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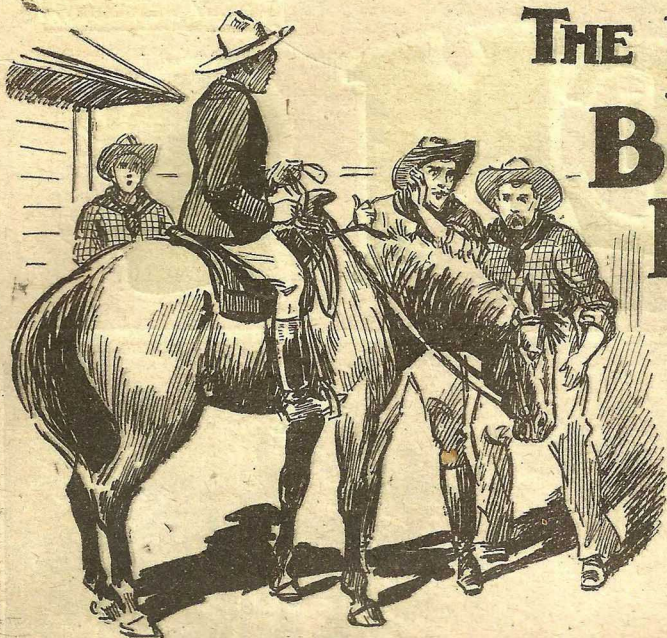
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A FIGHT FOR LIFE!

Alone and unarmed, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy realises that if he doesn't overpower his Redskin for his life won't be worth a moment's purchase! (See the grand school tale inside.)

GUSSY COMES OUT ON TOP! They don't take very kindly to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's elegant clothes and polished manners at the Boot Leg Ranch, but there's a whole heap of character and grit behind that elegance, as Gussy proves, for he solves a knotty little problem that has been worrying these hardy cowpunchers for years, and risks his life in doing so!



THE DUDE OF THE BOOT LEG RANCH!

A Grand New Long Complete
Story of Tom Merry & Co., and
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of St.
Jim's, dealing with their holiday
adventures in British Columbia.

BY
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. Roped In!

"STOP!" Long Jim, the foreman of the Boot Leg Ranch, fairly thundered out the word.

Tom Merry & Co. stared round in surprise. Five juniors of St. Jim's were riding across the grassy plain under the burning sun of the Canadian summer.

That morning Kit Wildrake had gone to Rainbow with his father, and his guests at the Boot Leg Ranch were left to themselves for the day. Manners of the Shell had suggested a ride to the Indian camp about ten miles from the ranch to the south. Manners had his celebrated camera strung over his shoulder. Photographs of Redskins on their native heath would, in Harry Manners' opinion, look well on the walls of Study No. 10 in the Shell when the juniors returned to the old school. Only Manners was keenly interested in photographs; but all the fellows were interested in Redskins, so there was not a dissentient voice.

The juniors were five or six miles from the ranch when Long Jim appeared in the offing, riding out of a hollow of the prairie. He was at a good distance from the party, but his powerful voice carried the distance as he shouted to them to stop.

"Bai Jove! What's the wow?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Better stop, anyhow," said Blake.

Tom Merry reined in his horse.

"Something's up," he remarked. "Let's stop and ask him what's the matter."

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus with emphasis.

"Hold on, fathead!" said Monty Lowther.

"Wats!" repeated Arthur Augustus. "I wefuse to take any notice of that long-legged boundah! I am goin' on!"

"Gussy!" exclaimed Blake.

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus for the third time.

And the swell of St. Jim's rode onward.

"Stop!" roared Long Jim from the distance.

Four of the St. Jim's juniors had halted. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a frowning brow, rode onward.

Long Jim put his hands to his mouth and bawled:

"Stop! Danger!"

"Wubbish!"

Tom Merry & Co. stared. Around them were the rolling green plains of the ranch, in the distance the

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foothills of the Porcupine Mountains. Before them stretched the grass, waving in the sun, unbroken for miles. It was difficult to imagine where the danger could be.

"Is the fellow trying to pull our legs?" asked Lowther.

"Looks like it," grunted Blake. "He thinks we're greenhorns. Where the thump is the danger?"

"Better stop, all the same," said Manners sagely.

"We haven't learned everything about British Columbia in two or three weeks."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Right on the wicket," he said. "Let's hear what he's got to say, anyhow." And he shouted after the swell of St. Jim's: "Come back, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus did not heed.

He had been riding at a trot, but now he gave his steed a touch of the whip and broke into a gallop.

Since the chums of St. Jim's had been at the Boot Leg Ranch, Long Jim, the foreman, had not found favour in the eyes of Arthur Augustus. Gussy's eyeglass, his noble accent, and the immaculate elegance of his clobber had afforded Long Jim considerable entertainment, which he had not thought of concealing. He never alluded to Gussy except as the "Dude," a term which roused Gussy's noble ire. Gussy regarded him with a disdain that only added to the burly ranchman's entertainment. Indeed, Gussy had confided to his comrades that he had seriously considered giving Long Jim a fearful thrashing—though how the Fourth-Former of St. Jim's was going to thrash six-foot-three of muscle and sinew he did not explain.

On the present occasion Arthur Augustus declined to be ordered about by the long-legged ranchman. He was not a cowpuncher, to be roared at by Long Jim. So he rode on regardless.

As for danger, Arthur Augustus could not see any even with the aid of his eyeglass. The rolling plains lay before him, green and glistening in the sunshine. There was not even a herd of cattle in sight—not a solitary stray steer. Arthur Augustus declined to take Long Jim's warning seriously; indeed, he declined to take any notice of him at all.

He galloped on.

Long Jim put spurs to his bronco and dashed towards the group of halted juniors. His ruddy, bearded face was excited.

"You ginks deaf?" he exclaimed, as he dashed up.

"What's that young fool gone on for? Is he plumb loco?"

"What on earth's the matter?" asked Tom Merry.

"Call him back!" snapped Long Jim.

"But what—"

"The keg!" snapped the ranchman. "You were riding right on the keg when I hailed you! Call him back, if he won't listen to me!"

"The keg!" repeated Blake.

"Gussy!" shouted Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus heard, but he heeded not. Without looking back he rode on at a gallop.

"The pesky young idjit!" exclaimed Long Jim.

"Blessed if I can see any keg," said Blake. "And if there was a keg lying about, what would it matter?"

Long Jim stared at him.

"Oh, you're a god-darned tenderfoot!" he snapped. "You don't know your way about."

"Look here—"

"Come back, you gink!" roared Long Jim. "You hear me? Come back at once, you onery young scallywag!"

And, as Arthur Augustus paid no heed, the big ranchman spurred his horse again and dashed in pursuit.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Blessed if I can make it out!" said Manners. "Let's follow on. The chap's wildly excited about something!"

And the juniors rode after Long Jim.

The ranchman was riding furiously, using both whip and spur. His ruddy face was crimson. He shouted again and again to D'Arcy as he rode, without producing any impression on the swell of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus heard the thunder of pursuing hoofs, and spurred his horse. He was quite as well mounted as Long Jim and quite as good a rider, and it looked like being an obstinate race.

"Will you stop?" shrieked Long Jim. "You're riding on to the keg!"

Arthur Augustus heard that desperate shout, but it conveyed no meaning to his noble ears. He rode on harder and faster, determined not to be run down by the interfering ranchman.

"By gum!" gasped Long Jim. "Holy smoke! He's a gone coon, unless—"

He dragged in his horse to a halt and grasped the lariat at his saddle-bow. The swell of St. Jim's was keeping his distance ahead in the race, but he was still within the cast of a lasso.

Whiz!

The long rope sang through the air, uncoiling as it flew. The noose dropped over Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's shoulders and looped round his chest and sprang taut in a flash. It seemed to the swell of St. Jim's that a giant's hand plucked him from the saddle.

Arthur Augustus landed breathlessly in the grass, and his horse, with an empty saddle, galloped wildly on.

CHAPTER 2.

The Muskeg!

"G WOOOOGH!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy spluttered wildly as he sprawled in the grass.

For a moment or two he hardly knew what had happened to him.

But he knew that he was sprawling on the rough ground, with an ache in nearly every bone of his aristocratic person.

"Oh cwumbs!" gasped Arthur Augustus, sitting up dizzily.

He felt the rope round him, and understood that he had been lassoed like a steer. His face was crimson with anger and indignation. He staggered to his feet, grabbing at the rope to throw it off.

Long Jim rode up with a clatter of hoofs.

"You pesky greenhorn!" he bawled.

"Weally, you wuffian—"

"You locoed gink!" yelled Long Jim. "Why did you keep on when I told you to stop?"

"I wefuse to take ordahs fwom you!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I wegard your mannaahs as atwocious!"

"By gum! Chuck off that rope, you tenderfoot—I want it for your hoss. I guess I've more'n half a mind to lay it round you."

"I should wefuse to allow you to do anythin' of the kind," said Arthur Augustus, with as much dignity as was compatible with wriggling out of the encircling lasso. "I wegard you as a wude beast."

"Quick with that rope, you young fool!"

"I wefuse!"

Long Jim dragged the rope away roughly and suddenly, and Arthur Augustus sat down again.

"Oh cwumbs!"

"You pesky little idiot!" growled the ranch foreman. "Can't you see you was riding into the keg?"

"The what?" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"The muskeg, you gink!"

"I have not the slightest ideah what a muskeg is, and I believe you are twyin' to pull my leg!" said Arthur Augustus contemptuously. "You have had the feahful cheek to wope me in, and I am goin' to punch your head!"

He scrambled to his feet again with a warlike look.

Long Jim, gathering up the rope with a hurried hand, dashed away in the track of the riderless horse.

"Stop, you wottah!" roared Arthur Augustus. "I am goin' to punch your nose. Funk!"

Tom Merry & Co. came clattering up.

"Gussy, you ass!"

"I have been tweated with gwoss diswespect!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I am goin' to punch that cheeky wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am goin' to punch his nose!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Wait till he's caught your horse!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "You'll have to get on your horse to reach his nose, old bean."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Great Scott! Look!" shouted Tom Merry.

With a blanched face, he raised his hand and pointed after the riderless horse. The moment before, the horse had been careering wildly across the grassy plain. Now, all of a sudden, he was disappearing from sight. The grassy plain seemed to have opened to swallow him up. The juniors gazed at the scene, hardly able to believe their eyes. The seemingly solid plain had opened under the galloping hoofs, and the horse was already down to the girths. Its head was thrown wildly up, and a shrill, terrified squeal rang through the air.

"What—what?" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove, you fellows! What—what?"

"Good heavens!" breathed Tom Merry.

The wildly struggling horse sank deeper.

"It's a morass!" panted Blake. "Some sort of a bog—and—we were riding right on to it—"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus faintly.

The juniors watched in horror. So far as they could see, there was nothing to mark where the solid prairie ended and the treacherous morass began. But for Long Jim's lasso, Arthur Augustus would have gone galloping into the morass, to sink helplessly in its cruel grip!

"That's what he meant by the 'keg,'" said Blake, through his chattering teeth. "Oh, my hat!"

Long Jim had halted on the edge of the muskeg. His lasso swung out again, and the noose descended upon the struggling horse. The other end of the rope was attached to his own saddle. He swung his broncho round, and dashed back towards the juniors. The rope tautened and dragged on the animal struggling in the muskeg.

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D'Arcy's face was white as he watched. On Long Jim's rope depended the life of the entrapped horse. And it seemed to the juniors that he had sunk too deep to be dragged out.

"Oh, save him!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

The sinking horse struggled and floundered wildly in the morass. Unaided, he could never have struggled out. But Long Jim's broncho was pulling on the rope with all his strength, and that steady, powerful pull won. Minutes passed like centuries to the juniors, watching in frozen horror. But the floundering horse broke free at last, and was dragged half-choked from the grip of the muskeg. The exhausted animal rolled helplessly in the grass.

Long Jim jumped down and freed his rope. He coiled up the lasso and turned to the juniors.

There was an angry frown on his face.

"I guess I've a mind to lay this rope round you, Dude!" he snapped.

"Weally, Mr. Long Jim——"

"Didn't I tell you the keg was there?" roared the ranchman.

"I was quite unawah that a mowass was called a keg in Canadah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I weally cannot guess these things. I am vewy much obliged to you for stoppin' me in time. I should have wuined my clothes if I had gone into that howwid bog."

"You'd never have come out alive, you young idjit!" growled Long Jim. "You'd have gone down, eyeglass and all."

"Weally, you ass——"

"Wildrake shouldn't trust you out alone!" growled the ranch foreman. "By the holy smoke! He ought to take you out in a perambulator when you go out at all."

Arthur Augustus breathed hard and deep.

"I wegard that remark as uttally asinine!" he said. "Howevah, as you have saved me fwom spoilin' my clothes, I will not tell you what I think of you. I am much obliged to you for savin' my horse."

"Keep away from that keg, that's all!" growled the ranchman. "What the holy smoke are you riding this way at all for?"

"We're riding to the Indian camp!" said Tom Merry.

Long Jim stared at him, and burst into a laugh.

"Oh, holy smoke! You tenderfoot! The Indian camp's sixty miles away."

"Wubbish!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Why, I can see it fwom heah!"

Long Jim roared again.

Far in the distance ahead, on the slope of a rising hill, the tepees of the Indian camp could be seen. Columns of smoke were visible, rising against the blue of the sky. In the clear air, figures could be seen moving about the tepees, tiny in the distance. In the clear atmosphere of British Columbia, distant objects appeared nearer than they actually were; but certainly the Indian camp did not seem more than a mile or two away.

"Oh, carry me home to die!" exclaimed Long Jim, wiping his eyes. "You greenhorns sure get my goat. You've got sixty miles to cover to get to that camp—that is, unless you've got wings to fly over the keg."

"Oh!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Foller the edge of the keg to the west, about thirty miles, and then strike south," grinned Long Jim; "then foller the other side of the keg the same distance back. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!"

"You mean it's sixty miles riding to get round the morass," said Blake.

"Jest that!" chuckled Long Jim. "And you'll find it a hard trail, too, I guess! You young ginks hit the home trail pronto, afore anything happens to you on the prairie!"

And Long Jim remounted his horse, and dashed away at a gallop, leaving the juniors to their own devices.

CHAPTER 3.

Gussy on His Own!

TOM MERRY & CO. looked at one another. Obviously, they had still a few things to learn about British Columbia! Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusted his eyeglass, and stared across the green, treacherous expanse of the "keg." The spot where his horse had broken the surface had closed up again and looked as solid as before. Far across the muskeg the Indian camp glimmered from the green of the hill-slope, and smoke rose against the sky. Several times, riding on the ranch-lands, the juniors had seen the smoke of the Indian camp in the distance, and it had never occurred to them that there was a ride of sixty miles to reach the place.

Arthur Augustus shook his head seriously.

"I should not like to undahtake to teach Mr. Wildwake his business as a wanchah," he remarked. "But, weally, if I were wunnin' this wanch, I should have this mowass fenced in. It is weally dangewous."

"How much would it cost to put up a fence thirty miles long?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!"

"I fancy it would run away with a lot of the profits of ranching," said Tom Merry, with a smile. "We've seen wire fences running for miles and miles in this country; but fencing in that bog would be a big order. I suppose the natives of the place know their way about."

"Yaas, wathah! But I should think that cattle must get lost in it sometimes," said Arthur Augustus.

"I dare say they know better than dudes," remarked Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Anyhow, we can't get to the giddy Indian camp, that's a cert," said Tom Merry. "Come to think of it, Wildrake would have taken us there to see the place before this, if it had been within reach. Let's ride round and get back to the ranch to dinner, but for goodness' sake keep clear of the muskeg."

"I am afwaid I cannot wide, deah boy—my horse is simply smothahed with muck fwom the bog."

"Better clean him down," said Tom, laughing.

"Pewwaps you fellows would like to wub him clean," suggested Arthur Augustus. "It would not take you long all togethah, you know."

"Go hon!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"We'll sit round and watch you," suggested Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Pile in, Gussy. You're wasting time."

Arthur Augustus looked critically at his horse. Both the steed and the trappings were thick with the slime from the muskeg. Even a rough-and-ready puncher would hardly have cared to mount the horse in its present state; and the swell of St. Jim's shuddered at the thought of it.

"Bai Jove, you know," said Gussy thoughtfully, "I think I will send the gee home, and tip one of the chore-boys to clean him later! He will find his way back to the wanch all wight."

"And what will you do, fathead?"

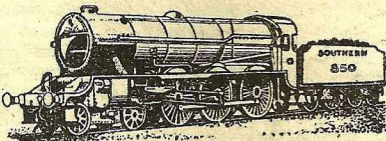
"I will walk, deah boys. I would wathah walk five miles than gwapple with that howwid mud."

"Slacker!"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"You didn't come to Canada to be so jolly particular,

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Whiz! The long rope sang through the air, uncoiling as it flew. The noose dropped over Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's shoulders, and looped round his chest, and sprang taut in a flash. It seemed to the swell of St. Jim's that a giant's hand plucked him from the saddle. (See Chapter 1.)

Gussy," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Ride the gee-gee as he is."

"Imposs, deah boy."

Arthur Augustus turned the slimy steed in the direction of the distant ranch, and gave it a flick on the flank.

"Twot home!" said Arthur Augustus, and the horse trotted off at once towards the distant corral.

"Home, John!" grinned Lowthler.

"Look here, you ass, we're not going to walk!" exclaimed Blake warmly.

"Not at all, deah boy. You fellows twot off, and I will walk," said Arthur Augustus cheerily. "It's all wight."

"You'll walk into the muskeg if we take our eyes off you!" growled Blake.

