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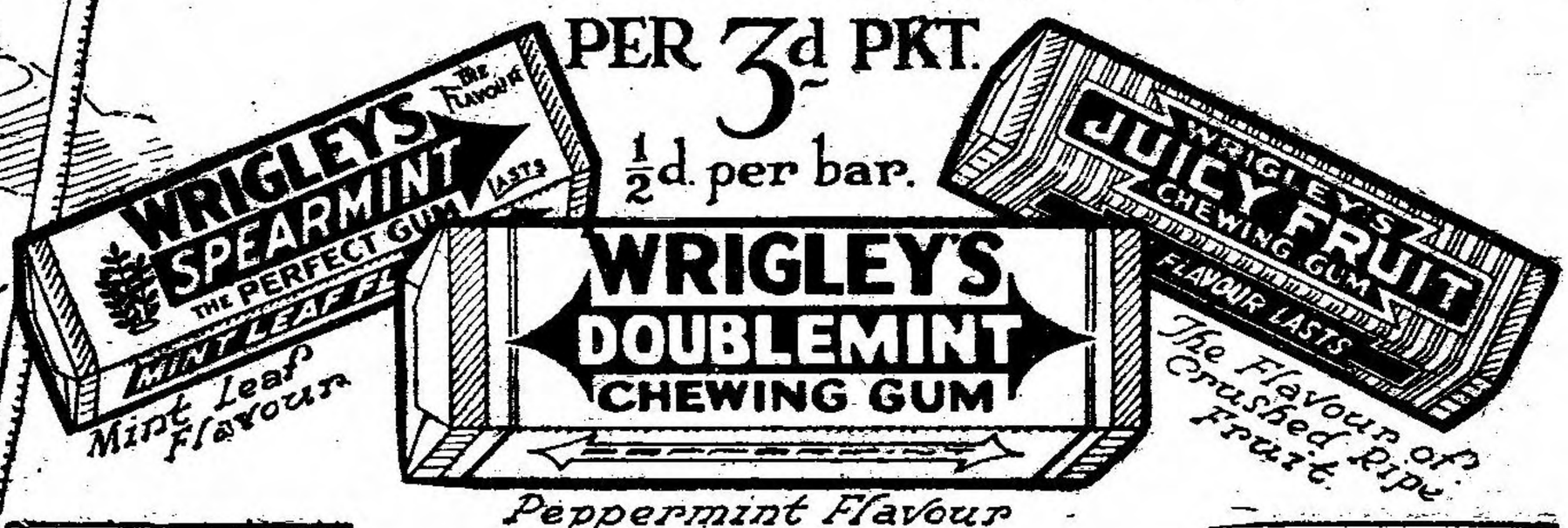

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The BOY from the WILD WEST

Our Splendid Long Complete School Story of the Boys of St. Jim's.
:: By MARTIN CLIFFORD. ::

CHAPTER 1.
Most Awkward!—

TOM MERRY came out of his Form-master's study in the School House at St. Jim's with a rather rueful expression on his face. Manners and Lowther were waiting for him in the corridor. They had their coats on over their football rig, and Lowther had a footer under his arm. Both of them looked rather anxiously at Tom.

"What's the trouble?" asked Manners.

"Don't say anything's turned up to stop your playing!" said Monty Lowther. "If that's it, go back and tell Mr. Linton to think again."

Tom Merry made a grimace.

"It isn't all lavender——" he began.

"What isn't?"

"To be the nicest fellow in the School House," said Tom.

"What?"

"That's the trouble at present," explained Tom Merry. "Owing to my nice ways and irreproachable character, I sha'n't be able to play in the House match this afternoon."

His chums stared.

"Come off!" said Lowther. "What did Linton have to say?"

"There's a new kid coming here this afternoon——"

"Bother him!"

"Hear, hear!" said Tom Merry heartily. "Bother him black and blue! New kids always are a bother, and this one is a record. I've got to buzz off to Wayland Junction to meet his train."

"What utter rot!" exclaimed Monty Lowther warmly. "Can't any other fellow go?"

"You see——"

"I don't see, for one!" interrupted Manners. "Any fellow could do that. Is the kid coming into the Shell?"

"I don't know. He's a junior, of course; but whether Third, Fourth, or Shell is still on the knees of the gods, I think. But any other fellow won't do for the job, because——"

"Because which?" growled Lowther.

Tom Merry laughed ruefully.

"The kid is a stranger from afar," he said. "He comes from the West of Canada. And Mr. Linton was kind enough to say that he had selected me to meet him as head boy in the Lower School, and of a steady and reliable character——"

"He doesn't know you!" remarked Manners.

"Qucer what an innocent old bird a Form-master may be!" said Monty Lowther reflectively.

"Rats! The fact is, I could see that Mr. Linton wants to be sure that the new kid is landed here safely, without any larks. Some fellows would play japes on a merry stranger from the Rocky Mountains. You would, Lowther."

"I might pull his Western leg a little," admitted Lowther. "No harm in pulling a new kid's leg that I can see. I remember pulling your leg when you were a new kid."

"So I'm selected, because of my grave and respectable character, and my solemnity which is beyond my years!" grinned Tom Merry. "It's awfully flattering, but it's the very dickens of a worry, as the House match is due to start in ten minutes, and I can't trust you fellows to beat the New House without my eye on you."

"Didn't you tell Linton——"

"Ass! How could I tell Linton that any of my own business was of any importance when he was favouring me with his honourable selection?" said Tom Merry. "I didn't want to get his rag out. Linton's a nice man, and a gentleman, so long as he's stroked the right way. But——"

"They all are!" groaned Monty Lowther. "No end of tact is required in dealing with Form-masters. It's a trying life for a junior. Good training for a future career, of course; a chap who can get on with his Form-master can get on with anybody."

"Hallo! You fellows taken root here?" It was Jack Blake's voice. Blake of the Fourth came along the passage. "Figgins & Co. are on the ground already. Are you coming?"

"I've got to cut the match," said Tom.

"Bosh!" answered Blake decidedly. "You can't! I could captain the team, if it comes to that, easily enough; but we want you in the front line. You can't cut the match. Don't talk rot! Get a move on!"

"There's a new kid——"

"Rats!"

"A giddy lawyer man is putting him in the train at the London terminus, and I've got to lift him out at Wayland Junction," explained Tom Merry. "Otherwise he may go on to Portsmouth or Penzance."

"Let him, so long as we beat the New House," answered Blake. "He can go on to Penzance and stay there—I've heard the scenery's good. Now, come along to Little Side, and don't jaw!"

The Terrible Three of the Shell left the School House with Blake, and walked down to the football-ground.

Tom Merry looked worried.

It was really a compliment to be picked out like this by Mr. Linton to look after the new fellow, who was a stranger in the land. It showed that the master of the Shell placed great reliance upon Tom Merry. But it was a compliment that Tom could very well have dispensed with.

The high regions in which Mr. Linton's thoughts moved were far above such considerations as junior games. It was doubtful whether Mr. Linton even knew that there was a House match that afternoon.

If Tom had ventured to tell him, the Form-master would probably only have raised his eyebrows.

Pupil and master did not see eye to eye in such matters.

But so far as the juniors were concerned, the House match was of more importance than all the new boys that were likely to arrive at St. Jim's during the next dozen terms.

Tom certainly felt the most cordial goodwill towards the youth from the Canadian West. But he wished he had stayed a day longer in the shade of the Rocky Mountains.

"Look here, some other fellow will have to go!" said Monty Lowther. "There's Racke and Crooke loafing about doing nothing, as usual——"

"Couldn't send those rotters——"

"They'd take the new kid into a pub," grinned Blake.

"Well, there's Cardew——"

"That funny idiot! He would send the kid on to Penzance by way of pulling his leg."

"You could punch his head if he did."

"Ass! That wouldn't help the new kid."

"There's Gussy!" exclaimed Blake. "We can spare Gussy from the team; it was a toss-up between Gussy and Levison, anyhow. Levison's keen on playing, and Gussy's the man to meet the giddy stranger. Let's ask Gussy."

"Well, D'Arcy would do first rate," admitted Tom Merry. "But he would have to cut the match——"

"Put it to him nicely," said Monty Lowther. "Leave it to me. Gussy will do anything for a chap who takes the trouble to pull his leg."

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gussy!" called out Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth was chatting with Figgins & Co. of the New House on the ground. He glanced round in a leisurely way as his name was called, and turned his celebrated eyeglass upon Tom Merry & Co.

"Yaas, deah boy?"

"We want your advice!" said Lowther.

"Bai Jove! I am entiahly at your service!" And Arthur Augustus came up to the scratch promptly.

CHAPTER 2.
Gussy Goes!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY gazed inquiringly at the Terrible Three. The three Shell fellows maintained a considerable gravity of demeanour. Monty Lowther took up the tale.

"You don't mind advising us, Gussy?"

"Not at all, deah boy. Always pleased to help you youngstahs out of any difficult posish," answered Arthur Augustus, in his most fatherly manner.

"There's a new kid coming to St. Jim's this afternoon," said Monty Lowther. "His name is—— What's his name, Tom?"

"Kit Wildrake."

"His name's Kit Wildrake," continued Lowther, "and he's a rather special person. He's from Canada."

"I shall be vewy pleased to make his acquaintance," said Arthur Augustus. "I have a cousin in Canadah, and pewwaps he knows him."

"He was put in the train in London, and labelled for St. Jim's——"

"Labelled?"

