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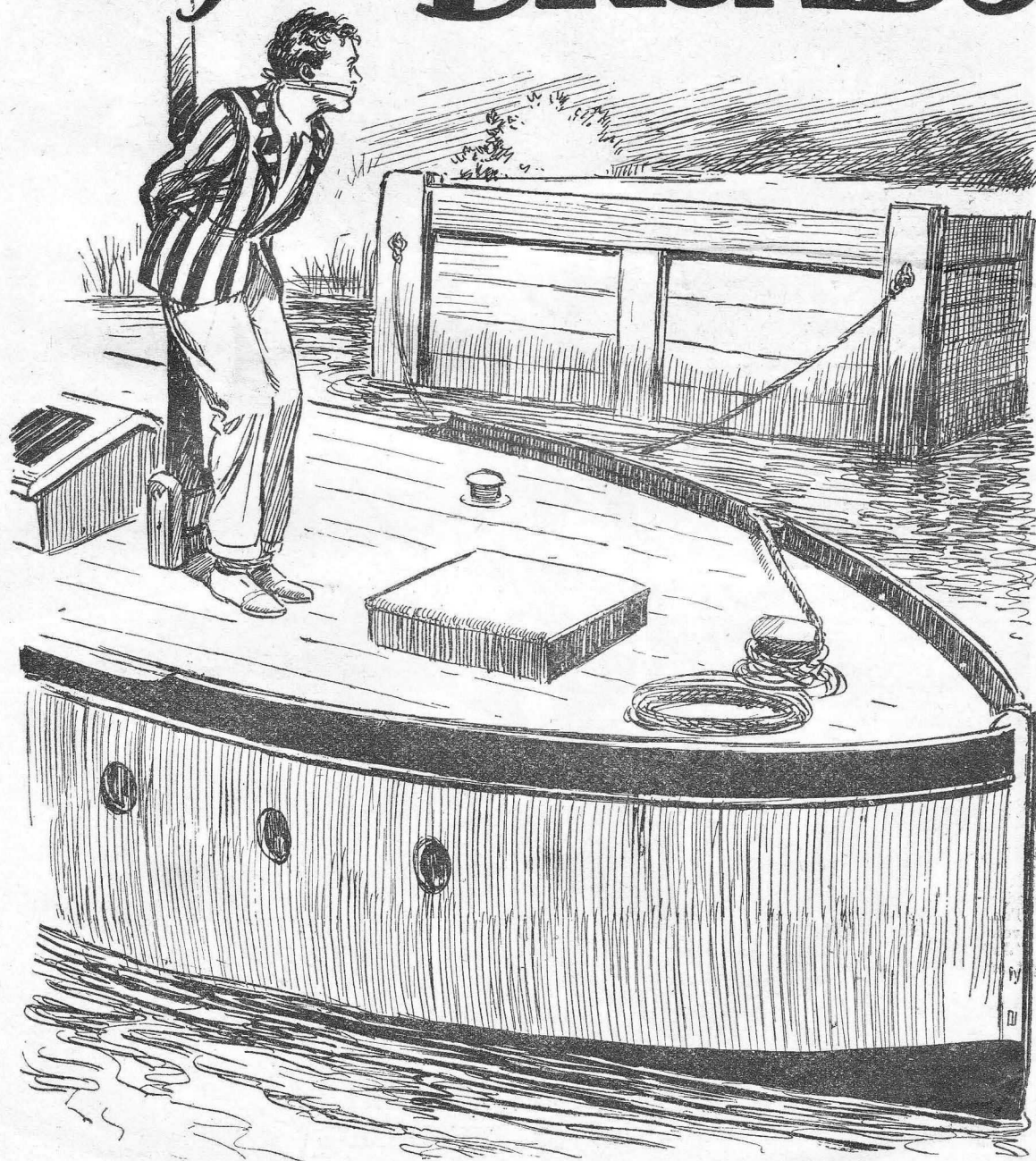
THE GEM 2¢



SPECIAL STORY OF
ST. JIM'S INSIDE!

QUIZZICAL QUIRK, MYSTERY MAN, MUSTARD ON THE TRAIL—

The MYSTERY of the BROADS



A Sparkling, Full-length Holiday Story by MARTIN CLIFFORD.

-RED-HOT SECRET OF A SUNKEN CASKET SOLVED!

FOOD AND FEAR FOR BAGGY!

FUN AND THRILLS FOR TOM MERRY & CO.!

All in this snappy complete yarn!



CHAPTER 1. Trailed!

"IT'S queer!"

Tom Merry stood in the stern of the motor-cruiser *Viking*, and shading his eyes with his hand, stared back along the silvery, winding course of the River Yare.

Over the wide Broadland of East Anglia the setting sun gleamed golden on tortuous waterways and glamorous lakes. But it was still hot, and the schoolboy crew of the *Viking* lounged in the shade, for the most part, taking life easy. Tom Merry & Co. were brown as berries, and fit as fiddles, and they were enjoying every moment of their holiday on the Norfolk Broads.

"What's queer, Tommy?" yawned Jack Blake, pulling his panama a trifle lower over his eyes as he sprawled on the deck. "If you're referring to your chivvy I agree—"

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Your nose is pealin', deah boy, and you look as if you've used bwown boot-polish on your face, you know!"

Tom Merry frowned—he scarcely heard his chums' frivolous remarks.

"Jolly queer!" he repeated. "I say, Monty, run and get me the field-glasses, old chap!"

Monty Lowther promptly began to snore loudly. He was not feeling quite energetic enough to fetch the field-glasses, so he pretended to be asleep.

"Ass!" snorted Tom. "Digby, old chap—"

"Fetch 'em yourself, old bean!" chuckled Dig. "We're not at cricket now, and you can do your own fielding for field-glasses!"

"What's the matter, anyway?" asked Herries, who was at the wheel of the cruiser.

"That chap's trailing us again!" said Tom grimly. "I want to get a glimpse of the joker, if I can!"

"Oh! My hat!"

They were all suddenly interested in Tom's proceedings.

Blake, Digby and Herries jumped up and joined Tom on the cabin deck top. Even Arthur Augustus rose leisurely, smoothed out the creases in his elegant flannels, and joined them. Manners, who had been busy cutting films on the saloon table, came out and joined them.

They all stared hard along the gleaming wake of the motor-cruiser.

For some considerable distance the winding Yare was visible, shimmering in the sunlight. But though plenty of craft could be seen moored to the banks, only one was moving. It was upon this craft the juniors fixed their eyes intently.

"It's the one!" said Blake. "It's a una-rigged yacht with an outboard motor! He's following us, right enough!"

"Looks like it!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But why?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Goodness knows!"

"And who the thump is he?" asked Blake.

"That's what I want to find out!" said Tom, and he hurried into the saloon, reappearing a moment later with a pair of field-glasses. He focused these on the distant yacht. He lowered them after a few moments with a grunt. "No go!"

"You can't see the chap?"

"Can't see his chivvy clearly," said Tom. "He's crafty enough to keep his distance all the time. But—but I'm beginning to get a notion as to who the fellow is!"

"You—you are?" ejaculated Blake. "Then who on earth—"

"What about that beauty, Quirk?" said Tom.

"Bai Jove!"

"Quirk? That fellow we had a row with in the train coming to Lowestoft?" gasped Blake.

"Exactly! And the fellow, remember, who Trimble claims to have caught trying to burgle Fenreed Grange!" said Tom grimly.

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"If there was a burglary!" grunted Herries.

"Well, you know what happened that night? Trimble and Gussy went to sleep at the Grange while we stayed on the cruiser. In the middle of the night we woke up hearing Trimble yelling, and then we saw the fat ass racing for the boat in his bare feet and pyjamas, with someone chasing him."

"That's so. But—"

"We ourselves caught the rotter prowling round the Grange that same night," said Tom, "and Trimble claimed that it was Quirk! I believe Trimble told the truth there, but I don't believe the fat ass told all the truth."

"Yes, I thought the same!" agreed Blake. "There was something queer about the whole business! But why on earth should Quirk follow us—if it is Quirk?"

"I fancy Trimble could tell us if he wished!" said Tom coolly. "Anyone can see the fat rotter's got something on his mind. And why is he always wanting us to return to Oulton? It all beats me—"

He broke off as a fat figure emerged suddenly from the saloon, rubbing his eyes drowsily. It was Baggy Trimble. He blinked round at the juniors.

"I say, you fellows, I've been asleep!" he grunted. "Look here, Tom Merry, I've had just about enough of this!"

"Good! You can shove off home any time, old fat man!"

"Beast! Look here, you've jolly well got to turn back and make for Oulton Broad, Tom Merry!"

"Bow-wow!"

"I'm jolly well not standing it any longer!" snorted Trimble, glowering at the grinning juniors. "Aren't I in charge of this cruiser?"

"No, old bean!"

"I jolly well am! This is my uncle's boat, and I invited you rotters to come on this holiday! You're my guests, and it's for me to give orders and run this rotten cruise!"

"Nothing of the kind, old scout!" said Tom, laughing. "You asked us right enough. But you spoofed us into it. When we got to your uncle's house at Oulton, we found we were to be paying guests, you fat rotter!"

"Yaas, wathah! You twicked us by a spoof invitation, Twimble!"

"You gave us to understand that Fenreed Grango was a magnificent house, and that we were to have the loan of this cruiser free and for nix, as guests," said Tom, grimly. "Instead, we found the Grange was little more than a deserted ruin, and that your giddy uncle kept things going by hiring out the cruiser in the summer!"

"Ahem! Look—look here—"

"We found we were expected to pay for the hire of the cruiser," resumed Tom. "And as we liked the idea of exploring the Broads we agreed to hire it, and here we are! But we're not your guests now, Trimble. You're our guest, fatty, and if you want to go back you can jump ashore any old time and hook it. See!"

"But how can I?" asked Baggy. "I can't walk all that way! Look here, you beasts, you'll jolly well have to take me back!"

"Rats!"

"Then lend me my fare, and I'll go back by train when we get to Yarmouth, you beasts!"

"Not likely, old tulip! You'd spend the cash on grub at the nearest place, and turn up again for more. We know you!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Beasts! Look here," wailed Trimble, "you might take a fellow back. You can easily start off again from Oulton after you've landed me."

"What d'you want to go back for, Trimble?" asked Tom Merry, eyeing the fat youth keenly. "What's the game, you fat idiot!"

"Eh? Oh, nothing! That—that is, I want to speak to my uncle about—a most important family matter!" gasped Trimble. "It—it's fearfully urgent! A—a matter of life and death, practically!"

"And you want us to return right away, this minute?" asked Tom.

"Eh? Oh, yes," said Baggy eagerly. "I say, if you will—"

"But we'll run right into Quirk if we do," said Tom calmly.

Trimble jumped. His fat face went almost white.

"Q-Q-Quirk?" he stammered.

"Yes," said Tom, his eyes on Trimble. "He's in that boat behind us, if I'm not mistaken, Baggy."

"Wha-what?" yelled Trimble. "Oh dear!"

"He's been following us for days—ever since we left Oulton," said Tom Merry steadily. "At least, I believe it is Quirk. And at least three times, when we've happened to leave the boat unguarded, we've come back and found

it broken into, Trimble. If it is Quirk who's following us, then he's after something—or else he's after you, Baggy!"

"Oh d-dear! I say, you fellows, I thought it might be that beast, you know!" groaned Trimble. "Look—look here, d'you really think it is Quirk?"

"We'll soon find out if we turn back," said Tom. "Round with the boat, Herries. We'll—"

"Yarrooop! Don't turn back!" howled Trimble, in dire terror. "Go on, you beasts! Full speed ahead, Herries! Oh dear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry did not laugh, however. Ever since they had left Oulton, Baggy had been in a strange state of nervous tension and uneasiness. They now knew the reason. Baggy, also, had suspected that the craft which had been trailing them was manned by Mr. Quirk, the man from South America. He was terrified now he realised that they suspected the same.

"No, we won't go full speed ahead, Baggy!" said Tom grimly. "I mean to find out for certain if it is Quirk. Let me take the wheel, Herries!"

Herries gladly relinquished the wheel. Baggy pleaded for full speed ahead in vain. The cruiser had been jogging along quite gently. Tom Merry & Co. were not out to break speed limits, and they had been taking their time during the cruise. But now Tom increased the speed slightly, and suddenly he turned the cruiser into the narrow entrance of a reed-filled stream, running into the Yare.

Once inside, Tom closed the throttle, and allowed the craft to glide gently to a stop, deep in the high bulrushes, and well hidden from the river by the bank.

"Now we'll see!" he said, with a soft chuckle. "Quirk doesn't know the Broads—we do know that. If he is following us, he'll follow us in here. It's only deep enough for any boat for a few yards up this creek—see?"

Tom's chums nodded and grinned as they waited breathlessly.

Baggy Trimble, realising now what was afoot, bolted into the shelter of the forward cabin and stayed there.

A few tense minutes passed, and then the low chug-chug of a small motor became audible. It grew louder, and then, quite abruptly, a small, white-painted yacht, its mast bare, and driven along by an outboard motor, glided swiftly through the reed-filled entrance.

In the stern, with the helm in his hand, was a man in his shirtsleeves, smoking a cigarette. His face was swarthy, his eyes black and beady, and his nose was hooked and prominent.

It was Mr. Quirk, the man from South America!

Tom Merry stood up on the saloon roof. As yet Mr. Quirk had not sighted them. His face registered savage alarm as he took in the small, reed-filled creek. Tom did not leave him long in suspense.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Quirk!" he called cheerily. "If you go another dozen yards you'll be aground, old chap!"

Mr. Quirk started convulsively. He looked round, and then, as he sighted the grinning faces of the crew of the cruiser, he muttered an exclamation, and his eyes glittered at them.

He stopped his engine swiftly, realising instantly his danger of running aground.

"That's good enough!" murmured Tom Merry coolly. "Now we know who's trailing us; and now Mr. Quirk knows we know, and perhaps he'll keep his distance a little more after this. But I think we'd best get a move on!"

"Yaas, wathah! I don't like the look of that bwute, deah boys!"

Nor did Tom Merry. He opened the throttle, and the cruiser moved out into the River Yare and increased speed. At the rate they were going, Mr. Quirk, with his little outboard motor, was not likely to catch them up for a time, at all events.

Baggy Trimble showed a fat, scared face at the door of the saloon.

"I—I say, you fellows," he gasped, "was—was it that awful beast?"

"Yes, it was Quirk right enough," said Tom. "What is the fellow after, you fat fool? Why don't you explain, Trimble? Can't you see it's jolly serious?"

"How—how do I know what he's after?" mumbled Baggy.

"You must know, you idiot!"

"It—it must be vengeance!" said Baggy, eyeing the juniors uneasily. "You—you know how I knocked him about when I caught him breaking into uncle's library—"

"Bow-wow! We know how you ran—like a rabbit!"

"Beasts! Look here, if it was that beast—"

"It was—and look out, Baggy, here he is!" yelled Lowther.

"Yarrooop!"

Baggy didn't stop to see, he bolted back into the saloon; nor did he reappear again for some time. Obviously, Baggy Trimble did not wish to see Mr. Quirk, whether that unpleasant gentleman wanted to see him or not.



Grundy crashed backwards, sending Wilkins and Gunn right and left.

CHAPTER 2 Ungrateful!

LOOK here, Tom Merry—"Dry up, you fat clam!"
"But, I say—"
"Rats!"

Tom Merry sounded exasperated. As a matter of fact, he was with Baggy Trimble. It was an hour later, and the Viking had been travelling at quite a good speed during that time. Tom Merry was still at the wheel, and he was busy. At the time they had not long passed the entrance to Rockland Broad, and there were plenty of craft about. Tom needed all his attention for steering, and he had none to spare for Baggy.

"Hallo! Look out, Tom!" shouted Blake. "Some silly asses are trying to wreck your yacht ahead there!"

"I'm watching them," said Tom, still keeping his eyes keenly ahead. "Those lubbers oughtn't to be allowed out in anything but a mud-barge!"

And Tom eased the throttle and slowed down.

Ahead of them, a small, una-rigged yacht was tacking across the river towards them, in a manner that threatened every moment to capsize the boat.

"Looks like Quirk's craft," said Blake, staring. "I suppose it couldn't be—"

"Of course not, ass!" grinned Tom. "Quirk's miles behind! And there's three fellows on that craft—three born idiots, by the way they're mishandling that ship. My hat! What the thump is that chap up to?"

Tom slowed down to a crawl.

From the yacht came the sound of voices arguing—one voice almost bellowing, in fact.

"Rot!" came the bellow. "Think I don't know how to sail a blessed tub like this, Cuthbert Gunn! Shut up!"

"But, you ass—"

"You shut up, too, George Wilkins! Think I don't know port from starboard! Shut up!"

"Bai Jove! I know that voice, deah boys—"

"Grundy!" gasped Blake. "That explains it. It's that born idiot, Grundy! I think we'd better turn back, Tom, while we're safe!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was no outboard motor fitted to the yacht ahead;

she was edging along under her big mainsail, tacking against the wind—or should have been. She had just crossed the river; but now, while Tom waited for a chance to cut round her stern as she tacked back again, she was standing, scarcely moving, with her sail flapping.

"What the thump is the ass going to do?" gasped Tom.

"Buzz past him quickly!" said Manners.

"Can't, you ass! Never cross the bows of a sailing-boat when she's tacking!" retorted Tom. "She has the right of way. We're a power craft."

"Well, she's not tacking now!"

"Goodness knows what she's doing, and what that born idiot Grundy will do!" snapped Tom. He raised his voice in a wrathful hail.

"Get a move on, there! We want to pass, Grundy!"

"Hallo!" Grundy's voice came back in a bawl. "Why, it's those cheeky fags! I might have known it! Go on, you idiots! Going to keep us waiting all day? Don't you know the rule of the road!"

"Yes, but—"

"We're a sailing-boat," bawled Grundy. "We've got the right of way, and we're keeping it!"

"We'll be aground in a minute, Grundy, you ass!" came Wilkins wrathful yell. "Get her across, so those fellows can pass!"

"I jolly well won't! I'll show 'em what's what! Cheeky cads!"

Evidently Grundy was labouring under the impression that, as he had the right of way, he was entitled to keep it and hold it for as long as he liked, and wherever he liked. Grundy always was a perverse fellow. He was more than perverse, in fact, and a sudden thought seemed to strike him now.

"Hold on!" he yelled. "We're not jolly well going to let those cheeky cads pass, Wilky! We're going to board 'em!"

"To whatever?" hooted Gunn.

"Board 'em, and give them a thumping hiding all round!" bawled Grundy. "I've been fairly aching to get my hands on the rotters! Don't you remember how they chucked me out of the train coming down, and how they made me go on to Yarmouth from Lowestoft? I knew I'd meet 'em sooner or later on the thumping Broads!"

"But— Here, hold on, you born idiot!"
But Grundy refused to "hold on." In the train to Lowestoft he had been hurt and humiliated by Tom Merry & Co., and he had been fairly aching for vengeance since.

Now was his chance—or so he thought.
The yacht began to move as Grundy hauled at the sheet, and started as if to tack across to allow the cruiser to pass. Then—what Grundy did the grinning Tom Merry & Co. did not see. Evidently Grundy's idea was to run alongside the cruiser, board her, as did pirates of old, and slaughter her crew.

Unfortunately—for Grundy—he was no yachtsman.
The yacht swung round suddenly, and heeled over, and there were yells from Wilkins and Gunn—yells that were quite drowned by the fearful yell Grundy gave as the boom swung round also, catching him on the side of his thick head.

Crack!
Splash!
Grundy went overboard and explored the weedy bottom of the Yare.

