

WILDRAKE ON THE TRAIL!

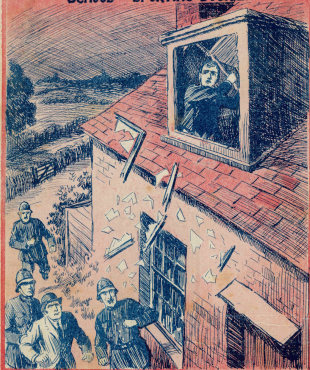
Special, Extra-Long School
Story—Inside!

The GEM 2nd

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

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1922.

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SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES



A DESPERATE MEASURE TO ATTRACT ATTENTION!

Imprisoned in a garret for three days, Sidney Trappo, the St. Jim's jester, draws attention to his plight in the startling tactics shown above! See the grand school page inside!

ANOTHER DELICIOUS TUCK HAMPER WON THIS WEEK!

Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes offered for good jokes. (If you know a good joke, send it to "The Gem Library," My Readers' Own Corner, Gough House, Gough Square, E.C. 4.)

**THIS HAMB'S WINNER,
Well Played, Plymouth!**

The teacher was giving his class a lesson on honesty. "Now," he said, pointing to a boy sitting in the back row, "supposing a friend lent you a coat, and when you put it on you found a shilling which your friend had completely forgotten about. Would you keep it?" "Certainly not, sir," answered the lad. "That's right," said the teacher. "What would you do with it?" "Spend it," came the quick, but unexpected, reply.—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to Miss Doris Hensley, 1, Summerland Place, Plymouth.

Well Done!

"Now, Tommy," said mother, "I'm going upstairs to wash the beds, and I want you to look after these shirts I've put by the fire to air." "Yes, ma'am," said Tommy cheerfully, and mother departed to the higher regions. After a time Tommy's shrill treble sounded up the stairs: "Come on, ma'am! I think the shirts are done. They're quite brown!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to John Lasham, 72, Bedford Street, St. Clair, Dunedin, New Zealand.

A "Moving" Story!

The little town of Middlebury was in a state of great excitement. "Stable, the grocer, one of the best and most kind-hearted and generous men, was in the dock on a charge of assault. Surely there was a mistake somewhere! The Justice of the Peace leaned over towards the accused. "You are accused," he said, "of wilfully striking and causing bodily harm to Mr. Brown, a cinematograph-operator, of this town. What have you to say in defence?" "Stable drew himself up proudly. "Your honour," he said, "the man insulted me." "In what way?" demanded the magistrate. The grocer blushed a ruddy hue. "If you please, your honour," he said, "he came into my shop and asked if he could take a moving picture of the church!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Master Edgar Major, 23, High Street, Aneurddarf, South Wales.

Cool!

As usual, Henry, the office-boy, had arrived at the office fifteen minutes late to find his employer waiting for him. "Don't you know the time we start here?" asked the chief angrily. "No, sir," answered the lad. "You have always started by the time I got here!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to F. Wadley, 1, Reed's Buildings, Chalk Lane, Dury St. Edmunds.

Jackie's Ambition!

Mother: "Jackie, what are you going to do when you're a man?" Jackie: "Grow a beard, ma'am, so that I shan't have so much hair to wash!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Clifford Green, 3, Camp Road, South Kirby, near Doncaster.

Some Hopes!

The master was writing on the black-board, when a propeller in the shape of a pen hit him on the head. He turned round and saw Herbert Hopkins with a pencilcase. "Hopkins," said the trait master, "explain yourself." "Please, sir, I was just going to shoot at Tommy Green, when a feather tickled my nose. I sneezed, and the pen hit me, sir." "Oh, indeed!" said the master. "And who tickled you?" The boy looked round. There was no hope, for the bodies of the class were all round him. He thought desperately. "I'm waiting," said the master. "I'll please, sir, I—I—It must have been a fly!" said the boy.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Jeffrey, 33, Blackhorse Road, Walthamstow, E. 12.

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To fill Wildrake, here and here in *McClure's*, *Collier's*, following a trail is as easy as A B C. To Tom Merry



CHAPTER I.
Gated!

"**WHY** grouse!"

Tom Merry asked that question cheerily as he topped Sidney Troops, of the Fourth, on the shoulder.

Troops, the new fellow in the St. Jim's Fourth, was looking along the passageway, with his hands in his pockets, and an exceedingly gloomy expression on his face.

Usually, Troops of the Fourth looked cheerful enough. But on this special afternoon he seemed to be in the deepest depths of dejected slumps.

Which really was rather odd, for it was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and the autumn day was clear and sunny; and there was, moreover, a fair at Wayland town, to which most of the St. Jim's parents were going. By order of the Head, Wayland Fair was within bounds, and most of the fellows were looking forward to the fun of the fair.

In fact, only one gloom face was to be seen in the House, and that was the usually sunny face of Troops, of the Fourth.

Howe Tom Merry's cherry inquiry.

"Why grouse, old man?" he asked. "What's the jolly old trouble? Tell your Uncle Thomas!"

Troops grinned faintly.

"It's rotten!" he said.

"Not the weather?" said Tom Merry. "For once the weather is playing up like a little son."

"Oh, how the weather!"

"Limes!" asked Tom sympathetically.

"No."

"Liked?"

"Bait! No! I jolly well want to go to the fair like the other chaps," grunted Troops.

"By jove, then," asked Tom. "Sudden change of cash? My dear chap, you've hatted into the right party! I had a resistance this morning."

Troops laughed.

"Thanks to end!" he said. "You're a good chap, Tom Merry. But it isn't cash. I've lost of that, if it were any good."

"It's generally supposed to be some good," said the captain of the Shell, with a smile. "But what—"

"I'm gated!"

"Oh, I'd forgotten that!" said Tom. "It's rotten hard fate, old fellow—gated for nothing! But it's for your own good, you know."

"How can you be gated?"

"You're not safe outside the gates of the school in the present jolly circumstances."

WILDRAKE ON THE TRAIL!

A Splendid Long Complete Story of
Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's, with
Kit Wildrake, the Canadian junior,
well in the limelight.

BY
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"I'm willing to risk that."

"So should I be in your place," said Tom. "All the same, it wouldn't do, Troops. You're a special case. The Head's got to keep you in hand for the present. You see, that man Bauer, who tried to kidnap you, is still loose—the police haven't been able to put him on his tail yet—and so long as he's loose, you've got to be kept tight."

"Are you coming, Tom?" invited Monty Lowther from the end of the passageway.

"Coming?" called back Tom. "Sorry, old man! I wish you could come, too, Troops. It's hard enough."

Tom Merry nodded to Troops, and walked on to join Monty Lowther and Maxmore. The Terrible Three, of the Shell, were among the first to start for the fair.

Troops drove his hands deeper into his pockets, and grunted.

He was feeling down; there was no mistake about that.

A fellow who was "gated" for kicking over the traces, in one way or another, might not like it—in fact, was pretty certain not to like it—but at least he would have the consolation of knowing that he had asked for it.

And Sidney Troops hadn't asked for it.

He was gated for his own safety, because some unknown and mysterious gang of kidnapers had twice tried to kidnap him, and they were still at large.

It was an unprecedented state of affairs, and it brought Sidney Troops into a predicament which was very unusual for a new junior in a big school.

But Troops did not enjoy that kind of limelight.

Being a sensible fellow, he realized clearly enough that the Head was quite right to keep him within school bounds; that, in fact, Dr. Holman could do nothing else. Nevertheless, he was riled by the loss of his freedom.

It came very hard on this special half-holiday, when all the fellows had leave to go to Wayland Fair, and Troops naturally wanted to go with the rest. Not only was he kept within gates, but he had the prospect of having the whole place to himself for a good many hours. Like Robinson Crusoe on his island, he would be mistress of all he surveyed. His right there would be none to dispute. And he did not like it in the very least. Time was likely to hang very heavily on his hands until the other fellows came home from the fair.

Troops looked dully along the passageway, and looked out of the big doorway of the School House.

Four fellows were going out—Hilde and Hermin, Dight and D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form. All the members of Study No. 2 looked very merry and bright.

"Hi! Jove, how's 'Troops?" said Arthur Augustus P'Acroy.

"Gated!" along in the hair, Troops?

"Gated!" grunted Troops.

THE GREAT LAMAR—No. 311.

"It's good!" said Blake. "It's hard cheese."
 "Yes, wathik! Lots of sympathy, dear boy," said Arthur Augustus. "Try to remember that it's for your own good."

Great from Troops.
 "Wouldn't you all about it when we get back," said Harry.

Another great from Troops. The prospect of leaving all about it from George Herries did not seem to console him.
 "There's another fair next year," said Harry.

Great!
 "But Jove! Another fair next year won't be very ready me to Troops this afternoon," said Arthur Augustus. "I'm faintly sympathetic, all sharp."

"It's a jolly good deal to look it, and deliver it!" grumbled Troops. "I could cut easily enough."

Great!
 "Come on, George!" said Blake. "We don't want to be late."

"I am speakin' to Troops—"
 "It's had enough for Troops without your conversation thrown in, old wathik. Give him a rest!"

"Wally, Blake—"
 "Are you coming?" demanded Herries.

"Yes, wathik, when I have finished speakin' to Troops. Troops, old man, I trust that you were only speakin' out of your hat, and that you have no real intention of lookin' it," said Arthur Augustus seriously. "You must remember that those kidnapers wouldn't be long about on a half-hour, waitin' for a chance."

Great!
 "It is quite probable that, if they are here about, they will know all about the fair at Weyland, and will look for you," said Arthur Augustus. "It's the very thing that you should be most careful to convey to the Head's wathik, Troops."

"I know," muttered Troops.
 "There may don't think of lookin' it, dear boy. You would be wathik a beautiful wide of wathik wathik St. Jim's again. Blake, let go my arm! Dig, you foolish old, let go my wathik arm! If you shove me like that, Herries—"

Arthur Augustus D'Arny started for the bar, with the vigorous assistance of his three chums. Blake & Co. seemed to be tired of waiting while the wathik of St. Jim's bestowed his homages on the new janitor.

"You foolish wathik! Leggo! Blake, you wathik wathik! Herries, you silly old! Dig, you cheap! Oh, wathik!" Arthur Augustus wathik, protesting once and away in the distance.

Troops grinned as he looked after the chase of Study No. 1. But the grin faded away from his face, and the glass expression returned. Really, it was very hard on Troops, of the Fourth, and in a dismal mood he looked forward to a dismal afternoon.

CHAPTER 2.

Widrake Wants to Know!

"I GUESS so!"

Kit Widrake, of the Fourth, was the speaker, and Troops heard the remark, as he strolled along the Four-Yarn passage in the School House a little later.

Widrake, the Canadian janitor, was coming out of No. 2 Study as he spoke, and apparently addressing some fellow mill in the study.

"I say, old chap—" Peggy Triebble's fat voice followed the Canadian janitor into the passage.

"Can it?" said Widrake.
 "But I say, I want to go in the fair, you know," urged Peggy Triebble. "I happen to be stony, but I'll settle up at the end of the week, honest injun! Ten bob—"

"I guess not," said Widrake, with a laugh. "Make it a tanner, and I'll see what I can do—and never mind about settlin' up at the end of the week. I guess I know how you settle."

"Wath, a tanner isn't much use—"
 "Good bye, then."
 "But it's better than nothing. Shall we?"
 "Cute!" said Kit Widrake.

He turned in the doorway of No. 2 Study, and tossed a suppers to Peggy Triebble. There was a yelp in the

study. Triebble, apparently, had caught the glimpse with his nose.

Widrake grinned, and hurried down the passage, and about ran into Troops. He stopped.

"I guess you're looking idle," he said.
 "I'm looking idle," said Troops.

"Come along to the fair!" said Widrake. "No end of fun, so the fellows have been sayin'."

Troops grinned faintly. His guess was a serious matter to him, and was heavy on his mind, but the other fellow, thinking about his own affairs, naturally did not remember it, though they had all heard of it. But Widrake seemed bored the next moment, and he walked on.

"But wathik gaud," he said. "I forget, I guess it's enough on you, Troops, but it isn't too long. That man hasn't been to be nabbed by the police sooner or later."

"Looks more like later than sooner," said Troops.
 "Anyhow, they haven't nabbed him yet—better late! I don't believe there's much risk. I can take care of myself."

The Canadian janitor gave him a keen look.
 "You're thinkin' of lookin'."

"I didn't know you were a thought-reader."

"Look here, old man! Don't do it!" said Widrake earnestly. "You'll land in trouble as safe as houses. These lighters will very likely expect you to be at the fair, and may be on the look-out for you."

"Don't waste your time in grooves," said Troops, laughing. "I've had that up already from D'Arny."

"Shows that George has some jaw-wood," said Widrake. "If you've got a wath, you may't like out of gates-to-day. Even if nothing happened to you, the Head would be mad with you."

"He wouldn't know," muttered Troops. "Still, I suppose I had better stick it. But it's rather, with all the fellows going out. Something about on my own! Enough!"

"I guess it's rather, but not so rotten as being lagged by a gang of kidnapers," said Widrake. "Trot down to the gate with me."

"Right-to!"

Troops left the House with the Canadian janitor, and they walked towards the gates together. Widrake seemed at a leisurely pace, different from his usual quick, springy stride, perhaps reluctant to leave the "gate" (never too soon to be heard). He chose the path under the elms, which was longer than the drive. Troops smiled as he realized the Canadian's kind intention.

"Don't waste your time," he said. "You want to be at the fair. Most of the chaps have gone already."

"Lots of 'em," said Widrake thoughtfully. "I've been longin' to speak to you about that kidnaping matter, Troops; only I don't know you very well, of course. If you won't think I'm bustin' in—"

"What lot?"

"Well, then," said Widrake, "it's a pretty queer affair, and I was up I'm interested. It's not just curiosity, you know."

"I guess I've been thinkin' whether I could be of any use. From what I know, it seems that that man hasn't been on hangin' you—so keen that he's running a lot of risk, and after tryin' twice, it's very likely he may try a third time. If he hangs about St. Jim's looking for you, there might be a chance of ropin' him in. If I know him by sight, I guess I'd just in this afternoon looking for him, instead of going to the fair."

"You'd waste your time, as you don't know him," said Troops. "and the Head wouldn't let me try."

"Too risky for you," said Widrake, shaking his head.

"From what I've heard, he tried to tag you the first day of term, when you were coming to St. Jim's."

"Yes. Some considerations of his got my grandfather, Mr. Pilkington, away, and the brute afterwards ran in the train," said Troops. "Triebble gave the alarm, though, and it turned out all right."

"What was he like in look at?"

"A rather better fellow, wearing some all over, with a hard face, and eyes as hard as flint," said Troops.

"You didn't know him?"

"Not from Jellum."

"But he knew you all right?"

Troops grinned.

"Yes, he knows me, and seems to want to improve the acquaintance. I can't get on to it really. He knew all about me—knew about my being left money by my old uncle, Colonel Trow, who died last year; knew even that the old colonel's racing stable was left to me, and a parohone named Kobi-Noor—knew more than I did, in fact."

Widrake looked at him.

"Mean to say that you, a schoolboy, are the owner of racing stables and a parohone?" he concluded.

"It's odd, isn't it?" said Troops, laughing. "If I lacked a horse, I should be asked from the school; and yet I'm the owner of a parohone that's going to run in a big race in a week or two. But I can't help it, you see. My uncle left all his stuff to me, but he left strict instructions in his

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BREAKING BOWTIE! Almost before he knew that he had made up his mind to chase it, Troops was attacking the steaming oak, and he found himself on the wall. A ravenous morsel and he had dropped to the roadway. The oak was cast now! (See page 7.)

will that the racing stable was to be carried on under his banner, and that Kobi-Noor was to run in certain races he had booked him for—everything as if the colored man still lived. So my position is that if the horse wins the Eight Hundred Guinea, he wins it for me, though, of course, I can't touch the money till it comes to me. My guardian draws no end of a long face about it, but he will not be upset. If the colored's indignation aren't carried out to the very letter, I can the whole sheet—a big horse, a pot of money, and the rest. So there you are?"

Widrake nodded very thoughtfully. "It's an extraordinary position for a schoolboy," he said. "I don't like it," said Troops. "My uncle was a racing man, but I've never had any taste that way. When I'm at age, I shall sell the stud and all that's in there. What's a good many years old you, of course?"

"You're sure that your Isaac was a racing man?"

"Quite!"

"And these confederates of his, who were seen about here last week—Squinty and Tadger—"

"Both of the same kidney," said Troops. "They're a nice gang, of course."

"But why should a race gang have a down on you when you never dabble in anything of the kind?"

"I give that one up! I've thought about it till my head aches, and I can't even begin to guess. I've never spoken to a racing man in my life till that was Isaac talked to me in the train."

"You haven't thought that your old uncle's will might have anything to do with it?"

"How could it?" he asked.

"You see, you've no personal connection with racing, and yet a race gang are after you," said Widrake. "But under your uncle's will, you're the owner of a racehorse that runs in a big race next week. As that's your only connection with racing, it may put up the reason why a race gang are interested in you."

"That's rather vague," said Troops. "If Isaac and his gang are backing my horse—which I've never seen—but supposing we wouldn't do them any good."

"None!"

"If they're laying money against the horse, it still wouldn't do them any good that I can see."

"None," asserted Widrake again.

"You see, I've no control over the matter, and Isaac knows as much about the position as I do," said Troops. "Suppose he wanted the horse withdrawn from the race for some reason—well, I couldn't withdraw it; it's not in my hands at all. The old colver's master is the man he would have to deal with—not me."

Widrake nodded.

"Well, the idea crossed my mind," he said, "Isaac might be in a gang who have booked another horse, and they might think of forcing you to match Kobi-Noor—if you had the power to do it."

"But I haven't. In fact, if I had the power I should not do it," said Troops frankly. "I'm bound to respect my uncle, of course; but I've been brought up among people who don't approve of horse-racing, and I don't like it myself. But I can't interfere. My guardian says so, and he's a solicitor."

"Then that can't be their game," said Widrake. "It looks like a giddy puzzle. All the same, my idea is that your racing interests are somewhere at the bottom of the affair; that's the only spot where you touch the Turf, you see, and Isaac belongs to the Turf. I guess that's the line I should work on, if I were in your place, and trying to figure it out. Well, here we are. Keep a stiff upper lip, old man, and keep safe."

With a cheery nod, Widrake went out of gate.

Troops stood in the gateway, looking after him, with a very thoughtful expression on his face.

Long and hard he had pondered over the mysterious attacks made on him by the race gang, and now a glimpse of the solution of the mystery had occurred to his mind. But it occurred to him now that the cool, clear-headed Canadian had put his finger on the spot, so to speak, however or other, it was his ownership of a racehorse that had brought a race gang on his track. Their motive was still to seek, but at least he seemed to have a beginning of a glimpse of how matters stood.

