man was questioned about him; and very shortly he was glad of his decision.

"You tigerish squire has vowed to hang all my friends!" Nick chuckled grimly. "By my life, he shall not know that innkeeper John is one of 'em!"

With that Nick pushed open the inn door and peered into the parlour, which had a huge, stone fireplace, an oak-beamed ceiling, and panelled walls.

One glance showed Swift Nick that the parlour was empty, though voices sounded from the tap-room. Another showed him a large fireplace with a wide chimney. He knew every bolt-hole and secret room in the Fox and Hound Inn.

Nick uttered a chuckle as he ran lightly across the parlour, leapt over the hearth, and thrust his head and shoulders up the wide chimney. There sounded the rattle of an invisible chain, then Nick's breeches, and, finally, his big riding-boots vanished upwards.

There was a secret chamber hidden in the huge chimney, and therein Swift Nick meant to wait until the inn was empty, when he could show himself to burly John Dunn. Doubtless Roy would turn up later.

But not long had Nick been hidden up the wide chimney, when he faintly heard the clatter of hoofs in the inn yard. Very shortly he heard heavy footfalls clumping into the parlour below him. Then a harsh voice belowed:

"Hola, there, innkeeper! Hola, there, John Dunn!"

Swift Nick felt his pulses leap; then he laughed to himself, for the rough voice was Squire Hudson's. And it was plain by the sounds that half a dozen men tramped into the parlour, so Roy had doubtless escaped his pursuers, too.

"Good-evening, squire!" sounded the deep voice of John Dunn, hastening to answer the summons. "What can I do for you, sirs?" Then, in surprise: "Five Bow Street Runners, squire! Who are you seeking?"

"Swift Nick!" thundered Squire Hudson. "Hast seen or heard aught of the scoundrel?"

"Nary a glimpse, squire!" barked burly John. "Why should I hide highwaymen?"

"Why shouldn't you?" sneered the squire. "We thought he rode this way, but lost him, as well as his rascally young cully. No matter! I've hit on a scheme at last to end their rascally career."

"Indeed, squire," John Dunn murmured non-committally.

"Ay, that I have!" boomed Squire Hudson. "As magistrate, I've power to arrest all who help them. And, by thunder, I'm seeking out all their friends, and all shall hang! I warrant after a few hangings, Swift Nick and his cully will find all hiding-places barred to them. And I've caught one rascal to-night, to make a start with."

"Eh?" exclaimed burly John. "Who is that, squire?"

"A rascal named Bob Bankel!" The reply came with a gust of harsh laughter. "The leader of those plaguy poachers they call the Blacks! Zounds! Bob shall hang as Swift Nick's accomplice, then I warrant the rest of the gang will soon betray Nick to save their own necks! Or I'll round up the lot sooner or later, and all shall hang!"

## CHAPTER 2.

### The Chase!

AS Squire Hudson's raucous voice rose to his ears, the hidden Nick shook with fury and dismay.

Evidently Bob Bankel, in order to assist the highwaymen's flight, and trusting to the darkness of the woods for safety, had turned back, to blaze at the pursuing Runners with his blunderbuss.

After dispatching his gang to the secret cave, Bob must have turned back alone, seeking to lure the Runners into swamps and tangled thickets, only to be caught himself. Nick had heard firing as he rode from the glade, but fancied it was Roy and his pursuers exchanging shots.

Roy could not know of Bob Bankel's plight. Worse still, when he came riding to the inn as arranged, Roy would walk slap into Squire Hudson and the Runners.

Furiously Swift Nick wondered what on earth to do. Here was he, stuck up a chimney, with a room full of enemies below him. Where was Bob Bankel? How was Roy to be warned?

Swift Nick gritted his teeth in helpless rage. Thought of the jovial giant Bob being hanged made the highwayman frantic. No crime, worthy of death, had the plucky, great-hearted leader of the poaching Blacks ever committed, except the crime of being Nick's and Roy's accomplice.

For this crime he would hang. His death would be Squire Hudson's first successful move in the ruthless campaign to scupper Swift Nick and Roy.

"He shall not hang!" Nick determined. "I warrant I can get him out of the village gaol somehow."

That instant, however, to his dismay, Nick learnt that Bob Bankel was not in the local gaol, for he heard Squire Hudson guffawing.



"The scoundrel shall hang at York, where Judge Humphreys is now holding assizes," guffawed the squire. "He should reach York this time to-morrow."

"To-morrow?" exclaimed John Dunn.

"Ay!" laughed the squire. "For I packed him into the mail-coach at the Grey Goose Inn. Fortunately, there were two Runners travelling to York to give evidence in some case, and I handed yon blackguard poacher Bob to them. He's well on his way now. Ho, ho!"

At that the hidden Nick gasped in dismay.

Already Bob Bankel was on his way to York in the mail-coach, well-guarded, and doubtless miles away. What was to be done? Never had Swift Nick failed an ally.

Nor did he mean to fail Bob of the Blacks, if he could help it.

"How now?" he gasped to himself. "By thunder, riding Sultan, I warrant I might catch that coach, and bid it stand and deliver, Bob. But, i' faith, the squire and five Runners are below me!"

Indeed, Nick's own plight seemed hopeless, for there was no climbing up the chimney, thence on to the roof of the inn. The chimney narrowed upwards, and the chain only hung from Nick's hiding-place downwards. The only way was down.

And there was not an instant to lose. Every minute the mail-coach bore Bob Bankel farther to his doom.

"By my life, I must risk it!" breathed Nick. "At the same time I'll draw away yon knaves below, and leave the coast clear for Roy. Ha, ha!"

Nick did not hesitate. Recklessly he seized the chain, then swung himself downwards.

The slight rattle of the chain in the chimney was not noticed by the men in the parlour, who had just settled down and ordered themselves ale.

But, of a sudden, all heard a dull thud in the wide hearth. All swung round to see a masked figure crouching in the fireplace.

There went up shouts of astonishment.

"Zounds! What the plague! A Black!" bawled Squire Hudson.