"Well, put in the train, anyhow," said Lowther hastily. "But Mr. Linton thinks he ought to be met at Wayland."

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"Yaas, wathah! That would only be civil towards a fellow comin' such a vewy gweat distance."

"The question is, who's to meet him?" said Monty Lowther gravely. "You see, of course, that it's necessary to make a good impression on him at the start. What we really want is a fellow of tact and judgment——"

"Ah!"

"A fellow with really polished manners——"

"Hem!"

"Somebody who will do the school real credit, and—and let the Canadian chap get a really good impression of the place at the kick-off. Can you suggest any fellow likely to be suitable, Gussy?"

The Terrible Three looked at Arthur Augustus with grave inquiry.

Arthur Augustus blushed and toyed with his eyeglass.

"Bai Jove! There is only one fellow I know who is likely to answah to that desewiption, deah boys."

"Who is it?"

"You won't think I'm swankin'?"

"Not at all."

"Little me!" said Arthur Augustus modestly.

"You!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "My hat! Now, how was it we didn't think of Gussy in the first place?"

"How could we have overlooked Gussy?" murmured Manners.

"The very man!" exclaimed Monty Lowther enthusiastically. "Gussy to the giddy rescue! Of course, you're the man—the very man!"

"You flattah me, deah boy!"

"Not a bit. You're the man. We feel we can trust you," said Monty Lowther.

"Yes, I think we feel that!" assented Manners.

"You'll go, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah! I will take this Canadian chap undah my wing, and look aftah him in first-wate style," said Arthur Augustus reassuringly. "I will give him a good impwession of St. Jim's. At any wate, he will think we are a well-dwessed school, fwom seein' me first. When is he comin'?"

"Wayland Junction at three," said Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus started a little.

"Bai Jove! The football match won't be ovah by then!"

"Nunno!"

"Undah the circs——" began Arthur Augustus.

"You'll have to cut the match," said Lowther. "But that's a small thing in comparison with—with hands across the sea."

"And the bonds of Empire!" murmured Manners.

"Yaas; but——"

"I dare say Levison will play, if we ask him," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas; but——"

"Here, Levison——"

"Hullo!"

Levison of the Fourth came speeding up.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Do you mind taking Gussy's place this afternoon? Gussy's got a very important engagement."

"Like a bird!" said Ernest Levison.

"Yaas; but you know—weally——"

"It's a sort of—of diplomatic engagement that Gussy couldn't possibly miss," explained Lowther. "A—a sort of mission to draw closer bonds of hands across the sea—I mean, across the Empire—that is——"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Get into your things, Levison."

Levison cut off to change for footer. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon the Terrible Three uncertainly.

"You see, I did not quite wealise——" he began.

"We shall be able to give all our attention to beating the New House now," said Lowther. "We can rely on Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah! But I was goin' to say——"

"No need to worry about a thing when it's once in Gussy's hands," said Manners heartily. "That's the best of knowing that a fellow has plenty of tact and judgment."

"You are vewy kind, Mannahs. But——"

"Better change into your best clobber, and get off to Wayland," said Tom Merry. "No good being late at the station."

The Terrible Three ran off to join the footballers, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was left alone, polishing his eyeglass, with a rather perplexed expression upon his aristocratic features.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "Weally——"

Arthur Augustus was not quite sure whether he was pleased or not. But he seemed to be landed now; and he walked off the football-ground at last, and went into the School House to change into his handsomest clobber for his very important mission.

And Racke and Crooke, of the Shell, who had been loafing on the football-ground, and had lent ear to the interview, strolled away, the former speaking to his chum in low, eager tones. There was a grin upon the face of Aubrey Racke—not a pleasant grin.

"Easy as falling off a form!" he said, in a low voice. "D'Arcy will cut through the wood to get to Wayland——"

"But——" muttered Crooke.

"The two of us, you know——"

"He's rather a hefty beast with his fists, with all his funny ways," said Crooke doubtfully.

"Dash it all, we're both bigger than he is," said Racke disdainfully. "We can handle him all right."

Crooke grinned.

"And there won't be anybody at the station to meet the new kid! Tom Merry will get an awful ragging from Linton. He's sending him specially——"

"There will be somebody," said Racke coolly. "Little me!"

"You!" ejaculated Crooke.

"Little me!" grinned Racke. "Come along! I'll explain as we go. No time to waste if we're to get ahead of D'Arcy. I've got to get something out of my study."

"But I don't catch on——"

"Come on, I tell you!" said Racke impatiently. "It's the joke of the season, up against Tom Merry. Isn't that enough for you?"

"Quite!" grinned Crooke.

And the precious pair hurried away together. While Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was changing into his most impressive clobber, Racke was busy for a few minutes in his study in the Shell passage, and then the two black sheep emerged from the School House. Gussy was still changing his clobber when Racke and Crooke started by the footpath through the wood towards Wayland.

CHAPTER 3.
In the Hands of the Amalekites!

"BEASTLY weathah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that remark as he turned into the wood from Rylcombe Lane.

There was a mist in the wood, and it congealed on the leafless branches of the trees and dropped off in drops upon Arthur Augustus' shining topper. Weather which caused damage to a topper was undoubtedly beastly in Arthur Augustus' opinion.

However, the swell of St. Jim's trotted along the woodland path at a good pace, for he had taken up a good deal of time in arraying himself for the expedition, and there was no more time to lose. Punctuality is the politeness of princes, and Arthur Augustus liked not to be late for an appointment. He wanted to be ready on the platform to greet the new arrival in a properly impressive manner.

He was rather surprised to see Racke and Crooke of the Shell emerge from the trees ahead of him on the path. He had last seen those two shady youths loafing on the football-ground at St. Jim's.

They joined him on the footpath, with grinning faces.

"Hallo! Goin' somewhere?" asked Racke.

"Yaas."

"We'll come with you," said Crooke.

The two Shell fellows dropped into place on either side of the swell of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus paused.

"I am sowwy, deah boys, but I cannot have your company this aftahnoon," he said.

Arthur Augustus was as polite as possible. He felt a very considerable disdain for Racke & Co., and objected strongly to the company of the black sheep of St. Jim's at any time. But he hesitated to hurt the feelings even of Aubrey Racke. Not that he need have troubled; Racke's feelings were not easily hurt.

"What rot!" said Racke, with a wink

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at Crooke. "We're going the same way, ain't we?"

"Yaas; but——"

"Oh, we'll come," said Crooke.

"I would wathah——"

"Don't mench!" said Racke affably. "We're comin'!"

"You dwive me to speakin' vewy plainly, Wacke. I do not care for your company," said D'Arcy stiffly.

"Why not, old top?"

"If you weally wish me to explain, Wacke, I will do so. You are a howwid wottah! You smoke and play cards, and you are weally a disweputable boundah! I twust now you will welieve me of your company!"

"Have you bought this footpath?" queried Racke.

"I have not, Wacke."

"Then we'll walk along it, dear old bean, even if we come between the wind and your nobility!"

"Weally, Wacke——"

"'Nuff said! We're comin'!"

Arthur Augustus walked on faster. Racke and Crooke kept pace with him, with grinning faces. The expression of Arthur Augustus was cold and scornful; but certainly Racke and Crooke could not be prevented from walking along a public footpath if they chose.

As a matter of fact, the two young rascals intended to walk with the unsuspicious Gussy only as far as the middle of the wood, where they would be safe from interruption.

At a turn in the footpath, a good half-mile from Rylcombe Lane, Racke made a sign to his comrade.

To Arthur Augustus' great surprise, the two Shell fellows closed in on him suddenly and grasped an arm each in a tenacious grip. The attack was so sudden that Gussy was a prisoner before he understood what was coming.

He struggled angrily.

"Welease me, you wottahs——"

"Hold on, Crooke!"

"You bet!" chuckled Crooke.

"Welease me!" shouted D'Arcy.

"Not just yet, old bean!"

"I shall give you a feahful thwashin', Wacke!"

"Go ahead, old bean!"

Arthur Augustus strove to wrench his arms away; but he strove in vain.

Had he not been taken by surprise, the swell of the Fourth could have given a good account of himself even against the two; but he was at too great a disadvantage now.

His arms were held in a tenacious grip, and he could not get them free. He struggled fiercely, but in vain. In the struggle his topper fell off and rolled in the damp grass. Racke gave it a kick along the footpath.

"Bai Jove! You feahful wottah!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "You have damaged my hat!"

"I'll damage your features if you keep on wriggling!" said Aubrey Racke.

"Welease me, I tell you! I—I will let you off the thwashin' if you welease me at once!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am goin' to meet a new fellow at Wayland, Wacke!" gasped Arthur Augustus, in his extremity condescending to explain. "I shall be late if you delay me! Now welease me!"

"Gammon!"

"If you doubt my word, Wacke——"

"I do," said Racke coolly.

"Bai Jove! I—I——"

"Mr. Linton sent Tom Merry to meet Wildrake," said Racke. "I happen to know that, you see."

"I am goin' in his place."

"Gammon!"

"Weally, you unspeakable wottah——"

"You can't stuff us up!" said Racke, shaking his head. "Tom Merry will meet the new kid all right——"

"He is playin' football."

"Rats! He wouldn't play football when Mr. Linton has given him a special job at Wayland. You can't pull our leg, Gussy!"

"I assuah you, Wacke——"

"Bow-wow!"