"Wats!"

"Jump up behind me, and we'll ride double to the ranch, Gussy," said Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"It's all wight, deah boy. I suppose I am capable of walkin' a few miles," he said. "Twot off!"

"But—" said Manners.

"Oh, wats! Twot off!" said Arthur Augustus.

"You're not safe alone, you know. You'll fall into something, or over something, or under something. You know what an ass you are."

"I wegard that remark as uttably asinine, Mannahs."

"Well, a silly ass must have his way," said Blake. "Come on, you chaps—we're wasting time."

And the juniors rode away, leaving Arthur Augustus to follow on foot. They disappeared across the plains, a fold of the prairie soon swallowing them from sight.

Arthur Augustus started to walk cheerily.

He was only five or six miles from the ranch-house, and from the higher ground in the prairie, Boot Leg could be seen in the distance. It did not occur to Arthur Augustus as possible that he might lose his way,

and certainly it had not occurred to his comrades, or they would not have parted from him.

But the St. Jim's juniors were far from having learned all that was to be learned about the prairies of the Far West.

Seen from the windows of the Boot Leg Ranch, the plains seemed to stretch away level to the base of the foot-hills. But a fellow walking on the prairie found the matter quite different. Level as the plains looked on a wide survey, there were rises and depressions of great extent. Arthur Augustus found himself tramping across a great basin-like hollow, and round him was a horizon of grass and sky. He tramped on cheerily for some time, but at last he slowed down with a puzzled look. It dawned upon his noble mind that after covering two or three miles, the ranch buildings should have been near and in view. But there was no sign of the ranch to be seen. He knew that it lay to the northward, but it occurred to him that it was a little difficult to know which was the northward direction in the trackless maze of grass. Gussy was aware that the punchers knew how to use the sun as a guide, and he stared up at the blazing ball of fire in the blue sky. It was almost directly over his head, and after gazing at it till he blinked, and the water came into his eyes, Arthur Augustus had to realise that he could not draw the slightest hint from the solar luminary.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "I shouldn't wondah if I have to go a long way woun—I feel sush that I am not headin' stwaight for the wanch. This is wathah beastly. Of course, a fellow can see farthah on a horse than on foot."

He looked round him, and headed for a rising acclivity in the distance, from the top of which he hoped to get a wider view of his surroundings. But the acclivity, though it looked quite near, was more than a mile away, and Arthur Augustus was quite tired when

he reached the swelling ridge. From the top of it he had a wide survey of the plains, but to his astonishment he could see no sign of the ranch.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

He fanned his heated brow with his Stetson hat.

Evidently he was quite off the track. That he had not gone south was certain, for the treacherous muskeg barred his way, and there was firm ground under his feet. But whether he had gone east or west he had no idea.

"Bai Jove!" he repeated.

He sat down in the grass to rest for a while. But he started off again soon, hoping for the best. Suddenly, as he trod, there was a soft squelch under his foot, and his boot sank into the earth. What seemed like solid grassland to the eye had yielded under his tread. The grass grew on a thin surface, that cracked under his weight and let him through.

For an instant D'Arcy gazed at his sinking boot in consternation. Then a shudder ran through him.

"Gweat gad!" he gasped.

He was treading on the muskeg!

He dragged out the half-buried boot in frantic haste, and made a backward leap. In his haste he tumbled backwards, and sat down with a bump. It was a hard bump, on rough soil; but the swell of St. Jim's was only too glad to feel firm earth under him.

"Oh deah!" he gasped.

And for some minutes Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat quite still, gazing with dilated eyes at the fearful peril he had escaped.

CHAPTER 4.

Lost on the Prairie!

"OH deah!"

For the first time a sense of the solitude of the prairie came over D'Arcy. The blue sky stretched immense over his head, round him the trackless grass extended as far as the eye could reach. Not a sign of a habitation—not a sign of a human being—not a sign of an animal. Not even a bird winged its way across the burning expanse of the sky. The immense silence and loneliness seemed to press upon him. He would have been glad to see even a stray steer from the Boot Leg herds. But there was no sound, no movement; all was solitary and still.

He was not yet, however, feeling alarmed. He was getting hungry, and he was very thirsty, and he realised that he was lost. But he did not yet doubt that he was quite capable of getting himself out of the scrape. He rose to his feet at last.

"Bai Jove! I shall have to be vevy careful," he murmured. "I might not get out again so easily if I stepped into that howwid bog again."

He scanned his surroundings carefully.

Now that he looked more closely, he could see that it was possible to discern where the solid ground ended and the muskeg began. On the surface of the bog the grass was of a ranker green, and it was almost entirely flat, without the rises and falls of the prairie. To a cowpuncher, used to the plains, a casual glance would have been sufficient. Dangerous as the muskeg was, only an inexperienced tenderfoot was likely to come to grief in it.

It was easy enough to avoid the muskeg now that he was on his guard. But finding his way back to the ranch was another matter. That the muskeg lay south of the ranch he knew; but it did not, of course, follow a straight line east and west—it varied in width, with irregular curves and zigzags along its border. By setting his back to it, Arthur Augustus could not by any means feel certain that he was heading to the north. The Indian camp across the muskeg was not to be seen now, some rising fold of the plain hiding it from sight. Arthur Augustus tramped on again with heavy feet, tired and thirsty, but still full of pluck and determination. He looked round him for trails, but the hard earth and the rough grass gave no sign. The track of some ranch rider would have led him somewhere. Even the track of a steer would have been better than nothing; he might have followed it to the herd and found the puncher in charge, who

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would have got him out of his troubles at once. But a long hour of weary tramping passed away, and he was still in a trackless wilderness of grass.

And then, as he was beginning to feel something like despair, he found himself treading on a trail.

He halted, and stared down at the trampled grass.

Five or six animals had passed that way recently—not longer ago than the previous evening. There was no sign of a horse; apparently the tracks had been made by half a dozen steers that had strayed from the herd. It was at least a sign of life in that deserted immensity of sky and grass, and D'Arcy's spirit rose as he saw it.

If the animals had wandered from the herd it was probable that, sooner or later, they would wander back, and if D'Arcy found the herd he had a chance of finding the herders. The track was at least better than nothing as a guide, and the swell of St. Jim's started to follow it hopefully.

It was easy enough to follow, but all of a sudden it came to an end.

Arthur Augustus stared at the ground before him, mystified.

Where he stood the tracks of five or six steers showed plainly. Ahead of him there was no sign. And there was no trace whatever of the steers having turned back in their tracks. It was a strange mystery to the junior; it looked as if the wandering steers had reached that spot and then vanished into thin air.

He moved on, scanning the ground—and there was a warning squelch under his feet.

"Oh cwumbs!"

He jumped back in alarm.

It was the muskeg again. He had struck the bog once more at another point on its irregular border.

"Oh deah!" groaned Gussy.

The disappearance of the tracks was accounted for now. The trail led directly to the muskeg, and it was into the muskeg that the cattle had vanished.

Arthur Augustus stared at the green expanse before him, so secure and fair to the eye, so treacherous to the tread. He could picture the hapless steers floundering in the bog, sinking out of sight to suffocation in the miry depths.

And yet he was puzzled.

The Boot Leg herds wandered on the wide prairie bordered by the muskeg, and some instinct warned them not to cross the border; that was certain, or there would have been few of the herds left. A stray animal might be swallowed up occasionally, but it was amazing that half a dozen should follow one another into the death-trap.

Arthur Augustus bent and scanned the trail once more, to make certain that the tracks did not turn back.

But there was no sign of it.

Obviously, the wandering steers had reached the muskeg and vanished from all knowledge there.

The trail was no longer a guide to the junior. It had led him back to the morass, and that was all.

"Oh deah!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

He was utterly fatigued now, and worn with hunger and thirst. He understood—too late—his rashness in parting with his horse on the boundless plains. For the first time now a sense of his danger came to him. The day was wearing on, and if nightfall found him on the prairie, what was to happen to him? In the dark he would not dare to take a step—once the light was gone, any step might land him irremediably in the clutch of the muskeg.

But there were still many hours of blazing sunshine before him, and it was doubtful whether his weary limbs would keep up till night came.

He followed the trail again, backwards this time. There was a faint hope of reaching the herd from which the steers had wandered. Here and there, on harder patches of ground, the tracks became indistinct, but Arthur Augustus did not lose them. A clump of trees loomed out of the sunshine ahead of him, and he tramped on more vigorously to get into the shade of the branches. He gasped with relief as he tramped at last under the spreading shadows of a group of cedars.

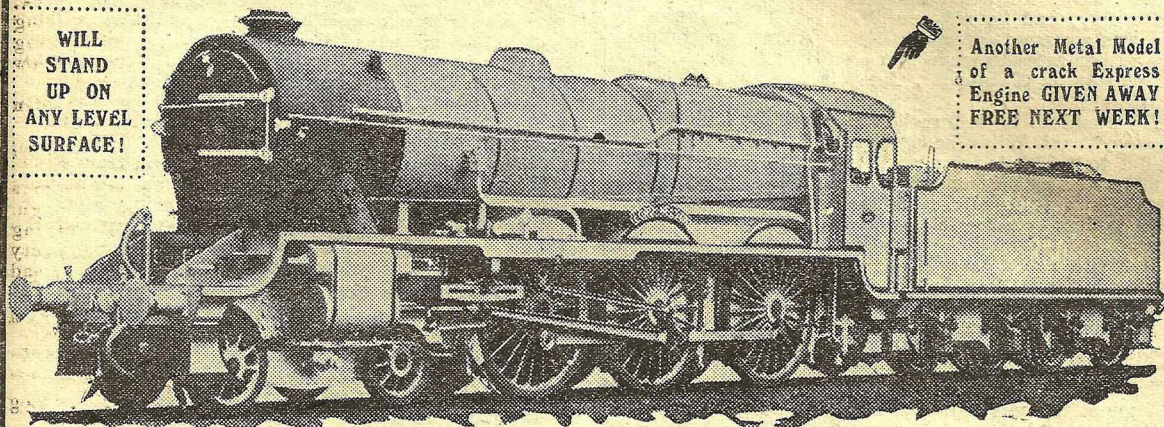
He threw himself down to rest, exhausted, under the branches that shut off the burning sun.

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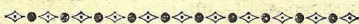
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The track of the steers passed under the trees, half a mile from the muskeg.

Arthur Augustus had intended to rest a few minutes, but when he strove to rise again he sank back against a tree, and sat there. He realised that he was worn out and could make no further effort. His throat was dry and parched and his eyes misty, and his brain was growing dizzy. He sat in the grass, leaning on the tree, utterly spent, only grateful for the shade of great branches that barred off the blazing sun.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured faintly. "I am weally lost! Oh deah!"

The swell of St. Jim's was hopelessly lost on the prairie. But he was too worn out to think clearly now. His eyes closed, and he slept the sleep of exhaustion, heedless of mosquitoes that buzzed around him, while the blazing sun sank lower and lower towards the far Pacific.

CHAPTER 5. Missing!

"HALLO, you 'uns!" Kit Wildrake hailed the St. Jim's juniors cheerily as he rode up to the ranch-house.

Tom Merry & Co. were on the veranda, taking their ease, when the rancher's son returned from Rainbow.

"Hallo, old bean!" called back Blake. "Seen anything of Gussy?"

"Gussy? No! Has he gone out?"

"Oh, he's taking a walk somewhere," said Blake, with a grin. "I dare say it's turning out a longer walk than he expected."

"If there's any trouble knocking about, you can rely on Gussy to shove his jolly old napper into it," remarked Monty Lowther.

Kit Wildrake handed over his horse to a half-breed chore-boy, and came up the steps of the veranda. The Canadian junior's sunburnt face was rather grave. He dropped into a cane chair and put a straw into Tom Merry's glass to help him dispose of the cooling contents.

"Dry weather," said Wildrake, with a smile. "But what about Gussy? You don't mean to say he's gone out on foot?"

"He went out on a horse, but he's coming back on foot!" grinned Blake. "The gee-gee got a little soiled!"

The juniors chuckled.

"Spill it!" said Wildrake tersely.

The juniors explained, with smiling faces. To their surprise, Kit Wildrake's face grew graver and graver.

"I guess this isn't a jest, you fellows!" said the Canadian junior. "How long since Gussy started to follow you on foot?"

"About four hours."

"It wouldn't take Gussy four hours to cover five or six miles."

"But it has!" said Blake. "Of course, he's missed the way, and gone wandering. I dare say he's heading for either the Rocky Mountains or the Pacific. He can't get to the United States, because the muskeg's in the way."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wildrake rose to his feet.

"Bring that hoss back, kid!" he called out.

"Thinking of looking for Gussy?" asked Blake.

"Yep!"

"But he's all right. Even Gussy couldn't keep it up after dark. He will wander in presently."

"He may, and he may not," said Wildrake quietly.

"He was an ass to give up his hoss, and you fellows were rather asses to leave him on foot. I guess if he's lost his way on the prairie, Gussy is in danger."

"What?"

"He would be back here before this if he hadn't lost his way," said Wildrake. "Goodness knows where he has got to! If he's been walking all the time, he may be miles and miles from anywhere. We've got a good many square miles to choose from in looking for him."

The juniors became grave at once. For the first time it came into their minds that the matter was serious.

"But the ranch was in sight when we left him," exclaimed Blake—"at least, we could see the smoke from the chimney!"

"A fellow on foot might lose sight of that in a few minutes. Once he was out of sight of it, what guide would he have?"

"I shouldn't have got lost!" grunted Blake.

"I guess you might have. Anyhow, it's pretty plain that Gussy is lost, and I guess he's got to be found before nightfall. If he wanders about in the dark, the keg will be the finish for him!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"But I reckon he'd never keep on hoofing it till dark. He would be worn out long before that. Most likely he's wandered in a circle; people lost on the plains generally do. By this time he's sunk down somewhere, you fellows, and—"

"But we shall find him!" exclaimed Blake.

"I hope so!"

"Wildrake, you—you don't mean—"

"We've got a lot of ground to cover before sundown," said the Canadian junior. "I'm going at once. You fellows coming?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Poor old Gussy!"

"You see, this isn't like being lost in England," said Wildrake, with a faint smile. "There are no roads or finger-posts on the prairie. Once out of sight of a trail or a landmark, even a plainsman is apt to lose his way. Let's get moving!"

The juniors were not long in getting their horses from the corral. Long Jim called to Wildrake as they were preparing to ride.

"I guess the Dude's horse came in some time ago, young Kit. Is the feller safe?"

"We're sure going to see whether he's safe," answered Wildrake.

"You'll have your hands full looking after that dude!" grunted the ranch foreman. "Bust me if I ever saw such a tenderfoot! You want to keep that galoot in a bandbox and sit on the lid!"

"Can it!" said Wildrake cheerily.

And he rode away with his friends.

Long Jim started after him, and bawled:

"Hold on, kid! Is the Dude lost?"

"Yep!"

"Where did the other galoots leave him?"

"Where you left us, Long Jim," answered Tom Merry.

"Waal, he can't have walked far with them dandy legs of his'n!" said the foreman of Boot Leg. "You hit for the Cedar Spring, young Kit, and I guess if you climb a tree, you'll spot him, if he's still moving."

"Good!" assented Wildrake.

The juniors rode away to the south over the rolling grassland. The red sun was low in the sky now to the west.

"What and where is the Cedar Spring, Wildrake?" asked Tom Merry.

"A clump of cedars about half a mile from the keg," answered the Canadian junior. "We shall raise them

in a few minutes. If Gussy got there and thought of climbing a tree, he could have seen the ranch-house. But he may be anywhere for twenty miles. Still, I've got my field-glasses, and if he's within a few miles of where you left him, I guess I shall pick him up from the top of a tall cedar."

"You—you don't think he may have walked into the bog, surely?" asked Manners.

"Not in the daylight, I reckon. After dark, as likely as not; but we'll sure find him before dark."

The juniors rode on at a gallop.

In a short time they "raised" the clump of cedars for which Wildrake was heading—a well-known landmark in that section of the widespreading ranch-lands. They rode on rapidly towards the trees. From the top of a high cedar, with his field-glasses, Wildrake had no doubt of picking up the lost junior if he was still moving. But if Arthur Augustus had sunk down exhausted, the matter was quite different. The long, waving grass of the prairie would cover him from sight, and there would be no clue—a horseman might ride within a dozen feet of him without seeing him. As they realised that, Tom Merry & Co. understood the terrible danger of their lost comrade.

Every face was grave now and deeply anxious.

They reached the clump of cedars at last. On the north side of the little timber island there was a glimmer and a ripple of water, where a spring bubbled up and flowed away, to be lost in the prairie a score of yards away. The juniors jumped from their horses by the side of the tiny spring.

Wildrake picked out the highest tree and climbed actively. Tom Merry & Co. waited below.

The foliage hid the Canadian junior from sight; but after a time, standing well back from the big tree, they saw him emerge above, clinging catlike to a high, swaying branch.

Sitting on the branch, holding on only with his legs, Wildrake opened his glasses and swept the surrounding country.

The juniors below watched him anxiously.

From that high point, with the help of the glasses, Wildrake was able to survey an immense radius of country. He turned the glasses slowly in all directions, scanning keenly. Minute followed minute, and there came no sign from him.

Blake set his lips.

"He can't see Gussy!" he muttered. "What's become of him? What fools we were to leave him!"

"We never knew!" said Tom.

Blake clenched his hands.

"Poor old Gussy! If anything's happened to him—"

He choked.

"Here comes Wildrake!"

The Canadian junior closed the glasses at last and packed them in their case, and came slithering down the tree. He dropped into the grass, and stood breathing hard.

"You've seen—"

"Nothing!" said Wildrake.