"Nay!" cried the Runner named Davis, more quick-eyed than the rest. "'Tis Swift Nick himself. How on earth—"

But, before a hand could draw a weapon, Nick leapt forth from the huge fireplace, and dashed across the parlour.

"Ay, squire!" he hooted. "I'm Swift Nick! And Bob Bankel shall not reach York, by thunder!"

Such was the utter astonishment of all at Nick's sudden apparition, that not a man found his feet before Nick was almost at the door. Obviously John Dunn was as astonished as any of the Runners or the squire.

But, to make quite certain that burly John should not be accused of hiding him up the chimney, Nick feigned to see in him an enemy.

"Out o' my way, darn ye!" Nick roared at the astounded innkeeper. "Ye will not? Then take that!"

Bang! Nick fired, aiming over burly John's shoulder. Then the room was in chaos, filled with smoke and roaring men.

"Stop him!" roared Squire Hudson. "There's five hundred pounds on his head!"

But Nick was out of the parlour, to slam and lock the door behind him. Then he could be heard dashing across the dark yard outside towards the stables.

Pandemonium was let loose in the parlour. There sounded yells of rage, stamps, and battering blows on the door. But the stout panels held, and Nick, running full split, dived into the stables, found Sultan, rushed him out, and vaulted on his back.

But Squire Hudson was leaning out of the parlour window, bawling to ostlers who had been roused by the uproar.

"Yon is Swift Nick, numskulls!" he raved. "Shut the yard gates! We have him!"

With a shout, a leathery ostler dashed at the gates and banged them together and shot the bolts home. The gates were slammed in Nick's face, even as Sultan leapt forward, hoofs striking sparks on the cobble-stones.

"Well done! We have him!" boomed Squire Hudson triumphantly.

And that instant the door of the parlour went down with a slamming crash, and out tumbled the yelling Runners, brandishing his pistols.

Nick saw his plight was desperate. And on him depended Bob Bankel's life, and probably Roy's, too, for Roy might come to this inn any minute now.

Whooping ostlers rushed to seize his bridle, but Nick did not hesitate. He fired at the ostlers, making them duck and scatter, then pell-mell he charged the bolted gates.

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Big and black they loomed up in the moonlight, nearly six feet high. But Swift Nick clenched his teeth and rammed Sultan at them.

The gallant horse did not hesitate. Nick felt a heave, felt a wind beat on his face, was vaguely aware of shots and yells, then felt as though he were flying. He was, in fact, flying over the yard gates, and thud he landed with his horse in the road outside.

"Zounds! He's escaped! What a leap!" bawled the Runner, Davis. "He deserves to escape! Never was such a tobyman!"

"After him!" raged Squire Hudson. "Open the gates! We'll catch him! He's after the York mail, the numskull! We'll run his nag down! We can change horses at every posting-inn!"

Nick heard the yells as he pulled Sultan together in the road outside, then he urged the horse forward. Laughing defiantly, he was away like the wind, but he looked back to see the yard gates flung open; to see shadowy men rushing out.

Bang, bang! Jets of flame stabbed the gloom, and smoke ballooned from half a dozen pistols. But galloping Swift Nick was a poor target in the dim light, and the bullets hummed harmlessly past him, to go crashing into the hedge beside the road.

"Blaze away, my lads!" Nick hooted. "I lay I wrest Bob Bankel from yon coach. Ay, even if the chase lasts to the very gates o' York!"

A split second later, however, the pursuit was thundering pell-mell after Nick. Spurring and bawling came five grey-coated Runners, headed by Squire Hudson, his wig wild, his plum-coloured riding-coat flying in the wind.

Nick laughed triumphantly as he glanced back again to see the shadowy horsemen, to hear the drumming hoof-beats. At any rate he had drawn away the whole pack from the Fox and Hound Inn. There the coast would be clear for Roy, when the lad rode to the agreed meeting-place.

But now Swift Nick knew he was in for the ride of his life. Far ahead of him must be the York mail-coach, sweeping jovial Bob Bankel to his doom. But not far behind Nick was the vengeful Squire Hudson and his human blood-hounds.

Nick adjusted his black mask as he galloped up the moonlit road. Then he sat down in his saddle, urging Sultan with hand and voice, his coat-collar turned up to his ears and his three-cornered hat pulled low.

Drum, drum, drum! The wind whistled in Nick's ears, and hedges and trees swam past. Black Sultan settled down to his stride, and soon Nick saw the Grey Goose Inn loom up at the roadside, then he flashed past it like a phantom.

But his six pursuers were hard on his track, and had him in sight.

After half an hour's hard riding, however, Nick had gained a long start, and grimly he chuckled as he clattered through a sleeping village and out beyond it. But he was very shortly checked.

Abruptly there loomed up a locked toll-bar, stretching right across the road, and bristling with great spikes. Nick uttered a gasp as he sighted this fearsome obstacle, and sighted the turnpike-keeper, blunderbuss in hand. And that moment his pursuers came thundering into view behind him.

"Hurrah! Yon toll-bar is locked!" roared Squire Hudson. "We have the villain!"

### CHAPTER 3.

#### Rescue!

**B**UT Swift Nick clenched his teeth.

"Open the gate, rascal!" he bawled at the turnpike-man.

"Not till ye pay," came back the lusty reply.

"Tuppence is my dues. Tuppence t' open t' gate!"

In the dim light the fellow luckily didn't spot Nick for a tobyman, and could not see his masked face. There was no time to argue. Nick sized up the obstacle, then abruptly clapped home his heel and gave Sultan his head.

Forward rushed the gallant horse, to leap upwards, to clear the terrible spikes by inches. Almost was the turnpike-man felled by his hoofs, and stumbled backwards with a shout of wrath and astonishment, his blunderbuss exploding with a booming roar.

On galloped Nick unharmed, and a minute later Squire Hudson and the Runners were at the toll-bar.

"Yon was Swift Nick himself!" bawled the enraged squire. "Why didn't ye stop him, fool?"

"How t' plague could I?" yelled the turnpike-man, picking himself up from the dust. "He jumped t' bar, he did. And nigh scattered my brains, by thunder! Catch him if ye can!"