"Yes, Master Troops!"

Toggles, the porter, came along from his lodge, vying the new jockey with a very suspicious eye.

"You're gated, you know," said Tangles. "He's asleep, Master Troopie. You ain't going out, sir." Troopie walked, and walked back from the gates. Tangles kept a suspicious eye on him till he disappeared in the direction of the School House.

CHAPTER J.
Fresh Leaves!

"TROOPIE, try her!"
Mr. Latham, the master of the Fourth Form, blinked very kindly at Troopie as he invited idly into the House. The little Form master's spectacles beamed with benevolence.

"Yes, sir!" said Troopie.
"I understood that the Head's orders are for you to keep within gates, Troopie."

"Yes, sir," Troopie looked hopeful for a moment. "The fact is, sir, I'd like to go to the fair. Perhaps, if you put a word in for me, sir—"

"My dear boy, impossible! You need not think for one moment of going outside the school gates until these lawless rascals are safe under lock and key!" exclaimed Mr. Latham.

"But Troopie looked discouraged.
"Nevertheless, it is somewhat hard on you to be confined to the school walls when most of the boys have gone out," said Mr. Latham. "I sympathize with you, Troopie."

"Thank you, sir," said Troopie, trying to look as grateful as he could for Mr. Latham's sympathy. Really, he was not contented, but sympathy was not exactly what he wanted just then. He wanted to go to Weyland War with the merry crowd of St. Jim's fellows. Sympathy—even his Form master's sympathy—was a very poor substitute for the fun of the fair.

"But this kindly, Troopie, may prove to be a blessing in disguise," went on Mr. Latham.

"Indeed, Troopie. You are somewhat weak in dependent veins," said Mr. Latham. "Now, if the time should tang heavily on your hands, Troopie, you may sit in the Form-room—"

"The—the Form-room?"
"Yes, Troopie, with your Latin grammar," said Mr. Latham kindly.

"My Latin grammar?" repeated Troopie blankly.
"And give a couple of hours to dependent veins," said Mr. Latham, beaming. "If you choose, Troopie, I will assist you on your exercise."

"Thank you, sir," gasped Troopie. "But I won't trouble you, sir."

"My dear lad, it will be no trouble! At all events, it is a trouble I have no objection to taking," said Mr. Latham. "I will prepare an exercise, not too difficult—"

"I—I—" stammered poor Troopie.
"—If you really wish it, Troopie—"

"The—the fact is, sir, I—I—*am* going to—to—to look at a book in the library!" gasped Troopie. "Thank you so much for your kindness, sir."

And Troopie got away as fast as he could.
Going was but enough, but if Mr. Latham supposed that dependent veins were a consolation to a gated junior, it showed that much water had passed under the bridge since Mr. Latham had been a schoolboy himself!

He beamed more kindly when he had placed a distance between him and the well-intentioned Form master.

"Burry, Troopie! Burry!"
Burry, Trumble met him in the Fourth-Form passage. Troopie eyed the fat junior gloomily.

"He'll have been glad of almost any company that dotted afternoon excepting that of dependent veins, but even dependent veins had an attraction in comparison with Burry Trumble."

"You can't go to the fair, old chap," said Trumble. "Awful hard times! Like me to stay in and keep you company!"

"No," said Troopie grimly.
"Well, I couldn't, anyway; my friends expect me at the fair," said Burry. "They'll hardly enjoy it without me, so I'm really bound to go. But as you're not going, Troopie, I suppose you could lend me ten bob?"

"Make it five, old chap," said Trumble. "After all, you owe me a lot, I let those brutes kidnap me for your sake, to save you—"

"Burr!"
"At least, they did kidnap me, and only let me go when they found I wasn't you," urged Trumble. "I found out a lot—the nigger of the brutes—and the police have found that burglar that brutes had all ready for keeping you in. If they lay their hands on the gang, it will be due to me. So five bob—"

"Are you wound up?" asked Troopie.
"After all I've done for you, half-a-crown isn't nearly," said Burry emphatically. "I had an awful time, and saved you at the risk of my life—"

"Burrish!"
"Well, considering everything I think a shilling isn't much to lend a fellow!" said Trumble.

Troopie burst into a laugh. From ten shillings Burry had come down to one, and Troopie laughed, and put his hand in his pocket, and the fat junior went on his way the richer by a shilling. Having ascertained that consolation in his expression at the fair, Burry Trumble did not waste any more of his valuable time upon Troopie. He was off like a shot.

Sallying as he felt in the deserted House, Troopie did not miss Trumble's fascinating society. There were some things worse than solitude, and Burry's fat company was one of them.

Troopie lazed along the passage, and looked into one study after another. Every single one was unattended; the fine weather and the fair had swamped all the Fourth class of the House. Troopie gazed, and walked along to the Shell Room, in search of a fellow to speak to. Only one Shell fellow was to be found, and that was Skinsops, who blinked up through his spectacles as Troopie looked in. Skinsops, of the Shell, was a studious and learned youth, who cared nothing for games, or fairs, or anything of the kind. He revelled in such extraneous subjects as entomology and geology and conchology. He smiled a welcoming smile at the gated junior.

"Come in, my dear fellow," he said. "I've got a book here—a really wonderful book. You'll be interested in it."

"What's the book?" asked Troopie doubtfully.
"Novelty and Environment in their Relation to Evolution and the Origin of Species," by Professor Babyngravel," said Skinsops, beaming. "I'm sure you—Dear me! Where are your going?"

Troopie passed on.
He did not stop to explain where he was going. He bowed Skinsops about his beamed head, and returned to his enthralling volumes.

Troopie went downstairs again, and made his way to the school library. But the sun and the fresh air soon called his feet again, and he strolled about the quadrangle.

Catching sight of Mr. Latham in the distance, walking with Mr. Ralston, the Housemaster, Troopie walked away rather quickly under the eaves. He did not want any more offers of exercise in dependent veins.

"Dash it all, I'm fed up!" gasped Troopie.
St. Jim's seemed to be almost deserted.

He thought of Weyland War, with the merry-go-round, the waterfalls, the swing-boat, the coconut tree, and the merry crowd of jokers.

He stood and eyed the school wall, in a secluded spot, shaded by trees, where a slanting oak offered temptation to a climber.

After all, why not?
He was gated by the Head; but surely there would be no great harm, so far as the Head was concerned, in

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(See Index.)

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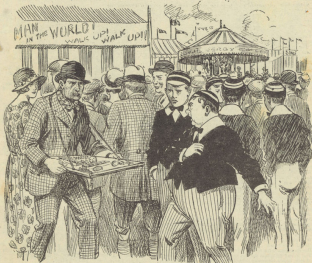
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ON SALE FRIDAY! PRICE FOURPENCE EACH.

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ONCE SEEN—The tucker merchant (bored from Grandy & Co. towards Withrake and Muppy Tristram. He sees Tristram's stare fall, and read recognition in it. The savage look that came over his face reads Tristram's purp. "That's the chap!" roared the fat junior. "That's him!" (See page 1.)

disregarding a getting which was not a punishment, but only a safeguard for himself.

As for the risk, he mentally snapped his fingers at it.

The kidnapers, after twice failing, might have given up the game, whatever their motive was. They were known by description, at least, to the police, and might never dare to venture near St. Jim's again. And if they did, how could they burn him in the midst of a surrounding crowd of the law? What likelihood was there of the men's taking it with him on his way to the market town? There was a risk, no doubt; but in his present mood, Troopie was disposed to minimize the risk. Indeed, the risk would never have kept him within reach of it, had he the Head's order.

He hesitated—said it is well said that he who hesitates is lost.

Almost before he knew that he had made up his mind to chance it, Troopie was clanking the clanking oak, and he found himself on the wall. A moment more, and he had dropped outside.

The die was cast now.

With a beating heart, Troopie scudded away, and in a few minutes more he was going at a trot along the footpath through Kyleshoe Wood, heading for the Wayland road and the inn of the Inn.

CHAPTER 4.

The Wanted Man!

TICKLERS! Ticklers and squeakers!

"Ei Jove!"

"Tickle, air! Only tuppence, air!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arvy turned his eyes upon the frothy merchant who offered him a "tickle" at the reasonable price of tuppence. Blake and Herries and Diggrived.

On such an occasion as a visit to a fair, the crowd of St.

Jim's was not considerably. But really he did not want a "tickle," and he had no desire to possess a "squeaker."

"Thank you very much," said Arthur Augustus, "but I have no use for a tickler!"

The tucker merchant eyed him, and eyed Blake & Co. He was rather a frowzy-looking man, with a battered hat and no sideways on a frowzy head. He did not look like the type of pedlar who carries a tray of "ticklers and squeakers" on a fair ground. His "cut" was unambiguously that of a leader of the race; "business" was written all over him. And, from his keen glance, it would have appeared that he was interested in the St. Jim's juniors, apart from any desire to sell them his goods.

"Fustine squeaker, air! Make the tickler jump, air!" said the merchant.

"Thank you very much; I have no desire to make anybody jump!" said Arthur Augustus.

The owner of Study No. 5 walked on, through the thick crowd on the fair ground. They were leading for the entrance; Blake & Co. having undertaken to swing a boat higher—much higher—than Figgins & Co. of the New House.

The frowzy man glanced after them, and turned away; but anyone who had observed him might have observed that he did not press his wares on the general public. He seemed to have a special desire to sell "ticklers" and "squeakers" to St. Jim's fellows. He even recognized several Waplanden who called to him, and pushed his way to where Lewison, Clee, and Garden, of the Fourth Form, were strolling along together.

"Tickler, air—squeaker!" said the merchant, and again his eyes scanned the faces of the St. Jim's juniors intently.

Lewison & Co. did not prove to be customers, and the merchant went on his way, scanning the crowd for St. Jim's eyes.

"Ticket, air?"

Buggy Trinkle stopped and looked at him.

"How much?" he asked.

"Troop, sir."

"Hallo, I've seen you before somewhere, hasn't I?" asked Trinkle, as he glanced in his pocket for coppers. "Hold on—You going to have a tobacco? Hold on! My hat! The silly owl, he's gone!"

The merchant had already vanished in the crowd, before Buggy Trinkle could extract the coppers from his pocket.

"The silly owl" murmured Trinkle. "I've seen him before somewhere, too—he looks like—like—blamed if I remember."

The taller merchant looked through the crowd, apparently not desiring to meet further rivalry from Buggy Trinkle.

"Tobler, sir!"

Widrahe smiled and shook his head, as the heavy man addressed him.

"No, thanks."

Widrahe's glance followed the man as he moved on.

He had not escaped his notice that the man had searched his face with a keen gaze for a moment, and he wondered why. Neither had he failed to see that the man, though extremely a "tinkler" merchant at a fair, looked like a hanger-on of the race—possibly one of the dozens of Abbotswold men, who was taking advantage of Fair Day at Wayland to drive business in a new line. But after his talk with Troops, of the Fourth, Widrahe was rather keenly interested in any racing man hanging about the locality.

Widrahe stopped near a narrow passage, and his keen eye followed the man's furtive look, but through the crowd.

The merchant stopped before Tom Merry and Marrow and Leadshoe, and offered his wares. The Terrible Three indignantly shook their heads and moved on.

A group of fellows from Reynolds Grammar School followed in Grammar School caps; but the merchant did not address them. He passed them unheeded, and moved on towards some St. Jim's business—Figures and Kew and Fairy Wren, of the New House.

A glint came into Widrahe's eyes.

This heavy-looking man, who looked more like a racing man than a merchant at a fair, seemed to be interested only in fellows in St. Jim's colours.

Apparently his object was not to sell the "tinkler" and "speculators" on his tray. He was negotiating very hazy possible customers, as he threaded his way about looking for St. Jim's juniors.

Widrahe moved through the crowd, keeping an eye on the hatted lawyer's kin.

His suspicions were soon confirmed.

The heavy merchant did not even address any of the Wayland folk, or the Grammar School fellows, as he followed from Abbotswold School. But whenever he spotted a St. Jim's cap, he hurried up to the wearer at once, and offered his goods—wiry, keen glances at the face of the schoolboy.

Widrahe's jaw set grimly.

The man was no fair merchant at all; he was a confederate of the racing gang who were "after" Troops, of the Fourth, and he was searching the fair ground for the new junior of St. Jim's. Only that could explain his interest in St. Jim's fellows, his keen glances at their faces, his more urgent of the trade he was pretending to follow. He could have sold out his tray long since, if he had chosen, and he had not chosen. The way was a pretence—and Widrahe suspected that the heavy man, the hatted bar, the shaggy head, wore pretences also. The man, at least, would bear watching.

"Hallo, Widrahe, old chap!"

It was Buggy Trinkle.

"Don't stop me now," said Widrahe.

"All right—I'll come along with you," said Buggy, cheerily, and he invited along with the Canadian junior. "I say, I've run out of cash!"

"Oh, bother!"

"As my steady mate, I think you might lend me a bob or two," said Buggy. "I say—"

"Hold on!" said Widrahe. "I remember now. You saw those galsies who wanted to buy Troops, of our Ferns, Trinkle?"

"Oh! Yes! Never mind that? If you could manage half—"

"You can see that merchant with the 'Golden?' and Widrahe."

"Oh! Yes! Never mind him—two bob would do—"

"Have you ever seen him before?"

"Yes! He offered me a 'tinkler,' and cleared off before I could buy one!" said Trinkle. "Right-remember—"

"And! Have you ever seen him before to-day?"

"I thought I had," said Trinkle. "Something about the heavy bouncer. A shilling—"

"Is he anything like that rascal who seduced Troops, the time you saw him in the trap?"

"My hat—yes! Oh, comrades!"

"Come along and have a look at him," said Widrahe

trifle.

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"I—say, if he's that man Isaac, he's jolly dangerous. He had a wooden, and—"

"Come on, you see!"

Widrahe gripped the fat junior's arm, and drew him toward, Buggy accompanying him in some indignation. The heavy man had stopped in front of Grandy, Wilkins, and Gann, of the St. Jim's Band. Grandy was waving him wildly away.

"Now look at him!" said Widrahe in a low voice.

Trinkle stared at the man.

"That's the chap!" he said. "He's changed a lot, but I'd know those hawk-eyes anywhere, and that nose like a bulldog's. That's Isaac!"

The "tinkler" merchant turned from Grandy & Co towards Widrahe and Trinkle.

He met Trinkle's stare full, and read recognition in it. The orange look that came over his face made Trinkle jump. The fat junior jerked his arm away from Widrahe, and vanished into the crowd.

Widrahe ran towards the racing man.

In an instant the tray of tinkles and speculators was thrown down, and the man was tearing through the crowd, amid shouts and angry exclamations, as he knicked people to right and left in his hurried flight.

Widrahe rushed after him.

"Stop him!" he shouted. "Stop that! Stop that!"

But a swirling crowd of merry sailors interposed, and when Widrahe struggled free from the rear, the man in the hatted bowler had vanished. The Canadian junior sought him, but he did not see him again.

He was gone.

And E. A. Widrahe, brother of the fat of the fair that he was watching, hurried out of the fair ground and headed for Wayland Police-station, to report that the "wanted" man was at hand.

CHAPTER 5.

Knapped!

"SEEN him, Isaac?"

An oath was the answer.

Two men were in conversation in a thicket by the foot-path through Epibornie Wood. Lying in the thicket, on the grass, they were watching the footpath, when the heavy-looking man who had sold "tinkles" and "speculators" at Wayland Fair passed there, and dropped into the grass. Had Buggy Trinkle been there he would have recognized Squary and Tadger, the two rascals who had seized him a week before in mistake for Troops, of the Fourth.

"You ain't seen him?" asked Tadger.

"No!"

"Then why have you checked it, Isaac?" asked Squary.

"You was going to spot him at the fair, if he went there with the others."

"I've been recognized!" growled Isaac.

"How?"

"That fat fool saw me, and another lad I don't know—sharp looking, though; he was after me like a pest!" snarled Isaac. "The game's up so far as the fair is concerned. But I've pretty certain that Troops is not there. I've looked at scores of legs from his school, and could not find him!"

"If he ain't there, what's to be done?" said Squary.

"Come to think of it, his hunchmaster would be very likely to keep him in, after what's happened, Jim."

Isaac smote again.

"It's likely enough; but there was a good chance that he would go to the fair with a crowd of others."

"We can watch the crowd of them going back," said Tadger. "We might spot him among the rest. I don't have about making him, though, if he's with a crowd."

"He's got to be caught, if he's with a hundred!" said Isaac severely.

"But suppose he ain't out of doors at all?"

"We can't touch him in the school!" said Squary.

Another oath rose the racing man.

"That's to be left till last—it's frightfully risky," he said.

"But if we can't catch him out of the school, we shall have to try it on. We've got to get him, or—"

He broke off, with a look on his face that made the two rascals stare at him steadily.

"None of that, Isaac," said Squary. "We ain't getting our heads into a rope, not even for the Eight Headed Goblins."

"Now my blessed neck, I tell you!" said Tadger emphatically.

Isaac growled his teeth.

"If Koly-Near runs, I'm a ruined man!" he said severely.

"It's the fault of that old fat, Colonel Troops—leaving his unrecognizable to a boy, with orders to catch on. The boy can thank his uncle for what happens to him."

"Nothing of that sort is going to happen to him," said Tadger. "Leastways, I'm out of the game if it does!"

"God get of H. here, and be hanged to you," started Isaac. "I tell you, I'm stopping at nothing."

"Hush! Somebody's coming!" leaved the spinning man.

There was a footstep on the path.

The three men lay low in the thicket, with their eyes fixed on the footpath that wound under the thick branches of the trees.

Isaac gave a violent start.

He stared through the interstices of the thicket with a fixed stare, as if he could scarcely believe his eyes.

"What luck!" he muttered.

"What?"

"It's Troops!"

"Oh, gosh!"

Isaac slipped his pipe into his pocket. Tadger threw away a half-smoked cigarette. Isaac rose to his feet, his eyes almost blinded.

Along the footpath came a St. Jim's junior—Squire Troops, of the Fourth Form.

He came along with a cheery face, at a trot. He was

He was a quick and active fellow; and the sudden, overwhelming sense of danger, instead of dismaying him, struck him in an effort to escape.

"After him!" yelled Isaac.

He tore after the fleeing schoolboy, with his two companions peering at his heels.

Troops ran on desperately, threading his way among the trees and tangled creepers.

Isaac tore after him desperately, leaving his followers behind in the rear.

There was a sudden crash, as Troops caught his foot in a trailing, lichen brand, and went heavily to the ground.

A second noise, and the racing man was upon him.

A savage grasp fastened on Troops, and pinned him to the earth. He struggled to rise, but the savage grasp of the racing man was too powerful for him.

Tadger and Squire came panting up.

"Get him!" gasped the spinning man.

"You'll catch him up, quick—he's as slippery as an eel!" bawled Isaac.