The yacht heeled almost over, and then swerved round, and ran aground among the rushes near the bank. She would have capsized completely had not Wilkins, with remarkable presence of mind and swiftness, desperately dropped the sail about his head.

"Oh, bai Jove!"
"Grundy's in!"
"Man the lifebelt!" bawled Lowther.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
There was not much danger.
"Well," said Lowther, "we'll leave his pals to save him!"
"Yaas, wathah!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

And they did. Wilkins and Gunn, not wanting to see their leader drown, for he was paying all expenses for their holiday on the Broads, gave their attention to the job of saving Grundy when they saw that Tom Merry & Co. declined the task. It was a stiff job, but they managed it, and by the time they did Grundy was little more than a drowned rat. All his fight seemed to have gone. He just sat up on the deck of the yacht and wagged a fist feebly at the grinning motor-boat boys.

"Good-bye, Bluebell!" called Lowther. "Mind you report your piracy at St. Jim's when you get back."

"You—you— Oh, won't I just wallop you for this!" choked Grundy.

The juniors did not wait to hear more. It was getting dusk by this time, and they wanted to find a good mooring for the night. So they blew kisses to Grundy, and then Tom Merry opened the throttle, and the Viking forged on her way again.

CHAPTER 3.

Rather Alarming.

"QUIET! Not a sound!"
"Wathah not!"
"Quiet, ass!"
"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I was meahly—"
"Shurrup! If he wakes—"
"He's still fast asleep!" breathed Lowther, peeping over the top of the saloon deck. "All serene!"
"Good! Lock the door, Blake, and we'll get off!" said Tom Merry.

From the stealthy movements and remarks of Tom Merry & Co. it seemed clear that some dark and mysterious work was afoot.

Actually, though necessarily stealthy, the work was not very mysterious.

A suitable mooring-place had been found, but Tom Merry & Co. had no intention of turning in yet. They wanted to stroll over to the village, partly to post letters, and partly just for the walk. It looked like being an ideal summer's night, with moonlight to aid them during the walk back.

But they did not want to take Baggy Trimble with them. They saw quite enough of that fat youth on the boat, without taking him for walks, on which he usually grumbled from the moment they started out to the moment they returned.

So great caution was necessary. When not eating or talking, Baggy was generally sleeping. He was sleeping now—or so they fondly imagined.

On tiptoe the chums trod cautiously ashore.
"Safe enough now!" chuckled Tom Merry. "I don't suppose he'll wake until we get back. Now come on!"

"Yaas, wathah!"
And Tom Merry & Co. vanished into the trees.
Then a fat chuckle became audible. It came from Baggy

Trimble as that crafty youth raised himself on one elbow and blinked shorewards.

"He, he, he!" he chuckled. "Thought I was asleep, did they?—Beasts! As if I jolly well want to tramp about just for nothing! If the thumping shops were open it would be different. Now for a feed!"

Baggy discovered that Tom Merry & Co. were a trifle more careful than he had supposed. They had locked the saloon doors!

"Beasts!" hissed Baggy. "Just as if they didn't trust a chap!"

Then his blood seemed suddenly to freeze in his veins. He gulped in sheer horror.

A man was approaching the motor-cruiser. He had just left the shelter of the trees, and was steadily making for the craft, glancing about him from right to left as he did so.

"Oh!" gasped Baggy. "Oh dear!"
He knew that tall, muscular figure—he knew that swarthy face with its black, beady eyes and hooked nose.

It was Mr. Quirk, the man from South America. And Baggy had very good reason indeed to fear Mr. Quirk.

He lay motionless, scarcely daring to breathe, his heart thumping against his fat ribs with sheer fright.

Mr. Quirk had not seen him—he was obviously quite certain that the Viking was unoccupied and unguarded. Probably he had seen Tom Merry & Co. depart. At all events, here he was, and Baggy knew only too well what the rascal was after.

He fairly hugged the roof of the saloon, terrified lest Quirk should climb up the little staircase and spot him lying there. But Quirk did not do so. Baggy heard him fumbling with the doors of the saloon. Then sounded a sharp snap, and a faint splintering of wood. Evidently Mr. Quirk was not so particular as regards breaking in as Baggy had been.

"Oh dud-dud-dear!" groaned Baggy.
Silence followed. Mr. Quirk was evidently at work in the saloon—searching. Baggy knew what for, and he almost grinned in that moment as he thought of the ivory casket the man was searching for—the casket that was now lying in four feet of water in Oulton Broad—and the casket Baggy intended for himself.

But terror returned again the next moment. Quirk had followed the cruiser day after day, and he was not likely to be satisfied with just searching the saloon. He might easily come over the saloon roof in order to search the fore-cabin any moment.

The thought gave Baggy the courage of despair.
He raised himself cautiously and lowered himself on to the lower deck over the rails, not making a sound in his rubber shoes. Keeping carefully away from the portholes, he clambered ashore.

Then he ran—ran for his fat life!
No shout followed him—apparently Quirk had not seen that hurried flight. The next moment Baggy was safely hidden by the trees.

He dropped to a walk after a while. But, still careful, he selected an easy tree and climbed into the lower branches. "Oh dear!" he gurgled. "And—and I thought we'd shaken the beast off! I wish to goodness I could slip back to—"

Baggy paused in his musings. Footsteps and voices sounded, and he glimpsed three white-clad forms through the trees. Then one voice, louder than the rest, reached him.

"You'll jolly well do as I tell you, George Wilkins!" it was bawling. "Am I in charge of the thumping cruise, or not?"

The voice was only too familiar to Baggy. And he knew better than to be caught by the great George Alfred after what had happened on the Yare. Grundy would want to take it out of him.

The next moment Grundy & Co. arrived underneath, and there, to Baggy's alarm, Grundy called a halt.

"There's the cruiser—you can see it from here!" he said, pointing triumphantly through the trees. "We're going to creep up to it, and then, when I give the word, rush aboard, overpower that fat ass, and rag the boat. See?"

"But what about supper—"
"Blow supper! Supper can wait! Those cads can't wait! I'm going to rag their thumping boat—turn it upside down, you know!" said Grundy revengefully. "I'll show 'em! I'll jolly well—what's that?"

The next moment Grundy knew what "that" was. It was, in fact, the breaking of the branch to which Trimble was clinging precariously. Baggy's weight was no light weight.

Crack!
Crash!
"Yarroooop!"
Trimble had joined the discussion. He joined it by falling headlong upon George Alfred Grundy, nearly flattening him

to earth. There arose a wild howl from Trimble and a still wilder howl from George Alfred.

"What the thump—"

"Great pip! It's that fat rotter Trimble!" yelled Wilkins. He stared blankly at the grovelling pair on the ground. And while he stared, Trimble acted.

Baggy was hurt, but he realised that he would be hurt very much more the moment Grundy recovered himself—unless he got out of Grundy's way.

Hurt as he was, Baggy jumped up again as if worked by a well-oiled spring. Then he flew, scattering the staring Wilkins and Gunn to right and left.

He went tearing through the trees as though he was out to break all records

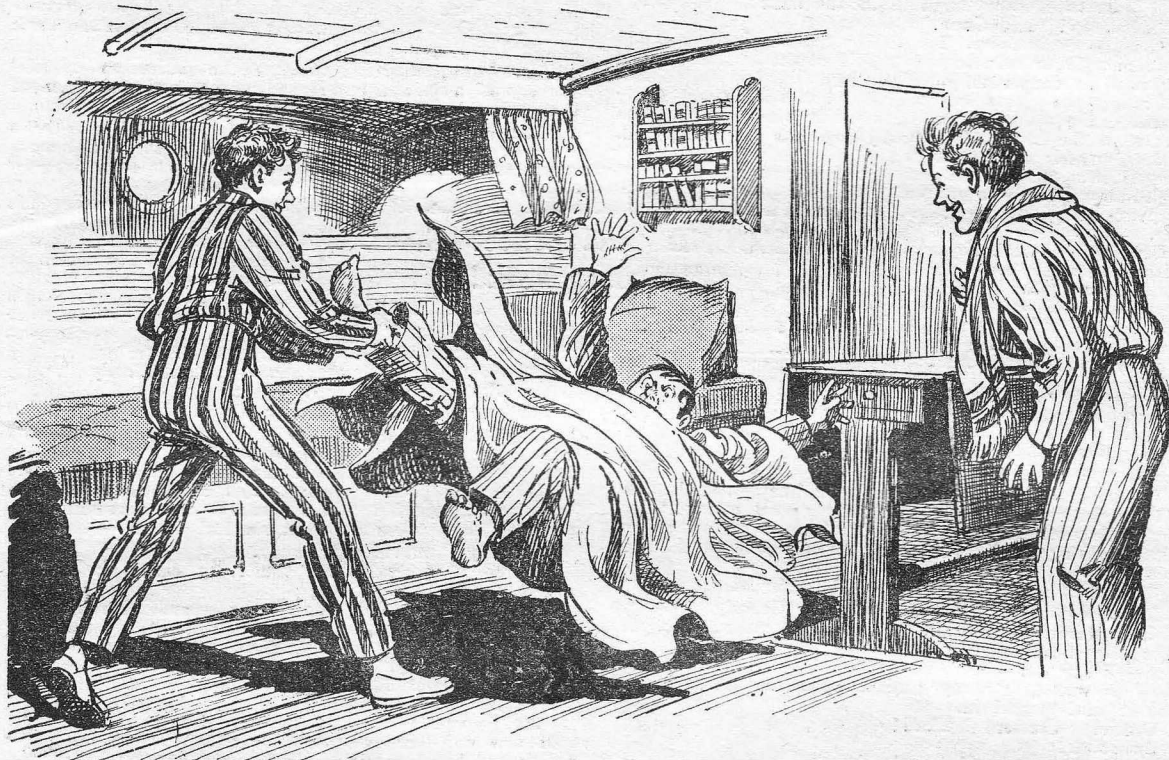
CHAPTER 4.

A Nice Surprise!

"Ow! Ow, ow, ow!"

Grundy sat up and gasped and groaned as if he were never likely to stop. Wilkins stood and regarded him, hiding his grin with his hands.

Trimble was gone—he had vanished into space. And



The pathetic invalid landed with a terrific bump on the floor, amid a tangle of bedclothes.

Wilkins and Gunn, not having had Trimble's weight on top of them, were quite willing to let him go. It was hot still, and they did not feel like chasing after Trimble.

"Hurt, old chap?" inquired Wilkins at last.

"Ow, ow, ow! Yow-ow!" gasped Grundy. He glared up at them "You—you cackling idiots!" he choked. "It was Trimble—that fat rotter! After him!"

"He's gone," said Wilky cheerfully "Miles away by this time, old fellow! Here, let me help you up!"

He lent Grundy a hand, and Grundy reached his feet, still gasping. After having been nearly flattened by Trimble's weight, it was really a marvel Grundy could still gasp. He gurgled and panted, and then quite suddenly he started with a rush for the cruiser. Wilkins and Gunn groaned and followed, just a trifle more leisurely. Grundy reached the craft and leaped aboard. He dropped into the well, and, finding the doors wide, rushed in.

Then he halted, transfixed.

Someone was in the saloon. But it was not Tom Merry & Co., nor was it Trimble. It was Mr. Quirk.

He stood at the far end of the saloon, like a tiger at bay. His face registered sudden alarm, but his eyes glittered dangerously.

Wilkins and Gunn arrived. They looked over Grundy's shoulder and jumped.

There was a silence.

"Hallo!" remarked Grundy grimly, at last. "Who the thump are you, my man? And what are you doing—oh! I remember you! You're the impudent rotter who had the cheek to collar my sea' in the train!"

Quirk did not reply. He was breathing hard, evidently taken aback by the arrival of Grundy & Co.

"You'd better clear out of this!" said Grundy, eyeing him with growing suspicion. "What the thump are you doing here, any—"

He got no farther. There was a sudden yell from Gunn.

"Look out!"

Grundy was just moving into the saloon. Quirk moved then. He leaped with the leap of a tiger, and an iron fist took Grundy on his square jaw.

Crack!

It was like the kick of a mule. Grundy's head went back, and he went crashing over as if he had been pole-axed, sending Wilkins and Gunn reeling to right and left, while Quirk bolted through the doorway.

He was gone in a flash, and his flying footsteps died away.

Grundy sat up, hugging his jaw dizzily. It was a wonder he was not knocked out completely. His head was

singing, and he felt his chin tenderly as if amazed that it was still there.

"Phew!" gasped Wilkins, scrambling to his feet. "The—brute! Grundy, old man—"

They helped Grundy to his feet between them. Grundy seemed anxious to go in pursuit of the man from South America, but they restrained him by sheer weight.

"Don't be an ass, old man!" panted Wilkins. "He's good enough for a dozen kids like us, that merchant is!"

"I—I'll smash him!" gasped Grundy faintly. "Ow, ow, ow!"

But he stopped struggling. Possibly, on second thoughts, he decided not to risk getting another hefty punch like that. One was more than enough for Grundy, in fact.

"He was up to something!" he groaned. "Burgling the boat most likely! Look at the state of those drawers and lockers! Hunting for loot, I'll bet!"

"Well, he's done our job for us," grinned Gunn, glancing round the disorderd saloon. "Not likely he's pinched anything! What about chucking this game up and getting back to supper?"

"Ass!"

"But, look here—"

"Idiot!" hooted Grundy, who was in a very bad temper by this time. "Funky pair of dashed duds! Think I'm

going back without doing anything? Rot! Get busy on the larder, Wilky; mix all their grub up! Gunny, you drag all the things out of the lockers."

"But—"

"Shut up! Carry out my orders!" roared Grundy.

They carried them out. After all, a rag was a rag, and Grundy & Co. had to keep their end up. Wilkins grinned and started work on the larder. There was precious little there, but he smothered the cold ham with mustard, and mixed the tea, the salt, the pepper, the coffee and the sugar together, adding sauce to give it a flavour, as it were. The milk he emptied on the floor. Gunn meanwhile dragged all the bedding and bedclothes from the bunks and strewed them on the floor, and tied the suits of pyjamas together in a long rope. This he carried on deck, and hoisted up the mast of the cruiser. Tom Merry & Co. were likely to stare when they got back and sighted their new "flag."

All that could be done was done at last. Then Grundy got a brainwave. He filled a bucket with water, and lodged it on the tiny ledge over the saloon doors. It just fitted in.

"What's that for?" inquired Wilkins. "Oh, I see!"

"A booby-trap!" grinned Grundy. "What a surprise for them when they barge in in the dark!"

"Buck up!" said Gunn.

Grundy bucked up. He tied a piece of cord, taken from a pyjama suit, to the handle of the bucket. Then he shut his chums out of the saloon.

Closing the doors carefully from the inside, Grundy fastened the other end of the cord to the handle of the doors on the inside. The booby-trap was now completed.

When any innocent person barged into the saloon that night, he was likely to get the surprise—and wetting—of his life.

Grundy eyed his booby-trap with satisfaction, and then he climbed on to the table, and managed to squeeze out through the skylight on to the roof of the saloon. He joined his grinning chums in the well again.

"Done it?"

"Yes!" Grundy chuckled. "This will teach those cheeky fags a lasting lesson! Now let's get off! Blow! My jacket's torn—Hallo, my wallet's gone, too!"

"What's the matter?"

"When that brute bowled me over," explained Grundy, "I caught my blazer pocket against a nail or something. Tore the pocket! My wallet was in it. I remember, now, hearing it fly out when I went down. Hold on a sec!"

"Here—mind, you idiot—" yelled Wilkins.

But the warning came too late for Grundy. George Alfred was a fellow who always acted on impulse. He also had a remarkably bad memory.

Forgetting all about his own booby-trap in his alarm for his wallet, Grundy pushed open the doors of the saloon and barged in.

Crash! Clatter! Thud!

Swoooosh!

"Yarrooooooooooop!"

Grundy's wild howl echoed and re-echoed across the River Yare.

Wilkins and Gunn stared into the saloon. Grundy had got the booby-trap all right. He sprawled full length on a floor that was swimming with water. On his forehead a big bruise was showing, where the bucket itself had caught him a terrific thwack. He lay and gurgled, his face distorted with anguish.

The booby-trap was a great success undoubtedly. Unfortunately—or fortunately—Grundy himself had got it! But it was just like Grundy—just what the great George Alfred might have been expected to do.

Wilkins and Gunn blinked in, and then they doubled up and howled—they simply couldn't help it.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

The unfeeling, heartless laughter did it. Grundy, though dizzy and bemused, heard it with feelings too deep for words. He leaped up with a wild howl of rage, and then he went for his laughing chums.

Wilkins and Gunn turned abruptly, and bolted for their very lives. And Grundy went after them, raging. It is said that revenge recoils on the head of the avenger. And Grundy, certainly, had cause to think there was something in that. Altogether, it had not been a very happy day for George Alfred.

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CHAPTER 5.

Trimble Trapped!

"BEASTS!"

Baggy Trimble stopped running at last.

He glanced behind him, and his relief was great when he saw that he was not pursued. Trimble had been hurt by that heavy fall from the tree. But, obviously, Grundy was hurt still more—too hurt to follow him and exact vengeance, at all events.

And Trimble grinned at the reflection.

"Beasts!" he chuckled. "But—what the thump am I to do now? And—and I wonder what will happen when Grundy barges in on that beast Quirk?"

It was a reflection that seemed to amuse Trimble. Grundy & Co. would certainly get a surprise. The situation looked like being very interesting.

Trimble rolled on. He had to keep out of the way now, until Grundy & Co. had left the cruiser—and Quirk. The sudden thought of Quirk again brought a serious frown to Trimble's fat brow. Quirk was still on the trail, and far more dangerous, in Baggy's opinion.

If only he could get back to Oulton, and let Quirk go on trailing the blessed cruiser if he wanted to!

Trimble was just dismally reflecting upon the impossibility of this, when he suddenly came out upon the bank of the Yare again.

Before him, moored amongst the bulrushes on the bank, was a small, una-rigged yacht, and the lines of the craft seemed very familiar to Trimble.

"M-mum-my hat!" breathed Trimble. "That—that's Grundy's thumping boat for a pension! I wonder—"

Trimble was very hungry indeed by this time. He reflected on the position. Here was Grundy's yacht, and Grundy was far away. Grundy was a comparatively wealthy fellow, and he never did things by halves. The larder on board that yacht was likely to be full of ripping grub—a land fairly flowing

with milk and honey, so to speak.

And then another great idea struck Baggy. Grundy had stated that he was starting homewards for Oulton Broad the next day. Evidently their time was up—or nearly up. Why not stow away aboard the yacht? He could have a good feed first, then collar as much grub as he could, and hide himself with it in the vessel's forepeak! Then, when the boat reached Oulton—

"Ripping!" murmured Baggy.

He felt he already had the ivory casket in his fat grasp.

With a cautious blink round, he scrambled aboard the yacht. Yes, as he expected, the little sliding hatchway into the cabin was not fastened. Grundy was not a suspicious fellow, like some beasts were!

Trimble's heart almost missed a beat as he slipped into the cabin.

"Oh!" gasped Baggy. "Oh—oh d-dear!"

It was not Grundy's yacht at all. It was the yacht Quirk had hired. Quirk's big bag was on the floor. Certainly it was like Grundy's craft. As a matter of fact, though Trimble did not know it, it was the sister boat to Grundy's boat, the Swallow. It had been hired from the same owner.

Trimble trembled as he realised this, and the danger he was in. If Mr. Quirk turned up now—

"Oh!" gasped Trimble.

He turned to bolt, all idea of stowing away aboard this boat suddenly gone.

And as he turned to flee he heard a step in the tiny well of the boat, and then a shadow loomed up in the doorway.

It was almost dark in the little cabin, but Trimble easily recognised the beady eyes, the strong, cruel jaw, and the hooked nose.