Before a hand could draw weapon, Nick leapt from the huge fireplace and dashed across the parlour!

Followed roars of abuse while the bar was being unlocked. Then, jostling, elbowing, and shouting, the squire's party were in pursuit again.

But now Nick was leading by a mile, and he eased black Sultan and patted his satin-like neck. Laughing grimly, he swept on up the moonlit road, till at last he saw the lights of a posting-inn. Into the inn-yard he thundered, to draw rein, slip his mask into his pocket, and shout for the landlord.

"How far ahead is the York coach, fellow?" he bawled, as the landlord appeared.

"It changed horses here an hour ago, sir," cried the man, straining his eyes in the gloom.

"Faith, they're an hour ahead o' me with Bob Bankel!" Swift Nick muttered in dismay.

But he threw the inn-keeper a guinea and demanded a quart of ale, which he gave to Sultan instead of drinking it himself. Then out of the yard he swept again, his mount rubbed down and refreshed. A few minutes later Squire Hudson and his gasping escort galloped in.

"Has a villain on a black horse with a white star on its forehead passed?" yelled the squire.

"Ay, a gentleman on a black horse who gave me a guinea—no villain!" barked the inn-keeper stoutly.

"'Twas Swift Nick, you fool!" bawled Squire Hudson. "Bring us fresh horses!"

In a few minutes the squire's party was mounted on fresh nags and on the road again. But Swift Nick was well away. He knew, however, that not even Sultan could out-run pursuers who constantly changed horses, and he resolved to hamper the squire and the Runners all he could.

"By my life, they'll get no change o' mounts at the next inn!" Nick laughed grimly.

He fled on for several more miles, gallant Sultan still hobbling his own with the matchless stride of a thoroughbred. The pursuers were still coming, but only on common posting-nags, and Nick uttered a grim chuckle when again he sighted a posting-inn.

This time he dismounted outside the yard, and dashed afoot into the stables, to see dimly four tired coach-horses and half a dozen riding nags. But not for anything would

Swift Nick change Sultan. All he did was to turn the riding nags out into the yard, to whoop and send them galloping loose up the road, running wild.

The clattering uproar brought landlord and sleepy ostlers dashing out to the scene.

"Choke me! Split me!" roared the former. "What are you a-doing with my 'orses, rascal?"

"How far on is the York coach?" thundered Nick, presenting bell-mouthed pistols.

"Half an hour! But who t' plague are you—"

But Nick did not wait to hear more. He blazed over the heads of the charging ostlers, to send them running for cover. Then out of the yard he dashed, to regain his saddle again and go streaking up the road on Sultan.

"Only half an hour ahead!" he muttered. "Faith, I'm gaining on yon coach. I'll save Bob Bankel, if I can shake off my pursuers."

And very soon Squire Hudson and his party arrived, roaring for mounts, at the inn, only to find there were none! Perforce they had to continue the chase on their sweat-lathered nags, shouting in disgust and fury.

They put on a spurt, however, and at last sighted Swift Nick again, away up the moonlit road, for Nick was saving Sultan all he could, knowing his grand horse had done many more miles than those of his pursuers. Also he knew he was gaining on the mail-coach, anyway.

On drummed Nick, with the squire's party a good mile behind. A small town awoke to the echoing clatter of hoofs, then again the chase was rushing up the road, with dim meadows and woods on either hand.

But the pace told on the pursuers' nags. Down crashed one Runner in the dust, as his tired horse fell under him. A little further on another Runner was forced to draw rein, as his sweat-lathered mount reeled and staggered.

"Thirty miles we've come, squire!" gasped the Runner, Davis. "Faith, we'll never catch Swift Nick on that horse o' his!"

"We will!" yelled the perspiring squire. "We'll catch him to-night, by thunder! Ay, even if it's at York!"

By now the pursuers were reduced to four men all



told. These four held on grimly, however, straining their eyes in the dim starlight, riding like men possessed.

Ten more miles were covered at headlong speed. Then again loomed up a posting-inn. Nick began to feel he had ridden half across England. Three turnpike men he had bluffed into opening toll-bars, fortunately.

"How far ahead is the York coach?" he bawled, thundering into the inn-yard, dismayed to see several ostlers. Not here could he again play the trick of emptying the stables.

"Gone fifteen minutes, sir!" cried an ostler, then: "Zounds! Your horse—I know it! You're Swift Nick!"

Followed a rush and shouts. Nick only escaped from that inn by the skin of his teeth.

True, he had learnt the mail-coach was not far ahead. He knew, however, that Squire Hudson and the remaining Runners would again be after him on fresh horses. This happened. The squire's party got fresh horses at the inn, and soon Nick heard them whooping on his track once more. And Sultan was beginning to fail just at the moment when the coach could not be far ahead.

What could Nick do to delay the squire again?

Fortunately, just as Nick began to fear he must rein in and fight, there loomed up a belated farm wagon, drawn by four horses, about to cross a narrow bridge.

At pistol-point Nick made the farm-hands draw their wagon across the bridge, entirely blocking it, then cut loose their horses.

"And I warrant you trick will delay the squire!" Nick laughed grimly, as he galloped on.

The trick succeeded. Arrived at the bridge, the furious squire and his men found the road blocked, and, with many fierce words, they set to work to move the heavy wagon.