Arthur Augustus recommenced to struggle. He was rumpling his handsome, natty coat dreadfully; Racke and Crooke were heartlessly indifferent to the crumpling they were giving it. But at the cost even of damage to his clobber, Arthur Augustus had to keep his appointment.

But the two Shell fellows held on to his arms as if for their lives. In point of fact, they dared not let Gussy get his hands loose. Even for the sake of the "joke of the season" against Tom Merry, they did not care to face Gussy's clenched fists in combat.

The three juniors lurched to and fro, struggling; but Racke and Crooke held on with vicelike grip, and Gussy had to stop at last, panting with exhaustion.

"You uttah wottahs!" he gasped. "You feahful bwutes! I will give you such a feahful thwashin' for this wuffianly conduct—— Let go my hands!"

He resisted manfully as the Shell fellows dragged his hands behind him; but it was in vain. Racke had a noosed cord ready over his wrist. He slipped the noose over D'Arcy's wrists, caught the end, and jerked it tight. Arthur Augustus' hands were bound now.

Aubrey Racke coolly knotted the cord.

"Oh, you howwid wuffian!" groaned Arthur Augustus.

"Now his dear little tootsies!" chuckled Crooke.

"Welease me, you howwid wottahs!"

Unheeding, Racke looped a second cord round Gussy's ankles. This was tied to each ankle, leaving a dozen or so inches of cord between. That length enabled Arthur Augustus to stumble along if he wished.

Then Racke took from his pocket a bottle of linen-marking ink. Arthur Augustus watched him in deep apprehension as he removed the cork. He dipped a corner of D'Arcy's handkerchief in the ink, and proceeded to paint a round spot on the tip of the aristocratic nose. Then he dabbed a daub on either cheek, and one on the chin and one on the forehead.

"Like a giddy leopard!" chuckled Crooke. "You ought to have brought your favourite hand-mirror, D'Arcy! You don't know how nobby you look!"

"Oh deah!"

"Isn't he a joy for ever?" chortled Racke. "Good-bye, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove! You feahful wottahs are not goin' to leave me heah like this?" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"My dear chap, that's exactly what we're going to do!" answered Racke, with a genial nod.

"You—you—you——"

"You can amble along to Wayland like that, if you like," said Crooke gleefully. "It's market day, and you'll make a bit of a sensation."

"You howwid wuffian——"

"Or you can shuffle back to St. Jim's," yawned Racke. "I'm sure I don't mind."

The two Shell fellows sauntered on along the footpath, and Arthur Augustus stared after them in speechless wrath.

He made a movement to follow, but his shackled feet stumbled, and he fell on his knees.

"Oh cwumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Racke and Crooke, looking back. "Do that again, Gussy!"

"I ordah you to welease me. At least, give me my hat, you feahful beasts."

Racke laughed, and came back and picked up the topper. He brushed the nap the wrong way with his sleeve, and then jammed it on the back of D'Arcy's head.

"Put it on stwaight, you beast!"

Racke took from his pocket a bottle of linen-marking ink. He dipped a corner of D'Arcy's handkerchief in the ink and proceeded to paint a round spot on the tip of the aristocratic nose. Then he dabbed a daub on either cheek and one on the chin, and on the forehead. "Like a giddy leopard!" chuckled Crooke. *(See this page.)*

"No fear! You look no end rakish like that."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Crooke.

"Bai Jove! I——"

"Good-bye-ee!" sang Racke sweetly. And the Shell fellows walked away, without turning back again this time.

Arthur Augustus gasped.

To amble on to Wayland with his shackled feet was impossible. At the best, he would be a good hour late at the station. And Arthur Augustus naturally shrank from showing himself in public in his present guise. He shambled back along to the footpath towards St. Jim's. But he did not venture out into the open lane. To show himself at the school with his spotted face, and his hat rakishly on the back of his head, was beyond his fortitude.

He remained on the footpath, hoping against hope that some St. Jim's fellow would come that way, and afford him help. And his feelings, as he waited, were inexpressible in words.

Meanwhile, Racke and Crooke walked on as far as the Wayland road. Before emerging from the wood, however, they stopped under the trees, and Racke took several articles from his pocket. With Crooke's help, he affixed a pair of dark eyebrows over his own rather sandy ones, and gave a touch of red to the corners of his mouth, to make it look wider—though really nature had made it too wide for beauty already. Then he dabbed his nose pinker.

"You wouldn't recognise me now?" he said.

"No!"

"Good!"

Racke's appearance was considerably changed by those few touches. He had had a good deal of practice—he was accustomed to those artistic touches when he visited the Green Man after lights out.

"That'll do," he said. "Now I'll get to the station. That jay is going to be led a dance—and he can put it all down to Tom Merry—and if he finds out it wasn't Tom Merry, I fancy he will never find out that it was Aubrey Racke. Safe as houses, old top."

And Aubrey Racke walked on to Wayland at a rapid pace, leaving his confederate chuckling.

CHAPTER 4.
Kit Wildrake from Canada!

KIT WILDRAKE looked out of the carriage-window as the train stopped.

"W-l-d J-nc-n!"

That was what the wail of the porter sounded like; but fortunately the new junior for St. Jim's caught the name of the station. He opened the carriage door and jumped out.

Racke of the Shell, standing back against the newspaper-stall, was watching for him, and his eyes fixed on the newcomer at once.

"That's the merchant!" muttered Racke.

He looked Wildrake over very critically. He saw a handsome, sunburned, upstanding youth a little younger than himself—a good deal more fit in appearance. The junior was dressed in Etons, with a silk hat. Racke had expected a rather shy and sheepish-looking new "kid"; but evidently there was nothing shy or sheepish about this fellow. His blue eyes were keen, and clear, and alert, and his manner was quite self-possessed. Few would have guessed, from his looks, that he had lately crossed a continent and an ocean, and found himself in a new country.

Racke felt a momentary tremor of uneasiness.

A jape on a shy new kid was one thing, but japing a cool, stalwart, self-reliant fellow like this might be quite another matter. Racke pictured himself for a moment standing up to the Canadian's fists; and he did not like the picture at all.

But he threw aside that feeling of uneasiness, and crossed the platform towards the new junior, who was looking round him, as if in expectation of being claimed.

Racke saluted him politely.

"Kit Wildrake?" he asked.

The clear, blue eyes turned upon him.

"I guess that's my name."

"You guess?" repeated Racke. "Don't you know?"

Wildrake laughed—a pleasant laugh to hear, and his blue eyes twinkled humorously.

"I guess—I mean, that's only a way of speaking," he said. "We all guess in the West, you know. My name's Wildrake right enough. I'm going to St. Jim's, and I expected to be met here."

"That's right; I'm here to meet you," said Racke.

"You're from St. Jim's, then?"

"Yes. Tom Merry of the Shell."

The new junior held out his hand in a frank way, and Racke gave it a shake that was like the contact of a cold fish.

"Glad to meet you," said Wildrake simply. "It's kind of you to come here for me, I guess."

"My Form-master sent me," said Racke—"Mr. Linton, you know. Never mind about your trunk," he added; "that's labelled for St. Jim's, and will go on."

"Right!"

"There's a local train goes from here to Rylcombe, and then it's a walk to St. Jim's," continued Racke. "But there's half an hour to wait. My idea is to cut across in a taxi."

"O.K.," said Wildrake.

"I'm standin' the taxi," added Racke. "I'm going to look after you, you know. This way out. How do you like England now you've got here?"

"Topping," said Wildrake. "I had a few days in London, at the lawyer's shebang——"

"His what?"

"His house, I guess. Rather foggy old burg, but no end interesting to a pilgrim from the Far West."

"I suppose so," said Racke.

As a matter of fact, Racke wasn't interested in the Canadian's views of the Old Country; but he felt that he had to keep up the character he had assumed.

"What do you think of the railways?"

"Ahem!" said Wildrake.

His blue eyes glimmered. But he was too polite to say what he thought of English railways, after the Canadian lines.

"Here we are," said Racke. "Taxi!"

There were a couple of taxis outside the station, and Racke opened the door of one.

"Jump in, Wildrake."

"Yep!"

Wildrake got into the cab, and Racke stepped back to speak to the driver, who had slowly detached himself from the wall of the station on seeing that he had a fare. Racke did not want the Canadian junior to hear what he had to say to the driver.

"Rylcombe Grammar School!" said Racke, in a low voice.

"Yes, sir."

Racke followed his companion into the taxi. The driver took his seat, and the engine buzzed. The taxi wheeled away from the station, and in the High Street of Wayland passed Crooke on the pavement. Crooke grinned to Racke, and made a gesture with his hand. Evidently the fish had been landed. Racke winked back at Gerald Crooke.

As there was no way through the wood for a four-wheeled vehicle, the taxi-driver had to make a detour to get to Rylcombe, and the drive was not a short one. The taxi buzzed on at a good rate. Kit Wildrake glanced round him with a good deal of interest—interested in the rural scenery of the Old Country.

"The hedges look topping, don't they?" he remarked.

"The—the hedges?" repeated Racke, in astonishment. It had never occurred to Racke to look at the hedges before.

"Yes; no end taking, to look at. I guess I keep on noticing the hedges," said Wildrake.

"I suppose they have hedges in Canada, haven't they?" said Racke, with a stare.

"Rail fences mostly, and barbed wire," said Wildrake. "But they take a good bit out of the ground, don't they?"

"Eh! What do?"