They blinked at each other, Trimble in dire terror and Quirk in amazed anger—anger which turned to triumph as he recognised Baggy.

"You!" he snarled.

Trimble did not speak; he was utterly incapable of speaking.

He was trapped—trapped by the ruthless enemy who had been trailing him for days. Baggy very nearly fainted in his terror.

"You!" repeated Quirk. "You here?"

There was triumph; there was deadly menace and satisfaction in his tones. Baggy shivered.

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It's 100 per cent GOOD STUFF!

"Stand still," said Quirk, almost gently. "You are the one person in the world I wish to meet just now. You—you young fool! Do you suppose I should allow you to escape me?"

He paused, and his eyes glittered.
 "You know what I want, boy," he said. "I have searched your cruiser from end to end. I have wasted more than enough time searching for what is mine. Where is that casket, you young thief? Tell me, or you go over the side of this boat with a weight tied to your feet!"

Trimble shook. Whether the man meant his threat or not, Baggy believed he did. But he could not speak.

"You know what I want—what I mean to have!" snarled Quirk. "I have waited long months. I have travelled from South America to get that casket, boy. Am I to be balked of it now by a schoolboy?"

"Grooogh!" Baggy managed to get that out.

"You have balked me so far!" said Quirk savagely. "You were at the Grange that night. You saw me take the casket from that secret cupboard. You bolted through the window, and took the casket with you. Where is it now?"

Still Baggy did not speak.
 Quirk stepped up to him and grasped him in a grip of iron. He clapped a savage hand over Baggy's mouth, half stifling that youth's terrified howl.

"Quiet, confound you!" ordered the rascal. "Answer me, you young fool! You had the casket when I chased you to the cruiser. I saw it in your hand in the moonlight. You did not drop it. I have searched every inch of the wood. Answer me! Do your friends know of it—quick?"

Baggy shook his head. He could answer that, at all events.

"Then where is it? Where have you hidden it?" snarled Quirk.

"I—I—I—" gurgled Baggy. "It—it—"
 "One minute I give you!" hissed the man from South America.

His clutch tightened on the junior, and Baggy was pressed back savagely against a bunk. Sheer terror kept the junior from speaking further had he wanted to. And in

that tense moment footsteps and voices sounded from the bank.

"Quiet," whispered Quirk. "One sound, and it will be your last!"

Baggy remained quiet.

CHAPTER 6.

The Wrong Boat Again!

"ALL quiet!" remarked Tom Merry.
 "He's asleep, I expect," grinned Monty Lowther. "Wonder what his face looked like when he found we'd locked the doors?"

"That's if he woke up," said Blake. "Looks as if he's still asleep, though I don't see his fat form on— Hallo! What the thump is that slung from the mast?"

"We hung no washing out to dry," chuckled Lowther. It was rather mysterious, though, to Tom Merry & Co. They blinked at the cruiser curiously in the deepening dusk of the summer night. And certainly the string of articles waving from the masthead of the cruiser resembled washing hanging out.

"Vewy queah!" remarked Arthur Augustus, jamming his monocle into place to aid his vision. "I wondah— Oh, great Scott! I—I seem to wecognise one of those articles!"

"What? But—"
 Arthur Augustus did not stay to discuss possibilities. He wanted to make sure that the dreadful thing could not be true.

Yet it was true. And the next moment a howl of rage came from the noble Gussy.

"My pyjamas! My vewy best suit of pink silk pyjamas!" he shrieked. "Who—who has done this feahful thing?"

"What? What the merry dickens— Oh!"
 Blake was on the cruiser now, also, and he saw the string of pyjamas hanging from the masthead.

"It—it's our pyjamas!" stuttered Tom Merry. "Those— those blue-and-white striped ones are mine! Who on earth's done this?"

"Trimble!" yelled Herries. "He's done this to pay us out, the fat rotter!"

(Continued on the next page.)

Tired and Thirsty?

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"Bai Jove! That's it! The—the feahful wascal!"

"We'll smash him!"

"Where is he?"

They began to look for Trimble. A glance on the top deck showed that he was not there, and then they saw the door of the saloon was open, and they rushed in.

Then arose howls of amazement and rage.

The water was still flooding the floor as Grundy & Co. had left it. And most of the bedclothes were soaked, likewise a great many of the precious articles of attire belonging to Arthur Augustus and the rest of them. Socks, ties, collars, cricket shirts—all kinds of articles had done their little best to stop the flow of water, and had got very wet and dirty doing so.

Arthur Augustus was in a state bordering on hysterics as he examined his own clobber.

"And look at the lockers, and everything!" stammered Tom Merry. "Trimble would never dare to do this, you fellows!"

"Then who else——"

"Goodness knows! I suppose that fellow Quirk——" Tom was beginning in startled tones, when Blake gave a yell and picked something from the floor.

"What's this?"

It was a curious, half-stifled yelp, and it came from the yacht which had no light showing.

"Bai Jove! What—what——"

"Trimble!" gasped Tom Merry. "It was Trimble yelping! It must be Grundy's craft! They're putting poor old Trimble through it! Quick!"

"Yaas, wathah! Wescue, deah boys!"

They boarded the yacht with a rush.

Ready for battle, they swarmed round the little doorway of the cabin. Tom was about to lead the way in when he pulled up with a startled gasp at what he saw.

They had scarcely expected to see Mr. Quirk just then.

But they saw him now, and they saw Trimble, his face white as chalk in the dim light.

"Quirk!" gasped Blake. "My hat! The brute's got Trimble!"

"Bai Jove!"

Quirk gave a start, and his eyes glittered.

"Get out!" he snarled. "Get——"

"Rescue!" shrieked Trimble, finding his voice at last. "Help! Oh, help, you fellows! He's going to kill me!"

"But—but——"

Tom Merry was too taken aback for the moment to move.

GREAT GOPHERS!

Young Cyrus is gone—— Kidnapped!

That's only one of the sensations when American gangsters rasp out
"Hands Up, St. Jim's!"

SPECIAL FOR NEXT WEEK!

It was Grundy's pocket wallet. It had burst open, and several letters and Treasury notes were scattered about the floor, many of them soaked in water.

"Grundy!" howled Blake. "Grundy's been here; he's done this! It's a rag! His revenge for this afternoon and the other day! Oh, the—the——"

"Rotter!" finished Herries, in sulphurous accents. "Look here, we're not standing this!"

"But—but this wallet——"

"He must have dropped it!"

"And this—this bucket!" exclaimed Tom blankly. "See, it's tied to the door, and—— My hat! Looks like a booby-trap! And somebody's walked into it, instead of us!"

"Most likely Grundy himself!" grinned Lowther. "Perhaps he fixed it up and then walked into it. Just what Grundy does do, you know! Only Grundy does these things!"

"It is nothin' to laugh at, Lowthah!" hooted Arthur Augustus. "I shall not west this night until I have thwashed Gwunday!"

"Hear, hear—I'm with you!" snapped Blake, glaring about him in a state of towering wrath. "That—that born idiot!"

"He must have collared Trimble and taken him off——"

"More likely the fat ass saw him coming and bolted!" sniffed Manners. "Look here, we're not standing this! I vote we go and hunt for Grundy & Co. They can't be far away!"

"That's so!" admitted Tom, frowning. "In fact, I sighted a light over there as we came across the fields! Look here, we'll go! We'll teach the born idiot to rag our boat!"

"Yes, rather!"

They were all tired after their walk, but they were not too tired to go on an expedition of revenge. Tom remembered the spot where he had seen the light glimmering from the river bank, and he led the way at a trot. The moon had risen, and they could see their way easily enough.

They hurried along the river bank, keeping their eyes open for the light. Before they reached it, however, they sighted another small yacht.

"That's it!" said Blake. "I'd know it anywhere!"

"It's like it, but—no, it isn't the one!" said Tom, his keen eyes scanning the craft. "Look, there's an outboard motor fitted—wha-what's that?"

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They had imagined it was Grundy, and naturally they were some moments getting over the shock.

But they soon did get over it. Tom Merry gave a yell: "On the ball, St. Jim's!"

It was enough. There was a rush into the cabin, and a startled, savage oath from Quirk. He released Baggy, and turned to face the onslaught, his face working with rage.

Baggy promptly scuttled across the cabin, and bolted, leaving Tom Merry & Co. to it.

They had more than their hands full. But Trimble had gone now. Tom Merry gave another yell.

"Down him, and run for it, chaps!"

It was the best thing to do in the circumstances. The man was remarkably powerful, and even with the odds at seven to one in their favour, Tom doubted their chances. Moreover, Trimble was well away now.

They swarmed over the man from South America. He struck out furiously, but they dodged his savage blows for the most part. They brought him crashing to the cabin floor at last.

"Run!" yelled Tom.

He was the last to release Mr. Quirk, who made a desperate grab at him. But Tom was a trifle too slippery—he was at the doorway before the raging rascal knew it.

"You—you—hang you——"

Tom laughed and vanished, leaving Quirk to waste his sweetness, as it were, on the air of the Broads. The rascal's voice, yelling imprecations and threats, died away as Tom joined his chums and they raced away.

They stopped at last.

"Trimble clear?" gasped Tom.

"Back at the cruiser by this time!" grinned Blake.

"I say, what does all this business mean, Tom?"

He became suddenly serious, and the juniors stared at each other in the gloom.

"That fellow's getting a bit thick!" said Blake. "He's followed us again, you see! But how on earth came Trimble to be there?"

"Goodness knows!" said Tom, frowning uneasily. "I don't like it at all. Possibly Trimble wandered in there after grub, or something—perhaps he thought it was Grundy's as we did at first, and he went to raid it while Grundy was raiding ours! But——"

"The fat ass was terrified out of his wits!" said Herries.

"That's so! It's all no end queer! Let's get back!"

"No fear! What about Grundy?" snorted Herries. "I say, there's a light over there!"

"And a gramophone!" said Lowther.

They hurried towards the light and the sound of the gramophone. Before they reached the boat that was moored in a little creek off the river they knew they need search no farther for George Alfred Grundy. His voice reached them as they stopped on the bank.

"As I was saying," Grundy was remarking, in grim, sorrowful accents, "I'll overlook your conduct this time, George Wilkins—and you, too, Cuthbert Gunn! But don't let it occur again, or—"

The next moment Tom gave the signal, and they boarded the boat and rushed into the cabin.

"Look out!" yelled Gunn. "Oh, my hat!"

Grundy & Co. were taken completely by surprise.

Wilkins and Gunn had already given up the unequal struggle.

A cord was fetched, and the three Shell yachtsmen were tied back to back until they formed a sort of triangle on the floor.

"Oh!" panted Grundy, his dishevelled appearance giving good evidence of the fight he had put up. "Oh, won't I wallop the lot of you for this! Ow, ow, ow!"

"What's good for the goose is good for the gander!" chuckled Tom Merry breathlessly. "You raided us—I suppose it was you?"

"Yes, it jolly well was!" bawled Grundy furiously. "And I jolly well—"

"Then this belongs to you, old fruit!" grinned Tom, showing the well-filled wallet down the back of Grundy's neck. "You shouldn't leave such evidence behind you, old bean—not such valuable evidence at all events!"

"Oh!" Grundy gasped his relief. "You—you found that, then?"

"Yes, old infant! It's rather wet, but then that's your look out, isn't it, Grundy?" chuckled Tom. "Chaps who rig up booby-traps and walk into 'em themselves—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cheeky, cackling rotters!" bawled Grundy, crimson with rage and dismay. "Look here—"

"Too painful, old fruit! Besides, we want our supper!"

"Yaas, wathah! These sausages are weally wippin', you know!"

"And there was nothing for our supper, and these merchants have ruined the cold ham we were keeping for brekker!" grinned Lowther. "Well scoff their supper and take our brekker with us, what?"

"Good egg!"

"Oh, you! You dare—" spluttered Grundy.

But they did dare. There were only plates and dishes for three set out, but Tom Merry & Co. soon added to them.

They sat down to the sizzling sausages, as Lowther ladled them out on plates. Sitting on the floor, bound hand and foot, Grundy & Co. gazed on with feelings too deep for words as Tom Merry & Co. demolished their supper.

"Good job dear old Trimble isn't here—I mean, a good job for your larder, Grundy!" said Lowther. "Be thankful for small mercies, old chap, and don't grouse!"

"I say, you fellows! Here, I'm coming in!"

Trimble came rolling into the cabin. He was still looking white about the gills, but his face brightened up as he saw what was afoot.

"He, he, he!" he giggled. "I smelled these sosses as I was—that is, I heard your voices, you know!" said Trimble. "Ripping! I say, I'm awfully hungry!"

"Just one sos left for you, fatty!" chuckled Blake. "Here you are! There's a heap of potted meat, cold ham and stuff in the larder, though! Trust old Grundy to stock a larder well. Pile in, old fat man! You're welcome as the flowers in May!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you—you fearful cads!" choked Grundy. "I—I—"

"I say, it was old Grundy who raided the cruiser, you fellows!" said Trimble, with his mouth full. "I heard him planning it! Did he muck things up?"

"Ha, ha! Yes, but he mucked himself up more, I fancy!"

"I say, this cold ham's ripping! I'm having some more!" said Baggy.

And he had some more—and then some, as Cyrus K. Handcock would have said. And Tom Merry & Co., feeling justified in the circumstances, also had more. There was also coffee steaming and ready, which they finished. There was work to do when they got back—plenty of work to get the saloon fit to sleep in again. With their inner man well stocked, Tom Merry & Co. felt they would be equal to it then—not before.

The meal ended at last. Lowther had put the gramophone on again—to drown Grundy's threats and sulphurous remarks more than anything else. So it was, altogether, a very jolly meal for Tom Merry & Co. But even Trimble's appetite was satisfied at length. Then, after stopping to empty three two-pound pots of jam—over the heads of Grundy, Wilkins, and Gunn—Tom Merry & Co. bade those worthies a cheery "Good-night!" and took their departure. They felt that Grundy & Co. had had quite enough without ragging their boat as well; Grundy & Co. themselves were of the opinion that they had had much too much—at least, George Alfred Grundy was. It had not been his lucky day at all!

CHAPTER 7. Fixing It Up.

"TUMBLE up, fatty!"

"Go away!"

"But it's time you were up, Baggy!" said Tom Merry grimly. "We've all got our jobs on this cruise. Yours is to help wash up at the moment. Cerrup, you lazy clam!"

"Go away! I'm ill!" said Baggy faintly.

"You—you're what?"

"Ill! Fearfully ill! I—I think I shall expire!" gasped Baggy faintly.

"You—you fat work-dodger!" snorted Tom.

"Malingering again, the fat rotter!" sniffed Jack Blake, who was busy making his own bed. "Yank him out, Tom!"

"I—I say, you fellows, I really am ill—frightfully ill!" gasped Baggy. "It—it was the shock I got last night when Quirk got me!"

"You'll get another shock if you don't get up and do your whack, my lad!"

"Beasts! Heartless beasts!" groaned Baggy. He rolled his head and closed his eyes. "Ow, ow, ow!" he groaned.

"I—I think I'd better have a doctor!"

"Right! We'll send for one—"

"I—I mean, not a doctor!" gasped Baggy, in sudden alarm. "I—I don't believe in doctors; never did! Look here, there's only one thing for it, Tom Merry!"

"A rope's-end—"

"No, you beast! Look here, unless you want me to expire on this boat, you—you'd better start back!" gasped Baggy, eyeing Tom Merry pathetically. "I always dreaded the thought of—of dying on the water, you know. At Fenreed Grange—among relatives—my own dear folk—Yaroooop!"

Bump!

The pathetic invalid landed with a terrific bump on the floor, amid a tangle of bedclothes.

"Yaroooop! Oh, you—you awful beasts!" wailed Baggy.

"Now get on with your job!" said Tom Merry firmly.

"We're a trifle too used to your malingering, old fat man! Before you have a bite of breakfast you've got to wash up; it's a job you ought to have done after tea yesterday."

"Beast!"

Tom Merry went off with a towel for his morning bathe. There was a succession of splashes over the side of the cruiser. All but Trimble were up and bathing. Trimble didn't want a bathe. He wanted to stay in bed. And he wanted still more to get back to Oulton Broad.

But Tom Merry—the heartless beast!—wasn't having any. Ill as Baggy was—or wasn't—he had to get up and get on with the washing-up.

"Beasts!" mumbled Trimble.

He rubbed himself and scrambled up. There was no help for it. He made his bed, after a fashion of his own, and then he started the washing-up the moment he had dressed, Tom Merry having already put the kettle on the spirit-stove.

But there was a curious gleam in Baggy's eyes now.

He felt very thankful indeed to Tom Merry for having brought him out of bed in such a rough-and-ready manner. It had been painful, but it had been worth it. For while gathering together his bedclothes again, Baggy had found something on the floor.

It had proved to be a ten-shilling note!

Trimble knew to whom it belonged, of course. It was one of Grundy's Treasury notes that had fallen out of the wallet the previous night. Though the juniors had cleaned up on getting back to the cruiser, they had not done the job thoroughly by any means. At all events, they had failed to find that ten-bob note—for which Baggy now was duly and deeply thankful.

After breakfast Baggy went ashore and wandered off along the bank.

He had a problem to think out. It was rather a serious problem. He now had the money for his fare back—money Grundy had loaned him, of course. That was all right.

He felt pretty sure ten bob would be enough. On the other hand it might not be enough. Also, Baggy had a feeling that if he once did leave the cruiser he would not see it again until the cruise was over at the end of the three weeks.

Tom Merry had stated his intention of hiring the boat for another week when the fortnight was up.

That didn't suit Baggy, if it suited Tom Merry & Co. Baggy was enjoying life on the Broads—"one glorious, long, irresponsible laze!"—as much as Tom Merry & Co. He did not wish to be out of it at all. But he had to get that casket in his fat clutch at all costs!

What was to be done?

He now had his chance to desert the cruiser and take train to Oulton Broad, or he hoped he had. But he didn't want to desert the cruiser. All he wanted was the casket. After that he was willing, anxious, indeed, to continue cruising over the sun-bathed Broads.

Besides, there was that beast Quirk! Baggy had a fearful dread of being away far from Tom Merry & Co. That villain might easily get to know he had deserted, and follow him. He would then have no Tom Merry & Co. to guard or rescue him.

It really was a problem.

As he rolled along Baggy came upon a large auxiliary wherry yacht moored to the bank. Inside the big saloon Baggy glimpsed several individuals at breakfast. On the deck an individual in a jersey and peaked cap was busy coiling a rope. It looked as if the wherry was being prepared for departure by the attendant.

And the nose of the wherry was pointing downstream!

The sight of it brought an idea to Baggy.

"I say, my man," he exclaimed, addressing the attendant, "do you happen to be going back to Oulton? I saw you starting out from there the other day, you know."

Baggy had. He had recognised the man again, and it was this fact that had given Baggy the idea.

The man nodded.

"Just going back," he assented. "Start soon after breakfast, young gent. Why—"

"Look here," said Baggy eagerly, "could you take me back, as a matter of fact. But I want a telegram to be sent course—"

"Can't be done, sir!" said the man, shaking his head. "This craft's hired by the gents inside. You'd have to ask them."

"Well, look here," proceeded Baggy. "I'd rather not go back, as a matter of fact. But I want a telegram to be sent from Oulton—a most important wire. If you could take it for me and get it sent from Oulton Post Office—"

The man stared.

"From Oulton Post Office—"

"Yes."

"Well, I reckon as I could!" said the man slowly; he said it in the tone that hinted that he could if it was made worth his while.

"There's a ten-bob note," said Baggy eagerly. Baggy could afford to be generous with Grundy's money. "That'll pay for the wire, and you can keep the rest," he added loftily. "I'll write it out for you!"

Baggy wrote on a page torn from his pocket-book.