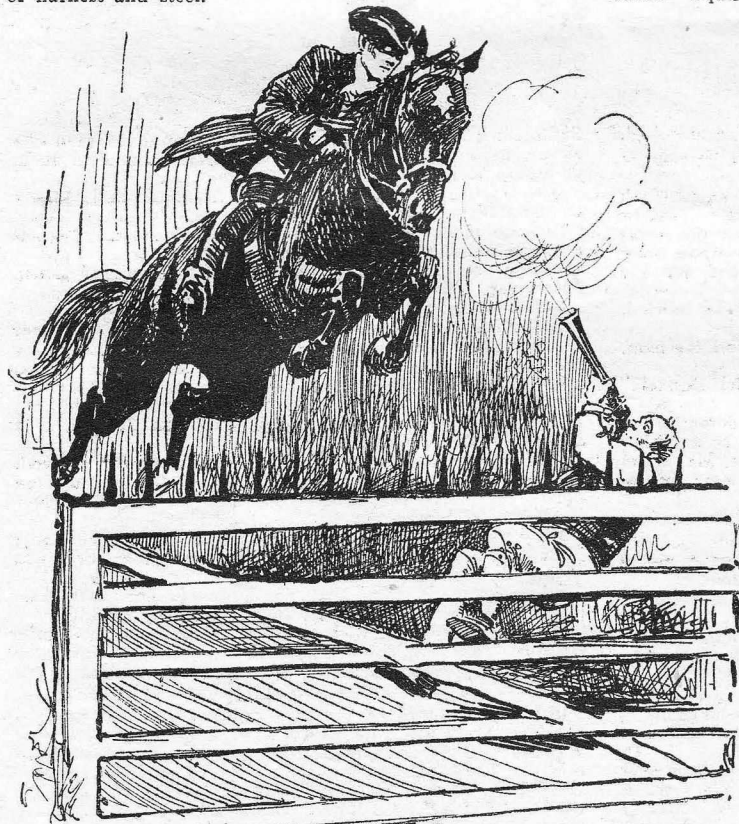
Swift Nick, meanwhile, rode on, his heart pounding with hope and anxiety.

Suddenly his nerves thrilled. Away, ahead of him up the moonlit road, he saw a swaying coach.

Was it at last the York coach, with Bob Bankel prisoner inside?

"On, Sultan! A last spurt!" cried Nick.

Full speed he galloped after the coach, gradually gaining on it. Hoofs and wheels thundered in his ears. Another spurt, and he was racing alongside the coach, to see straining postillions urging their horses, to hear the jingle of harness and steel.



The gallant Sultan leapt upwards, clearing the terrible spikes.

A glance through the coach-window showed Nick that Bob Bankel was inside. There sat Bob of the Blacks, in his rough poacher's garb, his bearded face blackened with charcoal, sitting bound between two Runners.

"Hurrah! I've caught the mail-coach!" Nick whooped hoarsely. "They shall never take you to York, Bob!"

Astounded, the Runners whipped out pistols as masked Nick flashed on past the coach-window.

"Tis Swift Nick!" yelled one.

"Impossible!" cried the other. "We've come sixty miles from Nick's country!"

But it was Swift Nick on Sultan. And Nick roared threateningly as he galloped up level with the postillions. The latter pluckily urged their horses on, however. So Nick galloped past them, then suddenly wheeled Sultan round to bar the way.

"Stand and deliver!" he shouted, levelling his barkers.

The shouting postillions saw they were beaten, and pulled up the coach. Promptly, however, the Runners inside let fly from the coach-windows.

Bang! Bang!

Reports awoke the echoes, and Nick found his cocked hat whirled from his head, felt a bullet graze his shoulder. But he blazed in reply, to shoot one Runner's pistol from his hand, to shoot the other fellow through his forearm.

All was confusion and uproar. And, even as the Runners tried to draw fresh weapons as Nick charged at the coach-door, Bob Bankel took a hand in the game. Bound though he was, the giant leader of the Blacks leapt to his feet, to bring his bound fists crashing down into one Runner's face.

Then the coach-door flew open, and out into the road tumbled giant Bob, atop of the other Runner, who was stunned by his fall.

"Tis i' faith you, Swift Nick!" gasped Bob delightedly, as he staggered towards Nick.

"Ay! I never desert a pal!" Nick laughed gaily.

"But haste! Here come—"

He leaned forward from his saddle, to slash Bob's bonds even as hoof-beats and fierce shouts sounded from down the road. Then four spurring horsemen came drumming into view.

"Seize my stirrup-leather, Bob!" gasped Nick. "Here comes Squire Hudson and his human bloodhounds! They've followed me all the way!"

Then Nick wheeled Sultan and dashed away, with Bob running alongside, gripping his stirrup-leather. The pursuers shouted in triumph, however, thinking they had got their quarry.

But Swift Nick had ridden the high toby up in this region before, and dashed away up a lane, which he knew led to a ferry across the river. The ferryman had gone home. But Nick and Bob reached the river in the nick of time, and Nick rode Sultan on to the large ferry-boat and cut loose.

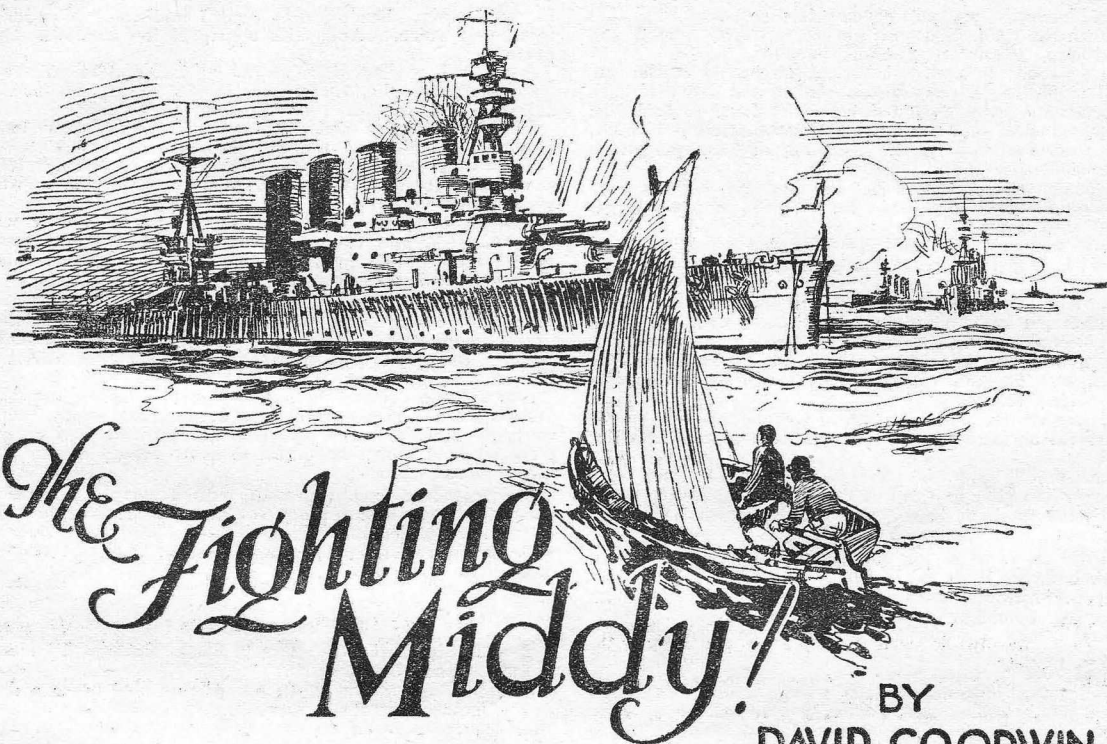
Out into mid-stream they poled, and a few seconds later Squire Hudson and his gasping men arrived on the bank, to see their quarry out on the river jeering at them. They fired pistols wildly, but their bullets fell short, and Swift Nick, Sultan, and Bob Bankel vanished in the gloom.