Troops struggled desperately.



St. Jim's Jingles!

MISS
No. 5 MARIE RIVERS.



If ever one consulted a list
Of famous girls in fiction,
Miss Marie's name could not
be missed—

Such is my firm conviction.
For surely she takes pride of place
Among our modern beauties;
With cheery smile and girlish grace

She goes about her duties.

Of all the nurses I have known
Miss Marie is the smartest;
I'm sure that if I break a bone
She'd set it like an artist,
And even if I broke my neck
Performing stunts unbecom'g,
Although I'd be a total wreck,
Marie would do the needful!

Miss Plack is matron at St. Jim's,
She's quite a grim old granny;
And pays no heed to all the whims
Of sufferers in the agony.
But Marie Rivers is a "Gee,"
"The Nurse's Friend," in addition;
She's

She's always "Popular" with
them,
And holds the first position.

If D'Arcy minor takes a chill,
If Frayser is sick and wady;



MARIE RIVERS!

If Roger Trimble's feeling ill
Through being extra greedy—
They rush to Marie right away
(At times they've rather checked
her!)

She tends them, and they always
say
She's better than a doctor!

Oh, lucky Talbot of the Shell!
To own a cream so sterling!
For she has stood by Talbot well,
Defiance boldly hurling
At all the buffets of Fate,
And troubles none and trying;
Miss Marie's loyalty is great,
A fact there's no denying.

I wish that Marie were a boy,
To join our jolly careers;
For I feel certain she'd enjoy
Gay revels with the jokers.
But all the joy that comes her way
Consists of riding pillion;
She is a girl, I grieve to say—
A girl, though, in a million!

NEXT WEEK! TOM MERRY, Captain of the Shell!

running, but his footsteps made little sound on the thick, damp, lichen leaves that covered the path, and he was quite close at hand when the awakened ruffian heard him.

"All together!" muttered Isaac. "Don't give him a chance of dodging!"

"What?"

Troops came leaping up, at their instructions.

He came abreast of the awakened ruffian, and then there was a sudden crash.

Isaac and his companions broke through the thicket, and rushed into the footpath at the St. Jim's porter.

"Nail him!" muttered Isaac.

Troops stopped.

He had quite forgotten the thought of danger, as he headed for Weyland and the fair; but as the ruffian dashed out of the thicket, he realized instantly what it meant.

The outstretched hands were almost touching him, when he leapt back and escaped the grasp.

With a swift bound, he left the footpath on the opposite side, and ran into the trees.

"You rotter!" he muttered. "Let me go!"

Isaac laughed scornfully.

"Likely, after all the trouble you've given us!" he said.

"Help!"

Troops shouted wildly, as the spinning man and Tadger grasped his wrists, and began to bind them together.

"Silence!" bawled Isaac.

He groped in his hip-pocket, and jerked out a revolver. The clear steel flashed before Troops's eyes, as Isaac thrust the muzzle fairly into his mouth.

"Silence, you young fool!" snarled the racing man. "It would pay me better to blow out your brains, where you lie, and leave you dead. There's only one thing that stops me! But, by god, if you give me any more trouble, I'll chance it!"

"Gosh, kid!" muttered Tadger. "Put that larkin away. Isaac, you fool! I tell you I won't have a hand in it!"

A handkerchief was stuffed into Troops's mouth. His hands were bound behind him, and then he was dragged to his feet.

"Now, come on!" muttered the spinning man.
 "Feed! Carry him!" snarled Isaac.
 "Look here, he can walk to the coast."
 "And leave the prints of his boots in these fallen leaves,"
 snapped the racing man. "Don't be a fool! Carry him!"
 "Up with him," said Tadger. "He ain't much weight for
 the lot of us!"

Troop was raised in the arms of Tadger and the spinning
 man.

"Now follow me," said Isaac. "If I give the signal, get
 into cover at once. If we've seen now, the game's up!"

"We're following you," said Squinty.
 Isaac jumped ahead, throwing his way through the thick
 wood. At a little distance, the two ruffians followed him,
 bearing Sidney Troop between them.

Isaac's eyes roamed to right and left, watched as a cat.
 He carefully avoided footpaths and open places, showing
 that he had already well-acquainted himself with Redcombe
 Wood. The three ruffians emerged at last from the woods,
 into a narrow, wooden lane. Almost concealed by drooping
 foliage, a covered cart stood there, with a horse carefully
 tethered. Troop was hurriedly shoved into the cart, and the
 ruffians drove away from him, completely hiding him from
 sight.

"Share, then, Tadger, you know the place."
 "Right!"
 Isaac loosened the horse, and Tadger mounted in the
 driver's seat and took the reins and the whip.

The covered cart rattled away.
 "And now we had better make ourselves scarce—ahint!"
 glanced the spinning man.

"Sharp's the word!" muttered Isaac.
 And as the covered cart vanished out of sight, with the
 kidnapped St. Jim's junior lurcher within it, Isaac and the
 spinning man parted, and disappeared in different directions.

CHAPTER 6.

Mingling!

BURNHAM!
 Dr. Holman, the headmaster of St. Jim's, picked
 up the receiver as the telephone bell buzzed.

"Hello! Is that the school?"
 "Yes, Dr. Holman speaking," said the Head, recognizing
 the voice of Inspector Skeat of Wayland. "Is there any
 news, Mr. Skeat?"

"A boy named Wilbrake has called on me, sir—a boy
 belonging to the school—"

"Yes, there is a boy named Wilbrake in the Fourth Form
 here," said the Head. "But what—"

"He has informed me that while at the fair in Wayland
 this afternoon he came on Isaac, the man who is wanted
 for attempting to kidnap Master Troop."

"How did you see him, Mr. Skeat?" "Is it certain—"

"According to his statement, the man's actions raised his
 suspicions, and he got Trimble—the boy who knows him by
 sight—to look at him, and Trimble identified him as the
 man Isaac. There would seem to be something in it, at
 least, because the man threw away a tray of goods he was
 peddling, and ran for it."

"Very good, inspector. Then we may hope to hear that
 the suspected has been taken," said the Head.

"I hope so, sir; you may be sure we are not neglecting
 this information," said Mr. Skeat. "This boy, Wilbrake,
 seems to be an unusually keen and acute lad, and I am in-
 clined to believe that he has made no mistake. My belief
 is that the man was seen among the crowd at the fair
 by Sidney Troop, who, expecting him to be there
 with the others. It seems very probable, as he must have
 had a strong motive for coming in this direction at all,
 watched by the police as he—"

"Quite so," said the Head. "Fortunately, however,
 Troop is nowhere near Wayland; he has been kept within
 school gates ever since the last attempt was made."

"The man Isaac is now being looked for, sir, but I have
 no news yet of him. I rang you up to warn you that there
 seems no doubt that the kidnaping gang are in the neigh-
 bourhood again, and that it would be as well to ascertain
 that Troop is in safety."

"Thank you very much, inspector. There is no doubt on
 that point, as Troop has my strict orders not to venture
 out of gates."

Dr. Holman heard a cough along the wire.
 "Here! Quite so, Dr. Holman? I believe, however, that
 thoughtful schoolboys sometimes neglect such instructions,
 and as Troop may be in real danger if he leaves the
 school—"

"I have no doubt on the subject, Mr. Skeat; but I will
 see Troop myself and warn him specially to keep within
 bounds."

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 see Troop myself and warn him specially to keep within
 bounds."

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"Very good, sir. One cannot be too careful!"
 "I quite agree."

The Head put up the receiver and rang the bell for
 Toby, the House page.

Toby was given instructions to find Master Troop at
 once, and send him to the Head's study.

Then Dr. Holman returned to the Greek papers he was
 preparing for the Sixth Form, and in that congenial task
 he did not notice how the minutes slipped by. It was more
 than a quarter of an hour before Toby returned.

The Head looked up.
 "Where is Master Troop, Toby?"
 "I can't find him, sir."

"He is somewhere within the school," said the Head,
 frowning.

"I've looked for him everywhere, sir, and I've asked
 everybody I see," answered the page. "I can't find him,
 sir."

Dr. Holman's face became very grave.
 "Very well, Toby, you may go."

The Head remained some moments in thought after the
 page had gone. He had sent for Troop, to make some-
 thing doubly sure that the gated junior was within bounds.
 A doubt crossed his mind now, but he could scarcely believe
 that the Fourth-Former had disregarded the order that had
 been given him for his own safety.

Dr. Holman left his study at last and proceeded to Mr.
 Reddick's. He found the School House-master there, talk-
 ing with Mr. Lathson, the master of the Fourth Form. Both
 the masters rose to their feet as the Head appeared.

"I am a little anxious about Troop," said the Head.
 "I have just heard from Inspector Skeat that Isaac, the
 kidnapper, has been seen at Wayland. Toby cannot find
 the boy in the school; is it possible that he has disregarded
 orders and gone out of bounds?"

"There is a fair at Wayland," said Mr. Reddick. "It is
 possible a great of the other boys have gone—"

He glanced at Mr. Lathson.

"I scarcely think so, sir," said the Fourth Form master.
 "Troop is quite a sensible and obedient lad, as a rule. I
 saw him about two hours ago, and, indeed, offered to give
 him some help in depositing books, to pass the time while
 his friends were out of gates. I have not seen him since,
 but I am sure he is within bounds."

"Perhaps you will ascertain," suggested the Head. "If
 necessary, call the prefects, and have a thorough search
 made. The boy will be in actual danger, if he has been
 foolish enough to disregard the orders to-day."

"I will lose no time, sir," said Mr. Lathson.
 "And I also," said Mr. Reddick.

The Head returned to his study and to Greek papers.
 Mr. Lathson and Mr. Reddick lost no time.

The school was almost deserted; it was not yet time for
 the fellows to return from Wayland. Most of the juniors
 were out of gates, but there were some of the Sixth and
 the Fifth at hand, and the Housemaster called on them for aid
 in looking for Troop. The fact that he was not found at
 once seemed to indicate that he was no longer in the school,
 and even a regular search was proceeding.

The result of the search was to establish the indubitable
 fact that Sidney Troop was no longer within the walls of
 St. Jim's.

With that news, when there was no longer any doubt,
 Mr. Reddick proceeded to the Head's study.

"The foolish, reckless boy!" exclaimed the Head. "No
 doubt it is the fair that has attracted him and caused him
 to be guilty of this act of disobedience. The man Isaac
 was actually seen near the neighbourhood."

"If the boy has gone to Wayland, he would be safe after
 reaching the fair in so large a crowd," said Mr. Reddick.

"But—"

"But has he reached Wayland?"

"The probability is that he has, sir," said the House-
 master. "But there is certainly a doubt, from what Mr.
 Skeat says. Perhaps I had better go at once to Wayland,
 and if he is there he shall return in my company."

"It is asking you to take a great deal of trouble, Mr.
 Reddick—"

"Not at all, sir," said the Housemaster. "As a matter
 of fact, I was thinking of taking a spin on my motor-
 bicycle."

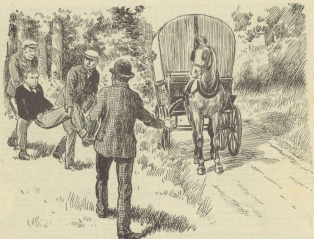
"Then I shall be very much obliged, Mr. Reddick. If
 Troop has gone to the fair, some of the other boys will
 have seen him, at least, and you will get news of him."

Two minutes later Mr. Reddick was seated on Wayland
 town on his motor-bike. By that well-travelled road it
 was a rapid run to the market town, and in a very short
 time Mr. Reddick was at the fair, amid the swarming
 crowds and the howling of the merry-go-rounds. Among the
 first St. Jim's fellows he saw were the Terrible Three
 coming off a swingboat.

"Merry!"

"Merry!"

"Merry!"



KIDNAPPED! Issues darted ahead, threading his way through the wood. At a little distance the two ruffians followed him, bearing Sidney Troop's baggage there. At last they emerged from the trees into a narrow lane, where a horse and covered cart awaited them. (See page 10.)

"Oh, yes, sir," said Tom, capping his Housemaster, quite surprised to see Mr. Railton at the fair.

"It seems that Troop of the Fourth has gone out of bounds, Merry. Have you seen him here?"

"No, sir," said Tom, and Messers and Leather shook their heads.

"I hardly like to ask you to give up your entertainment, my boys," said the Housemaster kindly. "But the matter is serious, and I should like you to help me find Troop if he is here. The foolish lad is actually in danger outside the school."

"Certainly, sir," said the Terrible Three with one voice, cheerily enough.

And the Shell fellows proceeded to hunt for Troop of the Fourth, among the crowds at the fair, asking every St. Jim's fellow they met for news of him.

In a short time a score or more of St. Jim's jockeys were looking for Sidney Troop.

But there was no one who had seen him at the fair, and he was not to be found by the searchers in the throng.

It was fairly clear before long that Troop had never arrived at Wayland Fair, though it was certain that he must have left St. Jim's for the purpose of going there.

Mr. Railton at last recognized his master-like, and took away to the Wayland police-station to consult Inspector Wood.

Tom Merry & Co. walked home to St. Jim's in a cheery crowd as the autumn dusk was falling.

But there were many thoughtful faces in the crowd of schoolboys.

Troop had broken bounds to go to the fair—a venial offence in the eyes of most of the fellows. But he had not arrived at the fair, and that looked as if something had happened to him en route. And most of the fellows knew now that Eggy Trumble had recognized issues, the tid-sapper, at Wayland.

"Of course, the chap may have changed his mind, you know, and gone somewhere else," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked.

"It's quite possible," said Tom Merry. "But—"

"It is really too worthless of him, you know, which I specially warned him to keep his bounds," said D'Arcy,

shaking his head. "He appears to have taken no notice whatever of my very serious warning."

"Go home!" murmured Blake.

"Woolly, Blake—"

"Can't really blame the chap for looking, in the circumstances," said Monty Leather. "But—"

"If nothing's happened to him, he will get a jolly good licking from the Hood for coming all this bother," said Carder.

"Then, wotcha; and woolly he will deserve it!"

"Let's hope that it will be the licking, then," said Tom Merry. "I'm afraid it's worse than that. It's pretty certain that he started out to go to the fair, and if he never got there—"

"Perhaps we'll find him at the school when we get in," said Bates hopefully.

But when Tom Merry & Co. arrived at St. Jim's it was to learn that Troop was not there. When Tuggles looked the school gates, Troop of the Fourth was still missing.

By that time it was clear enough that something had happened to Troop. Even if he had changed his mind, and gone somewhere else instead of to Wayland Fair, he would not have stayed out after lock-up.

There were anxious faces in the School House at St. Jim's that evening.

Scarcely a doubt remained that the group of the missing kidnappers had closed upon Troop of the Fourth.

Both the Head and the Housemaster were busy on the telephone at intervals during the evening; but there came no news from Inspector Skew.

Sidney Troop seemed to have vanished into thin air.

At bedtime he had not returned, and by then the last lingering doubt had vanished.

"He's kidnapped!" said Tom Merry, as he looked out into the starlight from the great doorway of the House. "Those ruffians have got hold of him at last! They were watching for a chance, at evening."

"Railton's still out," said Leather. "I can hear a noise-like rum—perhaps Railton will bring news."

"Bedtime, now kids!" called out Kildare of the Sixth.

"Hold an ill Mr. Railton comes in, Kildare—there may be news."

THE GUN LINGERER.—No. 101.

be none of Troop?" said Tom Merry. "He's coming in now."

Kildare nodded, and joined the little crowd at the door-way. There were steps outside, and the stalwart figure of Mr. Railton loomed up. The house-master came in, and all eyes were fixed on him at once.

"What have you?" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arvy. "What's the matter with Railton?"

The same question was in every mind.

Mr. Railton's face was white and set, and the look in his eyes was strange and strained. He looked like a man who had some fearful sight, or listened to news of horror. And as they stared at him, all the fellows there felt a chill. Was there news of Troop?—was it black news—news of something worse than kidnapping?

Tom Merry started forward.

"Mr. Railton! Is there any news—about Troop?"

"There is news," said Mr. Railton, in a hoarse voice, "Go to bed now, my boys—you will hear to-morrow." He hurried on towards the Head's study.

The juniors gazed at one another. "There were white faces in the crowd now."

"What on earth has happened?" muttered Levinson of the Fourth.

"He—he can't be—can't be—" Tom Merry broke off, his lips refusing to utter the terrible word.

"Dead!" breathed Carlow.

"Impossible!"

"That's what Railton looked like."

"Impossible!" said Tom, with white lips.

Was it impossible? What was the meaning of that strange, set, strained look as the House-master's door—that strange horror in his eyes? Hushed, chilled, the School House Juniors went to their dormitories—but it was a late hour that night before most of them slept.

CHAPTER 7.

Under the Shadow!

THE news leaked out at St. Jiv's the next day. It ran a shadow over the whole school—a chill of horror.

Even after all details were known, it seemed incredible—seemed too fearful to be true.

Yet there seemed no more to be said. Troop, of the Fourth, the level-headed, easy-going fellow, whom everyone had liked who knew him—Troop was dead—murdered! It was to that terrible conclusion that the evidence pointed.

By whose hand had the fearful deed been done? There could be little doubt on that point—basely, the racing man, was the assassin. Far and wide the police were searching for him now, to arrest him on the capital charge.

And yet the St. Jiv's fellows could scarcely believe that it was real, that it was true, that it could be true. Even when they knew that a warrant was out for him, on the charge of murder, they could scarcely believe.

Troop—poor old Troop! For what reason could any man, however hard-bred and desperate, have done so wrong and murdered a dead? He was not a madman—he must have had a motive. But what motive could any man have had for such a crime?

Yet it seemed impossible to doubt.

Troop's cap had been found on the towing-path a couple of miles from St. Jiv's—in the rushes at the edge of the Pool, the most dangerous reach of the river, where more than one strong swimmer had come to grief. In the cap was a bullet-hole from a revolver discharged at such close quarters that the cloth had been scorched by it. The cap was dotted with blood.

That was the discovery, made in the stable evening by the searching police, that had sent Mr. Railton back to St. Jiv's with a white face.

Further discoveries had followed with the dawn.

On the spot where the cap had been found, a cord of police had been drawn, and within the corded Inspector Sheat had made his search—minutely, methodically.

It was easily to be seen where a body, or at least some heavy object, had been dragged across the towing-path, through the crushed and broken rushes, to the river.

Every eye pointed to the fact that the murdered junior had been conveyed to the river at that spot, and the cap, doubtless, had fallen as he was launched into the water, or had been brushed off by the rushes, unscathed, it would seem, by the turbulence in the danger of the straight. There the blood-stained, pierced cap had remained, to reveal where the assassin had disposed of his victim's body. And that was not all.

A hundred yards further down the river a handkerchief was found, known to be Troop's by the initials worked

on it stained crimson here and there, and caught in a bunch of reeds.