"Just hand that in at Oulton," he said. "That's all you have to do. But it's most important, and very urgent. Mind you do it the moment you land there."

The man glanced at the wire. Then he nodded, though he looked still puzzled and doubtful.

"It's signed 'Whimple,'" he remarked, eyeing Baggy curiously. "That's the name of the owner of Fenreed

Grange. I've been attendant on this cruiser more'n once. But—"

"I'm his nephew," said Baggy carelessly. "He was with me when I saw you the other day, you know. That's all right—quite!"

"Very—very good, sir!" gasped the attendant.

He was evidently puzzled, but only too glad to earn several shillings so easily.

He glanced at the wire again, and then he pocketed the ten-shilling note.

"Right, sir! You can leave it to me, Master Whimple," he said. "We're going straight back—one of these young gents has to get back soon, as it happens. We shan't be stoppin' anywhere. It'll be at Thorpe Post Office in the mornin', certain."

"Good!" grinned Baggy. "Ripping!" And Baggy rolled back to the cruiser.

CHAPTER 8.

It Comes Off!

"ANY letters, Algy?"

"I wufese to be addressed as Algy, Lowthah!" said Arthur Augustus, with some asperity. "You know vewy well that my name is not Algy."

"My mistake, old chap!" chuckled Lowther. "Any letters for me, Gussy, then?"

Arthur Augustus stepped aboard the cruiser and mopped his brow. The walk to the post office at Thorpe St. Andrew had been a nice walk, but the early morning sun was hot, and Gussy was perspiring freely, and his clothes were very dusty.

But it had fallen to Gussy's lot to go for the letters, and he had to go.

He was back now, however, though in a somewhat irritated mood.

"No, there are no lettahs for you, Lowthah," he said coldly.

"None for anybody?" asked Lowther. "Didn't you ask for letters addressed to Tom Merry, Jack Blake, Gussy D'Arcy, Monty Lowther, Harry Manners, Arthur Digby, George Herries, Baggy Trimble, on board the giddy m.c. Viking, old sport?"

"I did not ask anythin' so widic, you funny ass!" snorted Gussy. "But there was a lettah for me, one for Mewwy, and one for Hewwies—that is all. And, bai Jove, there is a telewgram for Tom Mewwy, also!"

"Eh? What's that?" demanded Tom Merry, coming hastily out of the saloon. "A giddy wire for me, Gussy?"

"Yaas, deah boy. Heah you are!"

Gussy handed a letter and a telegram to Tom Merry. Tom Merry frowned and tore open the wire. He ran his eyes over it, and then he jumped.

"Anything wrong?" asked Blake, joining them. "No bad news, I hope."

"Nunno—not exactly!" gasped Tom.

"Then—"

"Look at it," said Tom blankly.

Blake looked at it, and then he passed it round, a look of astonishment on his face.

"To Tom Merry, on board m.c. Viking, care of Thorpe St. Andrew P.O.—Return at once. Urgent."

"WHIMPLE!"

"Well, my only hat!" said Blake.

Potts, the Office Boy.



"What awful luck!" groaned Lowther, all his humour suddenly disappearing. "But—"

"Something's wrong, evidently!" said Tom, in some alarm. "We'd better start straight back, you fellows!"

"Oh deah!"

"What luck!"

"Better go," said Blake, with a grunt. "Maybe someone ill—one of our relations, or something, though goodness knows how—though they could easily write or wire to Baggy's uncle, of course."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It seems queer," said Tom, wrinkling his brows dismally. "But—"

"Better go," said Blake, with another grunt. "After all, we'll soon run down there, and we've only got to run back as far as Reedham to work across to Yarmouth. That's supposing it's nothing serious, of course."

"That's so," admitted Tom. "We'll go back right away. I don't like chancing things, at all events."

"Why not wire him and ask for further parties?" suggested Manners.

"Only delaying matters," said Tom. "Uncle Whimple wouldn't wire for us like this unless he'd jolly good reason, I know. Come on! Sooner we get on the move the better."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I say, you fellows, what's up?" Trimble rolled up to them, blinking inquisitively. "You been for the letters, Gussy?"

"Yaas."

"Any for me?"

"No, Twimble."

"Nothing for anybody, I suppose," said Trimble, pretending not to notice the orange-coloured envelope in Tom's hand. "I say, let's be bucking up and getting on to Yarmouth. Never mind exploring Rickland Broad, you fellows. I'm keen to get to Yarmouth, you know!"

"He's thinking about bloaters," said Lowther. "Thinks the Yarmouth streets are paved with bloaters, and you can pick 'em up for nix and eat 'em."

"We're not making for Yarmouth, Trimble," said Tom, eyeing the fat youth curiously. "You've jolly quickly changed your tune, haven't you? I thought you were frightfully anxious to get back to the Grange."

"Eh? Oh, yes, so I am—after we've been to Yarmouth!" said the crafty Baggy.

"Well, Yarmouth's off for the time being," said Tom. "We've got to get back straight away, Trimble. Look at this."

He handed the telegram to Baggy, who blinked at it. As he had composed that telegram, Baggy, naturally, was not surprised at the words on it. But he assumed a start of surprise, for all that.

"Oh dear!" he gasped. "That's from my uncle!"

"Of course. Who the thump did you think it was from?"

"Somebody must be dead, or something—perhaps Gussy's pater," said Trimble. "Better rush straight off back, I think—full speed ahead, you know!"

"We're going to."

"Good! I—I mean, what a thousand pities, you know! Still, it may be a death—most likely Gussy's pater!"

"Weally, Twimble—"

"Still, Gussy will be a giddy lord then, won't he?" grinned Trimble, anxious to press home the danger of it being a death. "He won't mind much—"

"You—you feahful wottah, Twimble!"

"Oh, really, Gus— Oh! Yarrooop!"

Crash!

Not liking Gussy's look just then, Baggy started back hastily, forgetting he was standing at the top of the steps leading to the lower deck. He landed, with a terrific howl, on the lower deck, and a bump that fairly shook the cruiser from stem to stern.

After that Baggy ceased to press home the danger—which was, perhaps, just as well for his crafty scheme. He crawled, groaning dismally, into the cabin and into his bunk, and there he lay groaning, while the motor-cruiser forged on its way back to Oulton Broad.

CHAPTER 9.

Spoofted!

"HERE we are!"

"Oh, good!" said Trimble.

"What?"

"I—I mean, how feahfully rotten!" said Trimble hastily. "I—I meant, of course, that it's jolly good speed we've made. Here we are at last! Now, you fellows—I mean, we shall soon know if it's Gussy's pater—"

"Will you stop mentionin' my patah in that respect, you feahful wottah?" shouted Arthur Augustus. "You are causin' me a gweat deal of anxiety and annoyance, Twimble. There is no weason to suppose it is my patah or anyone else's patah, you feahful idiot!"

"Oh, all right!" grunted Trimble. "Blessed if I can see why you should get so waxy just because I say it might be your—"

"Dwy up!" hooted Gussy.

"Hallo! Here's Uncle Whimple!"

The podgy form of Trimble's uncle came down to the jetty from the old house just visible through the trees. Save for the matter of bulk, Trimble's uncle was as unlike Trimble as uncle and nephew could be. He was a kindly, genial gentleman, and all the juniors had taken a great liking to Uncle Whimple.

They eyed him anxiously now, however. He was looking remarkably grim.

"We've got back, Mr. Whimple," said Tom Merry, as he came up. "We hurried back as soon as we got your wire. I—I hope—"

"It was not my wire, boys!" said Uncle Whimple.

Baggy started.

That his uncle was obviously expecting them had astonished him enough already. But he seemed also to know about the wire! How on earth could he? Trimble felt uneasy.

Tom Merry & Co. were eyeing Mr. Whimple blankly now, however.

"Not—not your wire, sir?" echoed Tom.

"Certainly not! I did not send any wire, my boys!"

"Bai Jove!"

"I am very sorry indeed that this has happened," said Uncle Whimple, with a severe glance at the staring Baggy. "I would have wired you myself to stop your returning had I not known it would be too late. Indeed, I have only heard of it about an hour!"

"You—you've heard, uncle!" Baggy found himself stammering.

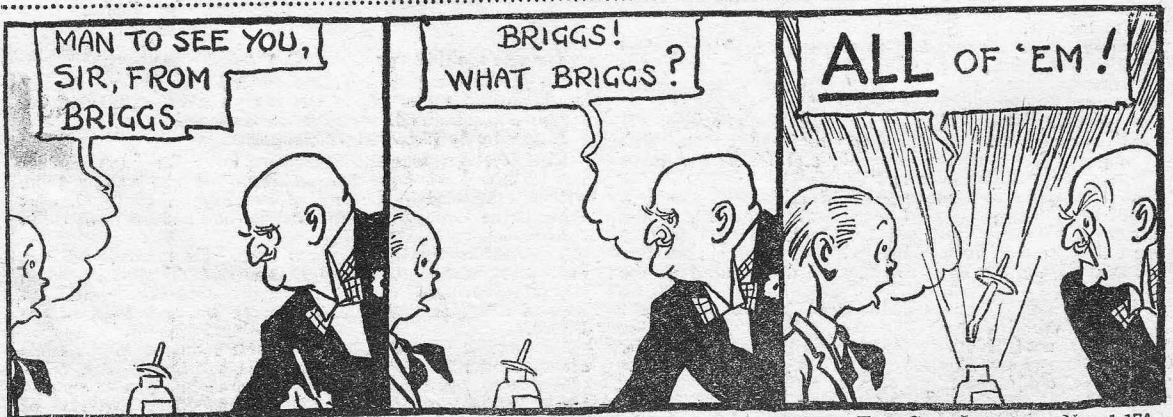
"Yes, Bagley!" snapped Mr. Whimple. "I am utterly at a loss to know why you should have played such a foolish, utterly foolish trick upon your friends!"

"Oh dear!"

Baggy gasped, and fairly wilted under the sudden, suspicious glances of Tom Merry & Co.

"But—but we don't understand this, sir!" said Tom Merry, taking the telegram from his pocket. "This was sent to

HIS One and Only!



us at Thorpe Post Office. As you see, it was signed in your name!"

"But I did not send it! I was not aware that it had been sent until an hour ago. Then——"

"But—but——"

"That young rascal is responsible for this wire," said Uncle Whimple, eyeing Baggy very severely. "I do not know what the reason can be for such an absurd prank. But he sent it—or, at least, arranged for Bill Adams to send it!"

"B-Bill Adams?" stuttered Blake.

"Oh dear!" groaned Baggy.

He began to edge away, but instantly Blake's grasp closed almost affectionately upon his shoulder. It was quite a careless action, but Uncle Whimple's eyes noted it, and he smiled grimly.

"Bill Adams is an old friend of mine—a local boatman who acts as attendant for boats for clients who require a skilled mechanic and one who understands the Broads," explained Uncle Whimple. "A little over an hour ago I happened to meet him on the station at Oulton quite by accident, and he mentioned to me that the telegram had gone off all right."

"Oh dear!" Baggy understood now.

"Naturally, as I knew nothing of any wire, I asked him what he meant," proceeded Mr. Whimple, with growing grimness. "He told me that he had been handed a telegram on the Yare not far from Norwich and asked to send it off at Oulton Post Office. He stated that it was signed 'Whimple,' and that my nephew, a short, fat schoolboy, had paid him ten shillings to send it off!"

"Oh!"

"That's it, then!"

"Bai Jove! Twimble——"

"Well, I'm very sorry, boys," said Uncle Whimple, "and I'll leave you to discuss—ahem!—this matter with Baggy! But, of course, you must start off again to-morrow—don't let this spoil your holiday!"

"Yes, sir——"

"Too late now to start off!" said Mr. Whimple. "You'll have to remain here for the night, of course! Well——"

He nodded to Tom Merry & Co. and walked off quickly. Baggy Trimble turned as if to follow him.

Immediately a dozen hands grasped him, and there was a fearful bump and a howl as Baggy landed on the deck.

But Uncle Whimple did not seem to hear—he was conveniently deaf! Possibly he felt that his hopeful nephew deserved to be made to yell.

And Baggy was made to yell!

He yelled, and howled and bellowed. He "explained" at the top of his voice, but he "explained" in vain.

Tom Merry & Co. were, naturally, angry, and like the prophet of old they felt they did well to be angry.

Shrieks of woe and anguish rang from end to end of the motor-cruiser, and across the wide waters of Oulton Broad. Baggy was "here at last" right enough; but just then Baggy Trimble wished from the bottom of his heart that he was far away!

CHAPTER 10.

Unexpected Visitors.

"MANNERS, old fellow——"

Baggy Trimble spoke in wheedling tones, honeyed tones.

It was evening. Tom Merry, Jack Blake, Arthur Augustus, Lowther, Herries, and Digby had gone to Oulton for the evening. Manners had elected to stay on the cruiser to develop some films he had taken on the cruise. Trimble had elected to stay, for reasons best known to himself.

Certainly Tom Merry & Co. were glad that he had decided to stay, and Baggy had seemed glad to stay. But Baggy was not at all glad that Henry Manners was staying.

"What are you stopping behind for?" snorted Baggy.

"To develop films, old chap! But don't worry, old fellow!" grinned Manners. "I shan't be in your way. You see I'm going down in the forepeak, and I shall be there the biggest part of the evening!"

"Oh! Oh, good! I—I mean——" Trimble's eyes gleamed.

"But I shall look up before I do go down, Baggy!" grinned Manners. "We know you, old fruit! If you get hungry you can chew that lifebelt, old chap!"

"That's all right!" said Baggy. "I don't mind if you do look up!"

"You—you don't?" gasped Manners. "Well, my hat! Weren't you thinking of raiding the larder?"

"Certainly not! Nothing of the kind!" said Trimble.

"Well, if you won't go, I shall go! That's all!"

"Good-bye, old fellow!"

"Beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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Baggy Trimble glared at the laughing Manners and rolled ashore. He walked into the trees, and then when some distance away, he hid himself behind some bushes. From this hiding-place he watched Manners as that youth carefully locked the doors of the saloon and fore-cabin. After doing which Manners went forward and opened the hatch of the forepeak.

The next moment he had vanished below, and the "lid" of the forepeak was lowered over his head.

"Oh, good!" breathed Baggy, with a chuckle. "I'll show the beast!"

He waited for several long minutes, and then he got up and hurried to the cruiser again. He stepped aboard very, very cautiously, and tiptoed to the forepeak. Alongside the hatchway, he found the peg of wood that usually secured the clasp of the hatch, and quickly he grabbed the peg.

Lowering the clasp of iron gently into place he rammed the peg of wood into position. Manners—though he didn't know it yet—was a prisoner.



Trimble's object was served.

He scuttled ashore, his face excited and eager. At last the time had come. Soon the ivory casket, with whatever treasure it contained, would be in his grasp!

Baggy fairly trembled with eagerness.

He felt about amongst the rushes near the bank, and at last he found what he was seeking. It was a long pole, with a rake tied to the end of it. Baggy had found that rake in the Grange gardens and he had hidden it there in readiness.

The next moment Baggy was busy. He remembered the exact spot where the ivory casket had dropped in when he made that mad leap for the cruiser that night, and soon he was dragging the rake along the weedy bottom of the Broad.

He worked almost frantically, lest someone might come and interrupt his dragging operations.

Weeds on weeds he dragged to shore; brick-ends, ancient rusty kettles and tins; an old bucket and all sorts of flotsam and jetsam he raked ashore. But the casket was not forthcoming—yet.

Then, quite suddenly, Baggy heard cautious footsteps and equally cautious voices. He dropped the rake in a flurry of alarm, and leaped into hiding. But he was too late. There was a sudden, startled cry.

"There's that fat rotter! Collar him! Quick!"

It was the voice of George Alfred Grundy.

Trimble was not so surprised as he might have been. He had known Grundy & Co. were back—that afternoon he himself had spotted their boat making for the strait at Oulton. Evidently the mighty George Alfred was allowing the sun to go down again on his wrath. He was still on the warpath, still seeking revenge!

"Oh crumbs!"

Grundy had spotted him, and flight was indicated.

Baggy flew. Grundy charged after him. For a hundred yards George Alfred chased the fat junior, but Trimble took refuge in the half-ruined stables of the Grange, and Grundy returned to the boat. After all, he knew Tom Merry & Co.



While the three sat roped together on the floor, Tom Merry & Co. enjoyed the sizzling sausages!

had gone into Oulton and weren't likely to be back early. Trimble was very small beer indeed, and he could scarcely give the alarm.

"Get away?" asked Wilkins, with a grunt.

"Yes—I could have caught him if I'd wanted, of course!" said Grundy loftily. "He isn't worth bothering about!"

"What did you follow him for then?"

"Shut up! Don't ask silly questions! Now, you fellows, you know what's the programme?"

Wilkins and Gunn groaned. They were fed-up with Grundy's programmes, and fed-up to the chin with his feud with Tom Merry & Co. They preferred a quiet life to dodging about asking for trouble like this.

"Look here, Grundy," said Wilkins, making a last moment attempt. "Why not let the rotters rip? Let's get off into Oulton and enjoy ourselves. You know what happened before?"

"Yes, I jolly well do know what happened before!" snorted Grundy wrathfully. "That's why I'm here now, you born idiots! We've had the worst of it so far! But I'm going to show them just how I keep my end up. See!"

"Oh dear!"

"Come on! Not a sound!"

"You're making row enough yourself, Grundy!"

"Shut up! If you want a thick ear, George Wilkins—" "Supposing they're not all gone. I didn't see Manners with them!" said Wilkins hastily.

"Blow Manners! Come on! First job is to collar all their grub! Then we pack up all their clobber in bundles and cart it away and hide it. After that we turn the cabins upside down, and after that—"

"Isn't that enough?" groaned Gunn. "Here we are, anyway! Blow it! It's getting dark, and—"

"Don't grouse! I say, well my only hat! Of all the—the sells!"

Grundy almost wept. He had discovered that the cabins were locked up!

"Well, that puts the lid on it!" said Wilkins, quite relieved. "Might as well push off home!"

"That we jolly well won't!" said Grundy. "Look here, we've got to do something after coming all this dashed way! Blow! We can't damage the boat—that wouldn't be playing the game, of course! But—Hullo! What's that?"

There was a sudden uproar from the direction of the forepeak. Evidently Manners had only just made the discovery that he was a prisoner there. Grundy & Co. rushed there to investigate.

"Someone thumping on the hatch!" exclaimed Wilkins, staring. "Somebody's in there—fastened in, you know!"

"What a brain!" said Grundy, with crushing sarcasm. "Of course there is, you silly owl! Jove! There's something queer about this!"

Grundy was very curious indeed regarding the remarkable situation. He stooped and took out the peg. Then he raised the hatch and blinked downwards.

As he did so something—the business end of a mop—took him neatly under the chin with a jar that shook every tooth in his head, and sent him head over heels backwards.

Crash!

"I'll thumping well show you, Trimble!" came Manners' wrathful voice as his head appeared in the opening. "I'll teach you—Why—"

Manners suddenly sighted Wilkins and Gunn. Then his astonished eyes beheld Grundy, sprawling on his back and howling.

"Oh!" gasped Manners.

He was on deck now, and he blinked in surprise at the raiders.

"Ow, ow, ow!" gurgled Grundy, sitting up dizzily. "Yow-ow! Why, you—you—Collar him, you footling owls!" he roared furiously at Wilkins and Gunn. "Grab him—smash him! Quick!"

Manners realised his danger then. Obviously it was a raid. As Wilkins and Gunn sprang to obey their raging leader, he hit out desperately with the broom.

Biff!

Wilkins got a hefty crack on his cranium, and he roared. But next moment Cuthbert Gunn had grabbed the broom and held it fast, and as he did so George Alfred leaped up.