"What of your scheme now, squire?" Nick hooted. "Hast enjoyed your ride? By my life, you shall never hang any of my friends! Nor will the Blacks betray me to you!"

Squire Hudson and his Runners stormed and fumed on the river bank, but all to no purpose. The Squire of Hanley had set his heart on capturing the highwayman, but Nick had proved one too many for him!

Nick and giant Bob gained the farther bank in safety. And the next night they met the anxious Roy and the rest of the Blacks in Hanley Woods again, delighted to resume the share-out of former plunder, at which occupation the bloodthirsty Squire Hudson had thought to catch the two highwaymen with the Blacks red-handed!

(Look out for another of these thrilling old-time romances, featuring Nick o' the Highway, in next week's bumper issue of the GEM.)



On Special Service.

"I CALL it hard on the lad," said Mr. Mytton. "But if you and he are resolved, there's no use in arguing. One thing, the authorities will alter the appointment themselves, I expect, when they see what's happened."

Ned gave his father a grateful glance, and went to his own quarters. Straightway he began to pack his chest for sea. The notice given him was so short that he had only four days; but all his kit and uniforms had already been procured some time before.

"Middy on the Victorious!" he said to himself. "Well, she's a grand ship. I can't believe they'll make it so hot for me as Mr. Mytton thinks. But if they do I'll face them out for old Ralph's sake!"

The four days passed swiftly; the time for Ned's departure drew nigh. In spite of doubts and fears, he was still as eager as ever to join the Fleet, and counted the minutes till he might leave Briars Hall for Portsmouth; the Battle-Cruiser Squadron was lying off Spithead. On the evening before he went, Ned was anxiously looking up his train in the time-table.

"You aren't going by train, Ned," said Mr. Mytton. "I have to go to Portsmouth myself—all roads lead to the Navy nowadays—and I'll run you down in my car. Plenty of room in her for your sea-chest!"

"That'll be fine!" said Ned. "Are you on Navy affairs, too, sir?"

"Don't ask questions of your superiors, Ned!" said his father gruffly. "Haven't you learned better than that yet?"

Ned said no more.

"Wonder what Mr. Mytton is at?" he thought afterwards. "Always something a bit mysterious about him. Sounded as if he were going to Portsmouth on business. He's in the Foreign Office, and I suppose they have dealings with the Navy agents. Glad he's coming, anyhow! A good sort!"

Ned slept little on the last night at home. He had plenty to keep him awake. The morning, none the less, found him fresh and fit, and his kit was hoisted into Mr. Mytton's car. Captain Hardy took the boy apart, and gave him such advice as only an old sea captain can give his son. He also handed him a ten-pound note, which rejoiced the middy's heart.

"You must make that last your first quarter, Ned," said his father. "I'm not going to make you a big allowance. It's not fair to the fellows whose parents are poor. You'll do very well on that, and I'm paying your mess expenses and kit."

Ned thanked his father heartily, and the two parted on the drive, after a last firm grip.

"Give yourself, mind and body, for the good of the Service. Fear God, honour your King, and obey your orders even though they break you. Good-bye, Ned!"

Two minutes later the big car was humming like a bee along the high road to Portsmouth, Mr. Mytton driving, Ned in the seat on his left. For the first half-hour the boy was silent.

Every mile they went Ned's spirits rose; he was aching for a sight of the sea, once more, the heritage of every Briton. It was a sixty-mile run to Portsmouth—nothing of a trip to such a car as Mr. Mytton's—and it laid the miles behind at a glorious speed till they were nearing Alton.

"A bit of a change this, sir, from the old days," said Ned, as they whizzed along, "when a middy went down by coach and took two days over it, with a chance of meeting a highwayman. No adventures like that now."

"Good thing, too!" said Mr. Mytton. "Adventures in a motor-car running forty miles an hour are no catch. It isn't—Look out! Sit tight!"

A dog ran out from the hedge right in front of the car, and Mr. Mytton twisted aside only just in time to avoid running over it. The car swerved and leaped ahead again, but suddenly there was a splitting crack, a sharp grinding noise, and the motor tilted to one side, and stopped with such a jerk that the driver was flung clean out of her.

Ned found himself sprawling on the car's bonnet, but he was not hurt; and, seeing Mr. Mytton lying on the road, ran to him quickly.

"Not hurt, sir, I hope?" he exclaimed.

Mr. Mytton was helped up, looking rather white. He had broken no bones, but one of his knees was so badly wrenched that he could not walk. With Ned's help he limped to the car and examined it.

"Front axle's gone!" he said. "This THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,173.

## A SECRET COMMISSION

—And what it led to!

### THE FIRST CHAPTERS

Midshipman Ned Hardy, son of a line of sea captains, is awaiting his appointment to a ship. Meanwhile, his brother Ralph is cashiered from the Victorious in connection with a robbery. Ned believes his brother innocent, but his father turns Ralph from the house. Ned gets his appointment—but to everyone's dismay, he is ordered to join the Victorious. (Now read on.)



is a bad business; we can't get any farther. Run on to that inn down the road, Ned, and get a car if you can; if not, a pony-trap, or anything. Look sharp!"