"The hedges."

Racke was quite at a loss. This was beyond the range of his intelligence.

"Blessed if I catch on!" he said. "What the thump does a hedge take out of the ground? Are you pulling my leg?"

It was Wildrake's turn to stare. He was a merry-eyed youth, and looked as if he had a well-developed sense of humour; but he was accustomed to taking life seriously and intelligently—a way in which Aubrey Racke had never dreamed of taking it.

"I mean, they take from the ground what might go to the crops," he said.

"Oh," said Racke, "bother the crops! I've never given them a thought. I—I suppose they do, now you speak of it."

"Of course, it looks ripping," said Wildrake, with an appreciative glance from the window. "But beauty in the view isn't the chief thing in farming, is it? Why do they divide the fields with hedges?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"There must be some reason for setting a hedge sucking out of the soil, instead of running a wire fence," urged Wildrake.

Racke yawned portentiously.

"I dare say there is," he said. "Never thought about it. I'm not a dashed farmer!"

"Can't be merely for the look of the thing," said Wildrake. "It's pretty, but it's not economic."

"My only hat! Did you learn that word in the Rocky Mountains?" exclaimed Racke, with a scornful laugh.

Wildrake looked at him. Somehow, he had not been favourably impressed by this specimen of the St. Jim's juniors; and he was growing still less pleased.

"I didn't live exactly in the Rocky Mountains," he said.

"The Alleghanies?" said Racke carelessly.

"The Alleghanies are down south, in the States," he said.

"Are they?"

"I come from west of the Rockies," added Wildrake.

"Oh!" yawned Racke. "Blessed if I knew there was anything west of the Rockies! What's it called?"

"British Columbia."

"Isn't that on the Pacific?" asked Racke hazily. Racke knew exactly as much geography as Mr. Linton had been able to drive into his head with the aid of the pointer.

"Between the Rockies and the Pacific," said Wildrake.

"Frozen deep all the year round, I suppose."

"I guess not," said the Canadian junior, laughing. "It's about the best climate in the world, I reckon. Don't you know we export no end of fruit to the Old Country?"

"I believe I've heard of Canadian apples," said Racke vaguely.

"Where are we now?" asked Wildrake, looking from the window.

"This is the Rylcombe Road."

"Oh, yes! Rylcombe is the village near St. Jim's, isn't it?" said the new junior. "What's St. Jim's like? Jolly old place, isn't it? Grey old walls covered with ivy, and all that?"

Racke felt uneasy again. The Canadian had evidently heard something about the look of the old school. But he answered carelessly:

"Not now; it's been rebuilt, you know."

"I guess I didn't know. What's it like now?"

"Square, red-brick building."

"Oh!" said Wildrake. He was evidently disappointed.

"You'll see it in a minute," said Racke. "There's the gates—those metal gates—and that's the school."

The taxi drew up at the gates of Rylcombe Grammar School. Racke opened the door and jumped out.

"We get out at the gate?" asked Wildrake.

"Yes; you have to report your arrival to—to the porter. Just tell him you're the new kid, and he'll direct you."

Racke stepped back into the taxi, and Wildrake's glance followed him.

"You're not coming in?" He did not like Racke much, and, as a matter of fact, was not sorry to part with him; but he felt obliged to the fellow who had met him at the station.

"No; I've got an appointment——"

"I guess you ought to let me pay for the taxi," said Wildrake.

Racke was not the fellow to refuse an offer of that kind. If he could carry out his jape "on the cheap" he was all the better pleased. It did not occur to him that Wildrake was unwilling to be under a monetary obligation to a fellow he did not like: neither would he have cared, if he had thought of it. The taximeter had registered nearly a pound, and Racke was quite pleased to be relieved on the point.

"Certainly, if you like!" he answered.

Wildrake paid the chauffeur, and the taxi drove away with Racke. It did not drive far. Close by Rylcombe. Racke left it, paying the driver for the short distance he had covered, and walked into the misty wood. There he relieved himself of his sham eyebrows, and rubbed his face with a handkerchief dipped in water. In his proper person again, Aubrey Racke set out at a walk for St. Jim's, chuckling gleefully as he wondered how Kit Wildrake was getting on at his new school; and the still more entertaining thought of what would happen to Tom Merry when the Canadian junior failed to arrive at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 5.
Missing!

"GOAL!"

It was just on time when the winning goal came from the foot of Talbot of the Shell. Fatty Wynn, in the New House citadel, grazed the ball with his fat finger-tips; but it went into the net.

"Goal!"

"School House wins!"

"Hurrah!"

Lefevre of the Fifth, the referee, blew the whistle. The players came off the field, School House winning by a goal to nil.

"Jolly close thing," remarked Figgins of the Fourth. "Talbot played up like—like——"

"Like a New House fellow!" said Kerr.

"Just it!" assented Figgins. "So he did!"

"Bow-wow!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Lucky for us he didn't!"

"School House ass——"

"New House donkey!"

And with that exchange of compliments, the rival skippers went to change. The early winter dusk was already beginning to fall when the footballers had changed, and the thought of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and his charge came into Tom Merry's mind. During the football match he had forgotten completely the existence of Arthur Augustus and the advent of the new boy from Canada.

"Isn't it time Gussy was back?" said Tom. "He ought to be back now, if he's walked from Wayland with the new kid. And he must have taken the local train."

"What about tea?" asked Manners.

"Bother tea! Has Gussy come in?"

"How should I know, dear boy? Suppose you walk around and inquire, while we get tea? I'm hungry."

"Same here," said Monty Lowther. "Perhaps Gussy has taken the kid to look at the new hats and neckties at his favourite outfitter's. He might do that by way of giving him a treat."

Tom Merry laughed, but he started to look for Gussy. Blake & Co. were in Study No. 6; but only Herries and Digby were with Jack Blake.

"Gussy not in yet?" asked Tom.

"Haven't seen him," answered Blake. "I say, we ought to have had that goal in the first half, Tom Merry. If Lowther had taken my pass——"

"Never mind the goal in the first half; I want to know where that blessed new kid is!"

"Oh, never mind the new kid!" said Blake. "I was thinking that there's too many Shell fellows in the team, you know. I believe I've mentioned it before. If you felt inclined to push Lowther out——"

"Ass!"

"There's several Fourth-Formers I could recommend——"

Tom Merry did not stay to hear Blake's recommendations. He walked away to inquire further after the swell of St. Jim's. If Gussy had missed Wildrake at the station, the result was likely to be annoying to the captain of the Shell. There was no harm in passing on his task to Gussy, if Gussy fulfilled his trust. But if anything had gone wrong, there was an exceedingly unpleasant interview to come with Mr. Linton.

In the quadrangle he found Study No. 5 coming in from a ramble—but Julian, Hammond, Kerruish, and Reilly had seen nothing of Arthur Augustus. He found Cardew lounging in the quad—and Cardew could tell him nothing. Outside the tuckshop he found Baggy Trimble of the Fourth and questioned him. Little went on at St. Jim's without Trimble observing it. It was always safe to apply to Baggy Trimble for information.

"Has D'Arcy come in, Trimble?" asked Tom Merry.

"No!" answered Trimble dismally.

"Sure?"

"I'm waiting for the beast. I want him to lend me a bob. By the way, you might lend me a bob, Tom Merry——"

But Tom Merry was gone.

He hurried down to the gates, and looked up and down the road. There was no sign of Arthur Augustus or a new fellow.

Tom turned back into the quadrangle,

A sudden shove from behind sent Gordon Gay spinning into the shed. He landed among the faggots on his hands and knees. Quick as thought, Wildrake grasped the two Woottons, one in either hand, and before they knew what was happening, hurled them spinning into the shed. *(See page 9.)*

feeling considerably worried by this time. Racke and Crooke were strolling in the quad, and they grinned at the sight of Tom's troubled face.

The captain of the Shell went up to his study—No. 10 in the Shell. Manners was poaching eggs, and Lowther was making toast. The study looked very bright and cheery, and the scent of cooking was very welcome to a fellow who had been playing football in keen weather. But Tom Merry had no time at present for tea.

"D'Arcy hasn't come in," he said.

"Oh, he'll come!" answered Manners.

"But he's had lots of time to get back, even if he walked," said Tom uneasily. The new kid ought to have reported to the Housemaster before this. Mr. Railton will wonder where he is."

"Well, what the thump has become of Gussy, then?" exclaimed Manners. "Don't say you want us to go and look for him! I'm hungry!"

"Something must have happened," said Tom uneasily. "There can't have been any accident—but they're not here. Gussy must have got late to the station, I suppose, and missed him."

"He would wait for the next train," assented Manners.

"But the new kid would come on here," said Lowther. "He's got a tongue in his mouth, I suppose, and could ask his way to St. Jim's?"

"Well, he hasn't come."

"Must be a howling duffer if he's lost his way!"

"How the thump could he lose his way?" said Tom. "Something must have happened to him!"

"What could happen?"

"Blessed if I know! He's lost somewhere, I suppose!" growled Tom Merry. "Linton will scalp me for this! I was an ass to think that Gussy could do anything without bungling!"

"You always were a bit of an ass, old chap," said Lowther comfortingly. "Never mind, give them till after tea; they may happen in."

Tom Merry hesitated; but he was hungry, and tea was inviting. He decided to give the absentees till after tea.

The Terrible Three sat down to the meal; but Tom Merry was in a disturbed mood. He finished much more quickly than usual.