Of the body nothing was yet discovered. The river was being dragged for it.

But it was not likely that the deep, dark Pool, with its whirling currents, would give up its secret soon. The body might have been carried far away—it might have sunk into some crevice in the deep river-beds—especially as it had evidently been weighted with heavy stones. Close by the spot where the cap had been found there had been picked up a large stone, obviously taken from the Rylands Road and carried to the river, a distance of half a mile. On the Rylands Road was a stack of such stones, placed for repair of the road on the trench there was no stone larger than a rubble that belonged there. And Inspector Sheat, when he found the handkerchief's stone, had no doubt that it was one of many that had been used to weight the body.

With such evidence to go upon, it seemed impossible to doubt that Sidney Troop was gone for ever from the eyes of his friends.

Still, the motive of the crime was unknown, to remain unknown, doubtless, till heaven should be arrested. It seemed impossible to imagine a motive for the kidnapping equally impossible to imagine a motive for the kidnapping of Troop. It seemed clear that the kidnappers had acted upon the supposition that he had resisted, and that the final shot had been fired, either to the struggle, or in a moment of vengeance. The fellows recalled how the kidnapper, on the occasion of the first attack on Troop, had made his escape from a crowd by deserting them with a revolver. It was evident that he was a cool and desperate man; and this time he had used his weapon!

It was like a black cloud over the school. The fellows spoke to one another in whispers that day. The terrible news had a stunning effect on them.

Nothing else was discussed in the school, but it was discussed with hated breath.

"It's too horrible," said Arthur Augustus Gladly, in Study No. 2. "It's really too fatal, you fellows! It seems too horrible to be really true, you know."

"It does!" said Blake pleasantly. "But it's true, right enough. My hat, I hope they'll find that villain soon."

"They're bound to find him, and then we shall know why he did it," said Herriot. "Goodness knows why, but he must have had an awful down on poor old Troop."

"Of course, Troop put up a fight," said Dig. "He would, you know—he had lots of pluck. Then that would bring that bit."

"Yes, that's it," said Arthur Augustus. "Poor old Troop! But Jove, wouldn't he keep on getting in my eye."

In all the studies that evening the St. Jiv fellows were discussing the tragedy, expecting to hear, from hour to hour, that poor Troop's body had been found.

In No. 9 Study, Ralph Brockless Carlow was listening, while Levinson and Clive talked, with a thoughtful expression on his face. Carlow put in a word occasionally.

"It seems to me pretty clear, you fellows."

Levinson stared at him.

"What does?"

"The motive!" said Carlow quietly.

"I don't see—"

"I fancy poor old Troop owes this to his wife's legacy," said Carlow. "There's been so much talk about his affairs now that I suppose you fellows know that old Colonel Troop left him his racing-stable and his famous horse Kobi-Noor—"

"Yes, we know that," said Clive. "But I don't see—"

"Troop was the owner of Kobi-Noor, who runs in the Right Hundred Guinea race," said Carlow. "He had a good control over the matter—the trainer was responsible for the whole thing, under the instructions in the colonel's will. But Troop was the actual owner of the horse."

"That's well known," said Levinson, with a perplexed look at Carlow. "But here does that touch this matter?"

"Then did it, I think," said Carlow. "Some gang of racing men have been laying heavy money on some other horse. I should imagine—and anybody who looks at the racing papers will see that Kobi-Noor is pretty well known to be the certain winner. You can tell that by the money laid—the bookies won't take betting against him, except at fantastic odds. In fact, it's a walk-over for Kobi-Noor all the way."

"What then?" asked Clive.

"He won't run now," said Carlow.

"Why not?"

"Because all a horse's engagements are cancelled by the death of the owner," said Carlow, very quietly.

Carlow's cheeks started at him.

"Good heavens!" muttered Clive.

"It's so," said Levinson. "I remember now—it's the Troop's death that takes the name out of the Right Hundred Guinea. Any hater who was afraid of Kobi-Noor is safe now."

"Could anybody be awful villain enough—" breathed Clive.

Carden shrugged his shoulders.

"A racing man, up to the neck in bets that he couldn't lose, with ruin waiting him in the face, might be capable of a lot," he said. "But it's all, you hear sometimes of people being honest, sometimes considered, by a gang of racing toughs, for their watches and the money in their pockets. This means a man of that kind. Troop's death takes Koko-Nooz out of the Eight Hundred Gaijans—and there must be a lot of racing men who will jump for joy on hearing that the favourite has been scratched. That's the motive, depend on it."

"If that's so, I suppose the police will be on to it," said Clive, with a gasp.

"Rejoice in it, Mr. Stout tarried to that, to begin with," said Carden. "He hasn't said so, because he wouldn't want to risk a word getting out to put the villains on their guard. But he knows where to look for Isaac & Co.—among the racing men, who had a bet in love of Koko-Nooz had a walk-over in the big race."

And when Carden's suggestion came to be discussed in the studio, the St. John's fellows concurred in the belief that he had guessed the truth. It was a motive for the murder, and it was the only imaginable motive. It explained much—but it came as an added blow to fellows who had hoped, against all appearance, that Troop might yet be living. For if this was the motive of the crime, it was a motive for more kidnaping—it was a motive for the unhappy boy's death. And that night, there was not a fellow at St. John's who expected ever to see Sidney Troop, of the Fourth, alive again—with possibly one exception.

That exception was Kit Widdrake.

CHAPTER 8.

Widdrake is not Satisfied:

"FOOTBALL!"

"No."

"Watch not."

A House-match was due that Saturday afternoon; but by common consent it was postponed. Tom Merry & Co. were in no mood for the game, and Piggins & Co., of the New House, fully agreed with them.

The shadow of poor Troop's terrible fate hung heavily over the school.

It was on Wednesday afternoon that he had vanished from the sight of all living eyes. Now it was Saturday, and the body had not yet been recovered from the river. The ongoing operations were still going on. Lower down the river, sooner or later, the several remains of poor Troop were expected to be recovered. Weather had any news been received of the arrest of the kidnaping gang—the gang of associates. Inance, the head-farmer racing team, Spirit and Tangle, seemed to have disappeared from the earth.

But it was not, after all, to be expected that the arrest would take place soon. The sporting men and Tangle were known only from a vague description, given by Buggy Trumble, who had been in a terrible state while in their presence, and from a description given by the Terrible Three, who had sighted them once, and only for a few moments. Each description was helpful, but not very helpful. As for Inance, his description was a little clearer, and his name was known; but it was likely enough that "Inance" was only one of many names by which the casual wad at different times, very doubtful indeed whether it was his own. It was probable, too, that he had been partly disguised at the time Trumble had seen him, as on the occasion when both Trumble and Widdrake had seen him at Weyland Fair.

The police, in fact, had an extremely difficult task in their hands, to track out the three desperadoes, and success was not likely to come soon, if it came at all.

"If a fellow could only do something!" Tom Merry said, as he walked out into the street, with his chance, after dinner on Thursday. "If a fellow could only lend a hand in bringing these devils to justice!"

"If a fellow only could," said Messers. "But there's nothing we can do."

"Nothing," said Lawless. "Of course, they've got enough away from here by this time."

"No doubt about that," asserted Tom glumly.

Kit Widdrake came out of the House and crossed over to the path under the elms, where the Terrible Three were walking. There was a very serious expression on the Canadian junior's face.

"You fellows looked for the afternoon?" he asked.

"No," breath'd he off.

"The fact is, a fellow can't do anything," said Monte Lawless. "Blasphemy I've got the heart for anything at all, except to march round and feel miserable."

"That won't do anybody any good, I guess."

"I know that, too! But there it is."

"Well, if you've got nothing better on, you might like to join up with me for the afternoon," said Widdrake.

"What's the game?" asked Tom, without much interest. Like his class, he was not looking out for anything at all. It was yet like him in "sneez" about his own spirit, but the terrible shadow of Troop's fate hung over him like a cloud.

"I guess I'm going to look for Troop," said the Canadian junior, very quietly.

"Tom Merry stared at him. "You can't lend a hand in dragging the river—you wouldn't be allowed, either."

"I guess I'm not thinking of that," said Widdrake. "Look here, you fellows, we're friends of Troop's, and I like the chap—though I didn't know him specially well. He seems a decent sort to me."

The chimes of the Shell fixed their eyes on Widdrake. He was of the present tense struck dumb, and paced on these occasions.

"You mean—he seemed—"

"I'll not let it be that soon, I guess, when I've driven to it, and not before," said Widdrake. "Everybody's made up his mind that poor old Troop is a gone case. Well, I'm not satisfied."

"Not satisfied?" repeated Messers.

"Nope."

"If you mean, they haven't recovered the body, that's nothing," said Tom. "A runaway was lost in the Ford case, and the body was not recovered for six or seven weeks."

"And Troop was weighted down with stones," said Lawless.

"I guess I've got my reasons," said Widdrake. "Mind, I'm not banking on this as a sure thing. But it looks to me very much as if Troop is so alive as I am, and I'm going on for what it's worth. It would like to hear my reasons—"

"I jolly well would!" said Tom. "I know you're not such an ass as to talk out of your hat, Widdrake; especially on such a subject. But it seems to me that the proof's so complete as it can be that poor old Troop is dead."

"A little too complete, I guess."

"What not?" said Messers. "Don't you know that his horse, Koko-Nooz, has been taken out of the Eight Hundred Gaijans race? The stewards are satisfied that he is dead, so they wouldn't take that step."

"They're bound to take it, I guess, on the evidence," said Widdrake.

"Well, then—"

"And I calculate that that is what the evidence is for!" said the Canadian junior.

"What?"

"Set down here, and I'll tell you how I figure it out."

The junior sat down on an old broken bench under the elms. Tom Merry and Messers and Lawless stood the Canadian eagerly. Happily in the case seemed, his words had aroused a vague hope in their breasts. And even that hope was something to cling to. And they knew that the junior from the Head Long Ranch was a cool, clear-headed fellow, not in the least likely to talk "out of his hat."

"Well, go it," said Tom. "We'd be jolly glad to believe that there was a chance of seeing poor old Troop again alive and well."

"I guess there's a chance. According to what we know, Troop was released by that gang, Inance, Spirit, and Tangle, so he was to the fair," said Widdrake. "He was shot through the head at close range, and his body weighted with stones and sunk in the river. I know it looks like it—horribly like it; and it's pretty clear now that there's only one motive the villains could have had for going for him at all, and that motive led to murder, not to kidnaping. It means a clear case."

"It does?"

"But there's a three or two in it, all the same," pursued Widdrake. "In the first place, if they meant to kill the poor lad, why did they ever try to bring him at all? On the first day of term, you remember, they nearly got Inance—and Trumble gave the alarm, and Troop was saved. But that was because Inance was kidnaping him—in the railway train, close in the carriage with Troop, he could have shot him through the head if he had wanted to, and got quite clear."

"I suppose that's so," said Tom. "But—"

"The second time they got Trumble in mistake for Troop—but there was no shooting. They bagged Trumble, thinking he was Troop, and put him in a car, and took him away a good distance—Spirit and Tangle did. They got to a bungalow where they met Inance, and he—knowing Troop by sight—saw that his men had made a mistake, and Trumble was his man. The police have found that bungalow—deserted, of course. But why was it all fixed up like that, if their intention was to kill Troop? Why hire a bungalow in a false name, taking all the risk of it, not to mention the expense, if their object was to kill the poor lad and throw his body into the river?"

(Continued on page 12.)

The Gem Library—No. 921.

THE

St. Jim's News

EDITORIAL!

By Tom Merry.

A B. note and conditions of persons distinguished and otherwise, have just been to St. Jim's at different times. Even Royalty has looked in to give us "How'd you do?" But that was in the days of Good Queen Bess, when that illustrious monarch, mounted on a white steed, paid a personal visit to the school.

Many long-ago messages are at this stage with one of his petty jokes.

"Tommy," he says, "when were the English people the greatest painters in the world?"

"Give it up," I reply, smiling my head.

"When they had one great DEF on the Upper!" chuckles Monty.

I've threatened to give him a lecture of black-and-white ink if he doesn't stop it.

Royalty and rogues, lords and laynes, dukes and duchesses—all are included in our array of visitors. Rich relations and poor relations, great grandees and grinded grandpas are constantly visiting us, either in the stately halls of St. Jim's by day; missionaries have glided through the yard in their luminous; charming girl would have strolled sedately under the dome.

Yes, really! St. Jim's has accumulated all sorts and conditions—all shades and grades of society.

And yet we have never published a Special "Visitors" Number! There is one chance to make good the omission. This week you shall read of the visits of various people—of:

"Our sisters and our cousins
When we reckon up by dozens,
And our uncles!"

as often Shakespeare of W. S. Gilbert says—I forget which for the moment.

The visitors I list here are those who take an keen interest in all that they see, and are not the standing when they sit down to a well-laid table; people who don't mind "biting their tin" from headless eggs, or spending ten out of a hundred; prosperous matrons who, at the end of their stay, produce a budget wallet from their breast-pocket, and whisper: "Pray excuse this box, dear boy, with my 'best wishes'." These are the sort of visitors who make visitations a dream and a delight.

As for the gummy, portly old grandpa-people who stumps before us, round the corridors, and growls and grumbles at everything he sees, and wants to know what the present generation is coming to, he is the type of visitor whom we prefer at a distance! No, this is the miserly uncle who "lets out" things in company at the termination of his visit, and warns us not to make heads of cabbages of the tuckshop on the strength of our words!

I must say that, on the whole, visitors to St. Jim's are welcome at the Bazaar in May, and extremely popular in the hallways of morning lessons, and will have to be warned!

TOM MERRY.

RULES for VISITORS!

(To be strictly observed
Drawn up by MISS LAWRENCE.



1. Do not mistake Tupples, the porter, for the Head, and conversely raise your hat to him. Misspelt's short-sighted uncle did this once, and Tupples hasn't stopped pressing himself yet!

2. If a millionaire, don't let a throng of admiring fellows know how much your money. They'll probably pass on the tulips to their own peers!

3. The correct thing to do on arrival is to bid, "Good day—my nephew," as the case may be—to the tuckshop, and give him with politeness until he's the worse for food!

4. If you have a habit of dropping your sticks, being to lack of education in such matters, be careful to stow them close to the Head with the remark, "Yes, Uncle! Yes!" or your young "special" sitting on with is "Uncle and is 'Uncle!" If you do this sort of thing, your "young hospital" will not almost homicidal towards you!

5. When you sit down to eat at a table, don't expect to find everything "just so." If your relative is a chump from the "Boys' Board," and if your breakfast has surpassed the usual sort of breakfast and supper, you must take it with a cheery grin and not complain. You can't expect a better and not complain. You can't expect a better study to be a sort of miniature King of the Hill!

6. Never "high shop" to your son or nephew. Let him by all means, but **never** be lugged in his last House match, but on an account name you mention Latin or Greek or maths. Such topics are strictly taboo!

7. Before giving the usual "to" prior to your departure, ask your son or nephew what he considers to be a satisfactory gift. If it be a copy of a picture "from" it is a hundred times better than a hundred pounds worth of corn in Egypt, and means from the skin, and all the rest of it, amounts a cheque for that amount right away!

8. Visitors who have left their shoes-locks at home will not be admitted to the school!

MY UNCLE!

By
George Alfred Grundy

WHILD comes to see me twice a term,
And tells me things that make me wince,
And feel that I'm a brainless wretch!

My Uncle!

Who rolls up in a car-de-luxe,
As if he's one of England's dukes!
Who's made some few financial fakes!

My Uncle!

Who greets me with a crashing grip
Which fairly makes me lose and skip!
(Why don't he kiss me on the lip?)

My Uncle!

Who boasts at Wilkie and at Gann,
And to the tuckshop both doors run,
And treats them to a Bally Linn!

My Uncle!

Who struts majestic in and fro
As if he owns the blessed show,
And rules all creatures here below!

My Uncle!

Who met with a most dire mishap,
And walked into a bookshop,
Prepared by some designing thug?

My Uncle!

Who rumped and raged, and tore his hair,
And made me tremble with despair!
(Sat on a chair that wasn't there!)

My Uncle!

Who threatened me for half an hour
And looked quite grim and furore and sour,
Who cover me did stand and tower?

My Uncle!

Who said to me, the stern olduffer,
"You are a dandified, a duffer!
Ingross, or you shall surely suffer!"

My Uncle!

But who, before he left the place,
Extracted from his pocket case
A "friv," with a bearing face!

My Uncle!

Who always tips on lavish scale
The one and only relative male
I do possess—his's not for sale!

My Uncle!

Who, though a grim old martinet,
Has never managed to forget
To "tip" his living nephew's net!

My Uncle!

READ THE SPECIAL
"COMMON-ROOM"
SUPPLEMENT
IN THIS WEEK'S
"MAGNET" Library.



BAGGY'S DREADFUL BLUNDER!

By Reginald Talbot.

"I can see what Leather's game is," said Mr. Bako. "He's got to depend on your help, or he'll lose up to \$5,000. It's in a good way. I'll show you'll catch your man, Baggy!"

"I haven't seen him since I was six years old."

"Then you'll have forgotten what he looks like. Leather's brother is that, or he's cousin or nephew on the lap of the law."

Baggy Trimble looked the picture of despair. He stared almost wildly at Bako. "No," Uncle Robert was not coming to see him, after all! It was all a hoax on Leather's part, and the telegram was a snarl. Baggy had destroyed the wire, so he could not verify the address of the leading office."

It seemed only too probable that Bako was right—that Monty Leather had visited the post-office before dinner, and dispatched that telegram to Trimble.

The ink indeed nearly went. After all the trouble he had taken in looking himself in the mirror and the hair, so to speak, Uncle Robert wasn't coming? It was a blow. Uncle Robert who would come leading of the herd who would come leading, and driving a hard cut."

It was a bitter pill for Baggy, but he could find consolation. Bako had put him wise about the projected trip, and when the long receipt, Trimble would see to that. Baggy's blood boiled at the thought of how he had been duped by that telegram, and when he was used to go for Leather by mail up, his mind to go for Leather at St. Jim's in his beloved person."

"The awful matter!" gasped Baggy. "Are you quite sure, Bako, that you see him send of a telegram?"

"Quite," said Bako. "He was checking, but when he wrote it."

That seemed to put the matter beyond all doubt.

"I'm much obliged to you, Bako, for telling me this," said Trimble.

"You're welcome," said Bako cheerfully. "What are you going to do when Uncle Robert turns up?"

"I'll Uncle Robert, but I'll jolly well hunt him!"

"He, he, he!"

Baggy was not a gentleman, as a rule, but he was so serious with Monty Leather that he would have readily have himself upon the road and receive him tip and kick if that were possible.

"Listen," said Uncle Robert. "Monty has a car coming."

Baggy Trimble stamped his gloves into his pocket and dashed his hands, and rushed down to the hotel garage.