Ned scudded off, and, rousing up the people at the inn, helped to harness a pony into a chaise, and drove it back to the motor. Mr. Mytton directed the ostler to help Ned get the sea-chest into the trap, and he entered it himself, which was as much as he could do, for his knee was giving him considerable pain.

The chaise was driven to the inn, and Mr. Mytton gave directions for men to be sent for at once, who would get the car into shelter.

"What a smash for that beast of a dog to make!" said Ned, with deep concern. "I'm awfully sorry you're hurt, sir!"

"Can't be helped, old boy! Nothing serious, but I shan't be able to get any farther to-day, try as I will. It would take hours to get another car sent here. The trouble is you're due on the Victorious at noon, and you mustn't be late on any account. You'll have to go by train from Alton—safest way now."

Ned was scared at the notion of turning up late on his first arrival on the ship; he knew no excuses were taken in the Navy.

"Look here," said Mr. Mytton, "you won't have time to change into your uniform at Portsmouth, as we intended. You'll have to do it here. Get your sea-chest taken into a bed-room, and change at once."

Ned did so, as there was plenty of time before the train started, but very little at the other end. He got out of his shore-going kit, and with great pride, donned his smart gold-buttoned monkey-jacket and trousers.

Before he had finished, Mr. Mytton came into the room, hoisting himself almost painfully. He shut the door, and beckoned Ned to him.

"Youngster," he said, in a low voice, "I find I can't get to Portsmouth to-day, and I want you to take a package for me. There's no other way. It's a Foreign Office message, of the greatest importance, and must reach its destination this afternoon. You'll just have time to take it before you go to your ship."

"All right, sir!" said Ned.

"Here it is!" said Mr. Mytton, drawing a long, thin envelope from his pocket. "Now, remember, you mustn't show this to a soul, nor let anybody know you've got it—except the person it's meant for."

"I understand," said Ned.

"There's no name or address on it, as you see, and I don't want to write it down for you. You've got a good memory, I know, and never forget anything; so I'll just tell it you, and you'll have to repeat it, and make sure of it."

Mr. Mytton had perfect confidence in Ned's memory. He gave the boy a name and address in Portsmouth, which Ned had never heard before, and he had it by heart at once.

"Put the paper in your inside breast-pocket," said Mr. Mytton; "that's it. Come down when you're ready, and the trap will take you to the station in half an hour."

Ned looked very thoughtful when Mr. Mytton had gone. He took the envelope and glanced at it.

"If this is some Government thing that's extra important, I'd better be precious careful," he said to himself. Ned had a shrewd eye for anything of this sort, and he guessed that Mr. Mytton had given him the thing because nobody was likely to suspect a midshipman. "It shows in my breast-pocket when my jacket opens. Be a dashed bad beginning if I were to lose it!"

He thought for a minute, and then, taking off his monkey-jacket, Ned made a small slit in the lining of it, inside between the shoulders, with his knife. He slipped the envelope between the lining and the cloth, and, taking a needle and thread from the ditty-bag in his sea-chest, he deftly sewed the lining up again.

He could hardly feel the envelope at all against the stiff cloth. Ned put the jacket on, and found it made no difference whatever to the fit. The envelope lay between his shoulder-blades, and nobody could have told it was there.

"It's safe now, anyhow!" he said. "If I've got to take the blessed thing, I don't want to get into any mess over it!"

He went down, and twenty minutes later, having seen his sea-chest put into the trap, he bade a hearty farewell to Mr. Mytton, expressing his sorrow at the accident.

"Good luck to you, Ned!" said Mr. Mytton. "Don't worry about me—I shall be all right when I've had my knee bandaged up and a couple of days' rest. I've wired

to your father. Don't forget what I told you," he added, in a lower voice. And, with a grip of the hand, the two parted.

It was only a short drive to the station, and before long Ned was journeying southwards in the train. He had a carriage to himself, and was able to take it easy.

The train was a slow one, stopping at all the local stations. Ned found himself uncommonly drowsy. His lack of sleep the night before was telling on him, and he snored most of the way, till the train pulled up at a little place called Privett.

Just as it was moving off again, the carriage door was thrown open, and two men entered—one of them white-haired and dressed in black, the other a rougher-looking customer, with a short red beard.

"I saw that fellow riding a bicycle on the road soon after our smash," thought Ned to himself, after a glance at the red-bearded customer. "He must have got in at Alton. Funny he should change into another carriage here!"

Ned felt no interest in the two men, who sat opposite each other and talked about the weather and crops. His thoughts were with the squadron at Spithead, and as the train plodded along, he began to grow drowsy again, and nearly dozed off.

Suddenly Ned roused himself with a start. A sudden sense of danger shot through his brain as he saw the eyes of the red-bearded man fixed on his. Both the strangers were on their feet, and the next moment they had thrown themselves upon him.

### Ned Joins His Ship!

"PIN him!" said the man in black, through his teeth.

"Look out, Jakoff!"

There was a sharp struggle as Ned made a desperate attempt to free himself. He drove one knee into the red-bearded man's stomach, and made him gasp. With a swift snatch, Ned drew his dirk to defend himself, but the next moment his wrist was seized and the weapon wrenched from his grasp.

Powerful as he was, the two men were too much for Ned, and they pinned him against the back of the seat.

"Let me go, you villains!" he shouted, struggling in their grasp; for he realised only too well what it was they were after. "You ginger-haired ruffian, you'll see the inside of a gaol for this!"

"Clap the stuff on, Jakoff, can't you?" exclaimed the man in black. "Stop the young idiot's mouth!"

The reek of chloroform filled the carriage as a sodden handkerchief was clapped over Ned's face. The boy struggled feebly, and then his senses left him.

"Look sharp an' go over him!" said the red-bearded man, stowing the chloroformed handkerchief away. "Here, I'll help! It must be somewhere handy!"

They turned Ned's pockets out with deft skill, but the result seemed to disappoint them.