"Then Gussy—"

"Goodness knows!"

"And night's coming on!" muttered Blake huskily.

Deeper and deeper towards the far Pacific the sun was sinking—out of sight now beyond the Porcupines and the Coast Range. Shadows thickened in the timber island; night was at hand. In the gathering dusk Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another, and every face was pale.

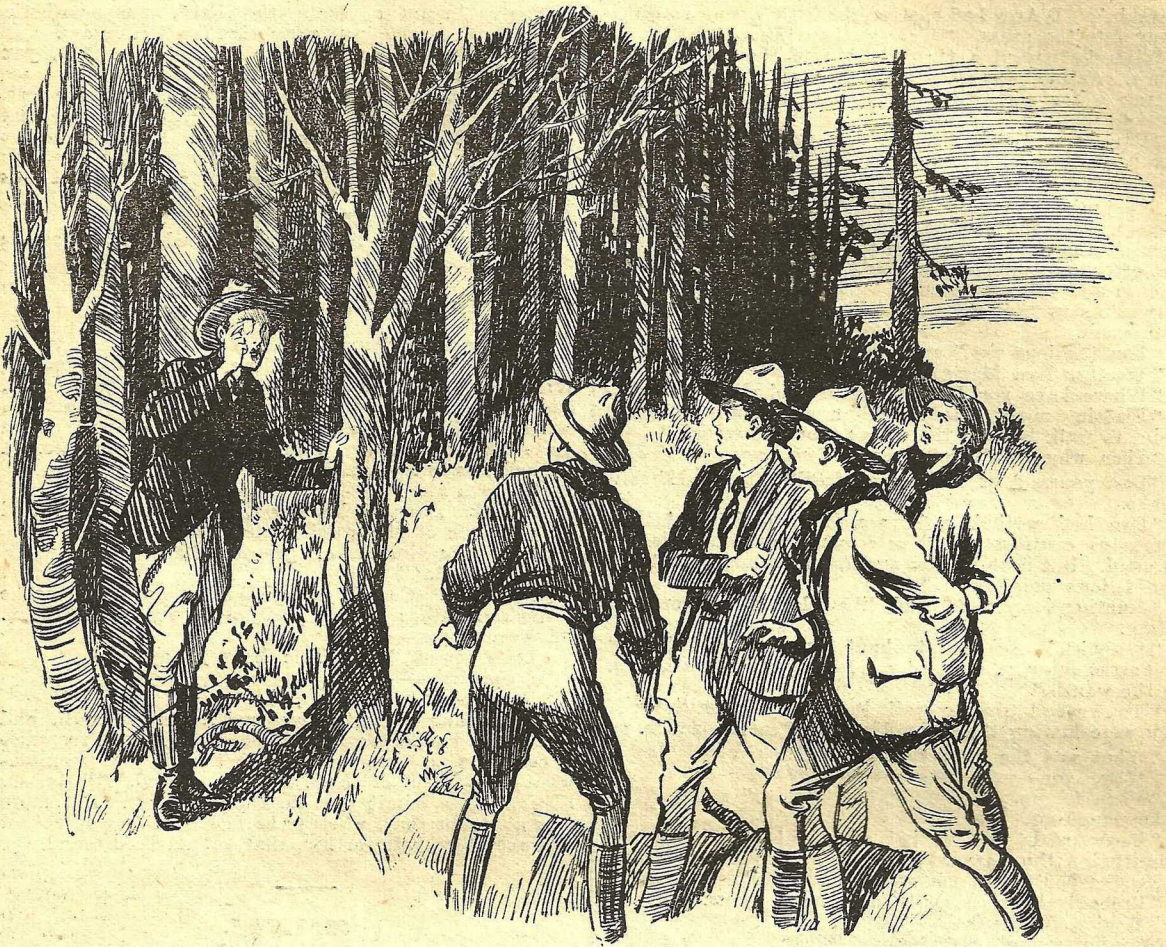
CHAPTER 6.

Not Lost!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY opened his eyes and blinked about him.

For hours he had slept the sleep of intense fatigue, scarcely stirring. But he awakened at last.

When he had closed his eyes the sun had been blazing down on the plains, and the shade of the cedars had been grateful and comforting. Now the shadows lengthened, and there was a chill breath in the air. The swell of St. Jim's rubbed his eyes and realised that he had slept long. Night was at hand, and already



"If anything's happened to him—" began Jack Blake, then he gave an almost convulsive start. "Gussy!" The swell of St. Jim's came out of the shadows, and turned his eyeglass on the group of juniors. He was quite calm and cheerful. "Jollay glad to see you fellows," he said casually. (See Chapter 6.)

shadows were thick in the trees and deepening to darkness on the wide plains.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

He was rested and refreshed by his long sleep, and he awakened with all his wits about him. It seemed to him that something had awakened him—some sound in the silence of the prairie. But as he glanced about him all was still. Even the buzzing of the insects had ceased.

He rose slowly to his feet.

He was lost, and whether he was a few miles or twenty or thirty miles from the Boot Leg Ranch he had not the faintest idea. He was hungry and thirsty, his throat was dry and parched. But with darkness falling he realised that it would be foolhardy to make any attempt to reach the ranch. In the dark he was as likely as not to tramp into the maw of the muskeg, yet to remain where he was, without food or drink, till morning was not a pleasant prospect.

"If a fellow had only a dwink!" sighed Arthur Augustus. "A fellow could do without gwub for a bit, but my throat is feahfully dwy. Oh deah!"

But the long rest had done Gussy good, and he was thinking more clearly now. It came into his mind that where there were trees there was probably water. It was, indeed, likely enough that that lonely timber island on the prairie owed its existence to some spring. The thought made his face brighten, and he started to explore the clump in search of water.

"Bai Jove!"

As he passed through the shadowy trees he spotted several dim figures under the cedars, and a murmur of voices came to his ears.

He stopped and listened.

He was not alone in the timber island, and he guessed now that it was the arrival of the strangers that had awakened him from his sleep. A faint grin overspread his face as he recognised Blake's voice. Those dim figures were his friends, though he could not imagine how they came there.

"Where can he be? If he had been in sight you were bound to spot him with the glasses, Wildrake."

"Sure!"

"He can't have tumbled into the morass?"

"I guess not. Not in the daylight."

"Even Gussy wouldn't be such an ass as that!" said Manners.

Blake gave a grunt.

"If anything's happened to him—" He paused. "If nothing's happened to him I'll jolly well punch his silly head for worrying us like this. But—but if anything's happened—"

"Weally, Blake—"

Jack Blake gave an almost convulsive start.

"What—what—what's that?"

"Gussy!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Gussy!" roared Wildrake.

The swell of St. Jim's came out of the shadows and turned his eyeglass on the group of juniors. He was quite calm and cheerful.

"Jollay glad to see you fellows," he said casually.

"Gussy, you ass!"

"Gussy, you chump!"

"Gussy, you frabjous fathead!"

"Weally, you fellows, wing off, you know!" said Arthur Augustus. "Can you lend me a tin cup or

anythin'?" D'Arcy had spotted the little spring rippling away into the grass. "I am wathah thirsty!"

Wildrake passed a tin pannikin to the swell of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus filled it with the cool, clear spring water and drank deeply and with great satisfaction.

"Bai Jove, that's bettah!" he remarked. "I was weally vewy dwy, you know. I've had wathah a long walk."

The juniors gazed at him. They had searched for him in vain, and now he had walked along and joined them in the most casual manner possible, as if nothing out of the normal had occurred. They had been feeling a deep and intense anxiety; but anxiety had changed to wrath now that they saw the swell of St. Jim's safe and sound.

"You frabjous ass!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Where have you been?" hooted Blake.

"Walkin' about," said Arthur Augustus. "I was goin' to walk back to the wanch, you wemembah."

"Then why didn't you?" demanded Manners.

"Lost yourself, of course, you foozling fathead!" said Blake.

"I've had wathah a long walk," admitted Arthur Augustus cautiously. "I've covahed wathah a lot of gwound. But heah we are again, you know. What are you fellows doin' heah?"

"Hunting for you, fathead, like a lost sheep!" snorted Blake.

"Wubbish! No need to hunt for me," said Arthur Augustus cheerily. "I told you I was goin' to walk back to the wanch."

"You've had time to walk it over and over again if you were hitting the right direction," said Lowther.

"What was the huwvy, deah boy?"

"Why, you—you—you——"

"Mean to say you weren't lost, Gussy?" asked Wildrake, laughing.

"Pewwaps I was wathah doubtful of the way," admitted Arthur Augustus. "But, of course, I should have weached the wanch soonah or latah."

"Probably later rather than sooner, I guess."

"Weally, Wildwake——"

"So you weren't lost?" roared Blake.

"I should not desewibe it exactly as lost," said Arthur Augustus. "A fellow can miss his way without bein' exactly lost."

"Look here, you chump——"

"Pway do not wear at a fellow, Blake. I have told you a lot of times how I dislike bein' woreed at."

"You—you you——" spluttered Blake.

"Pewwaps I had bettah be gettin' back to the wanch now. I am wathah hungvy."

"Come on!" grinned Wildrake. "I'll give you a lift on my hoss, Gussy. He can carry double."

"Thank you, deah boy."

"Hold on a minute," snorted Blake. "I want this clear. Were you lost, Gussy, or weren't you lost?"

"I missed my way," admitted D'Arcy.

"Were you lost?" roared Blake.

"You are wearin' again!"

"Were you lost?" bawled Blake. "Yes or no, you frabjous ass?"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as a fwabjous ass, Blake. I wegard the expression as both wudiculous and oppwbwious!"

Blake breathed hard and deep.

"If you were lost, all serene," he said. "A fellow might get lost, especially a silly fathead. But if you weren't lost you've been making your old pals anxious for nothing, and you're jolly well going to be bumped. See?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Lost or not lost?" grinned Lowther.

"Not exactly lost. You see, I should have awvived at the wanch soonah or latah."

"Bump him!"

"Weally, you fellows—— Leggo! Yawwooh!" roared Arthur Augustus, as Tom Merry & Co. grasped him.

Bump!

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Arthur Augustus smote the hard, unsympathetic ground. A terrific yell rang through the cedars.

"There!" gasped Blake. "Now, were you lost, you foozling frump?"

"No!" roared Arthur Augustus. "Nothin' of the sort. I admit that I missed my way and went wathah wound about. But I should not call it lost. I have no doubt that you would have been lost in my place, Blake, but I uttably and distinctly wefuse to admit that I was lost."

"Give him another!"

"Oh, cwumbs! Yawwooh!" roared Gussy, as he bumped the ground again.

"Lost or not lost?" demanded Tom Merry.

"No!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

Bump!

"Yow-ow-ow-wooop!"

"I guess we'd better be getting a move on," chuckled Wildrake. "Whether Gussy was lost or not, he's found, and that's the main thing. Lift him on my hoss."

"Gwooooh! I wefuse to be lifted on a horse. I am quite able to get on a horse without assistance. I wegard you as a set of wuffians."

"Up with him!"

Wildrake mounted his horse, and Gussy was tossed on the back of the steed behind him.

"Better tie him there!" growled Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gwooooh! Oooh!" gasped Arthur Augustus, as he scrambled into a sitting position on the horse's back.

"I wegard you——"

"Let's get off," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"I considah——"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

But Arthur Augustus was not to be silenced, and as the party rode back to the Boot Leg Ranch, for quite a considerable time he told his friends and comrades what he thought of them. And he refused, utterly and distinctly, to admit that he had been lost. But there was no doubt that, whether he had been lost or not, it was very fortunate for him that he had been found.

CHAPTER 7.

Stolen Steers!

"INJUNS or breeds!"

"But who——"

"That's got me guessing."

Long Jim, the foreman of the Boot Leg Ranch, was frowning darkly. He was standing by the steps of the ranch-house veranda, in discussion with Mr. Wildrake. Kit Wildrake was standing with his father, and the St. Jim's juniors, who were on the veranda, wondered what the trouble was. It was evident from Long Jim's looks that there was trouble of some sort.

"This time it's a dozen," went on the ranch foreman. "A dozen cows cut out from the bunch that Nosey Rogers was herding. Them pesky thieves ain't getting away with a dozen Boot Leg steers, Mr. Wildrake."

The rancher frowned in a puzzled way.

"It's been going on for weeks now," went on Long Jim. "All together there's more than a hundred head of cattle gone, sir. They're thinning out the herds. It's got to be stopped."

"We've got to stop it somehow, Jim," said Mr. Wildrake. "But it's got me beat. We've searched the whole section as far as Rainbow, and the Mounted men have lent a hand. Not a single cow with the Boot Leg brand has been found. I've raked Lone Pine through, and looked out every pesky breed there—but the cows never went Lone Pine way."

"I guess it's the breeds, all the same," said Long Jim. "They've got the cows hidden away somewhere."

The ranch foreman turned his glance to the south, where, beyond the plains and the green muskeg the hills rose blue against the sky. Beyond his range of vision there was the Indian camp, on the other side of the muskeg. He shook his head in answer to his own thoughts.

"Injuns!" he said. "It looks like Injuns the cute way it's done. Not a sign or a sound of the galoots—not even a hoss' track to be picked up. But there ain't no Injuns nearer than the hills yonder, and I reckon they

don't travel sixty miles to steal cows from the pastures. That ain't sense. It must be the Lone Pine breeds, boss."

Long Jim strode away with a puzzled and angry brow, and the rancher went back into the house equally disturbed and perplexed. Kit Wildrake came up the wooden steps and joined his friends in the veranda. His sunburnt face was very grave and thoughtful.

"What's the trouble?" asked Tom Merry.

"It's cattle-lifting," explained Wildrake. "It's been going on most of the summer, and it's got us all beat. Popper keeps on losing cows in little bunches, sometimes six or seven, sometimes a dozen. It can't be a big gang at work, or they'd go for bigger plunder—not that they'd get away with it, either. But it mounts up in the long run—losing a hundred head of cows is no joke."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, his eye gleaming behind his eyeglass. "We ought to get aftah the wottahs, deah boy!"

Wildrake smiled faintly.

"I guess the whole Boot Leg outfit would get after them fast enough if there was anything doing," he said. "But there's no clue. They lift the cattle in small bunches at night, and where they go is a giddy mystery."

"But you're a great hand at a trail," said Tom. "You used to open our eyes at St. Jim's the way you could pick up sign, Wildrake. Can't you follow the tracks of the steers?"

The Canadian junior laughed.

"I guess I could follow their tracks from here to Quebec if I knew where to start," he answered. "But there's nothing to it. You can pick up cattle-tracks all over the prairie if you look for them—steers wander from the herds sometimes; that's bound to happen with one man in charge of two or three hundred. There's a dozen beasts missing this morning from Nosey Rogers' herd in the South Hollow, about ten miles from here. But all round the hollow there are any number of cattle tracks."

"Yaas," said Arthur Augustus. "But you might pick up the twacks of the men who drove them off, you know."

"I guess Nosey Rogers has looked for them, and other galoots, too. There ain't any to be found."

"But someone must have taken the cattle," said Manners.

"I guess that's a cinch. But he's done it without leaving his own trail—which looks like an Injun. A Redskin knows how to tread and leave hardly a mark—and that mark he stirs up behind him as he goes, when he's on a job like this. There's no trail but the cattle trail, and as like as not the thief rode away on the back of a steer."

"Bai Jove!"

"But what beats us is where they drive the stolen steers," said Wildrake, wrinkling his brow. "Popper's been on the job for weeks—he's fairly raked out Lone Pine, where the breeds are. He's got the Mounted at Rainbow to help, every rancher in this section has been questioned, and nobody's seen a cow with the Boot Leg brand. I guess they get the animals up into the foothills, but"—he shook his head—"it's a long trail and a hard one, and it don't seem likely. It's got us guessing."

"Pewwaps I can make a suggestion, deah boy?"

Wildrake grinned.

"Go it, Gussy."

"Pewwaps the animals wandah off into the muskeg and sink into it," suggested D'Arcy. "I wemembah the othah day when I was lost—I mean when I tempowawily missed my way—I saw a trail of cattle goin' wight to the mowass. You see, I followed it, thinkin' it might lead to the wanch, but it went wight to the muskeg, and I could not find any back twacks."

"I guess cattle don't walk into the muskeg, Gussy—they know too much for that. Wild young calf does sometimes, that's all."

"I neahly wan into it myself, Wildwake."

"Well, you're a wild young calf," said Blake. "The steers have got more sense."

"Weally, Blake—"

"I guess we've thought of the muskeg," said Wildrake. "It ain't possible that bunches of steers

get lost in it; but if popper had an enemy I guess it would be possible that the scallywag might drive the cows into the muskeg to lose them for him and put him to loss. Some of the outfit have figured it out that that's the explanation. But who'd do popper such an injury for nothing? There was that galoot Black Louis, the breed, who was fired off the ranch a few weeks ago—Billy Pink says he's sure he's the nigger in the woodpile, and he's just losing us cows. But it ain't sense—the cows were disappearing long before Black Louis was fired. Nope! I reckon we're plumb up against a mystery."

"You think it looks like Indians?"

"Yep; but there ain't any Indian camp nearer than that show across the keg. They've been there since the beginning of the summer."

"Pewwaps they get across the mowass somehow."

Wildrake laughed.

"There isn't any way across the keg, Gussy. It's just slime and juice all the way, and a mile wide at the narrowest place."

"I was thinkin'—"

"Go it," said Blake encouragingly. "Gussy will hit it. Are you thinking that perhaps the Indians have an aeroplane, Gussy, and carry off the cattle in the air across the muskeg?"