"If Gussy hasn't come in, I'll get out on the bike and look for him," he said. "It will be locking-up soon. Jevver hear of such a silly ass?"

"Hardly ever!" said Lowther.

Tom Merry went downstairs, and soon ascertained that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had not arrived. He went for his bike and wheeled it out. The dusk was thick now, and he lighted his lamp before starting. He pedalled down the road as far as the footpath, and then wheeled his bike into the wood. Strictly speaking, cyclists were not supposed to ride along the footpath; but Tom Merry was in a hurry now. He simply could not imagine what had become of the two juniors, and he began to fear that some accident had occurred.

"Stop, deah boy!"

He was only a dozen yards into the wood, when a voice hailed him from the shadows, and, to his great relief, he recognised the tones of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom jumped from his machine. He turned the light of the lamp on Arthur Augustus, and gave a yell of astonishment.

"What the thump—you ass! What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Nothin'!"

"Where's the new kid?"

"I weally do not know, Tom Mewwy!"

"Haven't you been to the station?" gasped Tom.

"I was pwevented——"

"You haven't been to the station?" gasped Tom. "You haven't seen the kid at all?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, how could I go to the station like this?"

"Oh, you thundering ass!" groaned Tom.

"Weally, you know——"

Tom stared at Arthur Augustus in the light of the bicycle-lamp. The purple spots on his face gave him an extraordinary aspect.

"Instead of slangin' a chap, Tom Mewwy, you might have the kindness to welease me——"

"What on earth's happened to you?"

"I have been the victim of a wuffianly outwage. Wacke and Cwooke——"

Tom leaned the bike against a tree, and cut Arthur Augustus loose. He had no time to be sympathetic towards Gussy; he was anxious about Wildrake—not so much on that youth's own account, as because he was responsible for the new fellow's safe arrival at St. Jim's.

While he was freeing the hapless swell of St. Jim's, Arthur Augustus explained what had happened.

"Fathead!" said Tom. "You could have shuffled along—you could have come back to St. Jim's and told us——"

"I could not appeah in public shufflin' along with my legs shackled, Tom Mewwy, and purple spots on my face!"

"Ass!" roared Tom. "What about the new kid? Didn't you undertake to meet him at the station?"

"It was imposs to get to the station, deah boy. Besides, I could not let the new kid see me like this——"

"What would it matter, ass?"

"Bai Jove! If you think that I should make a good impression on the chap got up like this——"

"What did it matter about making an impression on him, fathead?"

"I undahstood fwom your wemarks that——"

"Oh!" said Tom, inwardly anathematising Monty Lowther for his artistic pulling of Gussy's noble leg. "All the same, ass, you ought to have come back, dummy, if you'd had to crawl on your hands and knees, chump, so that somebody could go in your place, you frumptious bandersnatch!"

"I was twustin' that somebody would come along and welease me," said Arthur Augustus. "I shall have to get a wash befoah I show up in public again."

"Oh, rats! What on earth's become of Wildrake?"

"I pwesume that he has gone on to the school alone."

"He hasn't ass; he's not come!"

"Bai Jove! He must be a feahful duffah if he cannot find his way to the school on his own! My hat is neahly wuined——"

"Blow your hat!"

"The weal twouble is, where can I get a wash——"

"Bother! I shall have to go on to Wayland and inquire after him—the fellow may be still waiting at the station to be called for."

"That is not pwob——"

"Then what's become of him?" demanded Tom Merry.

"I weally do not know. Pewwaps he's gone on to Portsmouth. Where on earth am I to get a wash——"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"I must get this howwid ink off my face befoah I go to St. Jim's——"

"Rats!"

Tom Merry remounted his bicycle to pedal on to Wayland, there to inquire after the missing new junior, leaving Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to solve his problem on his own. The captain of the Shell had to miss calling-over at the school; there was no help for that. He was getting really alarmed about the new fellow now. But at Wayland Junction he had no luck. There was no new fellow waiting at the station to be called for—and Tom was unable to get any news of him. In a state of considerable worry, Tom pedalled back to St. Jim's—with the prospect before him of an exceedingly unpleasant interview with Mr. Linton.

CHAPTER 6.
Catching a Tartar!

KIT WILDRAKE glanced round him, as he came in at the gates of Rylcombe Grammar School.

Not for a moment did a suspicion cross his mind that the junior who had brought him there had played a trick upon him, and that this was not St. Jim's at all. The big, square, red-brick building was not in the least like the description he had received of St. Jim's; but Racke had stated that the school had been rebuilt. Wildrake felt a sense of disappointment as he looked round him.

Three youths came in at the gates, as Wildrake was proceeding slowly towards the house, and they looked at him. They were Gordon Gay and Wootton major and minor of the Fourth Form.

"Hallo, that looks like a new kid!" remarked Gay. "I haven't seen him here before, at any rate."

"Looks a bit lost," said Wootton major. "Hallo, young hopeful!"

Wildrake glanced round.

"New kid?" asked Gay.

"Yes."

"What do they call you when you're at home?" pursued Gay.

"Kit Wildrake."

"How old are you?"

Wildrake looked surprised at the question. Gordon Gay's face was perfectly grave.

"Nearly fifteen," he said.

"Got your birth certificate with you?"

"Eh? No!"

"You've turned up here without your birth certificate?" exclaimed Gay, with a look of astonishment.

"I guess so. Why?"

"My dear chap, cut off and get it at once," said Gay seriously. "No good turning up here without a birth certificate. Is it far to your home?"

"A little," drawled Wildrake. "My home is in British Columbia. I guess I couldn't get there before dark."

"Oh, you're from Canada?" asked Gay, with some interest. He was from Australia himself.

"I guess so."

"Well, I can see you don't know your way about, kid. We must see what can be done," said Gay, and he looked at his two comrades seriously. "What's to be done about this chap's birth certificate, you fellows? We don't want him to get into a row with the Head for forgetting it."

"No, that would be hard lines on a new chap," said Wootton major, with owl-like gravity. "You see, Wildrake, its rather serious. As you come from Canada, you wouldn't understand, perhaps. In this country we're all numbered and ticketed now, like Prussians—registration-cards, food-cards, insurance-cards, passports when we travel—the whole Prussian bag of tricks complete. The latest is for every chap to carry round his birth certificate, and show it to a policeman on demand."

Wootton major's last statement was an exaggeration, and Wildrake looked considerably puzzled.

"I haven't been told this before," he said.

"That was an oversight, then," said Wootton, shaking his head. "Blessed if I know what you're going to do!"

"Hard cheese!" said Wootton major. "Can't we do anything to help him?"

"We must!" said Gordon Gay. "We're not going to see a new kid flogged on his first day here. He'd better be kept out of sight for the present, until we can explain to the Head and soften him. Come with us, Wildrake."

"Right-ho!"

Wildrake accompanied the three juniors, with a peculiar glimmer in his eyes. He was by no means the unsuspicious new kid the three Grammarians took him for, and it had already dawned upon him that the trio were gently pulling his leg. But he followed them cheerfully.

They skirted round the School House, and were hailed by Carboy of the Fourth.

"Whom have you got there, Gay?"

"New kid," said Gay.

"What the thump are you taking him round the House for?" asked Carboy.

Gay closed one eye.

"He's forgotten to bring his birth certificate, and it's necessary to keep him out of sight of the Head till something can be done," he explained.

"Oh," ejaculated Carboy, "I—I see!"

"Come on, Wildrake!"

Carboy joined the party—equally concerned for the new junior—and the five arrived at the wood-shed, in a rather secluded spot. Gay opened the door, and quietly put the key on the outside of it.

"Step in here, Wildrake," he said. "We'll come for you when it's all safe."

"You're very kind," said Wildrake gratefully.

"Ha, ha—I mean, not at all! We—we're always kind to new kids!"

"We love 'em!" said Carboy solemnly.

The four Grammarians looked at Wildrake almost breathlessly. Certainly, he was a new kid, and did not know the ropes, but if he allowed himself to be locked up in the wood-shed, they agreed—mentally—that he must be a prize ass. His face showed no sign of suspicion.

He glanced into the rather dusky shed. It was lighted only by a small, barred window.

"Why, what's that?" he exclaimed suddenly, staring into the shed.

"What's what?" asked Gay.

"Look—behind those faggots—look!" exclaimed Wildrake excitedly.

In sheer amazement the Grammarians crowded past Wildrake, and stared into the dusky shed.

"I can't see——" began Gay. "Why, what—— Yoooooop!"

A sudden shove from behind sent Gordon Gay spinning into the shed. He landed among the faggots on his hands and knees. Quick as thought, Wildrake grasped the two Woottons, one in either hand, and before they knew what was happening, hurled them spinning into the shed, and they sprawled over Gay.

Carboy jumped back as the Canadian turned on him.

Wildrake grasped him, and they struggled. Carboy's resistance was stout, but brief. He was hurled headlong into the shed, crashing into the trio as they were scrambling up. They all rolled over in the midst of a tumbling and crashing of overturned faggots.

Slam!

Click!

The door was shut, and the key turned on the outside as Gordon Gay scrambled furiously to his feet. He bounded to the door, and dragged on it.

"Look here!" he roared. "What——"

A merry laugh came from outside.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cheeky cad!" yelled Carboy. "Unlock that door!"

"I guess not," drawled Wildrake. "You were going to leave me there. What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, you know."