"Where is the thing?" said the man in black with an oath, searching Ned again.

Every pocket was ransacked, and the boy's waistcoat opened—even his vest was searched. Not the faintest crackle did the hidden envelope give, sewn in the cloth between Ned's shoulder-blades, where his jacket fitted him like a glove.

"No go; it is not on him!" said Jakoff savagely.

"Are you sure Mytton gave it to him to take?"

"He must ha' done, if he had it at all! I followed him all the way from London on a motor-bike, an' he's laid up at the inn now! It's my belief Mytton never had the paper, an' it's all a mare's-nest!"

The man in black swore long and comprehensively. He searched Ned again, with no result, while Jakoff went through the lad's pocket-book.

"Here's a ten-spot!" he said, opening the banknote Ned's father had given him. "May as well have it, though that's not what we're after."

"Right! An' put two o' these fivers in its place!" said the man in black, taking a couple of £5 notes from his own pocket.

"You're sure it's Hardy's son?"

"Of course, you mug! Brother to Lieutenant-Commander Hardy! An' the more dirt we can throw on him an' his family, the safer for you an' me!"

Jakoff, without another word, thrust the two £5 notes into Ned's pocket-book, which he returned to its place—a strange proceeding enough if anybody had witnessed it, for the notes were good ones, and Jakoff did not

look like a man who would change a £10 note for two of £5 if he could pocket the lot for himself. But the deed was done, and the book replaced in the unconscious boy's pocket.

The man in black darted an ugly look at Ned, and laid his hand on the door-handle.

"Come on! Time we got out of it! We haven't got what we wanted, but we've done a bit of good, I reckon!"

The door was swung open, and the two men, shutting it from outside, jumped quickly and skilfully from the foot-board, and, vaulting the railway fence, they vanished into a patch of willow trees near the line. The jump was no great feat, for the train was not travelling at any speed. Nor, it seemed, did anybody see them go.

The train rolled along as if nothing had happened, and gradually the fresh air, blowing through the window on to Ned's face, revived him. He opened his eyes, and for a time was so dizzy and bewildered that he could not tell where he was.

He staggered up at last, and pressed his hand to his aching forehead. Then, like a flash, he remembered what had happened. The two men were gone!

Ned jumped to the window to pull the communication-cord and stop the train, but he checked himself in time. Remembering his charge, he tore off his coat and felt eagerly in the lining. The stitches were untouched. He could have shouted for joy when he found the envelope was there.

"Good! They haven't got it!" he gasped. "Yes, by Jove, my pockets have been ransacked! And yet there's nothing gone!" He looked hurriedly through his belongings. "Here's the banknote dad gave me—they haven't even taken that!"

He did not look closely at the note, or notice that there were two of £5 each, folded together. The money was not what he was concerned about. Ned stood by the window, and let the cool air play on his forehead, for he was feeling very sick and giddy.

"Didn't even trouble about the money! That's queer. Sure thing, they were spies—not thieves. They were after that Government paper, or whatever it is, that Mytton gave me to deliver. It must be something extra important. What luck I sewed it in my coat!"

He began to feel better, and pulled his wits together.

"They must have jumped off the train—the swabs! How about stopping the train and having them chased?" He paused. "No, won't do! Mytton said I was to keep the whole thing dark. I should have to explain to the railway people. After all, no harm done! The paper's safe; that's all that matters!"

Ned felt better every moment, as the fumes of the chloroform passed out of his head. He was in a fever of impatience now to reach his journey's end.

"An' I said there were no adventures nowadays on the road to Portsmouth!" he thought, with a chuckle. "I call this tolerably hot stuff, and if things are going to pan out like that all the way, I'm not likely to have a dull time of it. Hallo—the harbour at last!"

The first glimpse of the great naval headquarters was visible from the train windows; and the Gunnery School on Whale Island across the water. Ned's train stopped at Gosport, and, getting his chest on to the ferry-boat with all speed, he crossed the harbour to Portsmouth Town.

Here Ned left his chest at a cloak-room by the ferry, and hastened off to deliver the missive with which he had been entrusted. He remembered the address well enough, and soon found the house. It was a large, handsome building in one of the chief residential streets, and a manservant opened the door to Ned.

"I want to see Mr. Elking at once on important business, please," said Ned.

He was shown into the library. Mr. Elking came down. He was a keen-faced, alert-looking man of about thirty, close-shaven, and rather sunburnt. He glanced at the boy, and led him into a small but well-furnished back room with a ground-glass window.

"Now, Mr. Midshipman, what is your business with me?" he said pleasantly.

For answer Ned took off his monkey-jacket, and, un-picking the stitches in the lining, handed the long envelope to the speaker.

"From Mr. Mytton, sir. And I don't mind owning I'm rather glad to get rid of it."

Mr. Elking took the envelope, examined it, and gave a nod of satisfaction.

"How did you come by this?" he said.

Ned told him briefly all that had happened since the motor smash. Mr. Elking's face did not change in the slightest, even when he was told of the assault in the train, but he kept his eyes keenly on the boy's face; and when the story was told, asked him several questions and for the descriptions of the two men, which Ned promptly gave. Then Mr. Elking stretched out his hand across the table.

"Shake hands, youngster!" he said, giving Ned's palm a warm grip. "My best thanks and congratulations to you! You're as smart a lad as they make! This paper"—he tapped it with his fingers—"is of the greatest importance, and the loss of it would have been serious!"

"I didn't do much, sir! Glad it's all right!" said Ned simply. "Will the men be caught?"

"I hope so. But, mind you, this is no matter for the



Powerful as he was, the two men were too much for Ned, and they pinned him against the back of the seat.

police. We can't afford to put them on to it. Where are you going now?"

"I'm due aboard my ship the Victorious in half an hour, sir."

"I shan't lose sight of you. But there's one thing more. You must not mention this affair to a soul. Say nothing about the paper or your adventure," said Mr. Elking. "I give you that order with the highest authority. It's hard luck, but you must put up with what those men did to you for the sake of secrecy."