A car turned slowly into the gateway. It

was not a luxurious limousine such as Trimble had portrayed. For from it, it was a very ordinary run-out coach with a car as might have been loaned from the garage in Montreal.

Seated in the car was a personification of gentleness in a heavy overcoat with a fur collar. The gentleman had a heavy face, a nose, and a baggy mouth with three large adenoidal spots. He had no doubt they were false. He did no doubt either that the person at the steering-wheel was Monty Leather.

"Now for the merry thrills!" shrieked Monty. "Bako! Robert's going to get it in the neck! I suppose it really is Leather, Bako? You weren't pulling Trimble's leg?"

"Not a bit of it," said Bako. "I saw Leather send a telegram, or checking over it, and it's pretty obvious that he's playing a large on Trimble."

The car came to a halt in the quadrangle. The bearded gentleman stepped out of it, and before he had time to get his hat on a fat and burly figure came bounding into him with lowered head.

"Good!"

"With a hat and a wig of angular, Uncle Robert was shown suddenly."

Baggy Trimble stood glaring down at him. "You better!" he roared. "I'll teach you to play these sort of tricks on me! Get up, and I'll give you a jolly good lesson!"

"Bago!" gasped the gentleman, as he struggled into a driving posture. "What—what has this outrage meant? Have you taken leave of your senses? How dare you assault me—your uncle—in this manner?"

"You're not my uncle!" bawled Trimble. "You're Leather of the West! You're a sporting man, and I'm going to give you the beating of your life!"

There was a patting of feet, and quite a crowd of fellows came running up to witness the extraordinary scene. Baggy dashed and leaped at them, and then he gave a terrible gasp of surprise as he saw the costume through which had collected in the entrance was Monty Leather!

"Oh, oh, oh!" said Trimble, as he gazed with dismay upon him. "It is he! It is he! It is he! He's the Uncle Robert!"

"Certainly I am," said Uncle Robert. "I had that gentleman's promise, as he referred to it. I had that in the card of reception I got from my nephew, after coming all the way from London to see him."

"Bako!" bawled Baggy, in great distress. "I'm awfully sorry I mistaken into you like that. I'd do it if I was really you. I thought you was one of the fellows—a chap with a name for practical joking."

Uncle Robert dashed himself down with his sparkling spectacles.

"You conduct?" said Baggy, in unappreciation. "It is explained to me. I have a very good mind to report it to your treatment. You conduct me to your study, where you can discuss this outrageous affair more fully."

Baggy Trimble, looking very crestfallen, asked Uncle Robert through the coach. After what had happened, Baggy was now in despair of getting the head "tip" which considerable money bestowed upon their nephew.

However, Uncle Robert, slumped down in the afternoon advanced, and under the influence of a good fire, he became almost genial. When he suddenly took to his room he bestowed a ten-dollar note upon his young nephew. It was not exactly a colossal tip, but it was more than Baggy had expected.

It happened later that Monty Leather had indeed sent a telegram of the post-office.

It had been a humorous wife to Bob Cherry of Greenville, and that was why Leather had chuckled over it.

After Bako had got hold of the wrong end of the stick, supposing that Leather was playing a large on Trimble, Baggy also had got hold of the wrong end of the stick. But he had got hold of a ten-dollar note at the bank, and that made some amends for his doubtful blunder."

END.

BAGGY TRIMBLE came majestically down the main street of St. Jim, in a very replacement limousine, attired in his Sunday best, and with a shining old topper perched on his head. A shiny fancy waistcoat, a pair of spats, and a big decoration to his hat, made up part of Baggy's equipment. For once in a way, the fat lumber had treated himself to the luxury of a walk, and his plump face glowed from the second morning. He had also donned a steam collar, and he carried a pair of elegant kid gloves.

It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and Bako and Crooks and Mellick were hanging at the head of the Second House steps when Baggy made his majestic descent. They gazed at him in wonder.

"Hallo, Baggy!" shrieked Bako. "You look like Robinson in all his glory days! You're in a wondrous!"

"No," said Trimble laconically. "My uncle's coming to see me this afternoon—my Uncle Robert!"

"Oh! I imagined you got a telegram today. Was that to say that your Uncle Bob was coming?"

"That! He'll be putting an ungrateful public on their feet!" gasped Mellick.

"He, he, he," said Mellick, who Uncle Robert's coming meant. He's what they call a million-dollar—that is to say, a millionaire a million times over!"

"Good job!"

"He's simply rolling in it!" said Trimble impressively. "He made his money out of westland."

"A hundred thousand, what!" said Crooks.

"My uncle's got so much money," said on Trimble, giving full play to his fertile imagination, "that he simply doesn't know what to do to get rid of it. He gives a million to his charity, and a million to that, and a million in the office, but his bank-balance seems to go on growing."

And doubtless Trimble's story would have gone on growing if Bako & Co. had been prepared to listen patiently, but they weren't!

"I expect the truth of the matter is," said Mellick, "that Baggy's Uncle Bob is a partner in a westland factory, something about thirty bob a week."

Baggy Trimble gave a snarl. "And you want all my uncle come rolling up in his limousine!" he said. "He'll make such an impression that you'll all be bowing and scraping before him!"

"Quite my friend," cried Bako. "You can bet we'll all give him the tip, Baggy! I don't believe your Uncle Bob's coming at all!"

"What! But I've had a telegram from him!"

"A fake!" said Bako coolly.

Baggy Trimble blinked at Bako almost in horror.

"A—a fake telegram!" he stammered. "What makes you think that, Bako?"

"I went down to the post-office just after midnight," said Bako, "and Leather was there smiling at a wife. You know what a jolly fellow he's always been, somebody or other. I've no doubt he sent you that telegram, or you were not enough to notice the fact!"

"Oh, crickets!" gasped Baggy in dismay.



A fat and burly figure came bounding into Uncle Robert.

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"Wildrake on the Trail!"

(Continued from page 11.)

Tom Merry & Co. were silent.

"That's what I've been figuring out," said Wildrake. "It might be just that they intended kidnaping first, and decided on murder afterwards—or that Troops was shot in resisting kidnaping. But that won't wash, if their object was to get Kobi-Noor scratched from the Eight Hundred Guinea. Only Troops's death could serve their turn."

"But you seem to be going round in a circle," said Tom. "Why they tried kidnaping first is a mystery—but we know they did."

"Quite! And if they had succeeded in lugging Troops the first time, or the second time, I guess that these people that he had been murdered would have been found all the same."

"I don't quite see—"

"Look at it!" said Wildrake. "Troops's death was what they wanted, and I guess they'd have jumped for joy if he'd fallen under a railway train or a motor-car! But, however much they wanted his death, even a really bad man might pick at such an awful thing as murder, though he would be quite ready for a kidnaping stunt. And there's such things as a language and its reputation being good reasons why they shouldn't kill Troops if they could possibly help it."

"But you've said yourself that only his death could serve their turn," said Tom.

"Oh the proof of his death," said Wildrake quietly.

"Proof of what had happened?" asked Mansness quietly.

"Exactly!" said Wildrake.

And then there was silence again in the chairs of the Shell, saved blankly at Kit Wildrake.

CHAPTER 8. Wildrake Gets Busy!

"WILDLAKE, old man—" said Tom Merry, at last. "It's too steep!" said Mansness.

And Monty Leather shook his head.

Wildrake smiled faintly.

He knew that his silence was a startling one, and he was prepared for incredulity. He went on quietly:

"I guess I've thought it over and figured it out. I'm not backing up it. I don't know the facts any more than you do. But I guess it's likely enough that when Troops is still alive, a kidnaping prisoner, and will be turned loose after the Eight Hundred Guinea is run. So long as the men afterwards believe that he is dead, that is enough for Isaac & Co. And they believe it."

"Everyone believes it," said Tom. "His guardian, Mr. Pilkington, does. The Head does. The police do. Why, there's a warrant out for murder against the man himself! Finding the body is only a question of time—hours, perhaps. Wildrake, old man, you've let your imagination run away with you."

"I guess it's possible, but I don't think so," said the Canadian junior. "I've gone over the evidence, so far as the police have made it public. It's done enough to show that some bones on the landing-path hints that the road-builder's staves were used to weigh the body before it was thrown in."

"True enough," said Mansness.

"Plain enough that it was meant to give that impression, perhaps. And the villain who weighed the body so carefully never careless enough to leave a bloodstained cap, with a bullet-hole in it, in the racket?"

"It was starlight, and fairly dark," said Mansness. "They didn't notice it."

"It was found the same night, by the same starlight—by a Wayland policeman. He noticed it."

"That's so," said Tom. "But—"

"But there was a bullet-hole through the cap, and it was soaked in blood!" said Leather, with a shudder.

"Easy enough to shoot a hole through a cap hanging on a nail or a branch, I guess, and no clot of blood. It would be worth while to cut a finger over the job—or a good many fingers," said Wildrake. "Of course, the evidence may, and very likely does, mean exactly what it seems to mean. But it may mean only that Isaac & Co. want to have it believed that Troops is dead, while he's really alive. It would be safer for their game concerning Kobi-Noor for him to be

dead. But why's a good deal safer for their necks for him to be alive, and most galsos think of their necks first."

"That's true enough."

"If they'd killed him," went on Wildrake, "why didn't they leave the body where it fell? Hiding in the river didn't make things safer for them. Troops was bound to be searched for, and the search would go on till he was found, alive or dead. And if the game is to I guess in the man-made way that Kobi-Noor's owner is dead, the more proof they gave of that the better; and the finding of the body would have put it beyond doubt. It was just possible that the race towards night's end scratched Kobi-Noor on the evidence, and in that case they would have committed the crime for nothing. I guess it looks to me that, if they really had killed Troops, and taken such a frightful risk for a racing gambler, they would have put the body where it could be found at the earliest possible moment."

Tom Merry nodded slowly.

"They might have been jolly well frightened afterwards, and tried hard to hide what they'd done," said Mansness.

"But that was a risk, too—a big risk. You know where Troops's cap was found, down the river by the Post. They must have carried the body down in a sack, perhaps. But the Post is two miles, at least, from the footpath in the wood. Now, we've pretty certain—as sure as we can be—that Troops got out to win the race. He told me he was thinking of changing it. Well, if he was going to Wayland—well, he, too, after all the claims had gone—which way would he go? By the direct footpath, I guess, and that's where they got him."

"That's probable enough."

"But if they got him in the wood, would they hang about all dark with the body, and then carry it two miles?" argued Wildrake. "They may have been scared at what they'd done, but I guess scare doesn't make galsos take a risk like that."

"Only they did," said Leather.

"Well, if they did, they did! I don't set up to know better than everybody else. But I've thought hard over it, and it seems to me that there is a sporting chance, at least that Troops is still alive, kept close by these scoundrels till after the race is run."

"Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"There may be a chance," he said. "I—I think there's a chance—a sporting chance—as you say. But, in that case, Troops will come back into after the race. They won't want him after that."

"Correct! A walk in some hidden hole, with a raffish villain watching him," said Wildrake. "If that's how the matter stands, we want to save him from that if we can. Unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless a double should get abroad about his death," said Wildrake, in a low voice. "People who have backed Kobi-Noor will kick up a fuss, pointing out that there's no actual proof of death until the body is produced at the inquest; the manager may be keen to run the horse; that he's specially trained for the big race, and may have been backed with a lot of money. It's on the cards that Kobi-Noor might run, after all; and if that should be decided, what will happen to Troops, helpless in the hands of those dastardly scoundrels? Will they give up their scheme? Or will they take the final risk—the risk they've been trying to dodge by all this tuckery—and will Troops's body be found, a proof of his death?"

Tom Merry chuckled.

"I've been a long time hard over this," went on Wildrake, "and I guess I've figured it out as nobody else here figures it out. But I shouldn't be surprised if it came out later that Inspector Stout has figured it out in exactly the same manner, and is keeping it dark, because he knows the world risk Troops runs if he is a prisoner, and if there should be doubt of his death. About that, I can't say; but I guess there's a sporting chance, at least, that old Troops is still living, a prisoner and in danger, and I'm going to do what I can. That's why I spoke to you fellows. We've got the afternoon. Let's put it in looking for 'signs.'"

"I'm been enough," said Tom at once, and Mansness and Leather nodded assent.

Wildrake rose from the bench.

"Come on, then," he said. "Let's get out of gains in begin with. The four are enough. We don't need a crowd."

"Let's go," answered Tom.

The Terrible Three walked down to the school gates with the Canadian junior.

Their faces were lighter now. The chance that Troops was dead, faint as it was, was something; and it was something to be actively at work, instead of "mooching" about thinking of the tragedy.

"And where do we begin?" asked Monty Leather as they turned out of the gates.

Wildrake was a Fourth Form fellow, junior to the Shell fellows, but he was the acknowledged leader on an expedition like this.

Good sports as Tom Merry & Co. were, they admitted that the junior from the Boat Leg Ranch was ahead of them in that line.

"But yourself in Troopie's place," said Wilbrake. "From what he said in several letters, it's clear that he was thinking of breaking through and going to the fair. We can take it for granted that that's why he left the school, coming to Wayland after the crowd of us had gone. Well, he wouldn't go round by the road, as he was late already."

"Not likely," said Tom. "He went by the footpath, of course."

"That's what I think. And that's where we begin," said Wilbrake. "We may pick up signs there. Of course, we're two days late in looking for it, but that can't be helped. We're lucky that the weather has been good, and if any sign has been left, it may be there still."

"There's a chance," said Mallow.

The juniors climbed the side from Rykondee Lane into the wood, and followed the footpath from the side towards the Wayland road.

It was under thick trees, hewn by the axeman. The path was thick with fallen leaves. Many had passed over that path since Wednesday; myriads of leaves had fallen in the axman's wake. Even the keen eyes of the Canadian could not learn anything there. But Kit Wilbrake kept his eyes well about him as he walked on.

Tom Merry & Co. followed him, in a sudden silence. It was as certain as anything could be that this was the path Troopie had followed on that fatal half-holiday, and the chance of the Shell could please him, in their mind's eye, treading cheerily along the footpath under the trees, hurrying to make up for lost time, bound for the fun of the fair, which he was destined never to reach. If he had taken that path—which seemed natural—something had happened to him before he could reach Wayland; and it was easy enough to guess that the kidnapers had been watching the path, expecting, or hoping, that the doomed junior would be going to the fair like the others.

Had he gone with a crowd of St. Joe's fellows, their task would have been a difficult one; it was because he had been left behind, and had, after all, broken through and gone by himself, that they had found their task easy. Poor Troopie had never imagined the terrible results of that one act of thoughtless disobedience.

Somewhere on that shady path, winding through the wood, the enemy had been watching, and had closed in on him, and then—

Then the fatal shot had been fired, doubtless in the struggle. Troopie was a plucky fellow, and would get up a fight. The revolver might have been put to his head as a

menace; maybe might not have been actually intended. No one could say until the criminals were brought to justice.

The shot might have been discharged without intention, the axman becoming a carelessly lost in a lawless struggle. Or—so Wilbrake might be right, and the whole appearance of murder might be a piece of ghastly trickery, and Troopie living still. Who could say? There was little hope. It seemed to the Terrible Three that Wilbrake's theory was more ingenious than convincing. Even if the body was not recovered from the river, they knew that Troopie's death would be legally assumed, for the despatch of his fortune. And that seemed so with the matter. Olds and wiser heads than theirs had decided that there was no hope. And yet they clung to the glimmer of hope that the Canadian junior's words had inspired in them.

Wilbrake moved slowly. He did not keep to the path. He explored the thickets and trees on either side. He examined every opening among the trees and undergrowth. Progress was slow, but the juniors were patient. Usually it was in easy half-hour's walk through the wood to the Wayland road. When more than an hour had elapsed, the juniors were on half-way through the wood.

The Canadian junior stopped at last. He was standing knee-deep in ferns, amid the thickets that grew thickly by the side of the footpath, about half-way through the wood. The Terrible Three, stepping in the path, looked at him with eager inquiry.

"You've found something?" asked Tom Merry.
"I guess so."
"And what—"
"The ambush!"

CHAPTER 10.

The Trail of the Kidnappers!

WILBRAKE dropped on his knees in the ferns. From the path, Tom Merry & Co. watched him through the interstices of the thicket.

The Canadian junior's face was keen and eager. For the time he had forgotten that he was a schoolboy at St. Joe's. He was once more the teacher's son on the Boat Leg Ranch, in far-off British Columbia. He was a hunter, keen on the track as when he had followed the trail of moose or caribou in the distant Dominion.

Several times the Shell fellows saw him nod, as if with satisfaction, and they watched his face brightening. And they looked keenly and curiously at the spot he was examining. They were never themselves, though, of course, they had never had the experience that had been Wilbrake's on the occasion and the precise.

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And the thickets grew a tall, heavy-branched oak-tree, at a short distance from the path, screened from the path by the thickets. The ground was covered with grass and fern, and the Shell fellows could read "signs" there, to the extent that they could see that someone had been on the spot. No one, except for a special object, would have been likely to walk his way from the footpath through these thickets to the trunk of the oak, and so it was probable, at least, that this was the spot where the kidnappers had watched the Troop. Granted that, watching the path that Wednesday afternoon, doubtless they had seen comrades of St. Jim's fellows pass there, and at last Troop—alone! It was probable, too, to the eyes of the Shell fellows there was no proof of it: Yet from Wilbrake's looks it seemed that he was deducing proof from the "signs" that was left after the lapse of two days.

The Canadian junior looked up at last.
 "I guess they got him here," he said.
 "It's likely enough," said Monty Leother. "But—"
 "Lucky there's been no rain! I guess I wish I'd got on to this two days ago more, but it can't be helped; better late than never. They waited here—two of them, and afterwards went there. We know that there are three in the kidnapping gang, and we know that one of these, Logan, was at the fair that afternoon, got up as a ticket merchant, looking round there for Troop. I figure it out that Squary and Tudge were here, and James came along and joined them after I spotted him at the fair, and so had to run."

The Shell fellows eyed him dubiously.
 "Likely enough," said Tom. "But—"
 "But—" murmured Muzzers.
 "Come a bit nearer, and see your eyes," said Wilbrake. "A man in a rough grey coat sat here, smoking a pipe, and another man was smoking cigarettes. They waited a long time. Why should they stick under this tree a long time, if unless they were watching for somebody on the path? It was the kidnapping gang."
 "How do you know they waited a long time?" asked Leother.
 "Mind, I'm not saying they didn't. If they were the kidnappers, it's very likely they did. But—"
 "And the giddy guy cost?" murmured Muzzers.

Wilbrake smiled.
 "Look at the tree," he said. "Look at the bark! Naturally, fellows waiting here might sit down and lean on the tree. That's why I examined the bark. You'll find it a dozen places that some rough grey cloth has rubbed on the bark; there are threads of it left there. Look!"