"I was not thinkin' of anythin' of the sort, Blake, and I wegard you as an ass!" said Arthur Augustus. "I was thinkin' that it is up to us to look into this mattah. I should vewy much like to wecovah those stolen steeahs for Mr. Wildwake."

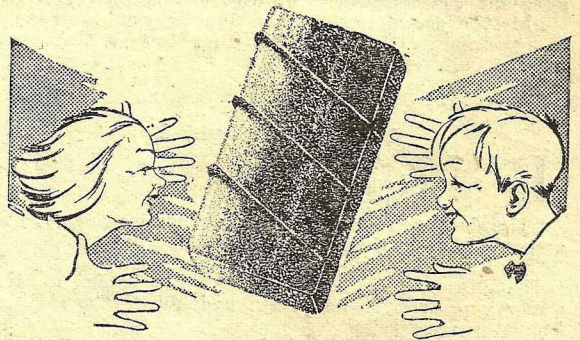
The juniors chuckled.

As the whole Boot Leg outfit had been puzzled by the mystery of the vanished cattle, they did not consider it likely that the aristocratic intellect of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy would solve the problem.

"Weally, you fellows, I see nothin' to cause mewwmi-ment in that wemark!" said Arthur Augustus stiffly.

"Lots of things you fail to see, old bean!" chuckled Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"



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"I have been thinkin'—"

"Give your poor old brain a rest, Gussy!" urged Monty Lowther. "It's not used to it, you know!"

"Weally, Lowthah, you ass—"

"Well, what have you been thinking, Gussy, old scout?" asked Kit Wildrake good-humouredly.

"It appears that the stolen cattle are wun off at night, deah boy!"

"Sure! They couldn't do it in the daylight without being spotted," said the Canadian junior.

"Then why not keep watch at night, and spot the wascals when they are affah the steeahs?"

"Rather a big order to keep watch at night on a few thousand acres!" remarked Blake.

"You see, the punchers are out with the herds," said Wildrake. "They keep watch so far as the thing can be done. But—"

"Yaas, wathah! But the more the mewwiah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wemembah watchin' at night at home with old Conway when there were poachers on the estate at Eastwood House, and we jollay well bagged them."

Wildrake smiled. Eastwood House and the Eastwood lands, though a large estate, could have been dropped and lost in a corner of the Boot Leg Ranch. But the Canadian junior nodded.

"It's not quite so simple as it sounds, Gussy," he said. "But, of course, there's always a chance of spotting the thieves at work. If you fellows cared for a night ride—"

"Jolly good idea!" exclaimed Blake at once. "Wippin'!"

"Well, I'll ask popper, but I don't suppose he would object. As a matter of fact, I guess I was thinkin' of it myself before Gussy spoke," confessed Wildrake.

"If you fellows would like to join up, we'll make a party of it, and spend a night on the prairie."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

And the rancher's consent having been obtained, Tom Merry & Co. made their preparations that day for a night on the open prairie. The fact that Mr. Wildrake gave his consent, rather hinted that he had not the slightest expectation that the juniors would see anything of the cattle-lifters. But Tom Merry & Co. hoped for the best.

CHAPTER 8.

A Night on the Prairie!

"**B**AI Jove, it's dark!"

"Go hon!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"The darkness," said Monty Lowther oracularly, "is accounted for by the fact that the sun has set."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

Tom Merry & Co. chuckled as they rode on the shadowy prairie. It was dark, undoubtedly, as Arthur Augustus remarked.

The chums of St. Jim's had spent an easy day at the ranch, and after nightfall they had saddled up and ridden away into the gloom. Some of the punchers grinned after them as they started, probably entertained by the idea of that expedition. Long Jim, indeed, had been heard to chortle, and he had even asked the Dude what he expected to see in the dark with his glass eye—a question which Gussy disdained to answer. In the dark vault of the sky few stars glinted, and the vast prairie was like a wall of gloom to the eyes of the St. Jim's juniors.

Without Wildrake Tom Merry & Co. would have found a great many difficulties at the start. But the Canadian junior seemed able to see like a cat in the dark. He rode at a trot without a pause, and Tom Merry & Co. trusted to his guidance.

"Bai Jove, there's somethin'!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus suddenly.

There was a faint sound and a looming of dark shadows from the night.

Wildrake laughed.

"Only some steers, Gussy!"

"Oh!" said Gussy.

A bunch of long-horned cattle blinked sleepily at the riders as they passed. They settled down in the grass again when the juniors were gone.

A few minutes later a voice rang out from the shadows.

"Halt therè, you 'uns!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Who—what—" began Blake, startled by the sudden hail.

"All O.K., Nosey!" called back Wildrake. "Only little us!"

A dim horseman showed up in the gloom. It was Nosey Rogers, the puncher. He peered at the juniors, and came closer and stared at them.

"Oh, you—young Kit!" he said. "What the thunder are you kids doing out on the prairie at this time of night?"

"Looking for the cattle-thieves."

"Oh, holy smoke!"

"I twust we shall be able to discovah the wottahs if they are wootin' wound the wanch to-night!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Weally, Mr. Wogahs—"

The puncher disappeared into the night again, but his chuckle came back to the ears of the juniors as they rode on.

"Bai Jove! What is that chap chortlin' at?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"I wonder!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Perhaps it's the first time he's ever been called Mistah Wogahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wats!"

Half a mile after mile of dim grass vanished under the hoofs of the horses, and Wildrake drew rein at last.

"I guess we camp here," he said. "We're close on to the big herd in the Cedar Spring section. It's as good a place as any."

"Right-ho!"

The juniors dismounted and tethered their horses. Darkness enwrapped them like a clinging garment. As they listened they could hear faint sounds from the night which told of the neighbourhood of a great herd.

The night was warm and fine. Tom Merry & Co. unpacked their bed-rolls, and bedded down in the thick grass. Wildrake was taking the first watch, and as the juniors rolled themselves in their blankets they saw him standing erect, dim in the gloom.

"Don't forget to call me, Wildwake!" said Arthur Augustus. "I am takin' the next watch, old fellow!"

"I guess you 'uns had better leave the watching to me," said the Canadian junior. "You're not used to this, you know."

"Wats! I am goin' to take my turn!"

"The fact is, I'm not goin' to sleep to-night," said Wildrake, "so you fellows may as well get your snooze."

"I shall insist on takin' my turn at watchin', Wildwake!"

"Any old thing, feller!" assented Wildrake, with a smile.

He did not expect that Gussy's eyes would open again before dawn once they were closed.

But in that the Canadian junior was mistaken. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was in very deadly earnest.

An hour later the swell of St. Jim's sat up in his blankets.

He yawned and rubbed his eyes. He was feeling exceedingly disposed to turn over and sleep again; but he resisted that temptation, threw aside his blanket, and rose to his feet.

"Wildwake, deah boy!"

"There was no answer."

"Wildwake!"

Still no reply. Arthur Augustus peered round in the shadows. There was a dim crescent of moon in the sky now, and it was lighter than before. It did not take

ANSWERS

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Gussy long to ascertain that Kit Wildrake was no longer in the camp.

"Bai Jove, he's gone!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "I say, wake up, you chaps! Wildwake isn't heah!"

"Shurrup!" murmured Blake sleepily.

"Pway, wake up, Blake!" Arthur Augustus shook his chum by the shoulder. "I say, Wildwake seems to have cleahed off."

"Let him! Shurrup!"

"Weally, you know—"

"I'm sleepy, ass! Shut up!"

"But we came heah to keep watch, you know!" urged Arthur Augustus. "I think we had bettah look for old Wildwake."

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ass!"

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry closed his eyes again.

Arthur Augustus gave it up. It really seemed as if Tom Merry & Co. were not taking the night watch so seriously as Arthur Augustus was taking it. Kit Wildrake, evidently, had gone scouting in the darkness, leaving his friends to slumber. Arthur Augustus could not help feeling that this rather implied a want of faith in the value of his assistance.

"I think I had bettah go and look for Wildwake, Tom Mewwy!" he said, after some thought.

No reply. Tom Merry was fast asleep again.

"He may be gettin' lost, you know!"

Silence.

"Oh, wats!"

And Arthur Augustus, leaving the camp, with the sleeping juniors and the tethered horses behind him, started out under the dim glimmer of moonlight to look for the Canadian junior.

CAMEOS OF SCHOOL LIFE!

The Camera Fiend!



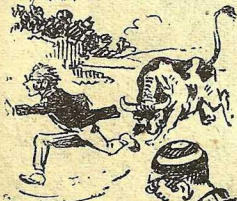
YOU see him setting out of gates,
His camera slung behind him;
Later, among his prints and plates,
You're pretty sure to find him.
For Harry Manners, of the Shell
Is most enthusiastic;
His snapshots always come out well,
Though he is not bombastic.

And when a booby-trap was fixed
For Gussy, spruce and dapper;
And ink, soot, flour, all intermixed,
Smothered his noble napper;
Manners was hovering near the spot,
All ready for the antic;
A most delightful snap he got,
And Gussy felt quite frantic!



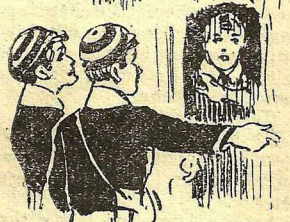
Cricket he "cuts," and dodges Gym,
Then he becomes a rover;
You'll see him by the river's brim,
Or else knee-deep in clover,
Taking the most delightful views
That Sussex has to offer;
His earnest hobby will amuse
Many a schoolboy scoffer.

The woodshed is the gloomy lair
Where Manners does his printing;
In fact, we often find him there,
And it is no use hinting
At cycle-runs, or country strolls,
Or picnics in the clearing;
Manners is busy with his rolls,
And hates us interfering!



Some of the snapshots Manners takes
Are of the gay variety;
Very amusing prints he makes
Of "big-wigs" in Society.
When Mr. Ratcliff, from a bull
Fled to escape a goring,
The snap was shown to all the school,
And set the fellows roaring!

His albums overflow with snaps,
He owns a picture gallery!
And one fine day, say all the chaps,
He'll draw a handsome salary
As Court Photographer, in town,
Well patronised by Royalty;
Should he aspire to such renown
We'll back him up with loyalty!



Arthur Augustus relinquished Blake's shoulder, and grasped Tom Merry's, and gave the Shell fellow a shake.

"Tom Mewwy—"

"Grooogh!"

"Wake up, deah boy! Wildwake's gone!"

Tom Merry sat up.

"Fathead! He knows his own business best! I daresay he's gone on a scout. Let a fellow sleep."

"But we're supposed to be keepin' watch—"

"Wildrake will call us if we're wanted, fathead. Go to sleep!"

"Don't you think we'd bettah go and look for old Wildwake? He may have got lost!"

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Look for a needle in a bundle of hay!" growled Tom Merry. "For goodness' sake, go to sleep, Gussy, and dry up!"

"Wats!"

CHAPTER 9.

The Secret of the Muskeg!

"BAI JOVE!"

It was about an hour later that Arthur Augustus halted on the dim prairie, staring about him, and uttered that ejaculation.

He had not found Wildrake. Neither had he found his way back to the camp of Tom Merry & Co. From the distance a murmur of water came to his ears; and that alone was sufficient evidence that he was nowhere near the schoolboys' camp—there was no water there.

Arthur Augustus was no more disposed to admit that he had lost himself than on the previous occasion. But he had to admit that, as on the previous occasion, he had missed his way. But on this occasion there was no need for alarm. He had his rifle with him, and signal shots from the rifle would bring his friends to him sooner or later, if it came to that. But Arthur

Augustus had no idea as yet of using that expedient. He was not in want of help—so far, at all events.

Ahead of him, in the direction of the faint murmur of water, he made out the dim shapes of trees against the dim sky. Even in the gloom there was something familiar in the aspect of that tall bunch of trees. He remembered that the juniors had camped in what Wildrake called the Cedar Spring section. He had no doubt that the bunch of trees ahead was the timber island of Cedar Spring, where he had sat down to rest on his previous wanderings, and where he had been found by the searchers. He tramped on through the grass, much encouraged by that discovery. Where the juniors' camp was he had no idea, but he was sure that it was within view of the clump of cedars, when daylight came. He would be able to locate it from the top of a tree and return at dawn, and then even Monty Lowther would not be able to say that he had been lost.

He reached the little spring that trickled out from under the dark trees. There he stooped to drink, and then he groped under the trees, seeking a comfortable place to rest. He had left his blankets at the camp; but the night was mild. Having made the discovery that he was tired, Arthur Augustus had sagely decided to rest until dawn.

He stretched himself in the grass at the foot of a tree, and in a few minutes was fast asleep.

He awakened suddenly.

The timber island had been as silent as the tomb when he closed his eyes; but there were sounds in his ears now as he awakened—sounds that had awakened him from slumber.

A looming shadow brushed past him, and he started. But he knew at once that it was a steer.

Another and another passed him, as he sat in the grass at the foot of the tree, blinking.

He watched the passing animals in silence.

Back into his mind came the recollection of the trail he had followed on the day he had been lost; the trail of a bunch of cattle that led directly to the edge of the muskeg, half a mile away, and there ceased.

Evidently, another bunch of cattle was going the same way, in the shadows of the night.

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet.

It was unusual for cattle to wander from the herd at night, he knew; and it was still stranger for them to be heading for the muskeg, from which their instinct warned them to keep away. It came into D'Arcy's mind that it was up to him to stop them, and turn them back, before they were engulfed in the morass. Each of the animals was worth a handful of dollars to the rancher. But herding cattle was an art that the swell of St. Jim's had not yet learned, and he did not quite see how he was to deal with the wandering long-horns. As he stood, perplexed, the sound of a voice came to his ears.

He started violently.

He heard a deep, guttural voice, without being able to distinguish any of the words used. Another voice answered in the same language—evidently an Indian tongue.

Arthur Augustus felt a thrill.

There were Kootenay herdsmen employed on the Boot Leg ranch; but it was obviously impossible that any of the ranch herdsmen could be driving a small bunch of cattle at that hour of the night away from the main herd.

In a flash, D'Arcy understood.

The cattle-lifters!

He knew at once what was happening. It was another bunch of the Boot Leg cattle, cunningly cut out of the herd in the darkness, and driven off by the cattle-thieves. Wildrake had suspected that it was the work of the Redskins, but had been perplexed by the fact that there were no Redskins anywhere near the ranch, excepting at the camp, which was barred off by the impassable muskeg. But these men whose voices D'Arcy could hear were Redskins; that was clear from the guttural, incomprehensible language they used.

Arthur Augustus stood silent, with beating heart.

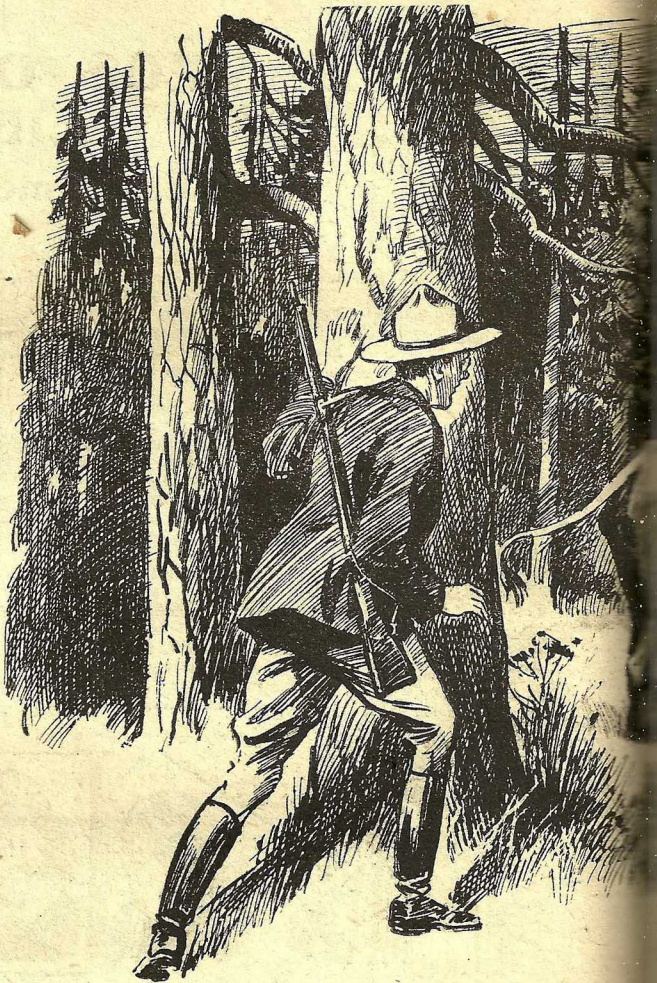
Another steer loomed up dimly before his eyes, and a dim shadow loomed over its back. He realised that

it was one of the cattle-thieves, riding on the back of the steer, in order to avoid leaving tracks. For a moment, D'Arcy expected to see him; but the man passed on without a glance. He was standing close to the trunk of the tree, and under the branches the darkness was dense and he was completely hidden from sight. Another steer with a Redskin on its back loomed past him.

"Bai Jove!" breathed Arthur Augustus silently.

There were at least two enemies to deal with, if his presence became known. But his presence was not even suspected by the red-skinned cattle-thieves.

Eight steers had passed him now, and on the two last animals, Redskins had been mounted. The bunch wound away through the timber island, and clumped on in the direction of the muskeg.



Arthur Augustus stood silent, with beating heart. Another steer loomed up dimly before his eyes, and a dim shadow loomed over its back. He realised that it was one of the cattle-thieves, riding on the back of the steer, in order to avoid leaving tracks. For a moment, D'Arcy expected the Redskin to see him; but

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stepped out of the black shadow of the cedar and followed in the wake of the stolen steers.