"Oh, I don't mind, sir!" said Ned, laughing. "I'm not going to whine just because I got a whiff of chloroform!"

"You shan't lose by it. But you must ask me no questions at present. Perhaps you'll learn more about this before you're much older. And this business will go to your credit. I'd like to have asked you to stay to dinner, but I won't keep you, as you're due on the Victorious. Duty before everything. Au revoir, Hardy, and, remember, not a word of this to anybody, no matter who asks you!"

Ned departed, and walked rapidly down the street towards the quays.

"Good chap, that," he said to himself; "and he's a big gun, too! It must be some Secret Service business or Government affair that I was carrying. I shall stick to his orders about it like glue! There may be some sport out of this. And now for the Victorious."

*(What sort of reception will young Ned receive aboard the ship from which his brother was dismissed? Lads, you simply mustn't miss next week's dandy instalment.)*



# BAGGY TRIMBLE'S GUESTS!

(Continued from page 19.)

bullet-head had butted into his waistcoat, fairly doubling him up with anguish.

Then Baggy tore himself free and bolted.

Sheer desperation, and the sight of Tom Merry & Co., so near through the trees, had given Baggy the courage to risk having his neck twisted like a rabbit's!

He tore for the cruiser, the little wood and the wide expanse of Oulton Broad ringing with his terrified howls.

"Yaroooop! Help! Murder! Help! Yarooop! Tom Merry, help! Murder! Police!"

"Hurrah! We've done it!" cheered Tom Merry. "All ready forward there?"

"Yaas, wathah!—I mean, ay, ay, sir!"

"Ha, ha! Any signs of that fat ass?"

"None! All serene, cap'n!"

"What-ho!"

"Cast off, then! Full speed ahead now!"

The ropes were cast off, forward and stern. The cruiser began to throb and move slowly from the jetty.

"Our luck's in, after all!" chirruped Blake. "We've got rid of Jonah! Now—Great pip! What's that?"

It was a sudden howling and shrieking from the little spinney.

Through the trees a fat figure came tearing, shrieking and yelling at the top of his voice.

"Bai Jove! Twimble!"

"Jonah!" gasped Blake. "Of all the—My hat! Somebody's after him!"

"Here he comes!" yelled Tom Merry. "Stand by! The fat ass is going to jump for it!"

Arthur Augustus, Lowther, Manners, Digby, and Herries stood by. Tom Merry frantically eased the throttle and reversed the engine. The cruiser shook, and was now a couple of yards from the jetty.

Then Baggy Trimble arrived.

One final howl he gave, and then he made a desperate, flying leap for the boat.

It was a trifle too much for a fat youth like Baggy Trimble, desperate as his leap had been.

One foot just scraped the edge of the deck, missing the rails, and then—

"Yaroooop!"

Splash!

"Man overboard!" yelled Lowther.

Trimble was in. Luckily the water was only up to his fat chin. He reappeared again, gasping and panting like a grampus, and then he opened his mouth and yelled.

"Help! I'm drowning! Grooogh! Help!"

His voice rose to a shriek.

"All right, you fat ass!" laughed Lowther.

He grabbed a boathook, and deftly inserted the hook in the slack of Baggy's flannel trousers.

"Now, heave-yo-ho, my hearties!" yelled Lowther. "Altogether!"

Together the crew of the cruiser heaved. Baggy rose from the waters of Oulton Broad like a great fat fish, water streaming from his drenched flannels. He was flopped down on the deck of the motor-cruiser.

"Grooogh!" he gasped. "Gug-gug-grough! Ow, ow, ow!"

Tom Merry glanced ashore keenly. Not a soul was in sight in the little wood. Yet he was certain, like Blake, that he had seen someone—a man—chasing Baggy Trimble.

"Better go back again!" said Tom Merry. "Who was after you, Baggy?"

"Grooogh! That beast—I mean, nobody!"

"What?"

"I—I—" Baggy sat up dizzily, and gazed with terrified eyes ashore. Mr. Quirk had seemingly vanished. "I—I— Nobody was after me, of course! I—I just decided I'd come with you, after all. That—that was it!"

"We'd better go back—"

"No; don't go back!" howled Trimble. "Go on! I'm coming with you, after all, you beasts! Ow, ow, ow! Go on, full speed ahead, Tom Merry! Yow-ow! Grooogh!"

"Thought it was too good to be true," sighed Jack Blake.

"You really mean to come, Baggy?"

"Ow! Yes, I jolly well do!" gasped Baggy, with a shiver that was not caused by the water. "Go on, you idiots! Wharrer you waiting for?"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Twimble—"

Tom Merry glanced ashore again. But he saw nobody; and, after a glance at Blake, he nodded.

"Off we go, then!"

And the motor-cruiser forged ahead on its way to explore the sunlit Broads, while Baggy Trimble—a member of the crew of the Viking, after all!—stopped his way below to change his drenched garments, and to avoid, if possible, further questions.

But Tom Merry's face, at least, was thoughtful as he took charge of the helm. Why had Baggy so suddenly changed his mind? That the fat youth had been chased by someone was certain, by someone of whom he was obviously in dire terror. Was it Mr. Quirk?

Still, Baggy was safe enough now. And by this time, also, the police, summoned on the phone by Mr. Whimple, would be at the Grange. There seemed nothing to return for, in any case. And for the time being Tom dismissed the whole strange mystery from his mind, and gave his attention to his steering.

But the St. Jim's juniors had not seen the last of the man from South America by any means, had Tom only known it. They—and especially the fat and fatuous Baggy Trimble—were fated to meet Mr. Quirk again before they ended their cruising of the rivers and lakes of Broadland!

THE END.

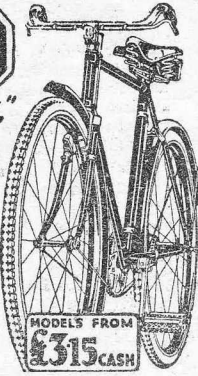
(Whatever you do, chums, don't miss the grand sequel to this yarn. It's entitled: "THE MYSTERY OF THE BROADS!" and will appear in next week's bumper issue of the GEM.)

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