"Oh—"
 "And now look, and you'll see where the glibest knacker took his pipe. Tobacco ash, here—and here—and here. Troop's in it a dozen places, if you look for it. He must have knackered out that pipe and lighted it again a dozen times, I should say. And that means that he was here a long time, doesn't it?"
 "I—I suppose it does."
 "And now look in this bush," went on Wilbrake. "I've spied out six cigarette-ends, and I show you there are more if we look for them. And a dozen old matches. A man doesn't smother a pipe and cigarettes at the same time. There was another man, and he smoked tips, while the glibest sitting against the tree smoked a pipe."

"Good man!" said Tom.

"It's two days ago, but you can still see in the grass where a heavy man sat under the tree, I guess."
 "Right enough," said Tom. "That's plain enough—broken ferns."

"And broken grass," said Wilbrake. "Why, this sign will be plain enough to read a week from now if the rain keeps off. Now, look here! The pair of them left plenty of tracks. Look at this bed of fallen leaves they tread over. You can see that there's a track of boots with nails in them and the print of shoes with rubber soles. The same man would wear both kinds, so there's another clue to a pair of them."

"Tree, O King!" said Monty Leother.
 "But the third man!" said Muzzers. "D's pretty clear that two men hang about here normally, but you mentioned a third man, who joined them later."
 "How do you figure that out?" asked Tom. "Of course, we know it's likely enough that if the two brutes were here watching for Troop, James came along and joined them when he had to run from Wayland Fair. But—"

Wilbrake smiled.
 "Look between the thicket, close by the path," he said. "You can see where three men were standing, side by side; the marks are plain enough. On the right, the man who was called Logan; in the middle, the one with rubber-soled shoes; on the left, another pair of tracks. Look!"

The Shell fellows stopped and examined the "signs" attentively.
 "There was no doubt about it. All the other 'signs' was of two men only; but in that one spot three men had stood side by side, facing the footpath."

"I guess it's a trick," said Wilbrake. "There's plenty of sign of two men, and only that one sign left of three, and I reckon that shows that two were on the spot for some time, and the third man only came along later, and wasn't here long."

"But why the thump should they stand in a row in the thicket there, like that?" asked Muzzers, peevishly.
 "I guess that was when Troop was spotted coming along," said Wilbrake. "What would they naturally do when they spotted him? Ledge up along the edge of the path, ready to jump on him as soon as he came abreast. I guess."

"Tom Meeves smiled.
 "It seemed to him that the Canadian junior had wanted it out completely.
 "The 'signs,' which would have escaped a careless eye altogether, had told the whole story of the ambush to the keen-eyed junior from the Boy's Leg Ranch."

"No law, no good," said Tom. "It happened here; at least, it looks like it. But what next, Wilbrake?"
 "Now we want to know what happened next," said Wilbrake. "They got here here, but they couldn't get him away without leaving signs, and that's what we've got to find. I've got one of Troop's old shoes in my pocket, and if he ran for it I'll pick up his trail easily enough. Nothing on the footpath, of course; but he may have taken to the wood, as those glibest were on the path. I guess we'll see."

"Which side of the path will you try?"
 "The other side. They would be between him and this side."

"Trap!"
 The junior crossed the footpath and entered the trees on the opposite side.
 In a very few minutes now Wilbrake picked up "signs" of poor Troop's hurried flight and the urgent pursuit of the kidnappers. It was signs that any St. Jim's crowd could have picked up, once on the alert for it.

Here and there, in fallen leaves or damp patches of ground, the track of the fleeing junior was seen, being exactly in Troop's shoes, which Wilbrake had carefully brought with him. But in many places where the ground was favourable for signs only the tracks of another's foot were to be seen, and Wilbrake readily realised out one track from another, showing that the three of them had followed Troop. The passing partners had trodden heavily, and in several spots the tracks were deeply marked. Wilbrake stopped at last.

"Troop ran for it, and they got him here," he said.
 "Look here! You can see that he's dragged. The ferns are trampled down; that bush has been broken into. A Mad man could see that there has been a scrap on this spot within the last few days. Even a downpour of rain couldn't wash it all away. They got him here."
 "How old Troop?" said Muzzers. "And—and here—"

He was thinking of the ahead cup with a pistol-bullet through it.
 Wilbrake was scanning the ground with anxious eyes.
 "It's possible," he said, guessing Muzzers' doubting thought. "It's possible—after two days there might be a sign left of knackered. But—but I guess there could be some trace. Besides, they never shot him here!"

The Canadian junior shook his head decidedly.
 "How can you be sure about that?" asked Tom.
 "Well, here's it out," said Wilbrake. "He was running head-on—towards by the library, and he may have thought he was running for his life. I guess he would be putting in the handkerchief now."

"No doubt about that."
 "We don't shoot that," went on Wilbrake. "Well, he had a sporting chance of getting away—no much chance, perhaps, but a chance. They knew that. They could have shot him down at any moment while they were chasing him, yet he got as far as that! Why? If they intended to shoot him, would they leave him that chance of getting away in the wood? Wouldn't they have made sure of him on the footpath, or at once as he started to run? Why should

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they have given him the faintest chance at all of getting away?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"That's so," he asserted. "Blessed if it doesn't look as if they never intended to shoot him at all. The revolver may have gone off by accident in the struggle."

"Possibly—but jolly unlikely. Once they got their hands on him he had no chance against a grown-up man—and there were three of them. He put up a fight, like a plucky kid; but they had him dead to rights. They didn't need any weapons in the struggle. If they shot him it was intentionally—and all the signs prove that they never intended to shoot him."

Wildrake spoke with conviction.

"Then—if he was lying when they got away from here," said Tom sharply, "we ought to be able to pick up his tracks again, if they marched him through the wood."

"We shall see."

Wildrake led the way again.

Through the heaviest recesses of the wood, whose feet seldom or never trail, he led on. It was clear that the kidnappers had been carefully avoiding all frequented places.

But wherever "sign" was picked up, it was only sign of the three kidnappers; there was no further track of Troop's shoes.

"They carried him," said Wildrake at last.

Tom Merry shivered.

"If they had to carry him, by now—" He paused.

"I guess that doesn't follow. He may have refused to walk—or they may even have thought about his leaving tracks that might be picked up. Up to the point where they got him, they wouldn't presume that—after they got him, they could prevent it, and most likely did. Asleep, dead or alive, we're on the trail of poor old Troop—they had him with them. Follow on!"

At long last the juncos emerged into a meadow here.

Wildrake paused it, and examined the woodland on the other side. There was no sign of a continuation of the trail. He repeated the Terrible News.

"I guess this is where they started off from the woods," he said. "You've noticed that up to this point they kept clear of any paths or open places—so they must have had a reason for wanting not to be seen here. I guess they had some sort of a go-cart waiting here to shove Troop into it if they succeeded in getting him. Once out of the woods, they couldn't carry him in daylight."

"A motor-car!" said Marmora.

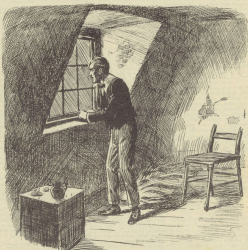
"I guess not. This lane is too narrow and steep for a car—and there's no sign of tyres in the mud. I guess nobody has ever used a car here," said Wildrake. "You fellows know this country better than I do. What's this lane used for?"

"It's used very little," said Tom. "It's a short cut for farmer's carts from the Wayland road to Rylocote Lane."

"They got out of this into the high road," said Wildrake. "But they must have had something to keep their progress out of sight if I guess some sort of a go-cart was waiting here."

It did not take the Canadian juncos long to find the spot where the covered cart had waited.

In a sheltered spot beside the lane the ruts of the two wheels were deeply marked, and there was ample sign of the trampling of a restless horse. Wildrake even picked



THE PRISONER! Sidney Troop pressed his face in the window-pane, and stared out into the bright moonlight. The St. Jim's juncos's face was pale and haggard. For three days he had been a prisoner in the dingy garret, and each passing day he had hoped for rescue.

(See page 23.)

out the branch to which the animal had been tethered, scored by the ruts at which the horse had pulled.

"A two-wheeled cart was tied up here," said Wildrake, indicating the sign.

"But some farmer's man may have stopped his cart here," said Marmora Lathrop. "It isn't a likely place, but—"

"You can see that the cart was turned here, I guess. It came on from the Wayland road—stayed tied up a long time—and then it was turned, to go back the way it came. I guess a farmer's man wouldn't be playing pranks like that."

"Well, no!"

"They had a car the day they rolled Tibbels in outside for Troop," said Tom Merry. "It waited in a lane near the high road. I suppose they wouldn't risk it a second time—a car hanging about this neighbourhood would cause questions to be asked, with the Wayland police on the look-out for these rascals to turn up again after poor old Troop. But, of course, nobody would take any special notice of a fern cart."

Wildrake nodded.

"It would be a covered cart," he said. "They had to keep Troop out of sight."

"That's so."

The Canadian juncos stood for some moments in thought. "You can't see this lane back out into the Wayland road?" he asked at length.

"Yes, if you follow it far enough," answered Tom. "It winds a great deal, through woods and fields, and comes out into the high road about three miles from the town."

"I reckon I've passed the end of it, then, killing on the high road," said Wildrake. "There's a cottage, with about three acres and a few sheds, at the corner where it joins the high road—what?"

"That's the place," said Tom, with a nod. "Old George Baker's cottage—he grows vegetables and sells them in Wayland."

"I guess I've noticed the shack. Come on!"

Wildrake led the way along the hilly, rutty lane, and the chance of the track followed him, a little prepared as the

Tom Merry Lathrop.—No. 102.

Chandler's next move, but prepared to follow his lead without question. For a couple of miles they tramped over dry road and dust, cut up by wheel-ruts, among which Widdrake pointed out every new and then "sign" of the two-wheeled cart the kidnappers had used—Widdrake's trail had led him true. A little road, but still loose, the St. John's junction arrived at the corner where the little lane joined the high-road.

CHAPTER 11.

The End of the Trail!

OLD George Banks greeted as he plied his line. The autumn afternoon was warm; and Mr. Banks had donned coat and waistcoat, and his gloves were rolled up over his ancient arms. He holed and he groaned, every now and then making a frantic dash at some insect that settled on his peering face; and he did not take the trouble to look up as fear St. John's junction came along, and stopped by his fence, and glanced over it. Widdrake stopped, and the Sted. fellows followed, his example. But they looked inquiringly at the weather-worn Widdrake called loudly, and pointed to a weather-worn board over the shed adjoining Mr. Banks' cottage. That board bore the inscription, in faded paint:

HORSE AND CART FOR HIRE: BY THE HOUR OR DAY.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "You don't think—"

"Why not?" asked Widdrake. "I remembered that sign—and it came into my mind at once. They wanted a covered cart—they know the neighbourhood—and what would be easier? Anyhow, it means only a few words to the old gaiter with the line."

He called cheerily to the old man with the line.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Banks!"

"Afternoon!" answered Mr. Banks, without looking up.

"I see you've got a horse and cart for hire?"

"Ain't!"

"But your sign—"

"I've said I ain't, and I mean I ain't," said Mr. Banks, looking up at last, and resting on his line; "and if I had, I wouldn't 'ave it out to a set of scoundrels, to drive my 'orse under a motor-car!" No fear! But that 'orse and cart ain't for 'er run anyhow, 'cause why, the 'orse is lame!"

"Lame!" said Widdrake. "The last man you hired him to drive him too far and too hard—what?"

"You may say so!" said Mr. Banks, with a grunt. "I don't say so as he'd be pay for damage done. He did, and I ain't grudging! But all the same, that 'orse is lame, and he ain't going out again under a wheel!"

"Some lawman who didn't know how to handle a horse, I guess," said Widdrake, with a smile.

"Well, he wasn't a countryman, you can say to it," said Mr. Banks. "But he could drive all right. He'd be worse out that poor 'orse, he did, and so ever. I'd be that 'orse covered thirty mile alone as god bless. Mary's that, too!"

"As you haven't hired him out since Wednesday?"

"No, I ain't!"

Mr. Banks resumed his hewing. Widdrake exchanged a glance with the Sted. fellows. It was on Wednesday, then, that Mr. Banks' horse and cart had been hired by a stranger, who had over-driven the horse!

The old man looked up after a moment or two.

"Do do you know it was Wednesday?" he asked. "I never told you so!"

"I think I know the chap," said Widdrake. "Wasn't he a jobman in a grey coat, smoking a pipe?"

"No, he wasn't!"

"Then he was another chap I'm thinking of," said Widdrake cheerfully. "Smoked cigarettes—what?"

"That's so," said Mr. Banks. "Smoking 'ag arter 'ag he was." The old gentleman looked rather severely at Widdrake.

"I've got a man's a friend of yours, young man. I don't say he didn't pay a man well for 'er, and for damage done to a 'orse, but that ain't the kind of man for a scoundrel to speak to!"

"You mean he had rather the cut of a racing man?"

"Just that!" answered Mr. Banks. "I've seen the cut at Aldenham Race, and I know 'em. I can tell you, he had to lay down a good deposit afore I'd 'er hire the 'orse and cart. I knows that sort! Not that I've got anything to grumble at, as I've said. He paid 'em!"

"Can I have a look at the cart?" asked Widdrake.

Mr. Banks stared.

"There ain't nothing a'gin it, if you want to," he said. "It's in that shed; it ain't been touched since he brought it back late Wednesday night. Pretty sure it was so, with meel and such. But mind you, I ain't 'er out that cut to scoundrels!"

Mr. Banks resumed his hewing once more, and the jansons

stroiled over to the open shed where the cart rested on its shafts.

"Looks like business!" murmured Tom Merry, as Widdrake examined the wheels of the cart, and then the interior of the cart.

"This is the cart that waited in the lane," said the Canadian junior quietly. "I've got the measure of the wheel-tracks; and look here!" He held up a couple of cigarette-stubs. "These are the same as the lag-stub I picked up in the wood, where the kidnappers waited in ambush. A common brand enough, I guess—but every little helps. Of course, it might all be coincidence, but I guess coincidences don't often happen in a bunch like this!"

Tom shook his head.

"No, it's the cart they used," he said. "There's a canvas cover folded up in it, too—they used that to stretch poor Troopie from sight!"

"No sign of a bloodstain anywhere in the cart," said the Canadian junior. "Banks says it hasn't been touched since it came back. And you can see it hasn't been washed-out for weeks—if for months, for that matter. Owing to his horse being lame, Banks hasn't used it since he hired it out late Wednesday. No sign that Troopie had been wounded—no sign that the vetina cleaned up any bloodstains inside the cart. If they shot him, it was after they had finished the trip in this go-cart—and why then? I begin this trail thinking it likely enough that Troopie was still alive. I am convinced that he is alive now!"

Tom Merry nodded; his heart was lighter.

"And now?" he asked.

"I guess we've got to know where this cart went," said Widdrake. "A good distance—the man over-driven the horse, and got back while it late at night. But I guess he never counted on a gallop getting on his trail, who was chased on a ranch in the west of Canada, or he'd have put in another hour cleaning down the cart before he brought it back to Mr. Banks."

"Why?" asked Lovatier.

"Because mud tells tales!" answered Widdrake quietly.

One hour later Tom Merry & Co. walked into the police-station at Weyland with Widdrake, accompanied by Mr. George Banks. And Inspector Smart, who had just come in a tired man superintending changing operations on the lower reaches of the river, listened to what they had to tell him; and all his tiredness vanished as if by magic, and he looked extremely keen.

CHAPTER 12.

"From Information Received!"

SIDNEY TROOPE pressed his face to a tiny window-pane, and stared out into bright moonlight.

The St. John's junior's face was pale and haggard. The moonlight, streaming in at the little dirty window of the garret, was the only light he had.

The garret was almost destitute of furniture. A rickety chair, a box that served as a table, two or three dirty rugs for a bed, were about all.

On the box stood a jug of water, beside it lay part of a loaf, a chunk of cheese, and some lard in a greasy paper.

For three days Troopie had been a prisoner in the garret.

It was a small room; the only door was a trap-door in the floor, approached by a ladder from the room below. In the lower room was his godder—the man who had driven him there, a brutal prisoner, in the covered cart.

Since a day Troopie had heard voices below, and recognized the shrill tones of Duncro; and guessed that the racing man had come to ascertain that he was still a safe prisoner. But Banks never stayed more than a few minutes.

At other times there was silence, save for the footsteps of the man below, sometimes a muttered curse. Troopie was a prisoner almost as much as the scoundrel he was watching.

Sometimes, when Troopie peered through a crack in the lower floor, he saw the man leading about, smoking innocent cigarettes. But if, wearied of the silence, he stole a glance Troopie saw, only a curse answered him. Twice a day Troopie brought him food and water with a scowling face, his temper here from his own locked confinement in the lonely below.

When he was, Troopie had no idea. He knew that he was many, many miles from St. John's, and that was all. The covered cart had waddled on with him, mile after mile. It was after dark on Wednesday when it had turned into the field in which the horse stood, and he had been carried into the garret.

Why he was there he could not guess. His kidnappers did not seem to want to harm him, only to keep him a close prisoner. They had taken away his cap, but had not robbed him of his money. The kidnappers, so far as Troopie could see, was quietness. He peered his brains over it long and hard, without guessing at a solution.

For a day or two he had hoped for rescue. Surely search would be made for him, far and wide—surely! It did not

even cross his mind that he was supposed to be dead—that the Rip's lower reaches were being dragged for his body.

His hope was faint now. Day had followed day, without sign of success. He was a prisoner until the kidnappers chose to let him go; and his heart was heavy.

It was a late hour now, as he stood with his face pressed to the dirty little window, and stared into the bright moonlight. Below he could hear faintly the sound of Tadger snoring.

The moonlight made the fields almost as light as day. Far in the distance he could see a road—in other directions, here and there. Closer at hand were pasture lands; closest of all, the large fields in which the herd stood, far out of the sight of any other human habitation. From the distant road, a narrow, rocky, muddy lane led to the gate in the field—which was a thirty yards from the hotel. In the winter that here was a bog of red clay; in the summer it cooled into ridges of red mud. There had been no rain for a week now; but last week's rain was gathered in pools among the ridges of red clay.

Troops glanced at the path, glimmering in the moonlight. Up and past them, the road the covered cart had come splashing and splashing—with the imprisoned schoolboy in it. How long ago! It seemed like years to the unhappy father.

How long was this going to last? Did the villain who had kidnapped him intend to let him go again, as long last? If not, what was their intention? What unknown fate was hanging over him? Sidney Troops had asked himself these questions again and again, without being able to think of an answer.

Most of his time was spent at the little window, staring hopefully towards the distant road—by which rescue would come, if it came at all. But he had ceased now to hope that it would come.

But he could not sleep.

Leary had Tadger seated in the room below; but sleep would not come to the hapless schoolboy, worn, anxious, suffering from the close imprisonment in the dirty garret. With his face pressed to the cracked pane, he stared out hopefully into the moonlight.