"Why, he—he—he tumbled!" gasped Wootton major, sitting up among the faggots. "The beast knew we were pulling his leg!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let us out!" roared Gay.

"No fear!"

"I'll punch your silly head!"

"Bow-wow!"

Leaving the key in the outside of the door, Kit Wildrake walked away. And Gordon Gay & Co. stared at one another blankly. Their little joke on the newcomer had worked in reverse order, and they were not pleased at the result.

Four infuriated juniors began hammering on the inside of the door to attract attention to their plight and obtain release; what time Kit Wildrake sauntered away to the house, and inquired for the Head to report his arrival.

CHAPTER 7.
In the Wrong Box!

DR. MONK, the Head of Rylcombe Grammar School, adjusted his pince-nez, and blinked at the youth who stood before him in his study. The good doctor was puzzled. It was rather surprising for any headmaster to receive a new pupil of whose existence he had never heard before.

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"You are—are—are—ahem!—a—a new boy?" said the doctor, blinking at Wildrake.

"Yes, sir; just arrived."

"And your name is——"

"Wildrake, sir."

"Upon my word, this is very odd," said Dr. Monk. "You are certainly not expected. I do not understand this. Where do you live, Wildrake?"

"Boot Leg Ranch, sir!"

"Eh?"

"In British Columbia."

"Bless my soul!"

"I've been staying in London with my father's lawyer, sir," said Wildrake, rather surprised by this curious reception.

"He put me in the train to-day, to come here."

Dr. Monk nursed his chin.

"There must be some mistake, my boy," he said kindly. "Certainly, you are not expected at this school—assuredly no arrangements have been made for your reception here."

Wildrake looked bewildered.

"I—I don't catch on, sir," he answered. "I understood that all arrangements were made——"

"There is evidently a mistake. There is another school in this neighbourhood," said the doctor. "Perhaps you have arrived at the wrong place, being a stranger here. Did you take a cab from Wayland?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then doubtless your driver stopped at the wrong school. Perhaps you did not give him the name distinctly," said Dr. Monk kindly. "Where do you suppose yourself to be?"

"At St. Jim's, of course!" said the bewildered junior.

Dr. Monk smiled.

"Ah! That explains everything!" he said. "This is Rylcombe Grammar School."

"Oh!"

"St. James' School is some distance from here," said Dr. Monk. "You can, however, easily reach it——"

"But—but the chap who met me at the station brought me here!" exclaimed Wildrake. "He was a St. Jim's fellow——"

"Ah! I am afraid a foolish trick has been played upon you!" said Dr. Monk. "A wicked advantage has been taken of your inexperience. I am sorry, my boy. But you had better hasten at once to your own school, or your failure to arrive there may cause anxiety. You will ask at the lodge as you go out, and the porter will give you full directions. Good-afternoon, my boy!"

"G-g-good-afternoon, sir!" stammered Wildrake.

He quitted the study, with crimson cheeks.

As a rule, Wildrake was a keen youth, and not to be caught napping—as Gordon Gay & Co. had discovered. But undoubtedly he had been completely taken in by the fellow who had met him at Wayland Junction, and had given him the name of Tom Merry. Wildrake could hardly blame himself for having been taken in in such a way; but he was very much exasperated, and he felt considerably sheepish as he backed out of Dr. Monk's study.

He clenched his hands as he went out hurriedly into the quad.

"I'll talk to Tom Merry about this!" he murmured. "If I don't give him a prize nose for being so funny I'll eat my hat! Now, where's that dashed lodge and that dashed porter?"

He found the lodge, but the porter was not there. Lane of the Fourth came in at the gates, and Wildrake hailed him.

"Where's your pesky porter?"

Lane stared.

"Blessed if I know. Look in the stables if you want him."

"Which way?"

"Yonder, and follow your silly nose," answered Lane politely.

Wildrake, with growing exasperation, found his way to the stable-yard. The dusk was falling now, and he had only a vague idea of the location of St. Jim's—it was in the neighbourhood, and that was all he knew. He did not want to arrive at his school late, after dark.

In the stable-yard a groom had finished rubbing down a horse, and the school porter was sitting on a bench in deep conversation on an interesting subject of politics. Wildrake tapped him on the shoulder.

"You the porter?" he asked.

"I ham!" answered Mr. Cutts, with dignity.

"Which is the quickest way to St. Jim's, please?"

"Go houter the gates," said Mr. Cutts. "Foller the lane down to the 'Igh Street,

and turn to the lef'. Keep right on till you come to St. Jim's—about a mile. And what do you mean by a-comin' in 'ere to ask, young man?"

"I was brought here by a silly ass!" growled Wildrake. "Look here, can you give me a lift of any kind to my school?"

"I can not!" answered Mr. Cutts.

"Will you lend me that horse?"

"Hay?"

"I'll tip you ten dollars if you'll lend me the horse," said Wildrake. "I want to get in before dark. I can ride without a saddle."

"Don't you tork sich stuff to me, young man," said Mr. Cutts. "You git orf!"

And the groom chuckled.

Wildrake approached the horse. The groom grinned at him.

"Keep away, sir!" he said. "This 'ere is Mr. Adams' 'orse, and he's a bit skittish with strangers."

"Will you lend him to me? I've got to get to my school in a hurry," said Wildrake. "I may get into a row for arriving late."

"You young donkey, you couldn't even mount him," said the groom.

"I guess I'll show you, then!"

Before the groom knew what was happening, the Canadian junior had vaulted upon the back of the horse and set the animal in motion. The groom jumped back as the horse reared.

"Here, you git orf!" he shouted. "Do you want to be killed? Let that there 'orse alone!"

"I'll send him back!" called out Wildrake.

"What! I tell you——"

Clatter, clatter!

How that remarkable youth was guiding the horse was a mystery to Mr. Cutts and to the astounded groom. With his knees gripping the bare back, Wildrake rode out of the stable-yard, waving his hand with a laugh as he went.

"Stop!" roared the groom.

"I guess I'll send him back!"

"I tell you——"

"Ta-ta!"

The groom rushed in pursuit. The bareback rider was out in the road in less than a minute, and riding down the lane towards Rylcombe. The groom stopped, breathless and amazed.

Wildrake rode on.

It was a reckless escapade—and what might follow the borrowing of the horse he did not know. But it was a long time since the rancher's son had felt a steed under him, and, apart from his desire to get to St. Jim's, the temptation was strong to ride. His face was sunny as he galloped down the lane on the unsaddled steed—which obeyed him as if a hand of iron had been on the reins. Many a time had Kit Wildrake ridden bareback on the Boot Leg Ranch, and he had the cowboy trick of guiding a horse with his knees. Probably he was safer on the horse without saddle or bridle than Mr. Adams was with those appurtenances.

As he came out of the lane, Rylcombe High Street was on his right, and he was aware now that the road on the left led to St. Jim's. The rider swept down into it gaily.

There was a shout from some of the villagers, who caught sight of a bareback rider in Etons and a silk hat, and were much astonished thereby.

Wildrake rode on at a rattling gallop.

He was thoroughly enjoying himself now.

Clatter, clatter, clatter!

The dusk had deepened. He slackened pace a little. A figure loomed up dimly on the road ahead of him.

"This right for St. Jim's?" called out Wildrake.

"Bai Jove!"

"Eh?"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He had emerged from the wood after parting with Tom Merry, and was tramping sadly towards St. Jim's when the horseman overtook him.

He had rubbed his noble face as clean as he could with a wet handkerchief—the only possible substitute for a wash, in the circumstances. He hoped to steal in quietly without being observed at the school.

He stared round at the clattering rider.

"Yaas, keep wight on," he said. "Bai Jove!"

Wildrake stared at the dim face of the swell of St. Jim's in the dusk. Some of the ink had been rubbed off it, but most of it was still there in heavy smudges. Gussy's aspect was rather startling.

"Jerusalem!" ejaculated Wildrake.

He set the horse in motion again.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "I wondah who that is? Widin' without saddle or bwidle, bai Jove!"

Clatter, clatter!

The horseman vanished from his sight.

A few minutes later St. Jim's was in Wildrake's sight. The windows of the School House were lighted, and gleamed through the dusk. Old Taggles, the porter, had reluctantly quitted the cosy fire in his lodge, and come out to shut the gates. Taggles jumped as a horseman clattered up.

"This St. Jim's?"

"Yes. Wot the dickens—— Oh, my heye!" ejaculated Taggles.

The horseman turned in at the gates. Taggles jumped aside.

"That the School House?" asked Wildrake, with a nod towards the lighted building in the distance.

"Yes. Wot the thunder——"

"Thanks! Come up, old hoss!"

And Kit Wildrake, with a thunder of hoofs, dashed across the quadrangle to the School House.

CHAPTER 8.
A Rather Dramatic Arrival!

"HALLO!"

"What the thump——"

"Who the dickens——"

There were startled exclamations on all sides as Kit Wildrake dashed up to the steps of the School House.

The light from the great arched doorway fell into the dusk without, and it was really a startling figure that dashed into the radius of ruddy light.

The horse came to a halt, pawing the ground, with steaming nostrils. Sitting the bare back with grace and ease, Kit Wildrake looked round cheerily at the crowd of fellows who had jumped away from the horse. It was near time for call-over, and a crowd of fellows were going in when the boy from the West made his dramatic arrival.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster, stood in the doorway, and his gaze fixed in great astonishment upon the newcomer.

"Who—what——" he ejaculated.