The timber was left behind him, and he trod the open prairie again. It was easy enough to keep pace with the slow-moving cattle, and easy enough to keep on their track, as they loomed like shadows ahead of him. His eyes gleamed with excitement as he followed on. He was on the track of the mysterious raiders—he knew that now; the Redskin rustlers were fairly under his eyes. He was on the verge of solving the mystery which had puzzled the whole of the Boot Leg outfit. How the stolen cattle had vanished from the ranch-lands, where they had been hidden, was a mystery to all the Boot Leg punchers, to Long Jim the foreman, and to the

rancher himself. And Arthur Augustus was on the trail. All he had to do was to keep in sight of that stolen bunch of steers.

He was tired, but he forgot fatigue. His footsteps made no sound in the thick grass as he pressed on.

The moon was coming out clearer now, and far ahead of him he saw the reflected light on the wide treacherous surface of the muskeg. The cattle-thieves were heading for the morass, and when the bunch stopped, at last, D'Arcy knew that they were on the edge of the keg.

He waited in intense curiosity. The trail he had followed days before had led to the edge of the muskeg, with no back-tracks. It had looked as if the cattle had plunged into the morass and disappeared. But he knew now that that was not the case. There was only one conclusion to be drawn from the actions of the



dimly before his eyes, and a dim shadow loomed over its back. the steer, in order to avoid leaving tracks. For a moment, D'Arcy passed on without a glance. (See Chapter 9.)

cattle-thieves he was following. There existed a path across the quaking bog, known only to the Indians. And that that was the case, D'Arcy soon had proof, for the halt of the stolen bunch was only for a few moments, and then they went on again.

In his anxiety to see, Arthur Augustus forgot caution and he moved nearer. There was a squashing sound from the distance, made by the hoofs on the yielding surface of the keg. A muttering Indian voice came to his ears. In the gleam of the moon on the muskeg he discerned that one of the mounted Indians was now leading the file of steers, evidently guiding. He heard a sound of blows. The stolen animals had been unwilling to trust themselves in the morass, and the Redskins were "quirting" them. Arthur Augustus drew

nearer and nearer, and the moon, emerging from the clouds, shone down more clearly on the vast expanse of the muskeg. The leading Indian was now at a good distance from the firm earth, far out in the muskeg; but he was not sinking. Winding across the morass was a firm path, hidden under the slime; and the cattle-thief was following it, mounted on the leading steer.

Arthur Augustus watched breathlessly. He had made a discovery of which the Boot Leg outfit had never dreamed. No man at the ranch would have believed for a moment that there was a firm and safe path across the morass. No white man in the Rainbow section had ever heard of it; it was a secret of the Redskins, and it was a well-kept secret. And Arthur Augustus had found it out.

In single file the steers followed one another, each treading where the one before had trod. Last of the file came a steer with the second Redskin mounted on its back.

Arthur Augustus stood on the very edge of the morass. In the dim light, he could see no sign of the path the Indians were following, though undoubtedly signs existed known to the Indians. The firm causeway was a few inches below the slimy surface, and in the slime the tracks of the cattle remained for a few minutes, slowly filling up.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus again. He watched intently.

He saw the second Indian slip from the back of the steer he was riding, and strike the animal, sending it on after the rest. The Indian, on foot, faced round, and D'Arcy saw him quite clearly, a powerful, dark-skinned man in ragged buckskin with a bunch of head-feathers. The Redskin came picking his way back along the sunken path, his moccasins squashing in the surface slime. For several moments, D'Arcy wondered why the man was returning; and it came like a shock to him that he was standing there in clear moonlight, and that the Redskin had seen him.

A thrill ran through him. The Indian was tramping back through the morass, and the glitter of his fierce black eyes struck the watching junior—and another glitter, as he released a knife from his girdle. And Arthur Augustus, in that terrible moment, knew that he was discovered, that the Redskin knew that a white man had penetrated the secret of the muskeg, and that he was turning back, knife in hand, with murder in his heart. A thrust of that murderous knife, the plunge of a body in the morass, and the secret of the muskeg would be a secret still.

CHAPTER 10. A Fight for Life!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY stood quite still for some moments.

His heart was beating hard and thick, and a thrill of excitement ran through him from head to foot. But it was not a thrill of fear. Quite clearly he realised his terrible danger; but it did not occur to the swell of St. Jim's to be afraid.

The Indians had not known or suspected that they were watched, till a backward glance had revealed D'Arcy standing in the moonlight on the edge of the muskeg. No doubt the red-skinned raiders had played the same game many a time, in the hours of darkness, through the summer, since the Indian camp had been pitched on the farther border of the muskeg. They had not been seen or discovered, contenting themselves with cutting out small bunches of cattle from the herds and driving them off, seldom or never more than a dozen at a time.

A raid on a large scale would have been more dangerous, much more likely to be spotted; neither could a large batch of cattle have been safely taken across the morass, where the animals had to go in single file on the narrow causeway. Time and again had the cattle-thieves, with Indian cunning and caution, snatched a few steers at a time and spirited them away in this fashion; and always, till now, they had carried out the stealthy operation in security.

Now, indeed, it was by chance that they were discovered—the chance that D'Arcy had been in the cedar island when they passed on their way to the muskeg. And with the one discoverer silenced, the same cunning game could continue indefinitely, with continual profit to the cattle-thieves. Arthur Augustus understood quite clearly that the Redskin was returning to take care that he did not tell at the ranch what he had seen on the muskeg.

He unslung the rifle from his shoulder.

The leading Indian was dropping out of sight, followed by the stolen steers. The man who had turned back had been twenty yards out in the morass when a backward glance had revealed D'Arcy to his keen eyes. Arthur Augustus could have kicked himself for his want of caution. It would have been easy enough to keep out of sight among the inequalities of the ground and the rough tufts of grass, had he taken thought in time. But it was too late to think of that now.

The Redskin had been twenty yards away when he dropped from the steer and turned back. But he moved with almost incredible rapidity, splashing in the slime of the causeway. He came directly towards the spot where Arthur Augustus stood, at the end of the path, his eyes gleaming and glinting, his white teeth showing through dark lips that were drawn back in a snarl, the knife glittering in his hand as it caught the moonlight. But the swell of St. Jim's did not retreat; he did not move for some moments, and then he raised the rifle to his shoulder, with the Redskin only six yards from him. His eye glanced along the barrel, and his finger was on the trigger.

"Stop!"

Whether the Indian understood English or not, the junior could not guess; but the man, at least, was certain to understand his action.

The Redskin stopped.

His teeth showed in a more savage snarl than before, and he stood half-crouching, ankle-deep in the slime of the muskeg, his black eyes scintillating at D'Arcy.

But he understood the threat of the levelled rifle; and certainly he did not know that the rifle was not loaded. Arthur Augustus himself did not remember that the rifle was unloaded until it was at his shoulder and levelled at the Redskin. And he knew that he had no time to load it; but he did not falter.

"Dwoop that knife!" he rapped out.

The Redskin, undoubtedly, believed that it was a loaded rifle that bore upon him; he could not have supposed anything else. The question was whether he would risk rushing upon a firearm. Even a poor marksman could have shot him down easily at such a range. But if he risked it, matters were very serious for the swell of St. Jim's.

He stood crouching, glaring horribly, like a wild beast crouching for a spring, in the glimmer of the moonlight.

"You heah me?" rapped out D'Arcy. "Dwoop that knife at once, you wascal, befoah I pull twiggah!"

The Indian's expression showed that he understood English. But he did not drop the knife; his dusky fingers closed more convulsively round the buckhorn handle.

"You heah me?" rapped out D'Arcy.

He made a slight motion with the rifle, and the trigger half rose.

"No shoot!"

The Redskin spoke at last.

"No shoot! Injun friend! Hawk Nose good Injun!"

"Dwoop that knife!"

A moment more of hesitation and the Redskin obeyed. The knife dropped to the muskeg, and in a few seconds sank out of sight in the slime that closed over it.

"Now put up your hands!"

"Injun good Injun! Friend of little paleface with the glass eye!" said the Redskin gutturally.

"Yaas, wathah! I know exactly how fwriendly you feel," said the swell of St. Jim's. "Put your hands ovah your wascally head and come nearah. Mind, I'm keepin' you covahed."

D'Arcy backed away from the muskeg a few paces to give the Redskin room. Hawk Nose, with his dusky hands held over the bunch of feathers in his thick,

matted hair, trod nearer and came off the slimy path into the grass of the firm plain.

"Keep your distance!" said Arthur Augustus, still covering the man with the rifle. "I shall pull twiggah if you play any twicks!"

"Injun prisoner," said Hawk Nose submissively.

He stared past D'Arcy, as if at some object behind the swell of St. Jim's, and called out a word in his own tongue.

Instinctively D'Arcy looked round over his shoulder, with the impression that another enemy was behind him—the impression that the cunning Indian intended to give him.

There was no one behind D'Arcy, but in the same instant the Redskin sprang forward with the agility of a panther, seized the barrel of the rifle, and with a powerful wrench tore the weapon away from the junior.

"Oh!" gasped D'Arcy.

The swift treachery of the Redskin had been too much for the swell of St. Jim's.

"Ugh!" grunted Hawk Nose, with savage ferocity blazing in his coppery face.

He leaped back, jammed the rifle to his shoulder, with the muzzle bearing full upon Arthur Augustus, and pulled the trigger.

Click!

Had the rifle been loaded the earthy account of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy would have come to a sudden end there and then. It was perhaps fortunate for Arthur Augustus that he had forgotten to load the rifle before leaving camp.

"Oh deah!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

The expression on the Indian's savage, coppery face was almost ludicrous for a moment in its blank astonishment. He had expected the paleface to fall dead at his feet, shot through the heart, but the empty rifle had only clicked harmlessly. That moment of utter astonishment gave Arthur Augustus his chance. He realised only too clearly that if the Indian clubbed the rifle and came at him, all was over. Without stopping to think the St. Jim's junior hurled himself at the Redskin, and a second after the empty rifle had clicked Arthur Augustus reached the cattle-thief and drove his fist into the coppery face.

"Ugh!" grunted the Indian.

There was plenty of strength in the elegant swell of St. Jim's and the blow was a hefty one. The Redskin staggered under it, but at the same time he grasped the barrel of the rifle with both hands to strike down the St. Jim's junior. But the slash was wild, and D'Arcy dodged it easily, and he struck again, his knuckles crashing on the cruel, snarling mouth. The Indian staggered heavily and dropped into the grass.

To run was useless—flight could not have saved the junior from the swift-footed Redskin. He knew that he had to fight for his life, and in those desperate moments the St. Jim's fellows would hardly have known Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had they seen him. His face was set and tense, his teeth shut hard, his eyes gleaming like steel. Not a fraction of a second did he pause. The Indian rolled in the grass; but he would have been up again in a moment, clubbing the rifle. But that moment was not granted him. Arthur Augustus came crashing on the fallen man, driving his knee into the pit of the Redskin's stomach as he crashed on him, and an anguished grunt came from Hawk Nose as almost every ounce of wind was driven out of him.

For the moment the Redskin was helpless, wriggling and spluttering spasmodically. He was not given time to recover. The rifle was torn from his relaxed grasp, and the heavy butt swept in the air.

Crash!

The thud of the rifle-butt on the Indian's bare head would have sickened Arthur Augustus at any other time.

Crash!

The first blow had half-stunned the man—the second stretched him still and senseless. But the butt came down for the third time before D'Arcy realised that the cattle-thief was at his mercy.

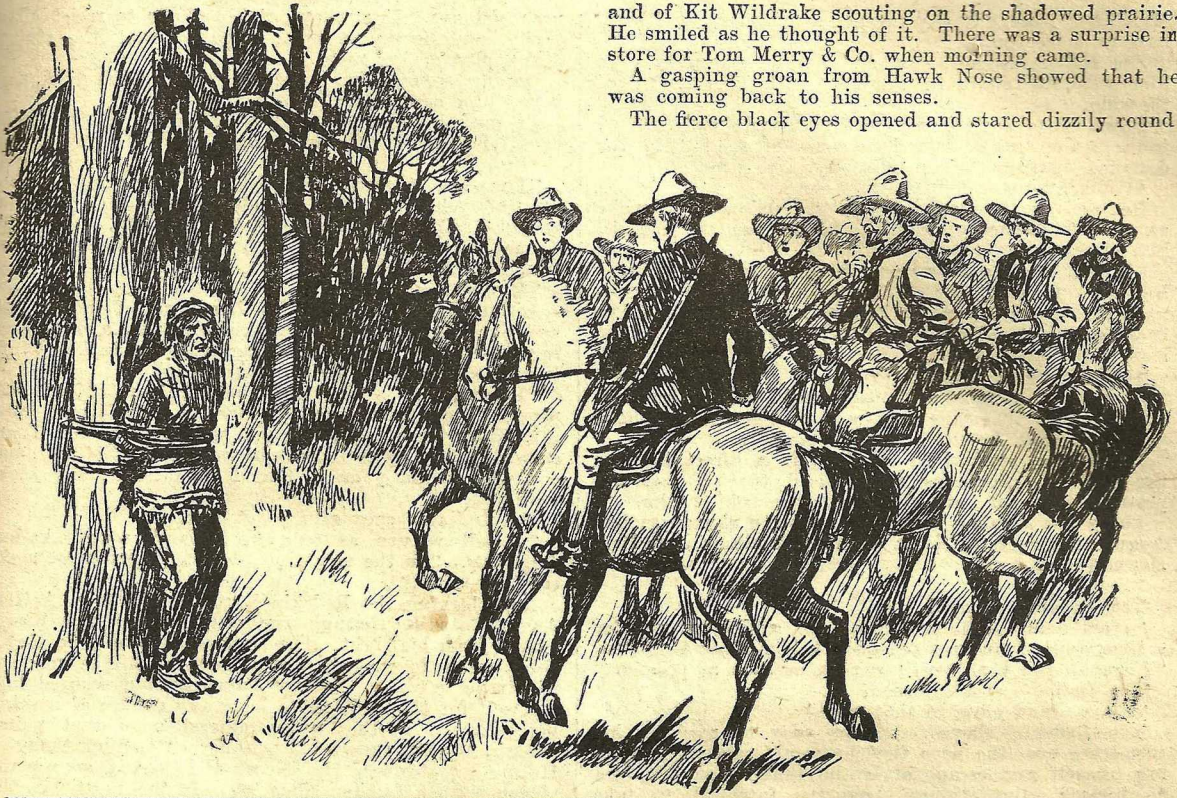
"Oh cwumbs!" gasped D'Arcy.

He lifted the rifle again, watching the senseless face in the glimmering moonlight intently and suspiciously. He was on the alert for trickery, but he soon saw that

and of Kit Wildrake scouting on the shadowed prairie. He smiled as he thought of it. There was a surprise in store for Tom Merry & Co. when morning came.

A gasping groan from Hawk Nose showed that he was coming back to his senses.

The fierce black eyes opened and stared dizzily round



"Where's this pesky redskin?" asked Rancher Wildrake. "On the othah side of the twees, sir," said Gussy. "Ride on!" The party rode through the cedars. Then there was a rear of amazement from the Boot Leg punchers. "Gee-whiz!" gasped Long Jim. Bound to the tree, where D'Arcy had left him, with glittering eyes full of ferocity, stood the Redskin! (See Chapter 13.)

it was no trick. Hawk Nose was senseless as a log, stunned by the crashing butt on his head.

Arthur Augustus rose from the senseless Redskin, his breath coming thick and fast, his heart thumping. He had fought for his life and he had won through, but he knew how fearfully narrow his escape had been. For a few moments he was sick and dizzy with the reaction, but he pulled himself together very quickly.

His first action was to jam a cartridge into the rifle and stare round him, lest the other Indian should have returned. But the man with the steers had vanished now into the shadows of the muskeg and the stolen steers were far out of sight. It was doubtful, indeed, whether the leading Indian had even seen Hawk Nose return, having been a good distance ahead, with his eyes fixed on the dangerous causeway over which he was leading the raided cattle. At all events, he was long gone, and Arthur Augustus had nothing to fear from him.

The swell of St. Jim's dropped on his knees in the grass beside the senseless Hawk Nose. The man was quite insensible, but he was likely to recover before long, and the St. Jim's junior was in haste to make sure of him. He opened his pocket-knife and cut strips from the Indian's ragged buckskin shirt, dragged Hawk Nose's hands behind him, and bound them there with knot.

"Bai Jove, that's bettah!" murmured Arthur Augustus, with a deep breath of relief.

The Indian was a helpless prisoner now when he should come to his senses. And Arthur Augustus, taking the rifle—loaded now—across his knees, sat on a grassy knoll to rest after his desperate struggle and to watch the Indian till he came back to consciousness.

CHAPTER 11.

A Prisoner of War!

HIGH over the grassy prairie and the glimmering muskeg sailed the crescent moon. Arthur Augustus, as he sat and watched and waited, was thinking of his chums sleeping in the distant camp,

They blazed with hate and ferocity as they rested on D'Arcy.

The Redskin made a bound and gained his feet, struggling with the buckskin bonds that held his arms behind him.

D'Arcy rose and lifted the rifle.

"Chuck it, you wottah," he said coolly. "You're safe now, you howwid scoundwel, and this wiffe is loaded now. You can't get loose, and if you did I should blow your wascally bwains out on the spot. Catch on?"

The Redskin's eyes blazed at him.

For two or three minutes Hawk Nose wrenched desperately at the buckskin thongs, but Arthur Augustus had bound him too well. The cattle-thief gave it up at last and stood gasping from his exertions.

Arthur Augustus smiled at him serenely.

"You're a pwisonah now, deah boy," he said.