Suddenly he gave a start.

A figure moved in the shadow by the hedge that enclosed the field; another and another moved.

Troops's heart beat.

Now, when he came, came by day; and now it was past midnight. And there were at least three of the shadowy figures that moved in the shadow of the hedge, and vanished again.

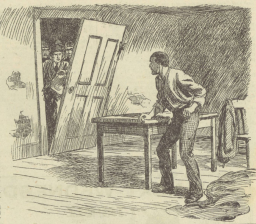
Again he saw three—and now they were within the hedge, and coming up swiftly towards the house.

The moonlight fell upon a sooty form and a ruddy face, and Sidney Troops's heart bounded. He had seen that partly grotesque before—he had seen him walking in the streets of Wexford in uniform, though he was in plain clothes now. It was Inspector Stone of the County Police.

"Oh!" gasped Troops.

Mr. Skene stopped at the door of the hotel, and two or three shadowy figures joined him there. Whether they knew that he was within, whether they were making a search that led them near the hotel, Troops could not guess. But he knew what he was going to do.

He turned back from the window to grasp the rocky chair, and sprang to the window again.



SURPRISE! Tadger, startled out of his sleep by the watching at the door, succeeded to his feet with an oath. Before he fairly knew what was happening the door opened in, under the powerful shove from the path below. (See this page.)

"Crash!"

Glass and cotton frame went flying outwards under that crashing blow, given with all the prisoner's strength.

There was a muttering below, as fragments rained down on the plump inspector and his men.

Troops leaped out of the shattered window, and met the upturned stare of Inspector Skene.

"Help!" he shouted.

"By gad! Is that Master Troops, of St. Jim's?"

"You—you—yes!" gasped Troops. "I'm a prisoner here—there's a map in the room downstairs—help! Have you?"

"That's what we're here for!" chuckled the inspector. "I guessed this was a likely place. Now then, man, shouldn't you be at the door, and all together?"

"Ugh!"

Tadger, startled out of his sleep by the crash of the breaking garret window, had scrambled to his feet, with an oath. Before he fairly knew what was happening, the door crashed in, under the powerful shove from without.

A moment more and Tadger was struggling in strong hands—a few more moments and he would be pinned against the wall, with handcuffs on his wrists.

Troops dragged at the trap-door, but it was fastened underneath. There was a heavy stop on the ladder, a bolt dug back, the trap was raised. The ruddy face of the Wexford inspector rose into the garret, grinning in the moonlight.

"Master Troops, what?"

"Have I am?" gasped Troops.

"I'll give you a hand down."

A lamp had been lighted in the room below; Tadger, handcuffed, standing, stood with a strong grip on his shoulder, and scooped him up. At Troops's the schoolboy descended. With a laugh here, the St. Jim's junior stood among the stairway constables.

"Only one of the gang here?" said Mr. Skene, looking at Tadger. "Where are the others? What?"

An oath answered him.

"I guess comes here every day, Mr. Skene," said Troops eagerly. "He hasn't missed a day. He's the ring-leader—and I know from what I've heard him say that he comes to see that I'm still safe. To-morrow—"

"Good?" said Mr. Skene gently. "To-morrow our friend Leary will meet with a surprise when he calls. You'll be safe back with a laugh here, the young man—and I hope at your school long before then, young man—and I hope

THE GUN LAMBERT.—No. 321.

and close your headmaster orders you to keep within bounds, you'll do as you're told."

Troop grinned faintly.

"But—how did you find me, Mr. Skew?" he asked. "It seems like a miracle to see you here. I suppose this is a long way from Wayland?"

"Nine miles on the cross line—twelve by the road," said the inspector. "Come with me, my boy—we've left a car a mile away. I shall take you back to your school; your headmaster will be glad to be knocked up in the middle of the night for such a reason. Do you know you're supposed to be dead?"

"What?" gasped Troop.

"I had my doubts—I had my doubts," said Mr. Skew cheerfully. "And here we are—here we are!"

Two of the constables were left on the level; the other walked Troop away with a grip on his arm, while the inspector walked with Troop. They splashed and plunged down the lane of red clay road towards the distant road.

"Your boots will want a clean after this, Master Troop," said the plump inspector genially. "What? So did the cart that brought you here—ha, ha!" Mr. Skew chuckled. "Even a criminal like our convict friend yonder cannot think of anything."

Troop looked at him.

"But how—"

"From information received," said the inspector. "We got hold of the cart that you were carried in, Master Troop—From information received. Scattered with red clay to the very axle, what?"

"And that—"

"You see, I know the country," said Mr. Skew complacently.

again, who did not haggle about the price—ha, ha! I was going to ask that gentleman a few leading questions, but you saved me the trouble by smacking out the window."

And the fat inspector chuckled again, evidently greatly satisfied with his success.

It seemed like a dream to Sidney Troop to feel himself in a car, rattling up the rails to St. Jim's.

But it was no dream—it was painful reality; an hour later he was within the walls of the old school once more.

St. Jim's had a surprise the next morning.

Troop was back!

Still a little pale and worn from his hard experience, but otherwise his own clever self, Sidney Troop, of the Fourth, was back in the place of St. Jim's.

"But Jerry, you know," remarked Arthur Augustine P'Arvy, "I had a sort of feeling that old Troop wasn't dead. Do you remember any mentions of it, Blake?"

"I don't," said Blake.

"Do you, Howitzer?"

"No."

"Do you, Dig?"

"Not at all," grinned Dig.

"Well, however I did not mention it," said the woe of St. Jim's thoughtfully. "But I had the feeling, at the time, and I am very glad to see that I was right. You fellows may have noticed that I generally am right!"

"Never!" said the fellows together. To which Arthur

Augustine rejoined:

"Was?"

Tom Merry & Co. congratulated Troop heartily. All

FOR NEXT WEDNESDAY!

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Trimble
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entirely
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really. "It's white chalk round by Wayland, like a good deal of Stinson. I know the whole county like a book, young man; and as soon as I saw Blake's cart, I know that it had been driven in the lanes round by Redwood—that's this district. A keen young fellow, Master Widdrake—but, of course, he did not know all that. We did not let the grass grow under our feet, Master Troop. Not many hours have passed since I looked at Blake's cart and decided to search all through Redwood for the man who had driven it. You see, I know the country like a book."

And the plump inspector chuckled again.

"It seems wonderful," said Troop.

"But you owe a lot to your school-fellow, young Widdrake," said the inspector genially. "A keen young fellow—very keen! He brought Blake and the cart to the station."

"Widdrake did!" said Troop.

"Yes—a keen lad—very keen. He had spotted the red clay on the cart, and knew that there was nothing of the kind near Wayland. A young fellow who sees his eyes, by god! He takes a sharp young fellow—was to look for the man who had driven the cart, in a red clay country, in a ten-mile radius or so. But, you see, knowing the country like a book, I knew where to put my finger on the red clay."

"I—I see?"

"It was only a matter of time," said Mr. Skew. " sooner or later we were bound to run you down, Master Troop. It happened sooner instead of later, that's all. Redwood was the place—and that lovely cottage the likeliest spot in the district—what? I asked a few questions in Redwood—they told me that that barrel had been let to a London

The Gem Library—No. 121.

the school congratulated him. The black cloud that had hung over St. Jim's was lifted; the shadow of a tragedy was gone.

Troop, of the Fourth, was alive and well; Troop, of the Fourth, was back at St. Jim's! P'Arvy & Co. came over specially from the New House to offer their congratulations. Great men like Kilburn and Duvall, of the Sixth, told Troop how glad they were to see him again, alive and well. Troop was in the highlight to an extent that was quite dazzling for a fellow in the Fourth Form. Boggy Trimble overwhelmed him with congratulations, and carried his effusive friendliness so far as to borrow half-a-crown on the spot.

"I owe it to you, old scout!" Troop said, when he met Ed Widdrake. "Mr. Skew would never have found me if you hadn't put him on the track."

Widdrake smiled.

"I guess I had a hand in it," he said. "Mr. Skew acted on information received; and I guess he got the information from little one. But don't worry about thanks, old man. I guess it's enough for me to see you safe and sound again."

"I shan't forget it," said Troop. "Thanks, and thanks, and thanks again! I shan't forget this in a hurry."

"And I guess the danger's over," said Widdrake. "They'll get Blake now, sure."

Widdrake was right; a few hours later came the news that the hard-luck mining man had been arrested. He had walked back into the hands of the police at the hotel near Redwood. Whether Troop's danger was over, the plotters were safe behind prison walls, and the schoolboy-crowd of Red-Door was able to sleep in peace.

RISKY! Two couriers of the *Crimson Claw* set out to warn the Government of the States ever when Ten Hoo holds away that Penny Reed and Pan Shee, two dangerous spies, are at large. The joke is that the two couriers are Penny Reed and Pan Shee themselves!



A New and Powerful Adventure Story of Chinese mystery and intrigue.

By
LESTER BIDSTON.

Pan's Way In!

"DAM!" across his legs, Pan," Pan whispered, as the Tibetan headman began a wild struggle. There, in the Khan dialect: "Keep quiet, you Tibetan lad! A fortune is yours if you have the wit to listen, but a halber awaits you unless your struggle ceases instantly!"

Either his words or the suggestive touch of steel made the fellow instantly passive. Waiting for several moments, to be sure his meaning had penetrated, Pan lifted his hand as such from the bearded man's chest.

"Is it robbery, vile ruffian?" the Tibetan demanded. "Know, then, that I travel peaceful, sans of legs."

Pan ignored the compliment. "Money, you'll have in plenty, if your head houses eyes," he said. "Food, a trifle of service—and we'll send you home with heavy pockets."

"What would you have me do?" the fellow asked solemnly. "You can choose either!" Pan whispered.

"I need either," came the answer. "I go to sell them in a good market."

"The market of Manchuria?" Pan demanded, and smiled at the fellow's nod. "That is good, and promises fortune, if you'll crawl back to where we can talk."

Keeping his gun prominently handy, Pan trailed beside the bearded man—until the latter came to a standstill some fifty yards from the camp.

"Now, man of the money," Khan Bann loomed, "the headman guards."

"We want food, and we want a way into Manchuria," Pan began bluntly. "In your company, two untraveled herdsmen will pass unnoticed. For permission to travel with you we will pay one hundred yuan down and another hundred when we take leave of you—in Manchuria."

"That means money to the rough outlanders, for even owners of herds in Tibet seldom have real cash in their pouch. His sharp intake of breath told its own

story of assumed rapidity, but for long Khan Bann remained silent.

"Into Manchuria none may go, except those vouchered for," he said, at length. "The vengeance of the 'Crimson Claw' strikes swift as summer lightning; and, like it, none see the coming till it has struck."

"Yet these hundred yuan is worth some risk," Pan tempted, substantially raising the offer.

Bann nodded slowly. "To offer so much, your business in the 'Claw' state must be urgent," he said. "Know you that intruders die at sight?"

"Death comes to all, soon or late," Pan answered calmly. "But to the 'Claw' domain we go—to find one who has vouchered us greatly." He thought it wiser to explain that Bann himself was the one in question. "To you, Khan, the risk is small. Take us to your journey's end, pocket your money, and—I am sure might—the penalty is ours."

For an appreciable time Bann stroked his beard, mumbled and argued with himself, then laughed softly.

"The penalty is yours," he agreed. "Pan see the bargain money, stranger; give me your promise to pay four hundred yuan in Hange, our destination, then you travel under my protection."

It was now Pan's turn to hesitate. The fellow was probably ready for the likeliest treachery if he thought to gain greater profit than was. Against that, they were armed and had taken care that Bann know it; anyway, the whole adventure was a desperate gamble, and one extra risk counted for little in a position well-nigh forlorn.

"Your price is high, Khan," he said slowly. "It means you take nearly our all, yet we will pay it—on condition that you feed us, as an act of your own men, and keep dead silent about us even when we have left you."

"That I will—also the 'Claw' will soon silence us," Bann answered grudgingly. "Now, our hundred yuan, unmarked one, 'Good! Wait you here for the things I will bring you."

Rather to Pan's surprise, the smooth herdsmen

WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

MYSTICISM RUMOR, better known as "Penny" Reed, have and had in China of English parents. Known the father of the Oriental from A. to Z. Attached to the Police Legion, and made a walking stick for the British Government on various secretarial British consulates in China.

PAN SHEE, a young Chinese, Penny's close friend and assistant. INSPECTOR WILSON, James or "Jimmie" Withers on account of his activities in the East End of London against Oriental criminals.

FRANCIS MURKIN, an authority on Eastern languages and customs.

MISSUS MEX BOY, chief of the notorious League of the Chinese Clan. Accused of smearing Agassiz's papers and all the night history of the East. Ten Hoo bids pay to kidnapping another Englishman.

CHANG FU, one of Ten's principal agents.

You know who to dominate China, but without under machinery and European release to set him, he realizes that by you do nothing. With circumstances during the national great course to England and through one of the most famous European consulates. My struggle the day ahead a private profit, now which, is true. The adventures begin except the talk intended for him, however, by dropping to earth in possession. To their agreement, the two cheer and themselves in the heart of China, close to the great Peking University. The end of the general religious root leads and other Penny and Pan, and returns them on their travels. After a series of thrilling adventures Reed and Pan Men sight a number of herdsman camped for the night. In search of food, Pan and his clan stealthily enter the camp, and are successful in reaching the headman.

(See next page.)

proved as good as his word. In ten minutes he returned with a quantity of smoked pork, black millet bread, and a small skin of thin, sour wine. Then, exchanging their Hajjar suits for rough, homespun, heavy knee-boots and burrod shoes, they lay down near Baan's tent, while that would-be worthy calmly resumed his broken slumbers.

But he proved a good friend and magnificently smoothed away the searching test of a camp roasted out in dawn. Early breakfast placed at the newcomers' disposition, several men gathered round with inquisitive tongues—until the Khan resumed something about rising rooms and found them very serious work to do.

"They'd sooner help than annoy you," the Khan explained. "But their tongues are ever wagging, and the less they know the better." He smiled slyly. "We have to look for the 'Claw' now for the first time they have gathered in Manchuria, and—if your object is to work them better—may say the gods bless you."

"Why try not to help the gods by hitting the 'Claw' men square?" Fan asked. "You profess to hate them—yet go to feed them!"

"As you would, if you were in my shoes," Baan stopped. "Your business I know not, for you are to know—but I'll tell you that Szechwan is a tiger's den, and that the tigers are merciless on all who hesitate to obey them. They race this part of Tibet at will—we must feed them or pay the price in blood."

That was substance for the Tibetans, but it raised the Chinese' fears of treachery. While the dogs here manifested along they had not done with the Khan, grew to trust him, and uttered many tips that must help in the uncertain future.

Eventually they crossed a border that was closely guarded by patrols of men clothed in the drab grey the Hajjar wind had furnished. The evidence of the cattle and Baan's journal wonderfully smoothed the way for the chamois, but the alert watchfulness of the many armed companies showed they could never have penetrated the guarded state on their own.

"I never thought we'd do it," Fan whispered, when Baan was actually in sight. "We're in, Pen, and not more than three days after old Yeh."

"But the rest comes now," Pen warned. "We're got to get past the gateway before we begin to ease."

Like many another Chinese town, Baan was caged by a wall of rough stone. From its massive gateway a cove of stolid soldiers were now leaning, offered by a fat man, chris, who subjected Baan to a searching "third degree" before he allowed the cattle to be penned in the stockade adjoining the city wall.

"Obvious one," he ordered loudly, "you will led your men feed and water the beasts, as a last step. Your three-colored gang will then wait here for you, but you will appear at my office in one hour to discuss your settlement."

"Magnificent, I have said will obey," Baan murmured loudly. He watched the fat official waddle back through the gate; then murmured softly: "And may your venemous ancestors, for a thousand generations back spit on you, blasted pig!"

Contentedly eased in his mind, he turned to Pen with an ingratiating smile.

"Now, needless one, there is a little matter of five hundred yuan between us," he hinted.

"The total given each time you mention it," Pen growled.

"But get as well inside the town and the cash is yours, Khan."

But Fan detected that the chamois were never to see the other side of that protective wall. Even as he gazed the wick, drawing beads on the last warned of minutes approaching in a mighty hurry—a sound that brought the plump mandarin back to the spot in anxious curiosity.

Thirty seconds later, two palloping hooves approached the group and two bearded riders cut themselves from spent mounts. Saluting the high officer with humble respect, one offered him a sealed document.

"Orders from the Council," he announced briefly. "An urgent message from the Sun of Heaven himself, Kowloon."

"Follow me, messengers, and I will consider the words of the Seldene One," the mandarin mouthed pompously.

"That cannot be, Excellency We," came the terse answer. "The message runs that spies of importance are seeking to enter Szechwan and we—with others—are ordered to warn all border towns without delay. Before dawn we must rouse the Governor of Luchow with a message similar to yours."

Orders of the "Claw."

SPARKING the pure tongue of Ekying, it never entered the chieftain's head that either Wa's soldiers, or the rough cattle-drivers near by, would possibly understand a word he had uttered. Now could they, but to Fan and Pen every creature's presence was a warning that

the hunt was up and that their position was precarious in the extreme.

But about a noise or whisper betrayed them while the tired messengers recounted their deeds and dashed away into the gloom.

For a time the mandarin stood in thoughtful silence; then, calling Baan forward, he addressed him as one would speak to an enemy spy.

"Fifty one, I expect strangers in Dango," he snarled.

"If you have seen any, I demand to know."

"Yes, in China, there are two distinct ways of asking a question. Flattery language is used for one's inferiors—and it is the deadliest of insults to make a mistake."

So, while the chamois leaped themselves for trouble, Baan's face turned purple; for he at least included himself in the equal. True, in present circumstances he dare not speak his thoughts aloud, but he took a cue of Wa's snarl, and better, way.

"Not a soul have I seen, except these, my own men," he answered instantly.

"Now could I expect you to see more, blind dog?" Wa sneered. "But those useless ones—you search for every man at their!"

"For why not?" Baan queried stupidly. "They are my own people, simply all my of my own kin."

"That warn them to keep their eyes open on your return, fool," Wa snarled. He turned again to the gateway. "I go now to read the word of my sacred lord and will deal with your treachery affairs later, dirty one!"

"A top-top snarl, thank goodness," Pen whispered.

"Baan, you've a stout head and deserve well in my prayers."

But Baan was glazing after the departing jerkon.

"May the gods speed him and his, past and future, till Szechwan runs again, he was muttering involuntarily.

In the deep dark, Pen sniffed across until his lip was within inches of the Khan's leonard face.

"If you want to have a real dig at him," he whispered, "let your men close their eyes and breathe in to our doings."

"If you can harm the fat pig, I will," Baan muttered, grumpily. "But what mad idea is in your head now, as usual?"