Wildrake rode close to the steps and doffed his hat.

"Please I've come, sir!" he said.

"What—what—who are you?"

"Wildrake, sir."

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "And what do you mean by arriving in this extraordinary manner, Wildrake?"

"I—I guess——"

"Are you riding that horse without a saddle?" exclaimed Mr. Railton, stepping out of the doorway in his astonishment.

"I guess so, sir! I couldn't stop for a saddle, or the galoot——"

"The what?"

"The galoot wouldn't have lent me the hoss, sir. I guess he didn't want to, anyhow."

"Bless my soul! Where did you obtain that horse, Wildrake?" exclaimed the scandalised Housemaster.

"At Rylcombe School, sir. I was taken there by a chap who met me at the station. He told me it was St. Jim's——"

There was a laugh from the curious crowd of fellows gathering round the surprising newcomer. Racke and Crooke were in the crowd, though they kept a little in the background. Racke did not think he would be recognised minus his false eyebrows, but he did not want to run risks.

"Really!" said Mr. Railton angrily. "This is too much! Merry, I understand, was sent to meet you at the station—— However, that is no reason why you should have—have acted in this extraordinary manner. Do you mean to say that you have ridden that horse here from Rylcombe without saddle or bridle?"

"Correct!"

"What?"

"I mean, yes, sir! I guess I've ridden no end of gee-gees bareback on the ranch at home, sir. No risk," said Wildrake. "I'll show you, sir."

He backed the horse away from the steps, into the middle of the wide drive, before Mr. Railton could guess what he was going to do.

Then a touch of his hand and a pressure of his knee started the steed, and there was a clatter of hoofs on the drive. The horse reared and curvetted and "cavorted," Wildrake sitting him as if he grew in his place. The St. Jim's juniors gazed on in wonder. They had never seen horsemanship like this before.

Mr. Railton almost gasped.

"Wildrake!" he shouted.

The new junior did not heed. Feeling himself on a horse again after so long was too much for him. He put the animal to the gallop and tore down the drive. The Housemaster stared after him blankly. In a few seconds the horseman came tearing back right for the School House steps. There was a yell from the crowd, and they scattered promptly.

It seemed as if the unbridled horse must dash into the stone steps and hurl his rider to death. Mr. Railton turned quite pale. Mr. Linton, who had come out of his study, gave a startled gasp.

"The boy will be killed!"

Clatter, clatter, clatter!

By magic, as it seemed, the horse was drawn in almost upon his haunches. His forefeet went into the air and then came down with a terrific crash. Kit Wildrake jumped lightly from his back.

"Boy!" gasped Mr. Railton.

"You see, it's all serene, sir!" said Wildrake.

"I—I—I hardly know what to say to you, Wildrake!" gasped the Housemaster. "You are a most—most extraordinary boy! Lowther, go at once and tell Taggles to come and take charge of this horse. It must be returned to the Grammar School at once. Wildrake, follow me to my study."

"Yes, sir."

Wildrake came into the School House, flushed and ruddy from his riding, with an elastic step. He was the recipient of a good many curious looks from the St. Jim's fellows. They had never seen a new boy arrive at the old school in this style before.

In the Housemaster's study Mr. Railton fixed a stern look upon the new junior; but the handsome, frank face of the young Canadian disarmed him a little.

"This prank, Wildrake——" he began.

"Prank, sir!" repeated Wildrake. "What prank, sir?"

"Coming to the school mounted upon a barebacked horse!" exclaimed the Housemaster sternly.

"I guess I hadn't any choice, sir," said Wildrake. "I was landed at the Grammar School, and I had to get here, and I reckon I wanted to arrive before you folk figured it out that I was lost, stolen, or strayed."

"That—that was quite right, certainly," said Mr. Railton. "But—however, as you are a new boy and do not, of course, know our customs, I will say nothing further on that subject, excepting that it must not occur again. It was very wrong and foolish of Merry to take you to the Grammar School instead of bringing you here—a foolish joke. I will see him about it at once."

Wildrake looked rather dismayed.

He had had to explain how he came to be at the Grammar School at all, but it occurred to him now that it meant trouble for the junior who had played the trick on him.

"Oh, sir!" he exclaimed. "I—I don't mind being spoofed——"

"I mind!" said Mr. Railton grimly. "You may be silent, Wildrake!"

He rang the bell, and sent Toby for Tom Merry. He signed to Wildrake to sit down while he waited. The new junior sat down, feeling very uncomfortable. Certainly he had promised his faithless guide a swollen nose for leading him astray, but he did not want to cause trouble for him with the school authorities. But that matter was out of his hands now. Toby came back to report that Tom Merry was out of gates and had not returned, though the gates were now locked.

"You will send him to me immediately he comes in," said Mr. Railton, and Toby retired. The Housemaster glanced at his watch. "It is now time for calling-over. You will go into Hall now, Wildrake, and answer to your name, and then return to my study."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Railton opened the door.

"Manners, kindly take Wildrake into Hall."

"Certainly, sir," said Manners.

He led the new junior away, regarding him rather oddly.

"You're a queer customer, you are!" he remarked.

"Think so?" drawled Wildrake. "I don't see how you figure it out. Haven't you ever seen a horse ridden bareback before?"

"Only in a circus," said Manners. "Here we are. Come in along with the Shell."

In Hall, Wildrake looked round him with interest as Mr. Linton called the names from the roll. He grinned as he sighted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy among the Fourth. While all attention had been concentrated on the arrival of the Canadian junior, Gussy had succeeded in dodging into the house by a side door unseen, and had been very busy with hot water and soap since. But he had not been able to remove all the marking-ink. His aristocratic features, crimson with rubbing and scrubbing, still showed streaks of purple, much to the entertainment of his Form-fellows.

There was one junior who did not answer to his name. It was Tom Merry of the Shell. He was still absent when the roll-call was finished and the school dismissed, and Kit Wildrake returned to the Housemaster's study. His interview with Mr. Railton was over before Tom Merry arrived at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 9.
Trouble for Tom!

TOM MERRY dismounted from his bicycle at the gates of St. Jim's and rang the bell loudly. He was an hour late for calling-over, which was rather a serious matter; and he was utterly ignorant of what had become of the new junior—which was a still greater worry. That Wildrake had been met at the station and led astray he had, of course, no suspicion. What had become of the boy from the West was a mystery to him.

It was some minutes before Taggles came down grumbling to the gate and opened it. He blinked sourly at the captain of the Shell.

"Huh!" said Taggles. "Nice goings-hon!"

"Bow-wow!" said Tom. "Do you want me to wheel this bike over you, old sport?"

Taggles grunted and stepped aside.

"Which you're to report to Mr. Railton at once, Master Merry," he said. "And I may say I 'ope you'll get licked! Huh!"

"Has the new kid turned up?" asked Tom.

Another snort from Taggles.

"If you mean a wild young rip what came a-galloping and a-prancing in on a wild 'orse, he 'ave!" grunted Taggles.

"Oh, he's come?" exclaimed Tom. "I mean Wildrake!"

"Yes," growled Taggles. "And if I was the 'Ead I'd send him 'ome again, I can tell you! Rushin' past a man on a wild 'orse—— Huh!"

"My hat! He came on a horse, did he?" said Tom, quite mystified.

"Ridin' bareback, like a circus performer!" snorted Taggles. "You believe me! Ain't I jest sent Simmons back to the Grammar School with the 'orse? Nice goings-hon. Hugh!"

And Taggles retired to the cosy warmth of his lodge again, and comforted himself with gin-and-water for these unusual goings-on.

Tom, greatly surprised, but much relieved to find that the new junior had arrived, after all, put his bike up and went into the School House to report himself to his Housemaster. He found Mr. Railton frowning severely.

"Merry! You were sent by Mr. Linton to meet the new junior at Wayland and bring him to the school. What do you mean, sir, by taking him to the Grammar School and leaving him there?"

Tom Merry almost staggered.

"My hat!" he stuttered.

"Answer me, Merry! This foolish and inconsiderate prank——"

"I—I didn't, sir!"

"Merry!"

"I never went to Wayland, sir," confessed Tom Merry. "I—I was wanted in the House match, sir, and D'Arcy offered to go, so—so——"

"You did not meet Wildrake at Wayland?"

"No, sir; I've never seen him. I've just been over to Wayland on my bike to see what's become of him, as he didn't come."

"This is extraordinary!" exclaimed the Housemaster. "Your name was given to Wildrake by the boy who met him at the station. Could D'Arcy——"

"D'Arcy never arrived at the station, sir," said Tom. "Some fellows played a joke on him in the wood, and he could not go. I—I supposed that nobody had met Wildrake. That's why I've been over to Wayland looking for him."

Mr. Railton looked perplexed.

"Wildrake was met at Wayland by some boy who gave your name, who took him to Rylcombe Grammar School in a taxicab, under pretence of bringing him here," he said.

"Keep away, sir!" said the groom. "This 'ere 'orse is a bit skittish with strangers." "Will you lend him to me? I've got to get to my school in a hurry," said Kit Wildrake. "You young donkey, you couldn't even mount him!" said the groom. Before the groom knew what was happening, the Canadian junior had vaulted upon the back of the horse and set the animal in motion. (*See page* 10.)

"My—my name? My hat!"

"You are sure, Merry——"

"Any of the fellows could tell you that I played in the House match," said Tom quietly.