"Ugh!"

"I am sowwy if you are, caused a lot of inconvenience," went on the swell of St. Jim's politely; "but I am suah you will see that I cannot wun any wisks with you. You are wathah too dangewous a customah for that, Mr. Hawk Nose."

"Ugh!"

"Pway walk in fwont of me, headin' for the twees," said Arthur Augustus. "I am takin' you to Cedah Spwing. Get on."

"You take Injun to white man's ranch?" asked Hawk Nose.

"Not at pwsent, deah boy. It's wathah too fah to walk; and, besides, I am not at all suah of the way till daylight. I am goin' to leave you in the twees for a time. Get movin', please."

The Redskin stared at him, seeming puzzled. Probably the swell of St. Jim's was something rather new in his experience.

"You b'long Boot Leg Ranch?" he asked.

"I am stayin' at the Boot Leg Ranch, as a guest of Mr. Wildwake, if you are cuwious on the subject,"

Mr. Hawk Nose. Now pway get a move on, or I shall have to shove you."

The Indian did not stir, and Arthur Augustus gave him a gentle shove in the ribs with the muzzle of the rifle.

Hawk Nose gritted his teeth, turned, and started towards the timber island, a mass of shadow in the distance against the moonlit sky.

Arthur Augustus followed him close.

He was quite prepared for the prisoner to make an attempt to escape, bound as he was, and he watched him closely.

"I shall fire if you twy wunnin' off, Mr. Hawk Nose," he said, tapping the Indian's back with the rifle-muzzle. "I warn you not to twy it on, as I should be vewy sowwy to shoot you. But you are not gettin' away."

"Ugh!" grunted Hawk Nose.

"I am unacquainted with the meanin' of that wemark, but I twust it means that you are goin' to behave yourself," said Arthur Augustus placidly.

The Indian stalked on steadily, in a direct line for the timber. Doubtless he realised that it was impossible to escape, with the rifle close behind him.

There was a pale gleam in the eastern sky as Arthur Augustus and his prisoner reached the clump of cedars. Dawn was at hand.

"Stop!"

The Redskin stopped.

"I am goin' to tie you to a twee, and leave you for a time, while I find my fwiends," said Arthur Augustus. "I assuah you that I will weturn as soon as possible."

The Indian's eyes gleamed.

"Pway stand close to that twee."

The Redskin obeyed. It was easy to read in his glittering eyes the hope that he would succeed in freeing himself and escape after the junior had left him to himself. But Arthur Augustus intended to take great care that he did not succeed. It had already occurred to Gussy's mind that the Indian prisoner was a guide to the secret path across the muskeg, and valuable for that reason.

Keeping a watchful eye on the silent, sullen Redskin, Arthur Augustus proceeded to manufacture a rope to fasten him to the tree. He used his own belt and the Redskin's belt and the sling of his rifle, fastening them together securely. Very quickly Hawk Nose was bound to the trunk, and then, with strips of buckskin, Arthur Augustus bound the Redskin's ankles together as a further precaution. Hawk Nose attempted

no resistance. It was out of his power to resist effectively, and he accepted the situation with the stoical philosophy of his race.

Having secured his prisoner, Arthur Augustus surveyed him carefully.

"I wathah think you will be all wight until I come back," he said. "Anythin' more I can do for you?"

"Ugh!"

"Pewwaps it would be wisah to gag you, in case any of your wascally fwiends should come wootin' wound," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "I weally do not want you to be missin' when I come back for you, Mr. Hawk Nose."

"Ugh!"

Arthur Augustus rolled his handkerchief into a ball and shoved it into the Redskin's mouth, and secured it there with a length of string from his pocket, binding the string round the Redskin's head.

"I think that is all wight," said D'Arcy. "That will pwevent you ffrom gnawin yourself loose like a wat, Mr. Hawk Nose. I twust you will believe that I am extremely sowwy to inconvenience you in this way, but you will see for yourself that I cannot take any wisks with you."

The Indian's eyes glinted at him.

"I will weturn as soon as I can," added Arthur Augustus. "In the meantime, deah boy, you must make the best of it."

And, leaving the Redskin bound to the tree, Arthur Augustus went through the cedar clump and disappeared from his sight. The moment he was gone Hawk Nose began to wriggle and wrench at his bonds, but he strove in vain. Arthur Augustus had secured him too well for the Redskin to have any chance of making his escape. Feeling quite assured upon that point, Arthur Augustus gave his prisoner no further thought. He passed through the trees, and looked across the plains on the farther side, towards the north, in the glimmer of the summer dawn. There was no sign of his comrades, and Arthur Augustus climbed to the top of a tall cedar to look again.

Then, in the far distance, he sighted a great herd of cattle, and, on the lither side of the herd, a bunch of tethered horses, and the St. Jim's juniors near them. It was the camp. The sun was up now, and shining down brightly on the prairie, and Tom Merry & Co. evidently were all awake and up. At the distance Arthur Augustus could not recognise them individually, but he counted the tiny figures in the distance, and found that all five of them were there.

Arthur Augustus grinned.

"Pwobably the deah boys have missed me by this time," he murmured. "But I yathah think that they have no ideah of what I have been up to. This will be somethin' like a surpwise for them."

Before descending from the tree-top Arthur Augustus looked for a landmark in the direction of the camp, which would be hidden from his sight again by the inequalities of the ground as soon as he had descended. He picked out a large knoll on the summit of which grew a bunch of live oaks, and marked the direction carefully. The swell of St. Jim's was already learning his way about on the trackless spaces of the prairie.

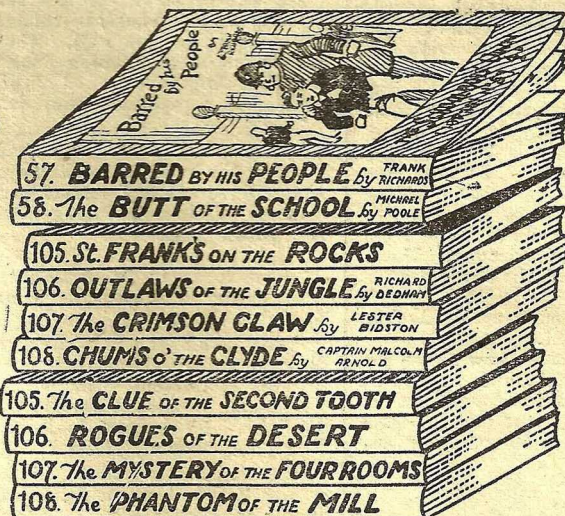
Then he slithered down the tree and, leaving the cedar clump behind him, started for the camp, guided by the bunch of live oaks in the far distance beyond it. And there was a cheery grin on the face of the swell of St. Jim's as he started.

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CHAPTER 12.

Wrathly!

THAT ass!"

"That chump!"

"That fathead!"

"That frabjous foolzer!"

Tom Merry & Co. were discussing Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Kit Wildrake had returned to the camp at dawn, after a night of scouting among the herds. He had seen no sign of the cattle thieves, and was quite unaware, so far, that they had been at work on the ranch during the night. The juniors had intended to ride back to the ranch for breakfast, but the discovery that Arthur Augustus was missing came as soon as they left their blankets.

"The frabjous ass!" said Blake. "The unspeakable chump! He was bound to go wandering again, of course."

"I guess Gussy is the galoot to look for trouble," said Kit Wildrake. "What on earth did he go out for?"

"Looking for you, I think," said Tom Merry ruefully. "He had an idea that you might be lost."

"Oh, great gophers!" Wildrake chuckled. "Well, I guess he's lost himself now, sure. Once wasn't enough for Gussy."

"I'll jolly well punch his silly head when we find him!" growled Blake.

"The frightful ass!" said Manners. "This means hunting for him, and when we find him he'll tell us that he wasn't lost. We'll jolly well bump him when he turns up, anyhow."

"Yes, rather!"

"I guess we can't go back without him," said Wildrake. "I've got some grub in my sack, and we can breakfast here. If he hasn't turned up by the time we've fed, we'll hunt for him."

And the juniors breakfasted on cold meat and hard tack, washed down by water from their bottles. There was still no sign of Arthur Augustus when they had finished, and the chums of St. Jim's were feeling in an extremely exasperated mood. One lesson had not been enough for Gussy; he had to get lost again, and Tom Merry & Co. resolved to make an example of him when he did turn up. At this rate, as Monty Lowther remarked, the whole vacation would be passed in hunting for Gussy when he lost himself, like a new game of hunt-the-slipper. Breakfast over, and Gussy not being in sight, the juniors mounted their horses to start looking for him. It was then that Wildrake spotted a tramping form in the distance, heading for the camp. He pointed it out with his whip.

"That's Gussy, I guess."

The juniors stared at the distant figure.

"Gussy, all right," agreed Blake. "He's heading straight for here. Looks as if he knows his way back."

"Let's go and meet him," said Monty Lowther; "and as soon as we get hold of him, jolly well bump him."

"Hear, hear!"

The juniors started at a gallop to meet the swell of St. Jim's, Wildrake leading D'Arcy's horse.

They bore down on Arthur Augustus at full speed; and Gussy, as he sighted them, halted and sat down on a knoll to wait for them to come up. They came up with a clatter of hoofs.

"Fathead!"

"Ass!"

"Where have you been, dummy?"

"You howling jabberwock!"

"Weally, you fellows——" began Arthur Augustus.

The juniors dismounted. Four of them gathered round

Arthur Augustus with grim looks, while Wildrake grinned and held the horses.

"I've been wathah busay, you fellows," said Arthur Augustus cheerily. "I have been—— Yawwooch!"

Bump!

In the grasp of four pairs of hands, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy smote the prairie.

"Yawwooh! Oh! Oooop!"

Bump!

"Yow-ow! You fwightful wuffians!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You feahful wottahs, wharrer you at? You sillay chumps, have you gone off your wockahs? Yawwooch!"

"Every time you wander away and get lost you're going to get some more of the same," chuckled Blake.

"You fwightful ass! I did not wandah away, and I did not get lost," yelled Arthur Augustus. "I have been twackin' down the cattle-liftahs."

"Ass!"

"I tell you I have been twackin'——"

"Fathead!"

"I wepeat——" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

Bump!

"Yooooooop!"

"Now let's get back to the ranch," said Blake. "Mind, you'll get twice as much next time you get lost, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus staggered to his feet. His noble face was crimson with wrath and indignation.

"You uttah asses!" he gasped. "I have been makin' gweat discovevics while you have been snowin'. But I wefuse to tell you now what I have found out. I wegard you as a set of uttah wuffians!"

Tom Merry & Co chortled and remounted their horses. They started for the ranch, and Arthur Augustus mounted the led horse and followed them.

"What jolly old discoveries have you made, Gussy?" grinned Monty Lowther. "Let's hear about it."

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort, Lowthah. I was goin' to tell you that I have twacked down the cattle-liftahs, but now I will not do anythin' of the sort."

"What?" roared the juniors.

"I wefuse to say a word about it till we see Mr. Wild-

wake at the wanch. I wegard you as a set of wottahs."

"By gum! You haven't really discovered anything, Gussy, sure?" asked Kit Wildrake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, what?" demanded Blake.

"I wefuse to answah that question, Blake, aftah the wuffianly way in which you have acted. You are unworthy of my confidence."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mr. Wildwake will be glad to heah the news when we weach the wanch," said Arthur Augustus. "It will wathah surpriswe him to learn that there is a path across the muskeg to the Indian camp."

"What?" exclaimed Wildrake.

"What else did you dream?" asked Blake.

"You uttah ass!"

Arthur Augustus gave his horse a touch of the whip and dashed away at a gallop towards the ranch. His comrades looked at one another.

"I suppose he hasn't really found out anything about the cattle-lifters?" said Wildrake, puzzled.

"Blessed if it doesn't look like it," said Blake. "There's such a thing as fool's luck, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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And the juniors, rather curious now, galloped after Arthur Augustus. But the indignant swell of St. Jim's did not pause and did not allow them to overtake him, and he was still ahead when the ranch was reached at last.

CHAPTER 13.

D'Arcy Astonishes the Natives!

LONG JIM came out of the bunkhouse and grinned at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as the swell of St. Jim's rode up.

"Mornin', Dude!" he said.

"Good-mornin', Mr. Long Jim!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I believe I have mentioned that I object to bein' addressed as a dude."

The ranch foreman chuckled. Arthur Augustus' noble accent always seemed to have an entertaining effect on him.

"Did you find the cattle-lifters?" he asked.

"Yaas."

Long Jim jumped.

"Eh, what?" he exclaimed.

"I twust I am speakin' in plain English," said Arthur Augustus. "I have found the cattle-liftahs, Mr. Long Jim, and I am pwepared to read a partay to wcovah the stolen steahs. That is what I went out for last night, you know."

Long Jim stared at him blankly. Two or three punchers came out of the bunkhouse, and they stared also. Billy Pink tapped his forehead.

"Loco!" he remarked.

"Plumb loco, I guess," said Long Jim, with a nod.

"Weally, you fellows—"

Tom Merry & Co. came clattering up and pulled in their horses. Long Jim grinned at Wildrake.

"Any news, kid?" he asked.

"Nix."

"The Dude says he's found the cattle-lifters," chuckled Long Jim. "He's ready to lead a party arter them. Haw, haw, haw!"

"Draw it mild, Gussy, old man!" murmured Manners.

"Wats! Where is Mr. Wildwake, Long Jim?"

"I guess you'll find him in the house. He'll be glad to hear that you've found the cattle-lifters. Haw, haw, haw!" roared Long Jim.

"Yaas, wathah! I considah that he is bound to be pleased," assented the swell of St. Jim's. And there was a roar of laughter from the punchers.

"Come in and have some brekker, Gussy," said Wildrake.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"I have no time for brekkah, Wildwake. I will take a snack in the saddle. You see, I must get back to the pwisonah."

"The—the what?"

"I capchahed a Wedskin last night."

"Wha-a-a-t?"

The juniors and the punchers stared blankly at Arthur Augustus. If he had stated that he had captured the man in the moon he could scarcely have surprised them more.

"You captured a Redskin?" said Blake faintly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Loco," said Long Jim. "Plumb loco!"

"Gussy, old man—" murmured Wildrake.

"Got him in your pocket, Mister Dude?" chortled Billy Pink.

"I wegard that as a wiculous question. I left him bound to a twee at Cedar Spwing."

"Oh, gee-whiz!"

"You kids had better look arter that dude," said Long Jim. "He's loco, I guess, or he's been asleep and dreaming. Take him in and put him to bed."

"Bai Jove! You uttah ass—"

"Here comes the popper," said Wildrake.

Mr. Wildrake was coming from the direction of the ranch-house. Quite a crowd was gathering round the juniors now, and the rancher was coming to see what was on. He smiled and nodded to Tom Merry & Co.

"Boss, the Dude has sure got news for you!" gurgled Long Jim. "He's telling us that he's tracked the cattle-lifters and caught a Redskin."

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Mr. Wildrake started.

"D'Arcy!" he exclaimed.

"It is quite twue, Mr. Wildwake," said Arthur Augustus. "I fail to see any cause whatevah for this absurd mewwiment. I went out specially last night to twack down the cattle-liftahs, and I have done it. I do not see anythin' surpwisin' in that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear lad!" said Mr. Wildrake, with a long and hard look at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Tell us what happened, Gussy," said Wildrake. "Blessed if I don't begin to think there's somethin' in it!"

"Yes, tell us what has happened, anyhow," said the rancher, with a smile.

"Certainly, sir. I came on the Wedskins at Cedar Spwing—there were two of them, and they were wunnin' off about eight or nine steeahs," said Arthur Augustus. "I twacked them as fah as the edge of the muskeg. They took the steeahs in single file acwoss the muskeg."

"But—"

"There is a path there, sir, and the Wedskins know it," said Arthur Augustus. "I watched them."

Mr. Wildrake coughed.

"Did you go to sleep at Cedar Spring?" asked Long Jim.

"Yaas, I had a west there. I was woke up by the cattle-liftahs comin' by," said D'Arcy.

"Sure you woke up?" grinned Long Jim.

"Eh?"

"I guess you dreamed it, sonny."

"Wats!"

"But—but—" said Mr. Wildrake, greatly puzzled. "No path is known to exist across the muskeg, my lad."

"Yaas, that is why the Wedskins have been able to get off with your cattle, sir. I watched them goin'," said D'Arcy. "They were sittin' on the backs of the steeahs; that is why they leave no twacks. One of them spotted me and came back with a knife."

"Oh, Gussy!" ejaculated Blake.

"I had a feahful tussle with him," went on Arthur Augustus. "But I made him a pwisonah, and I have left him tied to a twee at Cedar Spwing. It occurred to me, sir, that you could make him show you the path across the mowass, and then you could get aftah the steeahs without goin' sixty miles wound."

Mr. Wildrake gazed at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Loco!" murmured Long Jim.

"Gussy!" said Tom Merry.

"You—you mean to say that you have actually left an Indian tied to a tree at Cedar Spring?" said Mr. Wildrake at last.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Gussy, old man, you must have dreamed it all, you know," said Blake.

"Fathead!"

"Look here, you ass—"

"Wubbish! The Wedskin's name is Hawk Nose, Mr. Wildwake. He is a vevy wuff customah, and I weally had a vevy nawwow escape in dealin' with him. But I have left him quite safe."

Mr. Wildrake drew a deep breath. The information, if well founded, was of the greatest importance to the rancher. It solved the mystery of the cattle-lifting that had been going on all through the summer, and it enabled the Boot Leg outfit to put an end to it. But—

"We'll ride as far as the timber, at any rate," said the rancher, at last. "Call a dozen men, Long Jim."

The ranch foreman blinked.