"As soon as it's properly dark I want the loan of your two best men," Pen answered. "Also, when you trek for home, I want you to make a detour north."

"You go after the carriers?" Baan muttered. "You'll never catch them, man."

"We'll try, for they must rest my dear," Pen replied.

"You'll try, or to kick the 'Claw' knacker than it's ever been kicked before!"

The Khan hesitated. A brave man, undoubtedly, but Pen was asking him to accept a risk that meant terrible personal loss, if aught went wrong.

"We'll double the reward, Baan," Pen tempted; then at an afterthought: "And you'll be doing as the Grand Duke of Luchow would wish, for we work under his benevolence."

Pen could not possibly have used a better argument. The man he named is both the living god and the ruling King of Tibet, and is revered with a loving few people in the Western world on a scale.

Baan's response was instant and generous. Striding to one of his jehans, he whispered a dozen words, that made Pen their over-lord, for the time being. To Pen he was equally true.

"When the cattle are penned and the dark is full, edge away from the gate," he said. "The best of my mounts will be watered, led and ready." Then, congregating magnificently, he strode through the gateway to collect his men.

Forty minutes later the chamois edged by inches past the pens and into the outer darkness. Guided by one of Baan's drovers, they found everything in readiness for a quiet getaway.

"Lead the beasts until the wall is well behind you—be sound travels far at night," the guide whispered. "Then speed as you will, and may the gods keep the evil spirits from harassing you."

Silent for ten minutes, Fan then had a whole heap of questions to ask.

"Allowing we might catch these messengers, Fungy Radd," he began. "We can reduce Hwe's army by two—but what good will that do?"

"We're not going to reduce them by any, unless the fellows prove indiscreet," Pen grinned.

"Why take the trouble to follow, if you mean not to kill them?" Fan demanded.

"You seal-ins headmen?" Pen snarled. "If you really must know, it's because dead men are difficult to hide. If things go smoothly, they're going to catch, and we're going to take their place!"

It took Fan several seconds to absorb this astounding idea.

"You mean you're going into Luchow as couriers of the 'Claw'?" he gasped.

"I mean just that, old dear," Pen answered quietly.

"It's a risky game, but think of the advantages, Fan."

"I can think of many disadvantages," Fan snarled.



"MALT!" Quite suddenly a hoarse gravel challenge came, and Pan and Fan awoke to the fact that a pair of mounted men were drawn across the road, and that they had blundered right into them!

"Then forget 'em," Pan snapped. "Trotter side of the picture is that you're actually traveling in company of the 'Claw,' meaning everybody to look out for ourselves. That, surely, is the last disguise anyone would expect us to assume—the very fellows who broadcast the alarm being the spies themselves!"

"Then, again, Pan," he continued quickly. "Think of the opportunity it gives us. We'll be at liberty to travel a good deal of the leader, and it'll be strange if we don't gain a hint of How's mysterious retreat."

At last Pan began to absorb the daring scheme.

"My venerable ancestors! What a pass!" he chuckled—a rare thing for him. "But, oh! Fanny Bunk, what a pass we'd make, if you'd take the truth comes out."

"No chance than we'd make if How caught us in any other pass," Pan stated truthfully.

"But the real messengers?" Pan guessed suddenly. "You say we can't hide 'em dead, but I'm sure we can't hide them alive!"

"If Ezra carries out his part of the programme, I'm sure we can," Pan added. "But the rover's a mile behind now, so it's time to take the chances of those loggers and get moving in earnest."

Until the moon topped the distant hills and dispelled the worst of the night, they could only venture at walking pace. Then, as the moon's light was waning over the shadows, they saw the pale track they rode stretching mile upon mile, until it was lost in dimly visioned woods.

"Don't forget the country's on a wax footing, so keep your fingers clamped for night patrol," Pan warned. "If we're careless enough to meet any—his Excellency Wu has found the spies in Dando and sent us forth to stay the hunt."

Few hours after that hardly a word was spoken. The bitter wind, that nightly sweeps from the vast spaces of Tibet, whipped every exposed inch of skin, but helped to keep their awake. Yet, despite the discomfort of that miserable journey, Pan was smiling and guiding his horse by instinct when disaster nearly overtook them.

The road, now rising in a long incline to the dark forest, was lined on either side by broken walls of stone, that cut black shadows across their path. Quite suddenly a hoarse gravel challenge came, and Pan awoke to the fact that a pair of mounted men were drawn across the road and that they had blundered right into them.

"Where away in such haste, friends?" a hoarse fellow in poor uniform demanded suspiciously. "Your business must be urgent, to take you ahead at this hour."

"It is," Pan clipped in, before Pan was fully awake.

"We come from Dando, on affairs of state, and in the interests of the 'League of the Claw!'"

"That is not enough," came the stern answer. "I must know your business."

"We have no reason to hide it," Pan asserted quickly.

"His Excellency Wu has sought two spies, whom the Son of Heaven is hungry for, and we ride to stay the hunt that is no longer necessary."

The fellow asked several other leading questions, but Pan led on the ground while and told a hair-raising yarn of how How and Siew had been taken by the Dando gateway half an hour since the "Claw" couriers had left.

Then Pan carried on the good work.

"Somewhere ahead, the messengers go forward to Lin-chow," he murmured. "After that they speed north to cross the border stations to trouble no longer needed."

He was careful to speak with indifference, as though he had but a casual interest in the affair. Apparently they were carrying out a mere routine job, and, because it fitted in so well with the little the "Claw" officers knew of the business, he fell into the trap beautifully.

"These you would pass this way a short hour since," he said. "I advised them to take the forest path and to keep left when it forked. Their mounts are weary, you'll doubtless find them resting at the pool that lies a mile beyond the fork."

Throwing a casual word of thanks, the chamois returned the patrol at an easy pace. Only when the patrol was well behind did Pan relax his satisfaction at their stroke of luck.

"The gods are good to spoil the plans of rogues," he chuckled.

"And evil spirits halt inevitable traps to trip the steps of honest men," Pan parried. "We've been handed a leading line to victory, Pan, but we won't shake hands until we're through."

The Inn of "Society House."

IN the depths of the border forest, How's confidential couriers started from their beds and started the winter until they could continue the journey. Even here, despite the protection of named two-drinks, the thin Tibetan wind penetrated, and only the urgent need of resting their mounts held them to the eerie place.

Though the hour was late, never for a moment was the
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forest still. The whine of wind, the whisper of rustling foliage, the creak of the animals that lean or flee by night—all helped to reduce these impatiently yellow men to jeering laughter.

"A fool's errand, Leo," one growled in a low tone. "The Son of Heaven knows the carved ones must take weeks on the way—how he drives us forth with orders to hasten night and day."

"Save two of his men 'devil birds' failed to return, the Hsueh-lan men a spy in every man's line," Leo answered. "He's done mighty deeds in Szechwan—he wouldn't be grooving nervous as the great day draws nigh. You—"

"You'll like not this presiding by night like hungry rats," Wu growled. "Ere spirits leave the forests and do evil work in the darkness. Besides, we've two hours' ride to Linchow, so the chance we're over—"

"You'll sit very still and throw your hands up!" a voice whispered in his ear. "Any other move, Wen, will mean a decent burial for both of you!"

For a moment Wu really thought the evil spirits were loose. But the ring of steel lying in his neck told of a very solid and vindictive folk threatening him; and, as Leo was also feeling the icy touch of a second gun, their aims shot dead as if on springs.

Grooping hands relieved them of various death-dealing weapons, then two slender figures stepped into the circle of flashlight and ordered them to rise.

"The messengers of the Son of Heaven are seized," Leo scolded, obeying sulkily. "Those who delay our journey—lags are likely to die as you would choose!"

"Fussy! Dead! Laughed softly."

"We're not delaying—we're stopping your 'journeys' for good," he roared.

"You mean to kill us?" Wu snarled.

"Not if you act sensibly," Pan snapped. "Your main job now is to stop rickshaws and to strip every rag off your unsightly bodies."

Despite energetic protests at this fresh indignity, that they were forced to do. Then, observing in the dim night, they had the pleasure of seeing Pan discard his own rough shawl and expose the sun-burnt skin across his face. After that he held their eyes open with a inches of their trembling arms, while in chief command Leo's fists and back there got inside the drivers' sturdy rags.

"Now, Pan, we'll do three fellows up to powder tree, and I'll shoot back for them," Pan said broadly. To the furious scowlers he was greatly amused. "You know who we are, so you'll know we're desperate men. Submit to what you must, and the worst that will happen to you is a long trip into Tibet. Resist, and I warn you your lives will not stand in our way a single second!"

An hour later Hsueh had picked up the two walled prisoners, searched the ground, and departed on the long drive home through Tibetan wilds. There, in that lonely clearing, the chains had a short but noteworthy discussion.

"There is Hsueh's crime, in getting us from London, we've hardly had time to breathe," Pan began. "We'll first examine the messengers' dog-eared bags, then do a bit of quiet thinking."

It was unfortunate they found several sealed missives addressed to the governments of the more important border towns. In the other they discovered a marked map of the district, an open letter from the "League of the Five," ordering all citizens to speed the caravan with food and remnants as required, and a jade model of a beaver claw—the latter the talisman of the society.

"The letters and claw will be useful in going to live in the country, but the map's the worst," Pan grinned. "Call out the names of the towns the writings are going to visit. I tick off the markings on the map."

Beginning with Dando, they found the line ended at Langkung—a distance of nearly two hundred miles. This line Pan studied deeply for a while, then slowly nodded.

"Pan, we know there's a blind spot in Szechwan—a place where the 'Claw' has its headquarters, and one so well hidden that no Hsueh spy has yet found trace of it," he said. "Well, it's a common-sense idea to think that the two messengers we bagged were not travelling the whole border-line."

"It would have taken ten weeks to do it," Pan agreed.

"Then does a conveyance exist in you? I suggest that four couriers started out—two working north and two south."

Pan frowned in deep thought. Then, suddenly, his eyes narrowed and he sat bolt upright.

"As Dando was the first marked town for the northern riders, the hidden spot must be somewhere behind it," he whispered.

Pan nodded.

"They'd make for the nearest river first, naturally," he said. "Richard Dando the river Ssueh rushes through the

Ssueh mountains; and there, I'm convinced, we'll find Hsueh, the missing messenger, and the real copy he's planning!"

"The real copy?" Pan repeated. "We've seen that he's turning all Szechwan into an armed camp—you're not expecting a greater coup than that?"

"Hsueh's a stroke you'd strange that Hsueh should have his warnings met by this slow method. How should he look, in a land that covers an inland, he has small chance."

Pan answered: "We know he has an airship, and had two planes until we crashed them. If he has others, they are probably waiting Tibet, for he could hardly be expected to over the border so soon."

"Wireless was my thought—not planes," Pan replied.

"After all, other shaking is not unknown in China, and we can rest easy that Hsueh is up to all the latest dodges. The fact that wireless is unknown to the Szechwan natives seems to us remarkably strange, but I'll be very surprised if wireless doesn't prove a deciding factor before we're through with his fellow society."

"Anyhow, Pan, we've got to deliver these warnings, if we intend to keep in the character we've taken," Pan continued. "We don't turn back to Dando, but we can go north and perhaps see the river as a back-door to Hsueh's extensive headquarters."

That hurried dash north was perhaps the supreme joke of Pan's life. Wherever they went they were fed on the best; given the finest outfit in the land, and had the pleasure of watching a hard start up in the wrong direction! But, after all, the ride was merely the means to an uncertain end, and only calls for comment in its final, and most disastrous, stage.

Two miles from Langkung, they plunged into a guarded cross-road and had to submit to a slow scrutiny of their papers. As fast they took this route, for each the same thing had happened a score of times; but, when an armed escort was told off to accompany them to the town, they began to understand that Langkung was not the primitive village they had expected.

The first thing that caught their attention was the sinister beauty of the hills towering beyond the town. In the glare of a setting sun, the face of the heights burned with metallic colour, as if glowing hot from the work of infernal smiths!

Not daring to ask questions, or to even show surprise to become visible, their restraint was rewarded, when the young officer began to launch at Langkung activities.

"You see big wastes at headwaters, friends," he said slowly, "but the sight of younger hills will show that our efforts are unavailing."

Pan had not the faintest idea of his meaning.

"It is long since we were sent as far north," he answered curtly. "In those days the work had not developed to this extent."

"Now a day passes but six or seven loaded bulks drop down the river, pulled by the smoke-boats," the youngster continued gravely. "Never for a moment, day or night, does the labour of tending the mountain's streams cease."

Pan checked a start of amazement with difficulty. So this was Langkung's secret—the rounded summit of snow from the Ssueh mountains! He knew, of course, that Tibet and Eastern China were reputed to be the world's treasure-house of untapped mineral wealth, but he had never dreamt that sleepy old China would ever wake to the fact.

Yet the truth of it was beyond argument. Now, as they neared the town, he could see lines of gleaming rails sweeping down to the river front and scores of loaded trucks being tipped into great, walled-in basins in an amazing stream.

He dared not glance at Pan to see how he was taking it, but he felt it impossible to display a cold pose in that amazement world.

"Darn good," he hardly appreciate the importance of Langkung's efforts," he said slowly. "We labour hard, so you do, but I fear we begin that without your work ours would be futile."

"Fortunately Quong says much the same thing, though not so politely," the officer sniggered. "When we reach the line of Seventy Moons repeat your words and he will teach you with the gods."

"The line of Seventy Moons?" Pan questioned.

"Where his Excellency maintains the crown of the earth tonight," the youth explained, with a suspicion of sarcasm. "Pan observed his slightly ambiguous."

"Must not be afraid we'll be fruitful at our intrusion?" he asked. "Would it not be wise to let us make judgment for the night and prevent our miserable selves to get tomorrow?"

A sound plan, Pan thought. He had the feeling that events were working to a climax just a trifle too swiftly, but the unsuspecting guide instantly killed any hope of delay.

"An order of the Council looks no difference," he said importantly. "My own head would be the price of per-



TRAPPED! Suddenly the panels of the doors opened and a line of men with pointed rifles moved toward them. Next moment a deafening roar of exploding bullets crashed through the house as Pao and Fan Shan, crouched on the floor, then their enemies, brought their own weapons into play.

waiting "Chia" messengers to mail even Governor Quang's message." He pointed to a building near-by building facing the river front—a place now beginning to glow quietly with the lights of a myriad colored lanterns. "The Inn of Seventy Mosks, and our destination!"

A minute later they were ushered into a dusty-lit room, where Quang and one other sat feeding. As the door opened to admit them, Pao somehow sensed the idea that a third person had just vacated a seat at the table—a suspicion strengthened by sight of an unoccupied chair and a used dish.

"Whether true or not, Pao knew they had to try and carry the laws through with a bold face. With armed men drawn up in the doorway and the young officer already addressing them, there was no time to reckon the chance of conspiracy if that proved successful.

"Remain silent, Tai, with your own," Quang ordered. He stared at the chairs meaningly; then, "Advance, courtesy of the 'Chia'."

The words were spoken quietly enough, but Pao had little liking for the speaker. The crowd out of a jaw that even the heavy mountain table failed to hide, and the cynical glances of narrowed eyes, told of a danger that had no time for kindness.

"We hear news of agency from the Suldine this hour," said Pao, and loudly enough. "To leave, do a sealed minute, when delivery marks the end of a string road."

"The end of a string road," Quang repeated slowly. "You hear that, Chia—these (laughed) men know they have come to the end of a string road."

It was said quietly enough, as idle chatter as Quang loudly crushed the yellow seal of the warning. Yet, somehow, as they drove onward down Pao's back and a flicker of eye from Pao told that he also sensed danger.

Then again, the same Chia? Chia were common enough in China, but Pao's mind instantly jumped back to an agency days ago in London. He wondered if this Chia had any connection with that blood-red episode.

But the fellow merely smiled, and kept his back turned to them. And now, Quang had finished reading the despatch and was staring at the banners with expressionless eyes.

"News of famous land," he murmured. "Know you the contents of this message, messengers?"

"Only that spot are expected in Szechwan—that work you told us our parents began," Pao answered.

"I will read you the words of the Suldine Chia," Quang said, solemnly. "Listen, for they are worth your attention."

"The Son of Heaven, to his Lord of Langking," Quang read. "The three dragons speak—Ferdinand, Hual and Fan Shan—are here in Tibet. Their one desire is to enter Szechwan and they are ready beyond the ordinary. Beyond the morning, order a close examination of every visitor home Tibet—no matter what his business. If found they are to be killed at sight. To him who leads, a reward of ten thousand yuan will be given."

An oppressive silence followed Quang's sinister reading. Somewhere outside, the dull trilling of a wood whistle penetrated to the room, then a leisure challenge and deep laughter.

But those sounds were distant and unreal, in the supposed concern. In the half-dimmed silence of that inner room the fall of a pin would have been welcome, and Pao had the strange feeling that deadly forces were concentrating themselves on his, and Fan's, distraction.

Then, breaking the spell with a tremendous effect, he laughed lightly and stepped a pace toward the table. "A great reward," he said cheerfully. "Big money, for two miserable creatures, Szechwan."

"So big," Quang sneezed slowly, "that I feel tempted to garnish it."

"As all would, if opportunity came their way," Fan whispered; but, unlike Pao, he stopped gawky from the table with arms balled and hands hidden in his rummy sleeves.

"What am I that you agree," Quang sneezed; "for, as you ordered, opportunity indeed came my way?"

On that last word, loudly uttered, panels that stood for doors in Chia opened, both behind and behind him. From the one by which the Chia had entered a line of men stood framed with pointed rifles. Through the other, stepped the sinister figure of Chang—second lord of Szechwan!

As a cat plays with mice before the kill, so had Quang played with his trapped ones! Now in full view of a respective audience gaze flashed in his and Lien's hands, pointing the striking address at their victims, and the deafening roar of exploding bullets crashed through the house!

Pao's gaze followed the tremendous thunder-clap that echoed half over Langking, for the Chia were as quick as Her's rapiers on the draw, and just a trifle more accurate.

Quang had played with his victims a trifle too long, forgetting they were the audacious pair who had harassed the "Chia" for eight twelve months. His last remark had shown it too plainly that their real identity was known to him, and the realization of Chang's presence made plain the truth that he had watched them approaching the inn and among the inn with these others.

That knowledge came late, for both Pao and Fan were cool-blooded at the moment to worry about Chang, or anybody except themselves. As their enemies' gaze flashed at them, their speaking split several in advance, but enough to turn the non-time balance in their favor.

Quang dropped face forward, one bullet in his shoulder, the other palping his gun-weighted hand before whirling as fast as Chang's head. Then, quick as thought, Fan swung the heavy table at the seated Lien, while Pao tore down the single hanging lantern that these lighted the room!

OH! Pao's head and Fan Shan were taken in getting out of this ingenious trap or will they be taken before the great Fan Shan himself for punishment? Will you read next week's five instalment?