He was on Manners like a charging bull, and Manners went down at once, struggling gallantly. But the odds were too great. For some moments there was a wild, whirling fight on the small forepeak, and it was a marvel it did not end by all four going overboard.

Instead it ended by Manners finding himself flat on his back, with Grundy & Co. sitting on him, pinning him down.

"Got him!" panted Grundy wrathfully. "Fancy a Fourth-Form fag having the nerve to put up a scrap against us! Check, if you like! Well, he's got to go through it, what? Collar that rope there, Wilky. We'll tie him up to the mast."

"Good egg!"

Wilkins grabbed the length of rope, and after another struggle Manners was rammed with his back against the cruiser's mast, and he was bound to it securely. Finally, Grundy gagged the helpless Fourth-Former with a handkerchief and a piece of string.

Manners gurgled and gurgled his frantic protests, but he gurgled in vain. Grundy hadn't forgotten or forgiven his luckless adventures of the past few days. He was ruthless.

Then George Alfred, after a deal of powerful thinking, went exploring in the forepeak. He emerged at last with a can of thick, lubricating oil and a paint-brush and tin of green paint.

Manners' eyes goggled at the sight of these articles. He dreaded the worst, and he was not deceived.

"If you hadn't locked the cabins up, you might have escaped this, you know!" chuckled Grundy, as he poured lubricating oil over Manners' hair, and started to paint

Manners' crimson, agonised features with green paint. "But we can't come all this way for nothing. Something accomplished, something done, you know! There, that'll about do! How does he look?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pity it's getting dark!" said Grundy. "It's to be hoped it isn't too dark for them to see him when they get back. Manners may be here all night like this, then; which would be a pity!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gurgle, gurgle, gurgle!" came from Manners.

"Better get off now!" said Wilkins, with a rather anxious glance shorewards. "Nothing else we can do that I can see!"

To the great relief of Wilkins and Gunn, Grundy nodded. "Yes, we'll hook it now," he grinned. "This is just to be going on with, Manners, my lad! You can tell Tom Merry that I'm fairly on the warpath now, and that I'm jolly well going to make things hum. Got that?"

"Gug-gug-gug!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy & Co. took their departure. They had come to rag the cruiser thoroughly, and they had failed in that respect, owing to the cabins being locked. But they seemed quite satisfied for all that. And Henry Manners watched them depart with feelings that were too deep for words, had he been in a position to use words.

CHAPTER 11.

What Manners Saw.

THE last glimmer of sunlight vanished. The darkness deepened under the trees and on the waters of Oulton Broad. But the moon was rising higher, and soon the rippling waters glimmered under its radiance. A light twinkled through the trees from the direction of Fenreed Grange, the home of Trimble's uncle.

But it brought little comfort to Henry Manners, bound to the mast of the cruiser. He could see the light, but it did not help him. He stared shorewards, ears strained to catch the slightest sound that would tell him rescue was at hand, that his chums were returning. But some time

passed, and the only sounds that broke the deep stillness were the rustle of the wind in the rushes and trees, the eerie call of a wild-fowl, or the faint plop of a rising fish.

Manners groaned in the deep bitterness of his spirit.

Supposing his chums simply boarded the boat and went to bed? Yet he knew—as Grundy & Co. well knew—that they were unlikely to do that, and would undoubtedly come searching for him. Still, there was the risk.

And where on earth was Trimble? Had he also fallen foul of the raiders?

That question was soon answered for the unhappy Manners.

Ten minutes after Grundy & Co. had gone, a faint, unusual sound shorewards made Manners' heart thump with hope. He strained his eyes, and then, under the shadowy trees, he made out a fat, familiar form.

Manners tried to cry out, but only a faint gurgling came from behind the gag.

Trimble did not hear it, and his actions amazed Manners. He was standing among the reeds now, and he had something in his hands—a long pole, it seemed to Manners. There came a swishing of disturbed water, and the moonlight glimmered on rippling, swirling waves as Trimble went on with his postponed dragging operations.

Trimble was a fellow who never took chances with danger about, and he had given Grundy & Co. a very wide berth until he was quite certain they had departed for good.

Now he was making up for lost time. But Manners, of course, was utterly at a loss to understand what the fat youth was doing. He watched, astonished and bewildered, that Trimble was fishing for nightlines, or something of that kind, struck him as absurd. Trimble never fished—unless it was for loans, or grub.

But what was the fellow up to?

Manners watched him as the long minutes passed.

He could only see his fat form faintly, moving like a great fat ghost along the margin of the Broad, his figure reflected in the moonlit water.

And then Henry Manners gave a convulsive start.

From the trees behind Trimble a form had emerged—a tall, muscular form, whose actions were strangely stealthy and terrifying.

It was a man, and his face was hidden from the watching junior on the cruiser. He was creeping softly, stealthily upon the unconscious Baggy Trimble. There was something strangely eerie and terrifying in his menacing, cautious advance.

Then he suddenly came out into the moonlight, and Manners got a glimpse of his face. The junior's heart leaped as he recognised the glittering eyes, the hawk-like features of the sinister Mr. Quirk.

Nearer and nearer he crept to the unconscious Baggy Trimble.

Manners strove to yell out, but only a gurgle escaped him.

Then the man leaped, and a half-stifled yelp came from Trimble as he went crashing down.

No other sound came from the luckless Baggy.

There was a brief, desperate struggle on the margin of the Broad, and then the man rose, and he had the fat form of Baggy, still wriggling frantically, in his strong grasp, one hand clasped over the junior's mouth.

The next moment he was striding away through the trees, carrying Trimble as if that podgy youth had been a child in his grasp.

He vanished, and silence fell once again on the scene of the alarming, significant happening.

Trimble was gone—kidnapped!

Manners started then to struggle to free himself again; but Grundy & Co. had done their work too well, and he gave it up at last.

The long minutes passed—minutes that seemed like an age to the helpless Manners. But at last from shorewards sounded footsteps and cheery voices, and Manners almost fainted from sheer joy as he heard them. Then he sighted the forms of Tom Merry & Co. as they tumbled aboard the cruiser.

"Here we are at last!" came Tom Merry's cheery voice.

"Hallo! Has that ass Manners gone to bed?"

"Looks like it; Trimble, too!" said Blake. "Let's hope the beggars have left supper ready!"

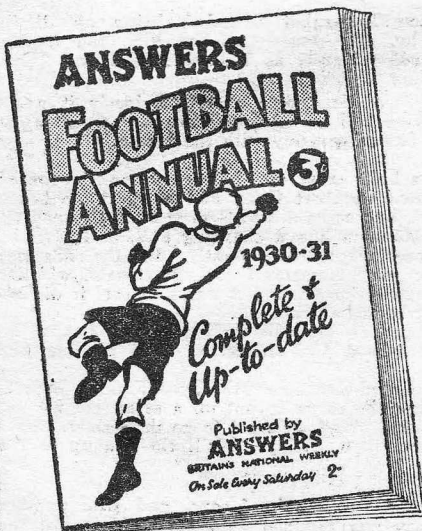
A light flashed from the portholes and skylight of the saloon as the electric light was switched on. More light came from the forward cabin the next moment. Then came astonished voices.

"Not here! Where the thump are the idiots? Manners, where are you?" bawled Blake.

There was some talking in the saloon, and then Tom Merry and Lowther came forward over the roof of the saloon. They seemed a trifle alarmed.

"The ass said he was going to develop films in the fore-

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peak," Tom Merry was saying. "Perhaps he's fallen asleep over 'em!"

"But Trimble—where's that fat ass Trimble?"
 "Blow Trimble! Where's old Manners? The ass! No supper ready!"

"The lazy bounder!" snorted Lowther.
 Tom Merry jumped down from the saloon-top and leaned over the open hatchway of the forepeak.

"Manners! Hallo! Not here!"
 "Gurgle, gurgle, gurgle!" came from Manners in an explosive, desperate attempt.

"Wha-what's that?"
 Tom Merry jumped, nearly falling headlong into the forepeak.

Lowther also jumped. The gurgling had sounded almost in his ear as he dropped on to the forepeak.

"What—what— Oh!"
 Quite abruptly Lowther made out the strange form pinned to the mast. The white gag showed up against the green-painted face, and Manners' eyes were fairly glittering in the darkness.

Then the moon glimmered out again and they saw him more clearly.

"G-gug-great pip!" ejaculated Lowther. "It—it's Manners! He's tied to the mast, or something! Oh, my hat!"

"Great Scott! Fetch a light, Lowther!"
 Tom Merry struck a match, while Lowther rushed off aft for a torch. In a few seconds Manners' horrid plight was made clear, and he was hastily cut loose. He almost collapsed, and it was some moments before he could tell the sad story.

Tom Merry & Co., startled and indignant, were surrounding him now.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "This is woally the limit, you know! That feaful ass Gwunday is—"

"We'll settle with Grundy for this!" said Tom Merry grimly. "Feeling better, old man?"

"Groooogh! Yes, a bit. Oh, my hat! Ow-ow-ow!" gasped Harry Manners. "It—it was frightful! Lend me something to get this beastly paint and stuff off before it dries on! Oh dear!"

An old towel was brought, and Manners rubbed his face hard, getting most of the horrid paint off. His face presented a peculiarly piebald appearance now.

"And Trimble——" said Tom Merry. "You say——"
 "Gone; that villain Quirk's got him! I saw it all!" said Manners. And he explained in thrilling detail what he had witnessed.

"Phew!"
 "Great Scott!"
 "Bai Jove!"

The juniors looked at each other.
 "But what was he dragging for?" demanded Tom Merry, frowning in blank bewilderment. "This beats cock-fighting!"

"Goodness knows what for! But—— 'Shush! What's that?"

From shorewards came a sound—the crack of a twig. A dim form could be discerned moving under the dark trees.

"Down!" hissed Manners. "It's that brute again! Hide!"

They hastily crouched down in the shadows by the mast, their hearts thumping not a little with excitement.

The figure came down to the water's edge and stooped. The face was faintly outlined, and Tom Merry gave a grunt. "It's Quirk!" he breathed.

"Yaas, wathah!"
 There was a faint splash, followed by a curious swishing.

CHAPTER 12.
 The Ivory Casket!

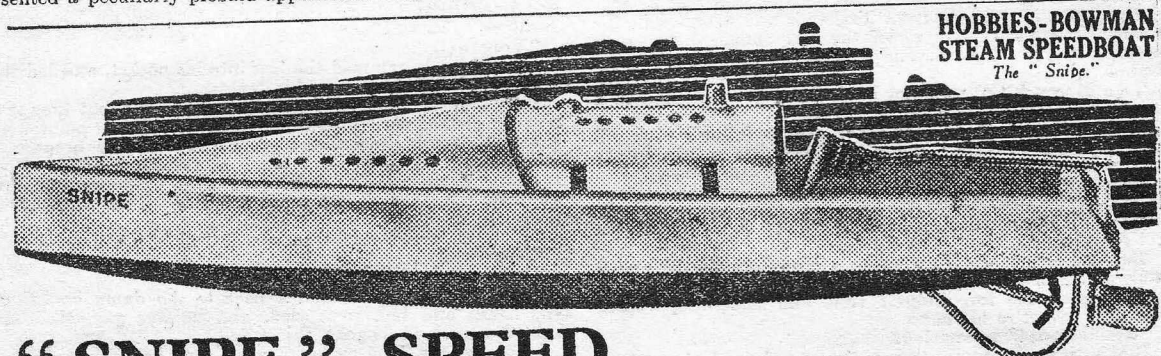
THEY watched in silence.
 Swish, swish, swish!

Again came that swishing sound. The ripples broadened, and tiny waves splashed against the sides of the cruiser from the disturbed water. The cruiser had been moored this time a little distance from the spot from which it had started days ago, so that Quirk's actions were not hidden by the cruiser.

He worked stealthily; and they could guess that his eyes were fixed on the cruiser all the time, and that his ears were on the alert for sounds from the boat. The lights were still burning, and he must have known they were not asleep yet. It struck Tom Merry & Co. that the fellow must be desperate, or frantically eager to get what he was after to have taken the risk of being seen and heard.

Breathlessly they watched.

What he was dragging for they could not imagine; only



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Baggy Trimble could have told them that. But Baggy was missing—Baggy, who only a little while ago had been engaged in a similar operation to that on which Quirk was now engaged.

What was the strange mystery? And how was Baggy Trimble concerned in it? Quirk had trailed the cruiser as far up as Norwich, and he had trailed it down again back to Oulton Broad. If it was something on the cruiser he was after, then why was he dragging the water now?

But a sudden, strange theory was working in Tom Merry's mind now. He remembered that first night when Quirk had chased Baggy Trimble, in his pyjamas and bare feet, down to the cruiser at midnight. Baggy had made a wild, frantic leap for the boat, and Tom Merry had heard something fall into the Broad as he helped Baggy aboard.

Baggy had stated that it was only a stone—a stone he had picked up to defend himself with against Quirk. But Tom had doubted the story.

He doubted it more now as he watched Quirk dragging the water.

What was he dragging for? Was it something which Baggy had dropped into the Broad that night?

The next moment Tom and his chums glimpsed what Quirk was dragging for.

They heard a sudden, tense cry of triumph.

The next instant they saw the man stoop and snatch something up from the weeds and rubbish he had dragged from the water.

It appeared to be a small box; the faint moonlight glimmered on its wet surface. It was white—either white wood or ivory, Tom concluded.

But Tom had seen enough.

He muttered a quick, stealthy order to his chums.

"He's got what he's after!" he breathed. "He's not going to get away with it. Ready for a stiff tussle?"

"What-ho!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then up and at him!" snapped Tom, and he instantly leaped to his feet and fairly hurled himself ashore.

He was followed at once by his eager, excited chums.

They swarmed over the side of the cruiser in the dim moonlight.

Stiff and aching as he was, Henry Manners also went.

There was a sudden, startled cry—a savage oath.

The next moment the boys and the man were at grips, fighting furiously on the marge of the wide, glimmering lake.

The ivory casket flew from his hands and dropped in the reeds. The rascal was down the next moment, dragged over in the grasp of seven pairs of youthful but sinewy hands.

Tom Merry & Co. were not likely to forget that fight in a hurry.

They had already had evidence of the fellow's strength and ruthlessness. They had more now. He fought like a madman. But they stuck to him like glue, bruised and more than one of them half-stunned by his savage, vicious blows.

"Stick it!" panted Tom Merry. "Stick it, men! We've got the brute?"

But had they? As Tom spoke a blow like the kick of a mule sent him reeling away, and the next instant Quirk was on his feet. He tore himself free, and something flashed from his pocket in his hand.

"Stand back!" he snarled.

Blake, scarcely seeing what the rascal held, leaped in again instantly.

"Look out!" yelled Tom Merry.

The weapon glinted in the moonlight, but Blake was on the man, and whether the rascal intended to fire or not, there was a sudden explosion as Blake thrust his arm up.

Crack!

Something went flipping up through the trees, and a shower of leaves fell on them. They were swarming round him again the next moment, and a sudden blow on Quirk's wrist from Lowther's fist sent the glinting weapon flying into the rushes.

Splash!

There was a new sound in the wood now—running feet and a shout. From the Grange the barking of a dog came; but the chums heard nothing—they were far too busy. The struggle went on with renewed fury. But suddenly a figure appeared, bearing a lantern, and the light was flashed on the scene.

"What—what—boys! Good heavens!"

It was Mr. Whimple. His appearance from the wood brought the fight to an abrupt conclusion. The sight of him seemed to give Quirk a sudden access of strength.

He gave an alarmed growl, flung the clinging juniors off to right and left, and then he tore off through the woods, and vanished amid the dark trees.

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"Oh crumbs! Ow!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Let the scoundrel go!" panted Tom Merry.

He staggered to his feet. Blake and the others were about to give chase, but Tom's call brought them back.

"What on earth does this mean, boys?" articulated Whimple, fairly jumping as he flashed his light on the juniors' bruised faces and dishevelled attire. "What—what—who was the man? What is the matter? I heard a shot—I'm sure it was a shot!"

"It was!" gasped Tom Merry.

He waited until he got his breath back, and then he began to explain to the astounded and alarmed Mr. Whimple.

"Bless my soul!" that gentleman gasped. "G-good heavens! You—you told me nothing of this, boys—nothing of that rascal's following you in the cruiser! But what—"

Tom Merry searched among the reeds. He found the box at last, and handed it to Uncle Whimple.

That worthy flashed his light upon it. Then he gave a violent start.

"You—you know it, sir?" said Tom breathlessly.

"I have seen it before. It belonged to my father, though it is long years since I set eyes upon it, my boys!" exclaimed Uncle Whimple, his voice trembling with strange emotion.

"And you think—you believe—"

Tom repeated his theory and suspicions.

"I believe you are right!" said Mr. Whimple. "But—but we must find Bagley before anything else is attended to, my boys! You say that rascal took him away—"

"Yes. Manners saw him!" Tom's eyes gleamed. He felt they were on the point of solving the mystery. "The scoundrel has taken him somewhere, sir. If you know of any likely place—a place where he can be keeping him a prisoner—"

"There is only the wood—which is very small; it is unlikely the man would keep him there. There are the out-houses of the Grange, but that also is unlikely. I know of no other— Stay!" Mr. Whimple's eyes gleamed. "The old boathouse!"

"What?"

"It is some distance along the Broad—a ruined boathouse among the rushes," he went on, with some excitement. "It is just the place the rascal would choose, though the ground round it is ankle deep in mud and water. I—"

"That's the place!" snapped Tom. "I saw when we were scrapping that Quirk's boots were covered in wet mud! Lead us to it, sir!"

"Very well!"

Mr. Whimple rammed the box into his pocket, and led the way along the bank with his lantern.

They kept eyes and ears open for Mr. Quirk, but they saw no sign of that rascal, and at last Mr. Whimple pointed to a small, tumbledown shed on the marge of the broad. It was almost surrounded by bulrushes, and they waded up to it ankle deep in water and mud. The doors were almost off their hinges, and also unfastened, and Tom Merry tore them open.

The light from the lantern was flashed inside.

"Trimble!"

There was a yell.

The fat junior sat with his back to the damp boarding. His hands and feet were tied, and he was gagged. He looked a most woebegone object.

"Ow, ow, ow!" he groaned, after they had released him. "It was that awful beast, Quirk! Ow, ow! I've had an awful time! He threatened to kill me if I didn't tell where it was, and I had to—"

Trimble paused.

"All serene, Baggy!" chuckled Blake. "We know all about the casket—we've got it here, in fact!"

"Oh dear!"

"Now come along to the Grange," said Uncle Whimple, with a peculiar glance at the apprehensive Baggy. "You can fill in the missing links of this extraordinary business as we go, Bagley!"

And Baggy, on reflection, decided that he had better.

Five minutes later, seated in the living-room at Fenreed Grange—only a quarter of which house was occupied, Mr. Whimple living alone there—Mr. Whimple succeeded at last in pressing a hidden spring, and the casket-lid flew open, revealing—sparkling jewels!

"Jewels!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Yes; old family jewels, and of great value!" smiled Uncle Whimple. "I half suspected it the moment I saw this casket again! Many of these jewels are familiar enough to me, though I have not seen them for many years. They belonged to my father—"

"And to you now, sir—"

"Exactly! To be frank," said Uncle Whimple, "my father was somewhat of a miser, and a very secretive old

(Continued on page 23.)

Nerve-Thrilling Romance of the "Good Old Days"!

Nick o' the Highway!

By Cecil Fanshaw.



CHAPTER 1.

The Robber Robbed!

"STAND and deliver!"

With the ringing challenge, forth spurred highwayman Swift Nick from the shadows of the overhanging trees, then reined up Sultan in the moonlit road, to bar the way.