"You don't take any stock in this yarn, boss? The Dude's been dreaming, or else he's jest loco."

"We shall see!" answered the rancher. "Horses and guns, pronto."

Long Jim made a grimace. Obviously he did not believe a word of D'Arcy's startling story. But he obeyed the rancher's orders.

"Get in and get a mouthful of breakfast, D'Arcy, while we're saddling up," said the rancher.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors went in with Arthur Augustus. They watched him with rather extraordinary expressions on their faces. Arthur Augustus ate a hurried breakfast with a very dignified manner. His comrades did not know what to make of his story. That was clear from



A tall old chief, with an air of dignity, in his tattered blanket came forward to meet the horsemen. "Ugh!" was his first remark. "Ugh! What do the palefaces seek in the camp of the Red men?" Mr. Wildrake pushed his horse forward. "We're going to search your camp for stolen steers, injun!" he said. (See Chapter 14.)

their looks. Arthur Augustus was incapable of deception, and certainly he was not "loco"; but it was possible that he had dreamed the whole occurrence. The juniors could hear sounds of laughter as the cow-punchers saddled up for the ride. Not a man in the Boot Leg outfit took D'Arcy's story seriously. Long Jim was irritated by what he looked upon as a sheer waste of time and trouble; but the punchers were laughing over the joke, as they regarded it.

"Gussy, old man—" said Tom Merry at last. "Wats! You will soon see for yourself, deah boy. I do not see any weason for all this surpris—any weason whatevah. In fact, I wegard you as a lot of sillay asses, if you don't mind my mentionin' it."

"Hem!"

"Ready, you fellows?" called out Wildrake.

The juniors hurried out to their horses. A dozen punchers were mounted, with Long Jim and Mr. Wildrake, and they all carried rifles under their arms and revolvers in their holsters. They were prepared to deal with the cattle-lifters if the story turned out to be well founded. A general grin greeted the appearance of Arthur Augustus. But Mr. Wildrake gave him a cheery smile, and the juniors could see that the rancher, at least, was taking D'Arcy's remarkable story with seriousness.

The cavalcade started at a gallop for Cedar Spring. Mile after mile of grassland raced under the galloping hoofs, and the clump of cedars was "raised" at last, to the south. Beyond it the muskeg glistened in the sun, with its patches of rank grass.

The punchers came up to the cedar clump with a thudding of hoofs. Mr. Wildrake looked round at D'Arcy.

"Now, where—"

"On the othah side of the twees, sir."

"Ride on."

The party rode through the cedars. Then there was a roar of amazement from the Boot Leg punchers.

"Gee-whiz!" gasped Long Jim, almost falling from his broncho in his astonishment.

Bound to the tree, where D'Arcy had left him, with glittering eyes full of ferocity, stood the Redskin. He had gnawed away the gag and striven to use his sharp teeth on the belts that fastened him to the tree. He looked up savagely and sullenly at the horsemen. Arthur Augustus jumped down.

"I am sowwy to have left you so long, Mr. Hawk Nose," he said politely. "I twust you have not been vewy uncomfortable. But you weally asked for it, you know."

"Gussy!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Good old Gussy!" chortled Blake.

"Some dude!" grinned Wildrake.

The bound Redskin glared ferociously at the punchers. Long Jim stared at Hawk Nose as if he could scarcely believe his eyes—as indeed he scarcely could. Then he stared at D'Arcy, and then at the Indian again.

"Waal, carry me home to die!" he murmured at last.

"I twust, Mr. Long Jim, that you are convinced now," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.

"Secing is believing, I guess," chuckled Wildrake.

Long Jim drew a deep breath.

"I guess you've got me beat, sir," he said. "You've got me beat to a frazzle. I take back all I've ever said about you, Mr. D'Arcy, and a lot more that I've thought and never said. I guess you're the goods—the genuine gilt-edged goods. I beg your pardon."

"Wight-ho, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus cheerily.

"And to think, sir," said Long Jim to the rancher—"to think that this hyer gang of Reds have been lifting our cattle all summer and fooling us like a set of innocent rubes, and this hyer dude from the Old Country is the man to spot their little game. I guess I take off my hat to him!"

"Bravo, Gussy!" chortled Blake.

"Three cheers for the Dude!" shouted Billy Pink.

And Arthur Augustus blushed and grinned as the Boot Leg punchers cheered, awakening every echo of the timber island. The Dude of Boot Leg Ranch had come into his own at last.

CHAPTER 14.

The Last of the Cattle-Lifters!

KIT WILDRAKE stared across the sunlit muskeg.

Far in the distance, on the opposite side, the tepees of the Indian camp could be seen against the hillside beyond. On the glimmering morass was no sign of a path. But the causeway was there, and it was known to the sullen-faced Redskin bound to the tree.

"I guess those Reds have been getting cheap beef all the summer," Wildrake remarked. "I reckon nobody would have found it out but for Gussy. There'll be some of our cattle hidden in yonder camp now—and I guess we're going to root them out."

"You think the Indian will show us the path?" asked Tom Merry.

Wildrake grinned.

"I guess he won't have any choice. We shan't stand on ceremony with a durned cattle-thief!"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah that in the circumstances it would be justifiable to apply a little pweasure," said Arthur Augustus.

"Or a lot, I guess," said Wildrake.

Long Jim had released the Redskin from the tree, but Hawk Nose's hands remained bound behind his back. The Indian's bronze face was apprehensive now.

"I guess you know what we want, Red," said the ranch foreman. "You're guiding us across to the camp yonder—savvy?"

"Injun no can."

The foreman laughed grimly.

"I guess you can and will. Throw a rope round his neck, boys."

A lasso was noosed round the bronze neck and the end of the rope flung over a branch. Two of the punchers took a grip on it.

The Indian stood with clenched teeth, his eyes glittering like a snake's.

"I guess we know how to handle cattle-thieves on Boot Leg," said Long Jim: "You savvy, Red? You can give us a day's ride round the muskeg if you like, but we're gettin' to the Injun camp anyhow. But if you don't talk, you Red thief, we leave you hanging on this tree when we start. Savvy?"

Hawk Nose breathed hard.

Tom Merry & Co. looked on in silence.

"Talkin'?" grunted Long Jim.

"Injun no speak."

"That does it! Up with him!"

The punchers dragged on the rope and the Indian swung off his feet. A choking yell burst from him.

The rope loosened and he crashed on the earth again. Long Jim glared down at him.

"Now, you pesky thief! If you go up agin, you go up for keeps! We're wastin' no time on you!"

The Indian gasped.

"Hawk Nose guide paleface."

"That's better! You go in the lead, and at the first trick you go head first into the muskeg. Savvy?"

The Redskin shuddered.

"The boys had better ride back to the ranch," said Mr. Wildrake. "It will be a dangerous path across the keg."

"Weally, sir—"

"As safe for us as for you, sir," said Tom Merry. "We want to be in at the death."

The rancher smiled.

"Very well, I guess you can follow on. But take care."

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

Long Jim tied the end of the lasso to his saddle, keeping the noose round the Redskin's neck.

"Hit the trail!" he grunted.

Hawk Nose, with a sullen face, started, the ranch foreman riding after him. The whole party followed.

At the edge of the muskeg the Redskin paused. He looked back and met the glare of Long Jim's eyes on him. There was no mercy in the ranch foreman's rugged face.

"It's you for the muskeg, Red, if we don't git across," he said grimly.

And the Indian, with a savage, sullen face, stepped out on the hidden causeway and led the way.

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Long Jim followed, his horse treading in the tracks left by the Redskin. Mr. Wildrake came next, and after the rancher came the rest, in single file, each horse treading in the tracks left by the one in advance.

Tom Merry & Co. brought up the rear.

Under them their horses' hoofs sank several inches in the ooze of the muskeg, but found firm footing on the hidden causeway.

Silent and sullen, Hawk Nose led the way.

No doubt he would have been glad enough to plunge the whole outfit into the quaking bog on either side of the hidden path, but his own fate was sealed if he played false. And it was easy to read in his bronze face his horror of sinking down to death in the slimy embrace of the muskeg.

Behind the long file of riders the tracks showed the path they had followed, but slowly the slime of the muskeg filled in the hoof-tracks and covered up the traces.

The horses proceeded at a walk.

"Bai Jove," murmured Arthur Augustus, "this is weally wathah thwillin', you know. If we missed the path—"

"Grooogh!" grunted Blake. "Think of something a bit more cheerful, you ass!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"I guess that Injun won't miss the path," grinned Wildrake. "He doesn't want to travel to the happy hunting-grounds by way of the keg. And we've only got to follow him. I guess I should be able to pick out this path again, after going over it once. There's a lot of sign now a galoot knows the path is here."

"Bai Jove, I do not see anythin' to distinguish the beastly path from the beastly bog, Wildwake!"

Wildrake laughed. His eyes were keenly about him, and the faintest "sign" was not lost on him.

A hundred yards out from the edge the path was wider, and in places the surface was firm, and the hoofs no longer sank in slime. It was only the first section of the path that was dangerous. But it was that narrow, dangerous section that had prevented the path from being discovered by the Boot Leg punchers.

As the party advanced the Indian camp on the opposite hillside grew clearer to the view, and they could see the Redskins among the tepees. They could see, too, that the passage of the muskeg had been discerned from the Indian camp. From the distance a number of Redskins and squaws gathered in an excited crowd, watching the advance of the punchers across the muskeg.

The Boot Leg horsemen held their rifles in readiness. But the rifles were not needed. The Indians at the camp stared and scowled, but they were not thinking of resistance to a large and well-armed party. The days of the war-trail in British Columbia were long over, and the Redskins were well aware of the long and powerful arm of the North-West Mounted Police. The cattle-lifters had depended on stealth and secrecy, and a desperate battle with the Boot Leg outfit did not even enter their thoughts. There were probably very few firearms in the Indian camp, and knives and hatchets would have been of little use against the punchers' rifles.

A sullen crowd of braves and a mob of excited squaws and papooses watched the Boot Leg outfit winding across the muskeg, riding at last out of the morass on to the firm land where the Indian camp was pitched.

A tall old chief, with an air of dignity, in his ragged leggings and tattered blanket, came forward to meet the horsemen.

"Ugh!" was his first remark. His eyes glittered at Hawk Nose, who covered under his glare. "Ugh! What do the palefaces seek in the camp of the Red men?"

"I guess we're after our steers, you Red thief!" answered Long Jim.

Mr. Wildrake pushed his horse forward.

"We're going to search your camp for stolen steers, Injun! If we find one steer with the Boot Leg brand on it, and I guess we shall, you'll be reported at the Mounted Police post at Rainbow for cattle-stealing, and I guess you will find yourself in trouble! Tell your braves that if any man here raises a finger in our way he will get a bullet, pronto!"

"The white chief has spoken!" said the Redskin, with dignity. "He is welcome to our lodges!"

"I don't think!" grinned Wildrake.

The old chief proceeded to harangue his braves in his own tongue. Some of the younger braves were handling their knives, with threatening looks. But they contented themselves with sullen looks, and the Boot Leg punchers rode into the camp.

In half an hour more than a score of cattle bearing the Boot Leg brand had been rounded up. They were the plunder of recent raids, not yet turned into beef by the cattle-thieves. The Redskins looked on sullenly while they were driven away.

"Look out for a visit from the Mounted!" was Mr. Wildrake's last word to the old chief.

A grin flickered over the Indian's impassive face. Long before the Mounted Police could reach the Indian camp the cattle-thieves would be gone, and many a long mile of mountain and plain would lie between them and pursuit. But the rancher was well aware of that, and he was satisfied for the wandering gang of Redskins to clear off from the neighbourhood of Boot Leg Ranch. The tepees were already being taken down as the Boot Leg party started on their return across the muskeg.

"I suppose we can release that fellow Hawk Nose now?" Arthur Augustus remarked. "We can find our way back without him."

"Not on your life!" said Wildrake. "I guess Hawk Nose is more anxious to get back than we are. If we left him here I reckon his tribesmen would put him to the torture for showing us the way across."

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Hawk Nose was obviously anxious to be gone. The Redskins were giving him savage looks, and only the presence of the Boot Leg outfit saved him from their vengeance. He led the way by the muskeg path again,

and the punchers followed, Long Jim bringing up the rear and driving the recaptured cattle in single file.

Before the party rode out of the muskeg on the Boot Leg side the Indians had struck their camp, and were winding away into the hills. Evidently they did not intend to wait for a visit from the Mounted Police.

On the northern side of the muskeg, while the punchers drove the cattle back to the herd, Long Jim dismounted, and released Hawk Nose from the lasso and cut loose his arms.

"I guess this critter can vamoose now, boss?" he asked.

Mr. Wildrake nodded.

"Sure!" he said.

Hawk Nose stood silent, staring across the muskeg towards the vanishing troop of his tribesmen disappearing into the hills. The juniors looked at him curiously. The man who had betrayed the hidden path was an outcast from his tribe now, and dared not rejoin them. For a long minute Hawk Nose stared across the muskeg, and then his black, fierce eyes turned upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. There was a deadly ferocity in his look that made a shudder run through the swell of St. Jim's. The Indian did not speak. He turned, after that long look at the St. Jim's junior, and strode away through the grass, following the border of the muskeg. In a few minutes he disappeared from sight, and Tom Merry & Co. were glad to see the last of him.

At Boot Leg, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the hero of the hour. Long Jim treated him with a new and surprising respect, and the whole outfit agreed that Gussy was the "goods"—which was very grateful and comforting to the Dude of the Boot Leg Ranch.

THE END.

**KEEP YOUR PEEPERS OPEN
FOR THIS COVER NEXT
WEDNESDAY, BOYS!**

Poor old Gussy has got himself into a nice mess, hasn't he? That Redskin with the burning brand means to finish off our Gussy in his own fiendish way!

But there's many a slip . . . etc. Read how Arthur Augustus gets himself into this pretty pickle . . . and what is perhaps more to your liking, how he gets out of it, in

**"The Secret of Pine Tree
Patch!"**

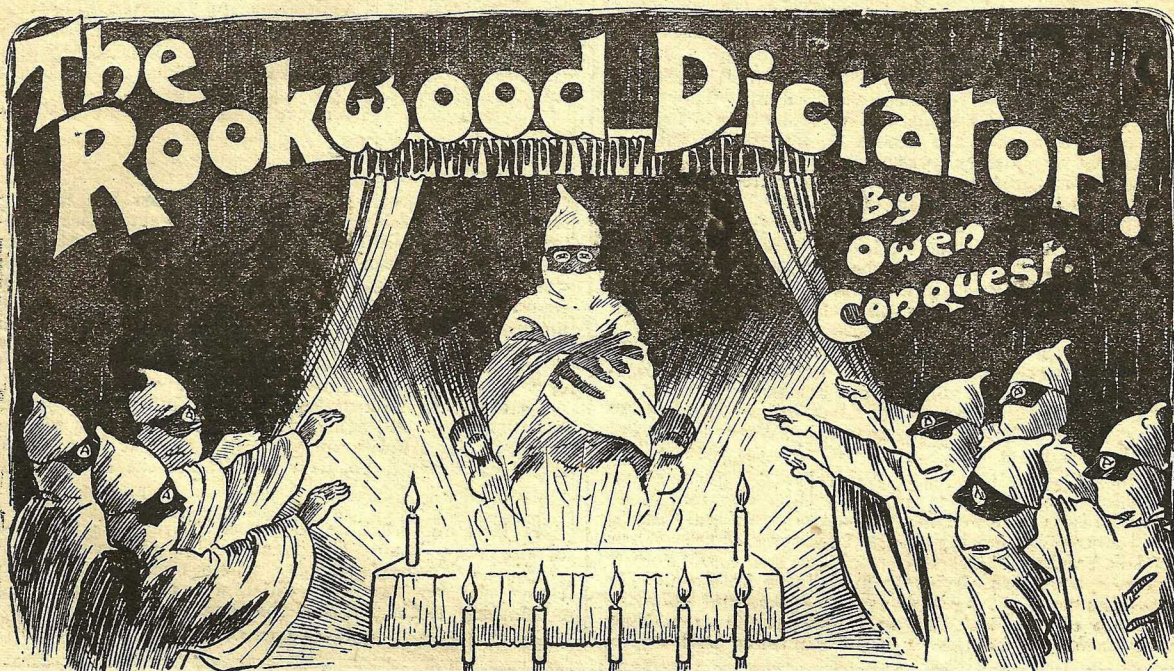
Next Wednesday's bumper story of the St. Jim's chums on holiday in British Columbia.

Order Your Copy of the GEM To-day!



START THIS BRILLIANT NEW SCHOOL STORY TO-DAY, CHUMS!

DEALING WITH A RASCAL! Captain Punter makes quite a nice little living out of certain "sportsmen" at Rookwood, but when he gets Lovell minor into his clutches he overlooks the fact that there's such a person as Lovell major! And Lovell major has his own original ideas of dealing with sportsmen of Captain Punter's kidney!



A GRAND NEW STORY OF JIMMY SILVER & CO., THE CHEERY CHUMS OF ROOKWOOD.

Unpleasant for Captain Punter!

TEN pounds!" Arthur Edward Lovell of the Fourth Form at Rookwood put a world of indignation into the words.

His chums, Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome, seemed inclined to agree with him for once—an unusual state of affairs in the end study.

"Rotten sharper!" remarked Raby.

"Swindling cad!" concurred Newcome.

"The kid can't pay it, anyhow," said Jimmy Silver.

"Ten pounds, you know!"

Arthur Edward Lovell fixed his eyes grimly on the fifth occupant of the study—Lovell minor of the Third.

The fag did not speak. His face was white and strained, and it needed very little observation to perceive that he was worried—desperately so. Indeed, it was not like the independent minor that Lovell knew to come to the end study for help and advice, ready as Arthur Edward always was to give it.

Lovell minor was evidently in a serious scrape; and, judging by the terrific indignation expressed by his major, it was not a scrape of the kind that Rookwood fags were constantly getting into.

"You owe this—this Punter fellow ten guids?" asked Lovell, apparently uncertain if he had heard aright.

"Yes," muttered the fag.

"Gambling!" said Lovell. "You know I warned you never to have anything to do with that gang at the Bird-in-Hand—you got into trouble with them once before—"

"Oh, I know all that! If that's all you can say, I'll go and ask Peele—"

"You won't get any change out of Peele, and you know it, you young jackanapes!" snapped Lovell. "And, what's more, I don't want this talked up and down the school—my minor in debt to a rascally card-sharper to the tune of ten guids! It's got to be kept dark."

"It has!" agreed Jimmy Silver. "Look here, kid. Cough it up, and we'll do our best for you. I expect there's some way out, when we've thought it over. Take a pew, and tell us the giddy worst."

"Yes, take a pew—and let's have it plain!" assented Lovell major grimly. "You've been playing cards with the man—this Captain Punter?"

"Yes."

"At the Bird-in-Hand, I suppose. And Joey Hook and

that crowd helped to fleece you. How much have you lost, exactly?"

"I—I don't know! I lost count! Punter says ten pounds."

"You young ass!"

"You—you see, he gave me odds at first, as I was new to the game, and—and I lost—"

"We know that. Get on."

"And then we tossed—double or—or quits," confessed Lovell minor, his face crimson. "I—I lost again, and made him toss double or quits again. That's all."

"Of course you lost each time!" ejaculated Lovell, in disgust. "He used a double-headed penny, you young ass! He simply swindled you!"

"But I've got to pay up," insisted Lovell minor desperately. "He threatened to come straight up to the school if he didn't get the money this afternoon. I'm to meet him at the old stile. I simply must have the cash—can't you understand? I wouldn't have come to you if I hadn't been in a corner—you know that!"

"You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself!" said Lovell coolly. "But I can't stand by and see you hoofed out of the school. We've got to settle with the man, you chaps."

"How about a whip-round?" suggested Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, my hat! I've got a sixpence," remarked Raby dismally.

"Four-and-eleven," said Newcome, laying that amount on the study table. "You're welcome, but it isn't much use by itself."

"Luckily I'm flush," said Jimmy Silver complacently.

"Hold on!" snapped Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Eh?"

"We're not paying a penny to this howling cad of a sharper," announced Lovell coolly. "He's got my minor into a hole through rotten trickery—and he's going to be punished. What do you think will happen if we square up? He'll be asking for more in a week or two."

Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome looked thoughtful.

"Something in that," agreed Raby.

"Exactly," said Lovell grimly. "I believe I've pointed out before that in this study I'm the man with the brains. I'm grateful to you fellows, of course—it's jolly decent of you to weigh in with your spare cash for this young rascal of a kid—"

"Here, I say—" began Lovell minor.

"Carry on!" grinned Jimmy Silver gracefully.

"But paying up would be a sign of surrender—and the man would bleed us dry before he let up," continued Lovell calmly. "Now, my way of dealing with him won't leave

any room for argument—and I don't think he'll come back for a second instalment, either!"

"What's your method?" asked Raby.

"I say, you know, there's no time for silly rot," remarked Lovell minor, in alarm. "It's got to be paid this afternoon, or—"

"You shut up!" snapped Lovell major dictatorially. "You're dead in this act, so give your lower jaw a rest. You've put the matter in my hands, and there's no need to worry. When we've dealt with Captain Punter, we'll give you a stumping—"

"You'll do what, you idiot?"

"Give you a stumping," repeated Lovell calmly. "As a warning to keep out of trouble in future. But just at the moment dealing with Punter is the job in hand. We're doing nothing special this afternoon, Jimmy—"

"We were playing cricket," remarked Jimmy Silver casually.

"Cricket can wait!" snapped Lovell. "You fellows remember I was talking about the Italian Prime Minister this morning—that Johnny Mussolini?"

"I say, we've had enough Mussolini for the present," urged Newcome. "Leave him out of it. This is a committee of ways and means. You can't deal with Captain Punter like Mussolini would, you know."

"Oh, can't I?" ejaculated Lovell excitedly. "That's just what I intend to do."

"Oh!"

Lovell's chums were silent. There were moments when it was difficult to know just how to take Arthur Edward Lovell. The silence was broken by a gasp from Lovell minor.

"You awful fathead! I want you to lend me the money—I'll pay it back somehow. For goodness' sake don't start any tricks on the man—he's a dangerous customer!"

"So am I!" remarked Lovell coolly. "I think that settles it. You men ready to interview Captain Punter?"

"I—I suppose so."

"Come on, then. He'll be waiting at the old stile—and I think he's going to get a surprise packet!"

"After all, he can't collect the debt legally," said Jimmy Silver thoughtfully. "He deserves to lose the money, if you come to that. And a thundering ragging might persuade him that this district isn't exactly healthy for sharpers and swindlers. It's worth trying."

"Especially when we haven't the cash, in any case," agreed Raby.

The Fistical Four rose to their feet, and Lovell threw open the study door. His minor gave a gasp of dismay.

"I—I say, you're not going to try ragging the man? Oh, you fatheads, you idiots! He'll come straight up here and tell the Head everything! I shall be expelled—and it will be all your fault, Arthur!"

"Shut up! I'm handling this!" snapped Lovell major.

"I wanted you to help me—I know I oughtn't to have been such a silly, weak fool!" gasped the fag miserably. "But—but you'll only make it worse for me by acting the goat!"

"Keep cool, kid," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "If we squared, the man would come again. Cut off, and leave him to us, there's a good chap!"

"Come on!" said Lovell.

His minor stared after the four juniors, not very hopefully. He had been a fool—a silly fool—and he reproached himself bitterly with the reflection. But so far as he could see, his major's intervention was only going to make matters worse. Still, the die was cast now.

Jimmy Silver & Co., meanwhile, made their way out of gates, and along the narrow lane. Conversation lagged, for there was really nothing to be said. The man Punter was to be met by the stile—and after that the affair was in Lovell's hands. His chums were prepared to back him up in ragging the rascal bald-headed, and they hoped charitably that it would do him good.

There was no doubt that Lovell intended to scare the man off with a ragging of a record kind.

"That's the man!"

Some hundred yards along the lane a tall, dandified figure was leaning against a stile. The Fistical Four did not need telling that it was Captain Punter. The captain was smoking a cheroot and swinging a malacca cane as he waited. He appeared quite pleased at the prospect of an interview with Lovell minor.

"Some captain!" remarked Jimmy Silver, as they approached him. "They wouldn't have that weed in the Army at any price. I hear he's only a visitor to this district—putting up at the Bird-in-Hand. He probably finds most places too hot to hold him after a while."

The man glanced up as the four juniors halted. He raised his eyebrows a little and continued to swing his malacca cane negligently. His look showed plainly that the presence of the Fistical Four did not alarm, or even interest him.

"Are you Captain Punter?"

The man gave Lovell a glance and nodded. His glance lingered on Lovell's rugged features. Perhaps he recognised a likeness to his latest victim.

"Then you're the man I want to speak to," said Lovell, with satisfaction. "You've been gambling with my minor; and he says he owes you ten pounds. Is that so?"

"You have the facts, young gentleman," agreed the captain, with a little more keenness. "You have come to square the account, I take it?"

"In a way," admitted Lovell grimly. "Not your way, though. You've got my brother into a mess by rascally trickery, and he doesn't owe you anything like ten pounds. You're not going to be paid a penny; and you're clearing out of this locality by the first train to-morrow morning! Do you hear me?"

"My hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "That's putting it plain!"

There was a gleam in the captain's eyes, but he still retained his urbanity.

"I am sorry to disappoint you, young gentleman. But unless the money is paid up to-day, I shall be under the painful necessity of calling upon your headmaster and explaining the whole matter."

"You'll do nothing of the kind!" snapped Lovell. "Have you got the I O U with you now?"

"The price of the I O U is ten pounds—not a halfpenny less," remarked Captain Punter coolly.

"He's got it on him, Jimmy," said Lovell, breathing hard. "Is that good enough? We'll teach him a lesson, what?"

"I'm with you," agreed Jimmy Silver at once.

"Same here!" concurred Raby and Newcome, with alacrity.

For the first time, the captain began to look slightly alarmed. His grasp closed tightly on his malacca cane, not that that would be much protection against four sturdy juniors.

"For the last time," began Lovell, "are you handing over that—Yarooop!"

He did not finish the sentence as he had intended. A savage slash from Captain Punter's cane took him across the shoulders, and Lovell gave a wild roar.

"Rush him!"

"Smash him!"

"Give him a taste of his own medicine!"

Captain Punter had lost his temper—never of the most equable variety. He was following up the first slash with another and another—and each left its mark on the juniors. But four pairs of hands were laid on the sharper's anatomy at the same moment, and he was lifted almost off his feet and rolled in the narrow lane, with the Fistical Four clinging to him like monkeys.

Really what happened next was never a clear memory to Captain Punter. His cane was wrenched from his grasp, and he was rolled and bumped and pitched hither and thither like a sack of coals. For several minutes it seemed to the captain that a series of earthquakes were occurring round about him. He sat up at last, gasping and spluttering, almost incoherent with rage, while four grim faces met his gaze.

"Are you handing over that I O U?" demanded Lovell curtly.

"Or do you want some more?" asked Jimmy Silver.

Captain Punter spluttered and spat.

"Hang you! Hang you, no! I'll ruin your brother for this, you young ruffian! I'll—"

"Turn him over!" rapped Jimmy Silver.

The captain was seized, and before he had realised what was toward, he was lying face downward, Jimmy Silver sitting on his head, and Raby and Newcome trampling recklessly on his legs. Lovell, his face set and grim, took the malacca cane in his grasp and swished it through the air.

"Let me gerrup!" came in muffled tones from the dust of the lane. "I'll have the law on you! I'll cut you in ribbons—"

Whack!

Lovell wasted no time in words. He brought the cane down across the captain's elegant trousers with all the force he could muster. A smothered howl from beneath Jimmy Silver was the response.

"Say when!" remarked Jimmy cheerfully. "Three grunts mean yes!"

Whack, whack, whack!

Whack, whack, whack, whack, whack!

Lovell was warming to his work, and terrific gasps and groans from the captain showed that the energy was not being wasted.

"Gerrruuuugh! Lemme gerrup! Anything—"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Say when!" remarked Jimmy Silver serenely.

An agonised grunt from the captain was taken to signify assent.



"Are you handing over that I O U?" demanded Lovell, curtly. "Hang you! Hang you, no!" spluttered Captain Punter. "Turn him over!" rapped Jimmy Silver. The captain was seized, and before he realised what was toward, he was lying face downward. Then Lovell, his face set and grim, piled in with the malacca cane. (See Page 25.)

"Chuck it, Lovell!" said Raby. Lovell, gasping with exertion, "chucked it," and the captain was permitted to regain his feet. There was no doubt that he had received a terrific licking. He swayed as he stood up, and his eyes glittered at Arthur Edward Lovell wolfishly. Lovell met his glance coolly enough.

"Hand it over!" he snapped. "Unless you want another dose! I'm game if you are!"

With four threatening juniors round him, the man had no choice. He drew a pocket-book and handed Lovell a slip.

"It's all right," said Lovell, examining it closely. "And, remember, you clear out of this district to-morrow morning! Let me catch you about here again, and I'll give you something that will make this seem like a joke!"

Captain Punter opened his mouth to speak, but the words refused to come. With a crimson face he turned on his heel and strode rather unsteadily towards the village.

The Fistical Four's Enemy!

CARTHEW of the Sixth frowned.

He was not in a pleasant mood that sunny afternoon. Something was disturbing the prefect's mind.

He had spent the interval since dinner in his study; but he did not go there to work, as "swots" sometimes did on a half-holiday. He had put in some hard thinking, and it had not made him happy.

Often and often there were troubles on Carthew's mind, troubles which did not usually afflict the seniors at Rockwood. It was Carthew's cheery custom to risk his cash on horses, and more than once he had made the painful discovery that the way of the transgressor is hard. What had happened before had come to pass again, and Carthew just at present was in dire need of money.

Lovell minor was not the only victim of the astute Captain Punter. The captain's airs and graces gave confidence where Joey Hook's might not, and Carthew had backed heavily on Blue Diamond, a horse which had come in twelfth in a field of thirteen. In consequence, he found himself owing Captain Punter the really terrifying sum of twenty pounds—and his prospects of acquiring twenty pounds were remote.

Hence the frown of anger: which overspread Carthew's face as a yell came to his ears from the direction of the cricket-field. Carthew was just going out, but he turned aside to investigate the commotion. He needed somebody to wreak his temper on just then.

As he strode towards Little Side, he caught sight of Lovell of the Fourth, his grasp on Peele's collar. Lovell was dragging Peele towards the wicket, and Peele was protesting loudly.

"Cave!" Lovell's grasp relaxed as he looked round, to behold Carthew striding after him on to the wicket, ashplant in hand.

"What do you think you're doing with Peele?" asked Carthew.

"Taking him along to practice," said Lovell.

"And since when," inquired Carthew, with heavy sarcasm, "have you been appointed junior captain, Lovell?"

"Go easy, old man!" breathed Jimmy Silver.

Lovell was beginning to look grim.

He had no high opinion of Mark Carthew, and he was not a fellow to hide his feelings successfully. If he despised Carthew for a smoky cad, he showed it. And it was evident to the rest of the juniors, if not to Lovell, that Carthew was in a temper—looking for a victim, as it were.

"Let Peele go!" rapped Carthew. "Now then! What do you mean by taking the high hand in this manner, Lovell?"

"Because it's jolly well time something was done!" began Lovell hotly. "Peele was frowning in his study when I routed him out. I'm starting a campaign, if you want to know. In the style of Mussolini, you know. Efficiency from the word go—and no slacking. When I've got Peele batting, I'm going to fetch Smythe to bowl to him—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Tracy and Howard and Lattrey and Gower and the rest to field," continued Lovell, with the utmost calm.

"They all need exercise—you can't deny that. In a short time I shall turn these weedy slackers into first-class cricketers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!"

The chuckling died away as Carthew rapped out the command. Nobody wanted to be the recipient of that ashplant, and it was only too plain that somebody was "for it."

"You see—" recommenced Lovell.

"I see a cheeky young rascal," said Carthew unmoved.

"What you need, Lovell, is a dose of this. Hold out your hand."

(Poor old Lovell is "for it"—his wonderful new scheme has met with a check at the outset! But Lovell is not the fellow to give up an idea easily! Don't miss next week's instalment of this topping yarn, chums.)

A WORD WITH YOUR EDITOR.

AMAZING FREE GIFTS!

The most important item of news for all readers of the Companion Papers is the fact that a record in Free Gifts is being presented by the "Magnet" to every reader this week.

As you will have seen by the previous announcements this

WONDERFUL FREE GIFT

takes the form of a splendid METAL MODEL in four colours of the famous EXPRESS ENGINE, "LORD NELSON."

The Lord Nelson is the pride of the Southern Railway and is the most powerful express engine in Great Britain to-day.

The Model which is now being given away by the "Magnet" is worthy in every way of its great prototype. Every detail of the monster locomotive is there, and the model is beautifully enamelled in all the glory of the Southern Railway's attractive green livery.

This unique Free Gift is one which every boy and girl simply must have. I should not like any GEM reader to miss it. It is up to everyone of you, then, to go right round to the nearest newsgagent, if you have not already done so, and buy the current issue of the "Magnet" containing this amazing Free Gift.

A SPECIAL REMINDER!

There is one point I should like to remind you of. That is that the "Magnet" Library now appears every Saturday instead of every Monday. Saturday—Pocket Money Day—is "Magnet" Day in future.

SPECIAL FOR NEXT SATURDAY!

Next Saturday, August 13th, the second of the Magnet's Amazing Free Gifts will make its appearance. This will be another famous locomotive,

"THE FLYING SCOTSMAN,"

the crack Express Engine of the great London & North Eastern Railway. This Model is a particularly fine one and will look splendid on your mantelpiece by the side of the "Lord Nelson." There must be no question of your failing to get it, but don't be too late! Remember, Saturday is the day!

NEXT WEEK'S PROGRAMME:

The GEM for next week contains another of these magnificent holiday stories of Tom Merry & Co., in Canada. The title is

"THE SECRET OF PINE TREE PATCH!"

and in this amazing story Martin Clifford shows up to the greatest advantage.

It is generally admitted that our famous author has never written a series which has proved more popular than the present one and in "The Secret of Pine Tree Patch!" he fairly lets himself go.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of course, plays a very prominent part, and once again proves that beneath his aristocratic exterior he is a fellow of sterling worth. Everyone of you will enjoy this topping yarn.

"THE ROOKWOOD DICTATOR!"

by Owen Conquest, trips along merrily in next week's issue.

Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood, are welcome visitors to the GEM Library, and I know you are all enjoying this latest yarn of their amazing adventures.

What happens in next week's instalment will only make this story more popular than ever.

The St. Jim's Rhymester, in his next Cameo of School Life, deals with that grim department:

"THE PUNISHMENT ROOM!"

in his usual cheerful and rippling verse.

Altogether you will find next Wednesday's GEM a very fine investment for your twopenny. Cheerio till then!

Your Editor.



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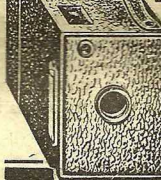
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