At sight of him, black-masked, and with his bell-mouthed pistols levelled menacingly, there was instant uproar. Abruptly the coach halted with a clatter of hoofs, a creak of harness and leather springs, and there sounded shouts of anger and dismay.

It was only a two-horse coach. On the box sat the driver alone, wearing a three-cornered hat and a triple-caped cloak, and muffled to his ears in scarves. But Swift Nick scented rich plunder, seeing a coat-of-arms on the panels of the coach door, and noticing that the horses were a strapping pair of bays.

"Down with you, cully!" He laughed gaily at the coachman. "And stand to your nags' heads, or, i' faith, I'll put a ball through your noddle."

Grumbling fiercely the be-cloaked coachman hastened to obey. He had had no chance to get at the blunderbuss under his seat, had little wish in any case to try conclusions with a gentleman of the high toby.

But the same instant a man thrust his head out of the coach window. He was a big fellow, red-faced, wearing a plum-coloured coat, a powdered wig, and with lace at his collar and cuffs. Furiously he asked the reason for the delay.

"Rat me!" he roared. "Who dares to stop a nobleman's coach on the King's highway? By thunder!" He broke off. "'Tis a plaguy tobyman!"

"Even so, my lord!" chuckled Swift Nick, riding up to the coach window and thrusting forward his barkers. "And I must have your plaguy money-bags!"

"The deuce! Who are you, sirrah?"

"A plain knight o' the road, my lord! Disgorge!"

"Disgorge i' faith! Dost know I am Lord Ridgeway, rascal, a sheriff of this county, who has power to hang such as you?"

"But not to-night, cully!" grinned Nick, his eyes flashing through his mask-slits. "Out with your money! And, by my life, I'll have yon diamond brooch from your neck-cloth, too!"

Lord Ridgeway nearly exploded with fury. But he liked neither the look of Nick's pistols nor gleaming eyes, so he tossed out his purse. Then he wrenched the diamond clasp from his lace neck-cloth and handed that over as well.

"Take your plunder and be hanged!" he snarled. "Hang you will ere long, I warrant. You'll be traced by that clasp, you fool!"

But Swift Nick only laughed at the threats. He swept his spoils into the deep pockets

of his riding-coat, then motioned the coach forward on its journey.

Away rolled the fine coach and pair, amidst a storm of abuse from its occupant, and quickly vanished in the gloom. Swift Nick laughed heartily as he stared after it, then wheeled black Sultan, and trotted slowly along the road in the direction the coach had taken.

Nick rode alone this night, having temporarily parted from his young pal Roy. The two highwaymen had found their usual haunts getting a bit too hot for them, so they had agreed to part company for a short time, and ride high toby independently in different localities.

Hence Swift Nick was trotting along the moonlit road alone in a district that was strange to him. The road was

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Come to

THE KING'S HEAD INN

Kidnapping Highwaymen a Speciality!

This week's "Client" A Surprise Packet!

flanked on each side by tall hedges, and Nick could see fields and woods dimly revealed by the moon.

He wondered how Roy was getting on, then chuckled at thought of the irate Lord Ridgeway, whose purse of guineas and diamond-studded clasp lay snug in his pocket. Lost in thought, for once Swift Nick was taken off his guard.

Of a sudden a horseman spurred forth from the dark shadows of a spreading oak-tree. Then hoarsely rang out the challenge:

"Stand and deliver!"

At that Nick gasped, as Sultan pulled up instinctively. He found himself staring into the muzzle of a great horse-pistol, firmly gripped by a big, broad-shouldered man, who bestrode a large, bob-tailed nag.

And, like Swift Nick, the big man wore a black mask, a three-cornered hat, pulled low, and his coat collar turned up to his ears. Nick muttered a hoot of laughter, finding himself held up on the highway!

"By my life, a brother tobyman!" he cried.

"No brother of yours!" came the hoarse rejoinder. "Out with your plunder!"

"What!" cried Nick. "Does dog eat dog? Does one highwayman rob another? And, faith, what plunder have I?"

"You plundered yon coach that just passed!" rasped the other highwayman.

"What if I did?" grinned Nick, unable to draw a weapon, but watching his chance to do so.

"I was waiting to hold up Lord Ridgeway," barked the big highwayman, "and found that you were before me. By my life, this is my section o' the road. 'I'm Galloping Dan Deever, my young buck, and no-one poaches on my preserves."

"Faith, I've poached, have I?" Nick exclaimed.

"You have! Hand over!"

"Nay, I'll go halves, Dan!" Nick cried readily. "I would not poach on a brother tobyman, but I've earned half the spoils for working the job."

But half the spoils did not suit Galloping Dan, who seemed a churlish sort of knave. He demanded all the plunder, particularly the diamond clasp, of which he seemed to know the existence. Swift Nick, perforce, had to hand over at pistol-point.

But he squared his jaw and braced his muscles. Even as Galloping Dan pocketed the plunder, Nick lashed out with his fist.

Crack! Nick's hard fist landed home on the burly highwayman's jaw. So unexpected was the attack that the fellow rocked backwards in his saddle, and Swift Nick gripped his pistol-hand in a flash. Galloping Dan struggled, but was dazed by the blow, and Nick abruptly wrenched away the pistol, then turned it on its owner.

"How now, cully?" he laughed grimly. "Methinks you'll return that plunder, and all else in your pockets besides. Make haste, you clodpoll!"

Furious was Galloping Dan at this turning of the tables. He swore and raved, and his eyes blazed through his mask-slits. But it was now Swift Nick who had the laugh, and heartily he laughed as he sat Sultan in the moonlit road, covering the discomfited Dan with his own bell-mouthed pistol. He jabbed the weapon against the other highwayman's broad chest, and taunted him for a fool as well as a knave.

"You a tobyman, Dan Deever?" Nick laughed mockingly. "By my life, you're a pretty bungler! No real tobyman would ha' been bested like that!"

Galloping Dan saw there was nothing for it but to return Nick's spoils, and to hand over all he possessed to boot.

With a fierce exclamation, he plunged his hand into the deep pocket of his riding-coat. Then he hurled Lord Ridgeway's purse and a handful of coins and other articles clinking in the road around Sultan's hoofs.

"Take the stuff, and bad luck to you, dog!" Galloping Dan roared. "But I'll pay you out for this ere long."

With that the fellow suddenly whirled round his bob-tailed nag, then went thundering away up the road, bent forward in his saddle. Swift Nick made to pursue, but sight of the gleaming coins and other valuables lying in the dusty road made him pause.

He swung to the ground hastily, to gather up several golden guineas, Lord Ridgeway's heavy purse, and a few other valuables flung down by Galloping Dan. To his disgust, however, Swift Nick could find no trace of Lord Ridgeway's diamond clasp, and in vain he searched the grass at the roadside.

"By thunder!" Realisation of the truth came to Nick like a thunderclap. "Yon beer-cask of a knave tricked me after all! He kept the clasp!"

For a moment Swift Nick clenched his teeth in anger and

disgust, for he did not like to think he had been fooled. Then he swung to Sultan's back.

"Faith!" Nick laughed grimly. "I don't leave this part o' the country until I've got even with Galloping Dan. I lay I soon meet him again, and next time he won't catch Swift Nick napping!"

But Nick little guessed in what strange circumstances he was destined to meet Dan next time.

CHAPTER 2.

At The King's Head!

MAKING up his mind to stay the rest of the night at the first inn he came to, Swift Nick pocketed his mask, beat the dust off his clothes, and generally brushed himself up. With his clean-cut, cheery features unmasked, Swift Nick could well pass for an ordinary traveller in a district where he was not known. And in this guise he proceeded to look out for an inn at which he could halt.

Soon he sighted one at the roadside, with lights gleaming cheerily through its diamond-paned windows. The King's Head was its sign, and coolly Nick rode up to the front door, and loudly he hammered thereon with his pistol-butt.

There came the sound of footsteps inside. Then the latch clicked and the door was thrown open, and there stood the landlord of the King's Head Inn, a jolly-looking fellow, well-built, wearing an apron, brown breeches, white stockings, and buckled shoes.

"Can I rest here to-night, landlord?" Swift Nick asked breezily.

"Faith, you can, sir!" the landlord replied heartily. "And indeed I'd advise you not to ride farther after dark, with t' roads infested wi' highwaymen."

"I'm not scared o' those gentry," laughed Nick, with a disarming grin. "I lay none would face my barkers; but I've no wish to ride farther to-night."

Then round to the stables at the back rode Nick, to put Sultan in a stall, and see that the horse was made comfortable with plenty of straw and a good feed of oats. He tossed the ostler a crown, then made his way into the inn-parlour.

Nick entered, dragging his saddle-bags with him, for they contained a good deal of plunder, and he did not care to lose sight of them.

Actually, Swift Nick did not know that the King's Head Inn had a very sinister reputation in the neighbourhood, despite the cheery aspect of the landlord, Tom Biles by name. 'Twas rumoured that guests vanished in most mysterious fashion. Belated wayfarers rode up, prepared to stay the night, and were seen no more! They had entirely vanished on several occasions.

Each time Tom Biles vowed they had departed in the night without paying him. He said so with much bitterness. Folk perforce had to believe him, since nothing could be proved to the contrary.

The fact remained, however, that an atmosphere of mystery and dark deeds enveloped the King's Head Inn.

Swift Nick knew nothing about the mystery yarns; would not have cared a straw had he known of them. He dumped his saddle-bags in one chair at the table and himself in another.

"Thank 'ee, landlord!" He laughed cheerily, spreading out his booted legs. "A feast i' faith—"

He broke off with a low gasp of surprise.

The cause of Swift Nick's surprise was a couple of handbills, fastened to the panelled wall, one on either side of the big stone fireplace. That on the left read:

**"FIVE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD.
Dead or Alive.**

Whereas Swift Nick, so-called, has on several occasions committed acts of robbery on the King's highway, and has notably held up his Majesty's mail-coaches, the above sum, to wit, Five Hundred Pounds, will be paid to any person as shall give information leading to the capture of the aforesaid

Notorious Highwayman,

Dead or Alive.

Long live the King!"

Nick stared at the handbill, and a slow grin creased his features.

"Faith! I did not know I was wanted even in this West Country," he chuckled to himself. "But no one knows my face or appearance here. Ho, ho!"

Then he glanced at the other handbill, to see that a reward of two hundred pounds was offered for another highwayman. The wanted highwayman, in this case, was Galloping Dan Deever!

"So you've noticed t' handbills, young sir," Tom Biles laughed, pausing as he laid the supper.

"That I have!" grinned Nick. "Who is Swift Nick?"
 "A tobyman who works round London way, I've heard," replied the brawny landlord. "He's not been seen out this way, but there's no knowing what he will do. A daring ruffian, by all accounts, young sir."

"I warrant he is," laughed Nick.
 "Plague take him and all his sort!" snapped Tom Biles.
 "Confusion to him!" Nick cried, chuckling inwardly. "I warrant he soon hangs! Maybe I'll try for the reward for him."

Then Nick glanced at the other handbill, concerning Galloping Dan.

"Galloping Dan!" exclaimed Nick. "By my life, I was robbed by yon knave!"

"When?" gasped Tom Biles.
 "Oh, not very long ago, landlord!" Nick replied, remembering to be cautious. "Not so long ago. By my life, I'll remember him when we meet again! Maybe I'll try for the reward for Galloping Dan first."

At that, burly Tom Biles shot Nick a queer, sidelong glance, but he chuckled aloud, as though Nick had made a mighty good jest.

"Faith, you ought to be a Runner, young sir!" he said, his broad shoulders heaving with merriment. "You would hunt down both Swift Nick and Galloping Dan. By thunder, Dan is t' plague o' these parts, an' you'd best beware of him! But mayhap you're a Runner in disguise?"

"Mayhap I am, landlord!" chuckled Swift Nick, burying his face in a tankard. "But keep it to yourself, cully!"

Burly Tom Biles replied with a knowing wink, but glanced at Nick as though in perplexity. He left Nick to finish his supper alone, however, and to stare at the two handbills and chuckle inwardly.

After supper Tom Biles came along with a candle, and proceeded to show Swift Nick up a dim, winding staircase to a bed-room.

It was a large bed-room, low-ceilinged, with oak-panelled walls and a sloping oak floor. Pale moonbeams slanted through the narrow window, to reveal a huge wardrobe, several massive wooden chairs, and a great four-poster bed in one corner. The landlord's candle cast queer, evil-looking shadows about the room, and the boards creaked underfoot in dismal fashion.

Altogether it was a gloomy apartment. But the great bed, with its heavy canopy and thick curtains draped around, looked inviting to Nick, who was weary after hours of riding.

"By my life, landlord," he laughed breezily, "I shall sleep sound in yon bed."

"I warrant you will, young sir," Tom Biles replied; then he set down the candle and departed.

But directly he was outside the room, on the dim-lit staircase, Tom Biles' expression changed.

Actually, he was no fool, but a mighty clever actor and a black-hearted villain. His expression of friendliness quickly changed to one of malicious glee.

"Ay, you'll sleep sound, my young buck—mayhap a deal sounder than you expect to!" Tom Biles muttered, with a grim chuckle. "A disguised Runner, i' faith! By thunder, I take you for something very different!"

With that, the broad-shouldered landlord padded swiftly downstairs, through his kitchen, then out to the stable-yard at the back of the inn. Swiftly he entered the stable wherein Swift Nick had placed Sultan; then he struck flint and tinder and kindled a lantern.

At the sudden light black Sultan snorted and looked round, and plainly Tom Biles could see the white star on the horse's forehead.

"'Tis as I suspected!" Tom Biles gasped delightedly. "Yon is Swift Nick's famous horse Sultan! My guest is Swift Nick himself! He thought to fool me, did he?"

Out of the stable padded big Tom Biles, thrilling with excitement. He doused his lantern, then hastily roused his ostler and man-of-all-work, who was snoozing in the kitchen.

"James!" he whispered harshly. "Stand by for orders, James! I've caught a rare fine pigeon to-night; and, faith, we'll get a fine reward for him, after I've plucked him!"

"Who be it, master?" leered James, a snub-nosed rascal, rubbing his eyes sleepily.

"I warrant 'tis Swift Nick!"

"Swift Nick!" gasped James. "He's a hawk, master, not a pigeon! You'll ha' a rare job t' pluck t' likes o' him!"

"Will I?" big Tom Biles rasped grimly. "Just give him time to fall asleep, then I'll settle him! Ho, ho! I warrant his saddle-bags are stuffed with plunder! Wait for further



Swift Nick came hurtling from the corner. Round-spun the startled landlord.

orders in the yard, and keep your ears open, you chicken-hearted loon!"

The rascal James, who wore a ragged coat, ragged breeches, and ancient leggings, shuffled quietly out into the stable-yard. He was quite under his master's thumb, and never questioned orders, though he reckoned his master had bitten off a tough job this night.

But Tom Biles was still chuckling grimly as he padded back into his parlour, and proceeded to give Nick time to go to sleep.

Swift Nick, however, was meanwhile discovering that he was in no ordinary inn.

Directly Tom Biles left him, he drew his big pistols from his pocket, and carefully primed and loaded them according to his custom. Swift Nick never took chances, and he placed the pistols under the pillow in the big four-poster bed.

Then he picked up his saddle-bags and tossed them into a massive wooden chair with curved arms. But even as he did so he recoiled with a gasp of astonishment.

"Zounds!" he gasped. "What the plague is happening?"

CHAPTER 3.

Nick Earns a Reward!

WELL might Swift Nick be astounded!

Even as he tossed his saddle-bags into the seat of the chair there sounded a dull thump, then a click. To Nick's surprise, the curved arms of the chair shot forward, to snap together at the ends and remain fast-locked.

Hardly could Nick believe his eyes. But there lay his saddle-bags on the chair, gripped by the locked arms as though in a vice.

Nick stared, then uttered a low whistle.

It was at once obvious to him that the seat of the chair contained a hidden spring, which was sprung directly a weight descended on the seat. The spring caused the curved arms of the chair to shoot forward, meet together, and become locked.

Obviously, if a man sat down in the chair, he would instantly release the spring and become a prisoner, held fast by the arms. In this plight he could easily be robbed or killed.

"Zounds! A trick-chair!" breathed Nick. "Methinks I've struck a flash sort of inn! Worthy Tom Biles treats his guests in scurvy fashion! How many other traps are there in this room?"

Holding the candle high, Swift Nick made a cautious examination of the rest of the furniture in his sinister bedroom. He discovered another chair with gripping arms; another with a back that fell forward on being sat in, the wooden back catching the luckless occupant no end of a clip on his head and knocking him out!

(Continued at foot of next page.)

'Tom Biles' real character at once became apparent to Swift Nick. The smiling innkeeper was a ruffian who killed his guests, if they seemed worth robbing, then secretly disposed of their plundered bodies!

Actually many wayfarers had thus vanished in the King's Head Inn. Thus the countryfolk gave the inn a bad name, but did not know how the travellers had vanished. Swift Nick was the first to discover the truth and live!

This particular bed-room was full of fiendish devices for overpowering guests, but Swift Nick had no intention of bolting from it.

"Zounds! I'll learn what game worthy Tom means to play with me!" he chuckled grimly. "Then I'll hoist him with his own petard!"

Nick proceeded to examine more of the furniture. But he moved cautiously about the dim-lit, gloomy bed-room. He had heard of inns kept by villainous, robbing landlords like Tom Biles, and fully expected that he might tread on some hidden trapdoor, which might drop him into a well.

He discovered no more devices, however. But he did not like the look of the big four-poster bed now, with its heavy canopy and thick curtains.

"Perchance there is a panel in the wall at yon bed-head," Swift Nick laughed grimly, "through which worthy Tom Biles can out me with a chopper while I sleep. Methinks I'll rig up a dummy, then wait and see!"

Swiftly Nick rigged up a dummy in the bed, placing the long bolster down between the sheets, then placing his rolled-up coat on the pillow. In the dim light it really seemed as though Swift Nick lay asleep in the bed.

But directly the job was done, Nick doused the candle, then hid in a shadowy corner, pistol in hand. He had

locked the room door, but guessed that by so doing he would not really be keeping Tom Biles out.

He guessed rightly. Nor had he long to await developments.

Suddenly there sounded a faint click, and Nick tensed. He saw a panel in the wall slide sideways, and there in the dark hole thus made he saw the round face and shadowy figure of Tom Biles. Nick gripped his pistol, and his eyes flashed.

Nick expected the villainous landlord to advance on the dummy in the bed, taking it for his guest asleep, meaning to slay and rob him. Tom Biles, however, vanished with a grim chuckle, after a glance at the bed, and the panel slid home again.

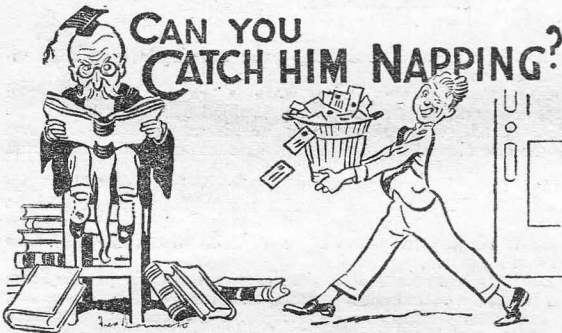
"How now?" muttered Swift Nick. "What's the game?"

He broke off as a dull, creaking sound reached his ears. Then he stared at the great bed in astonishment. Hardly could Nick believe his eyes, but he saw the canopy slowly descending towards the mattress.

Lower and lower, to the accompaniment of that dull creaking, sank the canopy towards the dummy between the sheets. Nick ground his teeth at the sight, for he finally saw the bed-canopy shut down solid on the dummy.

"Zounds!" breathed Nick. "Had I been sleeping in yon bed, I'd ha' been smothered! What a vile rascal the landlord is!"

In fact, the big bed, with its collapsible lid, was Tom Biles' trump card. In it he smothered any guest worth robbing, who had not been caught in a trick chair. He worked the machinery of the canopy by means of a lever in the passage outside.



See if you can reduce the "Oracle's" salary. We knock off a bob from his screw for every question he can't answer. Walk up—write up—and try your skill!—
Ed.

OUR Office Boy has given up trying to be an artist, chums. After the little incident last week, he was very quiet for days—so quiet that you could almost hear his toe-nails growing. Then I noticed that the office allowance of ink was disappearing at an alarming rate, so I questioned young Adolphus about it, thinking he might be drinking same.

He informed me that it was his intention to become "a norther," and write serials for the GEM, so I patted him encouragingly on the head with the heaviest ruler I could find, and took away the ink. I also took away the opening chapter of the serial, which started off like this:—

"It was lunch-time, and there was nobody in the sanktum except the Orakul, urtherwise known as the toothless monster, or wiskers. He was supposed to be ansering the readers' letters, a job that takes him orl his time. A single hair swept across the empty space on which he parks his topper when he goes out, and his alleged face wore a worried ekspresshun. Suddenly the door was flung open, there was the sound of a gur going off, and the Orakul dropt dead on the karpit. Now read on."

Well, chums, needless to say, I didn't. I just looked round for another ruler,

and when I had finished with Adolphus he was deciding to spend the rest of the day standing up.

At that moment the Editor opened his sanctum door and called me in, and in I rushed, ruler and all. When the old Ed. saw me brandishing the ruler he turned pale and dived behind his desk.

"Ha," he said, "I always knew you'd go off your rocker one of these days! Now, sit down, there's a good chap, and look at all the lovely questions I've got for you to answer. And you will put that ruler down, won't you, sonny? That's right!"

It was some moments before I could convince the Ed. that I was quite composed, after which he shook hands and showed me some snapshots of his garden.

"And now, my lad, to work," said he, groaning slightly, as he moved the first pile of readers' queries towards me. "Freddie Multon, of Fresingfield in Suffolk, wants to know if fishermen use a thing called a gig, and what it's like?"

"Well, sir," said I, "there are two answers to that little poser. In the first place, a gig, or as it's sometimes called, a fish-gig, is the name for an instrument used for spearing fish. The more correct pronunciation is "fiz-gig," as it come from a Spanish word, fisga, meaning harpoon. However, it's called a gig as a rule. Again, clinker-built rowing-boats on the Thames are known as gigs, as also is a certain type of ship's boat, a narrow, light affair, made for oars or sails."

"Bob Bristowe, of Tufnell Park, has been seeing some orchids in the hot-houses at Kew, and has been told that they grow on trees. Is this correct, my lad?"

"Yes, up to a point. In tropical countries the orchid grows in great profusion, and is divided into two classes, the one growing on the ground, as they do in England; and the other perching itself on trees. But although they are perched on trees, they do not derive their nourishment from the tree, but from the air, by means of a natty arrangement of spongy tendrils that absorb the moisture from the air and store it in bulb-like swellings in the stem. I expect Bob knows that orchid is pronounced or-kid."

"Can you tell 'A Constant Gemite' how many men there are in the crew of a lightship?"

"That depends on the size of the ship. There are many floating-lights of considerable size and power now in use that are worked automatically, without a crew to look after them. On the larger lightships, that have a displacement of over 700 tons, and carry powerful lighting and fog-signalling apparatus, the crew will number fifteen or more."

"A reader who signs himself 'Town-Dweller,' wants to know how many cereals there are, and whether rice is a cereal, like barley and wheat?"

"The word cereal," I explained, "was first given to barley and wheat only. The word comes from the Roman goddess, Ceres, the goddess of corn. The other grains were not known then, but nowadays the word cereal covers oats, maize, rye, and rice, as well as barley and wheat. And talking of serials," I added, "I've had to knock some dust off the office boy's trousers; he's been wasting the office ink writing a serial for the GEM."

"That's the stuff," said the Ed.; "is it bright?"

"Bright?" I replied, indignantly. "Why, I'm in it, and I'm shot dead on the first page."

"Dear, dear, but that's all wrong," said the Ed.

"Yes sir," said I, "and I told him so."

"Dear me, yes. He shouldn't have done that. You should have been kept alive till the last chapter, and then burnt!"

Would you believe it?

In a moment, however, it was plain that Tom Biles did not wish entirely to suffocate and kill his latest guest for some strange reason. After a short while, long enough for a sleeping man to be half-suffocated, Swift Nick saw the canopy rise again.

A moment later the panel in the wall clicked open again, and Swift Nick saw Tom Biles step into the room, carrying a sword in one hand and a candle in the other.

One glance the burly landlord flung at the dummy in the bed—he naturally thought it was Nick half-suffocated by the bed-canopy; and he uttered a grim chuckle, and ran across to the window.

"James," he called softly down into the yard, "I've got Swift Nick helpless! Get you t' Cranwell Town, quickly, an' fetch Runners, and tell 'em they'll find Nick here alive and trussed up! If he wakes up enough t' fight, I'll slit his gullet with my stickler—less noise than a barker. Ho, ho! And I don't want a crowd up here!"

"I'll fetch t' Runners, master!" came gleefully up from the yard; and then sounded fading footfalls.

Tom Biles swung rapidly back towards the dummy in the bed, shaking out a coil of rope.

"And I've earned five hundred pounds—t' reward for Swift Nick!" he chuckled evilly.

"Zounds! You have not, you scoundrel!" barked Swift Nick, and came hurtling from the corner. "You've been fooled!"

Round spun the startled landlord. His eyes bulged in horror, for he thought he saw a ghost. But he swiftly realised his mistake—realised that Nick had fooled him with a dummy, and hurled his candle aside, to charge forward, lunging savagely.

"I'll ha' t' reward for you dead—if not alive!" he roared.

But Nick also had a sword, which he frequently wore riding high toby. Not wishing to make a racket if he could help it, Nick dropped his pistol, and whipped out his blade.

Clash! Steel met steel, and sparks flew; then the burly Tom Biles and Nick were at it hammer and tongs, lunging and parrying. Tom Biles relied on his strength, but Nick was far the better swordsman. And hardly had the blades crossed than Nick guessed he would swiftly win.

Few men on the high toby could equal him with sword or pistol.

"Faith! This must end quickly!" Nick muttered to himself. "You rascal ostler may soon return with Runners!"

Clenching his teeth, Swift Nick drove at his dim opponent furiously. He drove him backwards across the room, but failed to get his point home.

Then the fight ended in strange and unexpected fashion, however. Of a sudden, there sounded a hoarse cry of dismay from Tom Biles, and simultaneously a dull thump, then a rattling click.

He had stumbled backwards into one of his own trick-chairs, and there he sat, with the encircling arms gripping him like a vice.

"Ha, ha, ha!" guffawed Nick. "You are caught in one of your own traps, after all, you scurvy knave!"

But Tom Biles struggled hercely, striving to get at his pockets. Swift Nick suspected that he had a pistol hidden, and stepped forward quickly to search the villain.

He found a pistol, lugged it forth, and hurled it on to the bed. But he found something else as well in the rascally landlord's pocket. He found a jewel-studded clasp, which brought a cry of amazement to his lips.

"Zounds!" cried Swift Nick. "This is Lord Ridgeway's diamond clasp, which I took from him when I stopped his carriage! How did you get your paws on it, rascal?"



Tom Biles had stepped backwards into one of his own trick-chairs and was a fast prisoner!

Tom Biles glared at Nick, but made no reply. But Nick's brains worked swiftly, and, uttering a low cry of triumph, he jumped forward again, once more to search his prisoner. This time he found a black mask.

"Faith! The riddle is solved!" cried Nick. "You are Galloping Dan—villain! You are Tom Biles, the landlord, when it suits you, and also Galloping Dan o' dark nights, riding high toby! So we've soon met again! I vowed to recover his lordship's clasp ere long!"

Tom Biles writhed in fury, but was helpless in his own trick-chair. Nor could he deny his double identity, seeing the evidence in Nick's hands.

"Ay, I'm Galloping Dan!" he snarled. "I did not recognise you at first for t' other highwayman I encountered in the road. But I knew you directly you told me that Galloping Dan recently robbed you. Set me free!" he cried desperately. "I'll give you a thousand pounds! Runners will soon be here!" And sweat rolled down his big face. "And they shall find you, cully," Nick laughed grimly. "You did your best to rob and betray me!"

With that Swift Nick dashed to a table whereon stood an ink-horn, quill-pen, and paper. Speedily he wrote:

"Herewith Galloping Dan, otherwise Tom Biles, a villainous landlord, who robs and slays his guests. His vile furniture is sufficient evidence. 'Tis Swift Nick who claims the reward, but is now unable to await it."

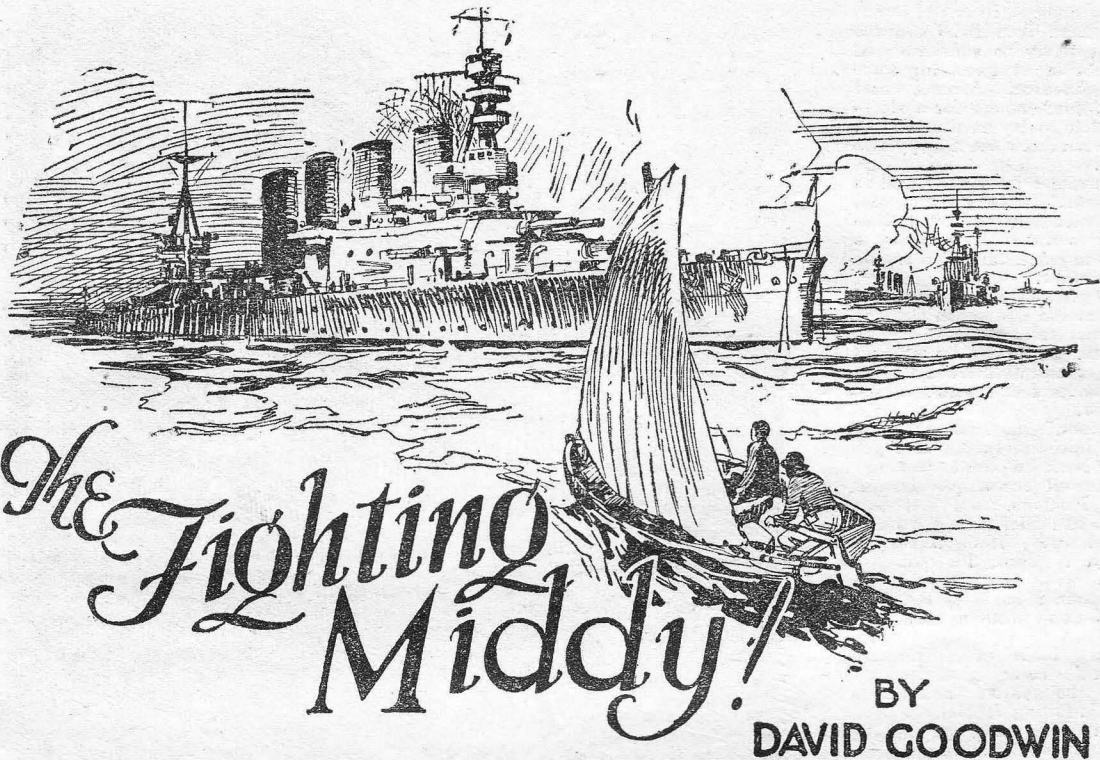
Nick signed his own name with a grim chuckle, then, pinning his note to the captive's collar with Lord Ridgeway's diamond clasp, he quitted the vile inn with all the speed he could.

Shortly afterwards, led by ostler James, Runners dashed up into the sinister bed-room of the King's Head Inn. But they did not find Swift Nick. It was Galloping Dan whom they found, his career of evil and duplicity ended at last.

Swift Nick, meanwhile, was galloping away across the moonlit meadows on Sultan, free as air. And laughed he, grimly:

"Hoist with his own petard! Ho, ho!"

(There's another thrilling story of Swift Nick on the King's Highway in next week's GEM. Be sure and get it!)



THE START OF THE STORY.

Midshipman Ned Hardy, son of a line of sea captains, is waiting 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. Owing to an accident on the way to Portsmouth, Ned has to take an important Government paper to a Mr. Ellis. He is attacked by two men in the train, but they do not find the paper, which Ned later delivers. He is told that on no account must he say a word about it to anyone.

(Now read on.)

Ned is Flogged!

NED was puzzled what to do when he reached the quays. How was he to get to the Fleet at Spithead, and whose charge was he to put himself into? Ought he to go to the depot, or the dockyards, or where? Mytton knew, and was to have seen Ned into the right hands, but he was shelved.

"Dash it all!" said Ned. "I've only half an hour, and if I've got to go making inquiries all round the shop I shall be late. Better go on my own. Great thing is to be aboard in time, and hang the brass-hat business!"

He struck a bargain with a waterman who owned a sailing-boat, and Ned and his sea-chest were soon flying down the harbour on the ebb tide, with a fresh breeze filling the sail and heeling the little craft over.

"This is good enough," said Ned. "Regular old style of going aboard. Suppose I ought to have gone in a pinnace with some of the Marines and a copper-nosed master-at-arms, or something. Never mind. Duty before decency, as Jack Easy said."

"Here be the squadron, sir!" said the waterman, as Gillicker Point was rounded, and the seven great battle cruisers were seen at anchor on the blue waters of the Solent. They made a fine sight, looking like tritons among the smaller vessels and torpedo craft that were in view. The admiral's pennant streamed from the masthead of the Thunderbolt, the first of the line.

"Which is the Victorious?" asked Ned.

"The second o' the line, sir—next the flagship."

The young midshipman looked at the great steel monster with as strong a thrill of pride as her captain could have felt. With one sweep of his eyes he took her in from stem to stern—the barbettes, and the huge turrets, with their mighty 15-inch guns, and the queer-looking tripod masts with the fire-control stations on top.

"She's a floating city!" said Ned. "She's a navy in herself; she can make rings round any battleship!"

His heart beat faster at the thought that he belonged to her. Everything else was forgotten, and at that moment the future seemed brighter to Edwin Hardy than it ever had before.

"I'm in time, anyhow," said Ned, glancing at his watch. "Five minutes to four. I say, skipper, for goodness' sake don't run into anybody! Wait till the gangway's clear!"

The boat luffed head to wind, and shot alongside. The corporal of the gangway looked surprised as he ran his eye over her.

"Where from, sir?" hailed the corporal.

"Midshipman Hardy—ordered to join!" returned Ned quickly, hoping he had said the right thing.

A shade of surprise passed across the corporal's face as he heard the name.

The master-at-arms was sent for; he soon had Ned out of the boat.

"Pass the word to Mr. Buckley!" said the master-at-arms to the gangway messenger. "We'll see to your chest, sir," he added to Ned. "Please report to the officer of the day at once on the upper deck!"

It was bewildering to Ned to find that the official part of the ship was not the quarter-deck, but was forward of the funnels. He would not in the least have known where he was, left to himself; but he was quickly brought before Lieutenant Buckley, the officer of the day—a tall and very dandified officer, with an eye like a hawk's.

"What name?" he said sharply, as Ned saluted.

"Hardy, sir."

"Ah! Was it you who came alongside in that pea-green swill-tub with the brown sail?"

"Yes, sir," said Ned, blushing red. "I was afraid of being late—"

"COME ABOARD, SIR!"

**Ned Hardy joins the Victorious . . .
and then the band starts!**

The officer cut him short as the bluejackets near by were all grinning behind their hands.

"Report to the senior sub-lieutenant in the gun-room, Mr. Hardy!" said Mr. Buckley; and he returned Ned's salute stiffly as he turned away. "Mr. Jinks!"

"Yes, sir?" said a midshipman, coming forward smartly.

"Show this young gentleman below!"

The midshipman marched Ned off, and took a keen and critical look at him as they passed down the alleyway. Ned's companion was a tubby, pink-and-white boy, with a cherubic grin.

"So you're the last new snottie, are you?" he said.

"New and shiny!" said Ned. "I say, will that officer make trouble about my coming off in the old boat?"

"Sure thing! You'll get six dozen on the trousers at the gangway when the owner comes aboard!"

Ned saw that his leg was being pulled, and he answered with a grin which matched that of Mr. Midshipman Jinks. The two felt themselves friends at once.

"You seem to think you ought to have been received with a salute of twenty-one guns!" said Jinks. "We don't take much notice of snotties on the Victorious, especially new ones. Number One* is visiting on the Flagship. The senior sub-lieutenant of the gun-room's on shore leave. That's the way they pamper these rotters, while zealous and efficient officers like me can hardly get leave at all," added Jinks, who liked the sound of his own voice. "Hart is senior in the gun-room while Grimshaw's away, so you'll have to report to him. Hurry up!"

Through the alleyway and down the companion stairs they went, and Ned found himself in the gun-room of the Victorious. Its size took his breath away; it was twice as big as even the ward-room of the ships he had as yet visited. There were six or seven midshipmen in it, and three sub-lieutenants at the moment, it being then the first dog-watch. Jinks led his charge up to the eldest of the sub-lieutenants, a square-built officer of barely nineteen.

"Latest new midshipman, sir!" said Jinks to the sub-lieutenant, saluting.

The other middies, who had evidently been very bored, jumped to their feet and came forward, grinning, to inspect the new victim.

"What's this?" said Lieutenant Hart. "Am I running a circus?"

He seized a ruler and gave three loud raps with it on the table. Before the last rap had sounded the middies had bolted out of the gun-room like rabbits, excepting only Jinks.

Ned was rather taken aback at this sample of the discipline in the Victorious' gun-room. Mr. Hart turned to Ned.

"You've reported yourself to the officer of the day?" he said sharply. "Let's see your papers!"

He went through the usual formalities, and returned the papers to the new midshipman.

"Here you are! You will have to see Mr. Grimshaw as well as soon as he returns, and he will see you registered and give you your instructions. In the meantime, take these from me. When anybody gives you an order in this gun-room obey it, not at once, but much sooner. Do you understand?"

Lieutenant Hart's voice changed from sharp command to friendliness, and he held out his hand with a smile.

"And, unofficially, I make you welcome to the gun-room mess, Hardy. You'll find things rather different here from what you've been used to."

Hart introduced Ned to the other sub-lieutenants, for it was the custom on the Victorious to be civil even to middies on their first arrival, unofficially.

"Jinks," said Lieutenant Hart, "take Mr. Hardy to the after flat, see his chest stowed, and—ah—instruct him in the elements of our social order."

"A doosid big order, too," said Jinks, as soon as he and Ned were outside—"and so you'll find, my son!"

"He seems a decent sort," said Ned.

"What! Old Hart? Oh, he's not at all a bad sort of ass!" said Mr. Jinks patronisingly. "He has his faults; but, of course, he's a blessed angel compared to Grimshaw. The senior, you know, the real gun-room boss, is Grimshaw!"

"Isn't he decent, then?"

"Decent! Grimshaw's absolutely the biggest swab un-hung!" said Jinks emphatically. "Got a temper like a raving tiger! He can't keep it under. Grimshaw's an outsider. You'll soon know him. Wait till he gets at you with a dirk-scabbard!"

"Do you whack chaps here much?"

"Don't we! Of course, the kids"—Jinks was senior to at least six of the midshipmen—"need a good deal of

keeping in order. Grimshaw's all right unless he gets a spite against a fellow—that's where the beggar shows his colours. Here we are at the flat!"

Ned looked round quickly at the long, low space between decks where the midshipmen berthed at night. There was a chest and a hammock for everyone, and nothing more. Ned saw his own chest being brought in by two of the ship's boys.

"Johnson, shove that box of tricks next to mine, will you?" called out Jinks. "That's the only empty place. Thanky! Here you are, Hardy! These are your quarters till you become a sub-lieutenant or get your head shot off. You and I will be alongside each other. I like the cut of your jib!"

He seated himself on his chest, and while Ned opened his own the two chatted about Dartmouth and the kids they had left behind there. Jinks had had his commission for eighteen months.

"It's queer your name being Hardy," he said. "There was a fellow called Hardy here—Ralph Hardy, a lieutenant-commander, who got kicked off this very ship only a week or two ago, for the most awful—"

"Hold on!" said Ned, standing up, his eyes beginning to glint dangerously. "If we're going to be friends, Jinks, stop before you say any more! You hear?"

"Great Scott!" said Jinks, staring at him. "You don't mean to say he's a relation of yours?"

"Ralph Hardy is my brother!" said Ned quietly.

Jinks looked at him in silence, and gave a long, liquid whistle of consternation. Another midshipman, who had come in, and happened to overhear, stared even harder than Jinks.

"This is pretty thick!" muttered the latter. "And they've appointed you to this ship? It's rough on you, Hardy! It's going to make a pile of trouble!"

"I couldn't refuse the appointment," said Ned. "And why should I?" he added defiantly. "My brother was innocent, and I'd say that to the admiral himself!"

Jinks rose to his feet.

"Hardy," he said, "let the others say what they like—your brother was one of the smartest officers I ever saw, an' I never believed him guilty! He was a topping good chap!"

"And you're a brick!" cried Ned, gripping the hand Jinks held out.

"Keep a stiff upper lip. I'll stand by you!"

"D'you think the other chaps—will they cut me?"

"I shouldn't think so. We're a pretty decent lot in the gun-room, after all. But, of course, Grimshaw—he may make things hot for you, and he's our boss. He hated your brother."

Ned locked up his chest, but made no reply.

"We'd better get back now," said Jinks.

He watched Ned as they turned to the gun-room—was surprised that he looked so cool. It was a beastly awkward situation, thought Jinks. And on the Victorious, of all ships!

No sooner had they entered the gun-room again than both Ned and Jinks saw that everyone there knew what was in the wind. The boy who overheard Ned's speech had spread the news.

For some moments nobody moved or spoke. The senior midshipman stepped forward, but before he could say anything an officer in sub-lieutenant's uniform strode in at the other door. He was lean and lanky in build, but with a dark, olive-skinned face and threatening brown eyes.

"What's this?" he said, catching sight of the new face in the mess. "Who are you, sir?"

"It's Grimshaw!" whispered Jinks to Ned.

"I've just joined the ship, sir," said Ned to the lieutenant, saluting smartly. "I've reported to Mr. Hart, and he ordered me—"

"Ah! Did you, indeed? Then come here and report to me, my lad! What's your name?"

"Edwin Hardy, sir!"

"Hardy, is it? You couldn't bring a worse name here!" said the sub-lieutenant sourly. "It is unfortunate, young man, that you should follow after a namesake who was the worst blackguard in the Navy!"

A pink spot burned on each of Ned's cheekbones, but he forced himself to keep silent.

"You may think yourself lucky you are no relation. I suppose you're not one, by the way?" said Mr. Grimshaw, with brutal jocularity.

"Lieutenant-Commander Hardy is my brother, sir!" said Ned, in a voice that trembled with anger.

"Your brother!" cried Sub-Lieutenant Grimshaw. "And you—you have the impudence—the infernal brazenness—to accept a commission on the very ship that fellow was kicked out of!"

*The first lieutenant.

Ned's wrath boiled over, and he strode up to his superior with blazing eyes.

"My brother Ralph was falsely condemned!" he cried hotly. "And he is lucky in not being shipmates any longer with a cad!"

"You little ruffian!" roared Grimshaw, beside himself with rage. "You dare say that to me!"

He darted forward and grabbed Ned by the collar. There was a struggle, and hauling the boy across the mess-table and holding him there with a grip of iron, Lieutenant Grimshaw snatched up a heavy dirk-scabbard that lay on the bench beside him. Wielding the weapon with all his might, he started to give Ned Hardy such a savage flogging that even the gun-room mess stood aghast.

The Tyrant of the Gun-room.

TO be flogged with a dirk-scabbard is no great trial in the ordinary way. It is the regular method of keeping a rebellious middy in order at the hands of his comrades.

But there are two ways of doing it, and even the gun-room mess of the Victorious stood aghast at the savage force with which Sub-Lieutenant Grimshaw's powerful arm laid it on Ned Hardy, and the way he brought the punishing, brass point-guard into play.

Ned struggled madly. The pain he cared little for, but the cruel humiliation of it and the affront to his brother made the blood boil in his veins.

"Let go!" he cried fiercely.

With a violent twist, he slipped out of Grimshaw's grasp and regained his feet on the other side of the mess table.

The sub-lieutenant, with a furious exclamation, darted round to seize him again.

Ned, panting heavily, beside himself with anger, clenched his fists and stood ready to defend himself. It was a mad thing to do, but he was past caring for the consequences. Jink's voice called him to his senses just in time.

"Don't be a fool, Hardy!" whispered the midshipman hurriedly.

Ned's common sense returned to him, and, with a gasp, he let his hands drop by his sides; the next moment Grimshaw had hold of him again.

"I'll teach you to defy me, my lad!" said the sub-lieutenant, through his teeth; and, hauling Ned bodily upon the table, he continued the punishment with the full force of his arm.

It was a wonder the scabbard did not split under such usage. All the resistance seemed suddenly to have gone out of Ned. He neither moved nor spoke, but took the thrashing quietly.

So brutal was Grimshaw's assault that a quick buzz of protest arose. The midshipmen were on the point of an outbreak, and one of the sub-lieutenants strode forward.

"There!" said Grimshaw viciously, releasing Ned, and throwing the dirk-scabbard down. "Now you have your answer! Get on your feet, and stand up in front of me!"

Ned did so.

"I think that's taught you who's master here!" said the sub-lieutenant, fixing his savage little eyes on Ned's. "Remember henceforward that if you answer me back, or disobey any order of mine for the fraction of a second, you'll be reported for insubordination, and broken! You are a junior midshipman in this mess, and I keep up the gun-room's reputation for discipline! Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir!" said Ned, facing him.

"Then get to your place and bear it in mind!"

"One moment, sir, please!" said Ned quietly. "I will remember what you say, but I don't think you've apologised yet for insulting my brother!"

There was an amazed silence, and Grimshaw, the veins on his forehead swelling with rage, moved quickly towards the boy.

"You young hound! You're asking for it, are you?"

Before Grimshaw could lay hands on Ned, Sub-Lieutenant Hart strode between and interposed.

"That will do, Grimshaw; he's had enough! You had no right to insult him, and he was right to resent it! Let him alone!"

Grimshaw turned on the speaker with a look of angry amazement.

"What the deuce do you mean, Hart? Do you question my authority?" he said ferociously.

"I have nothing to say about your authority. I am speaking to you as one gentleman to another," said Hart calmly. "You had no right to insult Mr. Hardy, nor to offer an

affront to his brother. As to the punishment, his name is not even on the ship's books yet!"

"Hear, hear!" said a middy.

Grimshaw leaned forward, his hands clenched at his sides, and his eyes glaring into Hart's.

"Look here, Mr. Hart," he said, breathing heavily. "I am in command in this gun-room, and I warn you that if you interfere with my proceedings you'll find yourself in Queer Street!"

There was a tense silence in the room, and even those who knew him were astonished at Grimshaw's behaviour.

"I shall not interfere with you on any point of routine," said Hart, meeting his gaze quite coolly. "And don't use that tone to me, for I'm not a snottie. This youngster, who is not yet a member of the mess, has the right to ask you for an apology. You need not give it unless you choose, but if you are going to thrash him because he asked for it, I consider the question of the insult ought to go before the captain, and I shall see that it does."

Grimshaw's face changed colour. Hart looked steadily at him, and the other swallowed his rage with an effort.

"Mr. Hart," he said slowly, in a grating voice, "as senior officer here, I order you to go to your seat at once! You hear?"

"Certainly," said Hart, moving away; "but remember what I told you."

He swung his well-built figure into a seat by the table, and turned his back on the proceedings. The whole room knew that the victory was not with Grimshaw.

The senior sub turned slowly to Ned.

"You have had your lesson," said Grimshaw grimly; "take care you don't forget it! And take care that the subject of which you spoke is never mentioned again by you in this gun-room. You will let it drop. You understand me?"

"Certainly, sir!" said Ned. "I will take that as an apology in the circumstances."

Grimshaw stared at him open-mouthed. He was too astounded to speak—too much so even to break out again. There seemed to be no checking Ned. The middies tittered behind their handkerchiefs.

"Have you any more to say?" said Grimshaw to Ned.

"No, sir!"

"It is well for you. Mr. Vaughan!"

"Yes, sir?" said the third sub-lieutenant.

"See Mr. Hardy's name's entered on the ship's books!"

"Very well, sir!"

It was a snub to Hart, for he was the second in seniority, and should have been given the duty. Grimshaw, turning without another word, strode out of the gun-room. Directly he had gone an excited buzzing of talk broke out among the middies, and they pressed up to Ned.

"Stop that row, you little beggars," said Hart sharply, jumping up. "Out you go into the school-room, every man-jack of you!"

The midshipmen departed swiftly, and Ned, his heart beating a good deal faster now that the trouble was over, accompanied Sub-Lieutenant Vaughan to go through the formalities which Grimshaw had thought fit to leave to his junior officer.

They did not take very long. Ned was beginning to find out what a very unimportant person a junior midshipman is. He had an idea beforehand that he would have to have an interview with the captain. They did not do things that way on the Victorious, at any rate, and Ned slowly realised that, to the captain, he was of not much more concern than a blackbeetle is to a cook.

Ned passed over to Hart as soon as he was free.

"I—I want to thank you, sir," he stammered, blushing.

"It was awfully decent of you—"

"Don't you be an ass, youngster!" said Hart sharply. "Drop that, and go and join the others! And remember, if ever I have to haul you over the coals you'll get twice what Grimshaw gave you! Get!"

In spite of the terrific scowl with which Hart delivered this, Ned felt perfect confidence in the second sub-lieutenant. He obeyed, and hurried out.

"That's a white man!" he said to himself. "His bark's worse than his bite, I think. I'd do a lot for him! This is a rum business to lead off with, anyhow!"

He found Jinks waiting for him outside, and that cheerful person received Ned with a grin of delight.

"You're a nailer!" he exclaimed. "We haven't had a show like that since I've been on the ship! I tell you what, Hardy, you've done a heap of good for yourself, and you can thank Grimshaw for doing you a good turn!"

"Eh?" said Ned.

"It's set all the fellows on your side, Grimshaw being such a sweep to you, an' it'll put you right about that affair of your brother's. Come on in!"

He hurried Ned into the school-room, which was the sanctuary sacred to the midshipmen, and a dozen of them were congregated there, talking excitedly in low tones.

There was a stir as Ned entered, and Keppel, the senior midshipman, came forward and held out his hand.

"Well done, Hardy," he said. "You're a plucky kid, one of the sort we want!"

"Didn't he stand up to Grimshaw like a brick!" exclaimed another midshipman. "Hardy, you've got a lot too much cheek for a junior snottie all the same. Go easy!"

"Cheek be hanged!" said another. "There was no cheek about it! He just told Grimshaw what any decent fellow would!"

"Shut up, Acland! Who asked for your opinion?" said Keppel sharply. "Hardy, you took your licking well."

"I don't mind a licking," said Ned simply; "it wasn't that that upset me."

"I've never seen a chap licked for that sort of thing before! But then Grimshaw's a queer customer, and he didn't like you—"

Keppel checked himself. There was an awkward silence for a moment.

"Cut it out!" said Acland. "Shake hands, Hardy! I'm glad you're one of us!"

They made Ned welcome, but none the less, there was rather a cold air about some of them, and several held aloof altogether.

"I'll go to the flat and set my things straight," said Ned, and he departed. Directly he had gone, an eager discussion broke out.

"That's chap's worth having in any mess," said Acland. "He'll buck things up!"

"Yes, he's got grit enough," agreed Keppel. "I hope the kid doesn't think he can do as he likes, though. If he does, I shall have to show him that I can handle a dirk-scabbard a bit myself."

"It's awkward, all the same," said Mayne, a solemn-looking boy with sandy hair. "He's the brother of Ralph Hardy, you know, who was turned off this ship and out of the Service over that robbery business. They say he stole some of the money himself."

"Well, is that young Hardy's fault, you owl?" exclaimed Jinks.

"No, of course not," said Mayne seriously. "But one can't shut one's eyes to it."

"You'll get yours shut for you, if you don't stop talking bilge!" said Jinks angrily. "Grimshaw's a cad to do what he did, and he ought to be cut by everybody and frozen out of the ship!"

"Hear, hear!" piped up two other middies.

"What's going to be done about young Hardy, though?" said a junior. "It's all very well—"

"It's a dirty shame that he's here at all!" snapped Wexton, a sallow-looking, middy of seventeen, with a long, sharp nose. "I consider Grimshaw was quite right, if you want my opinion. If this chap had any decency he'd have exchanged to another ship, and never shown his face here. He looks to me as big a bounder as his brother."

A storm of heated argument broke out upon this, some taking Ned's side and some Wexton's; it was with difficulty that Jinks was kept from pitching into the latter on the spot.

"I must say, I think Hardy might have stayed away," said Acland, when the tumult died down; and several others echoed him.

"Well," said Keppel, the senior, "it depends on himself. If he's going to raise troubles, we can make the place too hot for him. We'd better keep an eye on him and see what he's made of."

And in this manner that great autocracy the midship-

men's mess, decided to withhold its judgment till it had seen a little more of Ned Hardy.

Ned, ignorant of the tumult that he had left behind him, set to work to get his mess-kit out, and lay it ready on top of the other things in his sea-chest.

He was acting on a tip from Jinks, who had told him he would not be given much time to change. He also set his other belongings in order, and then rose to look about him.

A middy's head was suddenly poked round the bulkhead door, and its owner cried out to Ned in a voice of frantic excitement:

"Hurry up, Hardy! Why weren't you on deck? The officer of the day's singing out for you like one possessed. Look sharp, or there'll be the deuce to pay. The fore-deck man—quick!"

Ned was away and up the companion-ladder like a shot fired from a gun, dismay filling his soul. He had not known he was wanted; but there are no excuses taken in the Navy.

As he dashed through the alley-way he caught a glimpse of two grinning faces, but he only ran the faster. He showed them he could move, anyhow—he had been taught that at Dartmouth—and his journey did not take him fifteen seconds.



"It is unfortunate that you should follow after a namesake who was the worst blackguard in the Navy!" snapped Grimshaw.

It was in a very perturbed state of mind that Ned reached the deck, and hurried to the officer of the day.

Ned saluted, panting, and that exquisite dandy, Lieutenant Buckley, stared at him in blank surprise.

"Well, Mr. Hardy?" he said sharply.

"You sent for me, sir?" said Ned, saluting again.

Mr. Buckley looked the midshipman up and down in such grim silence that Ned feared the punishment for delay was going to be heavy.

"Did I?" said the lieutenant dryly. "I'm afraid, Mr. Hardy, you haven't got the hayseed out of your hair yet."

Ned caught a glimpse of grinning faces around him, and it dawned upon him that he had been sold. His face slowly grew crimson.

"Who gave you the message?" said the lieutenant.

"I don't know who it was, sir," replied Ned. "I came without waiting to ask."

"Ah," said the lieutenant, regarding him blandly, "we must teach you to be a little more wary, Mr. Hardy!"

(You must not miss the next grand instalment in this fine serial. Order your GEM in advance to ensure reading on.)

THE MYSTERY OF THE BROADS!

(Continued from page 18.)

gentleman indeed, with a terror of burglars. He lived, practically alone, in this old house for years after my elder brother and I left home. When he died, as I have told you, I think, he left all to my brother Gilbert, who lived in South America. But, to the great surprise of the lawyer and ourselves, all he left, apparently, was this old house and a very small income—an income far from sufficient to keep the old place going as it should be kept."

He paused.

"Naturally, as I say, we were all surprised indeed, and we more than suspected that, in his fear of burglars, he had hidden these old jewels—of which he was passionately fond—somewhere. My brother, I believe, was coming home solely to search for them, when he was killed, as you know, in a railway smash at Buenos Aires."

"You told us that, sir!" assented Tom.

"Well, I myself have searched many times, but have found nothing—neither money nor jewels—and I was forced to the conclusion that my father had, years ago, disposed of them!"

"And they were in that secret cupboard all the time!" breathed Tom Merry. "But how on earth did Quirk—"

"That is the mystery, of course!" said Mr. Whimple, frowning. "However, this is an amazing and a very happy find, my boys! These jewels will enable me to get the house renovated, and to keep it as such a fine old house should be kept. It has removed all financial worry, and"—added Uncle Whimple, with a laugh—"I shall now have no need to hire out my beloved motor-cruiser!"

"Bai Jove! Congwats, my dear sir!"

"Hear, hear!"

"As for Quirk," said Uncle Whimple. "I fancy we shall not see that gentleman again! He knows the game is up, and he'll only think of saving his skin. Obviously, the scoundrel got to know of the hiding-place—it would almost seem as if my brother knew and told him! It is the solution I can think of."

"Bai Jove! That must be it!"

But it wasn't quite "it," as things happened.

The next day the police visited Mr. Quirk's yacht. They found no Mr. Quirk—that slippery gentleman had vanished—but they found his big, shabby leather bag. Within, besides things of no value, was an old letter—a letter addressed to Mr. Gilbert Whimple, at Buenos Aires, and signed, and written by his father! It was a very strange and guarded letter, and it told Gilbert of the hiding-place of the jewels.

As Mr. Joseph Whimple had suggested, his brother Gilbert was returning to look for the jewels when he was killed. That much was clear. Other documents in the bag proved conclusively that Mr. Quirk had been an employee of Gilbert Whimple's in South America, and he had been travelling with him to the coast when he was killed.

The rest can easily be guessed at. Mr. Quirk had taken charge of Gilbert's property; but while he had sent the rest of it to England, he had kept that precious secret letter. Possibly, at the time, he had not had the money to come to England, and he had waited until he could raise it. At all events, that seemed the only possible theory, and was good enough for Mr. Whimple. The jewels were saved, and Mr. Quirk had "gone while the going was good"—as the juniors put it!

Baggy claimed all the glory, of course, but he did not get much praise. The next day he accompanied Tom Merry & Co. as they started off on the cruiser to continue their exploration of the sunny Broads. Mr. Whimple had, in his deep gratitude, stoutly insisted upon returning the hire money to the juniors—he could afford to do so now. They were no longer paying guests!

For another fortnight the cheery, sunburnt crew of the Viking cruised the lakeland of East Anglia, going up as far as Wroxham, Walsham, Stalham, and Hicking Broad, and also paying their postponed visit to Great Yarmouth, where Monty Lowther invented new puns in connection with bloaters and kippers!

Altogether it was a jolly holiday, and when they returned to St. Jim's at the end of the vacation they had many tales to tell and adventures to relate of the time when they had been "Baggy Trimble's Guests"—in fact as well as fancy!

THE END.

(Leon Lessing has escaped from prison, and he's after Cyrus K. Handcock again! You must not miss "Hands Up, St. Jim's!" Next week's great complete yarn!)

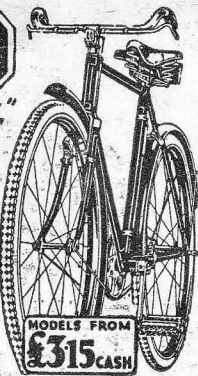
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