"I do not doubt your word, Merry. It seems that some unscrupulous boy has used your name to play an unfeeling joke on the newcomer. If you had carried out Mr. Linton's instructions this could not have happened."

"You can explain to Mr. Linton," said the Housemaster drily. "Go to his study now."

In a dismal mood Tom Merry repaired to Mr. Linton's study. The master of the Shell listened to his rather halting explanations with a grim brow. When Tom Merry had finished speaking Mr. Linton began—and he had much more to say than Tom.

His remarks, though not pleasant, were lengthy; they made up in quantity what they lacked in quality, as it were. He pointed out that he had selected Tom Merry as a boy that could be relied upon, and that Tom had failed him, and had not justified his good opinion. He was disappointed—indeed, he might say that he was shocked! He might say that Tom had acted in a thoughtless, not to say inconsiderate and disrespectful manner. He felt bound to add that he could not pass over this incident with merely a reprimand.

At this point Tom Merry began to feel distinctly uneasy. His uneasiness increased when Mr. Linton carefully selected a cane.

The master of the Shell explained further that the chastisement he was about to bestow was an unwelcome task to himself, and designed solely for Tom Merry's good.

Tom would willingly have excused him the painful task, but he did not venture to suggest that. Having listened meekly to the lecture, he received two swishes, and a hundred lines of Virgil for missing call-over. Then he was dismissed—with a warning that he would not regain his Form-master's good opinion, excepting by acting in a much more thoughtful and considerate manner in the future.

The unfortunate junior was thinking less of his Form-master's good opinion than of his Form-master's cane just then. He had an ache in his palms that was more painful than the temporary loss of Mr. Linton's esteem.

As he came along to the staircase to go to his study he caught sight of the new junior in the midst of a group of Fourth Form fellows. Tom glanced at him, and guessed that this was Wildrake—and in a less troubled mood he would have gone to him to speak. Now he passed on, and went up to his study in the Shell passage. Manners and Lowther were there, and they gave him a sympathetic smile as he came in, rubbing his hands.

"Licked?" asked Lowther.

"Ow! Yes! Linton was ratty!" groaned Tom, sinking into a chair. "He said he was—ow!—shocked. I know I am—ow! So that troublesome blighter turned up all right, after all?"

Manners chuckled.

"Yes. He came prancing in on a horse—bareback! Seems no end of a funny son-of-a-gun."

"Bother him!" growled Tom. "The silly ass! Some silly chump met him at the station, calling himself by my name, and——"

"We've heard the yarn," said Lowther. "Who the thump——"

"Racke and Crooke stopped Gussy in the wood—one of them, I suppose," said Tom. "Ow! Ow! I remember they were loafing on the footer-ground while we were explaining to Gussy—wow!"

"They ought to be ragged if they did it!" said Manners. "It was a rotten joke on a silly new kid!"

"He ought to have had more sense!" growled Tom Merry. "Ow!"

"Well, anybody might have been taken in by such a trick——"

"Oh, rot! He's a silly owl!" said Tom Merry rather unreasonably. "I know he's got me a licking! Gussy is one silly owl, and Wildrake is another silly owl! And I've a jolly good mind to punch both their noses! Ow!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked in. "That is wathah a wotten way of thankin' a fellah for cuttin' a footer match and goin' on a wotten expedish for you!"

"Br-r-r-r!" growled Tom.

"I do not wegard that as an intelligent wemark, Tom Mewwy. Do you fellahs see anythin' on my face now?" asked D'Arcy anxiously.

"There's rather a queer nose," said Lowther.

"Eh?"

"In fact, a very odd set of features altogether——"

"You uttah ass! I was alludin' to the ink! Is the ink all gone?" asked Arthur Augustus. "I have had a feahful twouble wubbin' and sewubbin' it, and the skin weally feels as if it is comin' off. Do I look all wight now?"

"As right as ever you do, old bean!" answered Lowther. "Of course, that isn't saying much."

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus stalked away to obtain an opinion in a less humorous study. Tom Merry continued to caress his aching palms, while Manners and Lowther started prep. The Terrible Three were all busy when there was a tap at the door, and Trimble of the Fourth looked in with a fat grin.

"I've got a note for you, Tom," he said. "From the new chap, Wildrake."

"Shove it in the fire!" Tom Merry apparently did not yearn for any communication from Wildrake.

"Better read it," said Trimble, with a chuckle. "He may think you're funky, otherwise."

Trimble tossed him the note. Tom glanced at it with a frowning brow, and his chums read it at the same time. It was couched in the following terms:

"Dear Merry,—It pleased you to play a silly trick on me at Wayland this afternoon. It will please me to knock a little sense into your silly head. I am told that affairs of this kind are generally settled behind the chapel after lessons. I will wait for you there at 12 a.m. tomorrow. With or without gloves, as you like.—Yours, KIT WILDRAKE."

Tom Merry grunted.

"If the silly ass asks for a licking, the silly ass can have a licking!" he answered gruffly. "Trimble, go back to the silly ass, and tell the silly ass that I'll give him a licking to-morrow at twelve o'clock behind the chapel."

"He, he, he!" chortled Trimble.

And he departed with his message.

Tom Merry sat down to prep. By the time prep was over the ache in his palms was gone, and with it the unusual crossness of his sunny temper. He looked at his chums rather thoughtfully as he rose from the study table.

"After all——" he began. "I—I rather wish I hadn't taken that silly ass's challenge——"

"My dear chap," said Manners, "how often have I told you you're a thoughtless ass?"

"I can't remember how often you've talked out of the back of your neck, Manners."

"Look here, you duffer——"

"Still, it's fixed up now," said Tom. "After all, I dare say a licking will do him good."

"Let's hope it will," said Lowther, with a chuckle.

And Tom Merry had to let it go at that.

There will be another grand, long, complete story of Tom Merry & Co. and Wildrake in next week's issue of "THE GEM LIBRARY." Make sure of your copy by ordering EARLY.

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Back To Iron Hand.

SHARPE'S DESPERATE SCHEME.

John Sharpe, the great analytical detective, is engaged by Chief Burnett of the Secret Service in Chicago, to track down the band of organised criminals operating in the West under the guidance of Iron Hand. Black, Burnett's assistant, overhears the plans and informs Iron Hand in the latter's lair in San Francisco. Black is discovered by Sharpe, who disguises as a telegraph operator, and he is traced to the home of his sister, Marna Black, one of the band of crooks. Marna is captured. Burnett induces Anne Crawford, a woman agent of the Secret Service, to assume Marna's identity and get into the confidences of Iron Hand. Anne leaves for the West. She is not known to Sharpe. The detective starts off for Iron Hand's lair, and on the train three of the band plan to kill him with "Mustard Gas." After a severe struggle he fortunately escapes.

The mountain den is run by Potsdam, Iron Hand's lieutenant. Anne meets Iron Hand, presents her credentials, and is taken into the gang. She is sent to Potsdam, and is in the den when a signal warns that someone is approaching. As Sharpe rides along the road to the den, a trap falls, precipitating him and his horse into a deep pit. Here he is captured and identified by Potsdam and his gang. He is thrown into a room adjoining that of Anne. Anne slips a knife-blade through a crack in the wall, enabling Sharpe to free himself of his bonds. By a clever ruse, Sharpe gets the gang into his room, locks them in, knocks out another of the gang, seizes a horse, and is on his way to freedom, when Potsdam, who has bombs planted all along the road, explodes them one at a time, and apparently blows him and the horse to atoms. Anne is ordered to return to Iron Hand again.

* * * *

ANNE CRAWFORD, who was on her way to the garage, halted when she came to the place which she believed was the scene of the ill-fated explosion which killed John Sharpe. She turned her head to see whether she was being observed by anyone at the Nest or not, and then dismounted and peered over the edge of the cliff.

Anne looked down with a puzzled expression.

She stared hard for a few moments, and then took out her pair of strong field-glasses and looked through them. The girl was completely astounded by what she saw.

The horse which the detective had been riding was undoubtedly dead, but instead of being John Sharpe, she realised that the other figure was a skilfully-arranged dummy. In a flash, the truth dawned upon her. John Sharpe had escaped! And a look of happiness crept into her face.

The next moment she dashed back to her horse, and, mounting, rode off again in the direction of the ranch, where she knew the garage to be. As she rode along, she could not help thinking what a wonderful man John Sharpe was. She admired him intensely.

By this time John Sharpe had reached the ranch. In the foreground he noticed a dwelling-house, and a little to the rear there were other buildings and shacks. The detective was just about to continue his journey, when something he saw made him pause suddenly. A short distance ahead he could see a man walking from the barn towards the house.

The detective watched him with interest, and when he saw him disappear into the ranch-house, John Sharpe quickly and stealthily ran towards the barn, taking advantage of the many trees to cover up his movements.

When Sharpe reached the barn he at once entered.

There were a number of horses in the stalls, and also a large touring-car standing ready for use. On a shelf on one side of the barn the quick eyes of John Sharpe noticed a chauffeur's cap and a pair of goggles. He looked at these for a moment with great interest, and then with wonderful agility he climbed up the sides of one of the horse-stalls, and next moment had disappeared through the opening of the hayloft above.

There was a considerable amount of hay and various other articles in the loft, but what attracted Sharpe's attention most of all was the fact that the door had a small crane over it, complete with block and tackle. This was evidently used for the purpose of hoisting bales of hay.

John Sharpe immediately experimented with this, in order to make quite sure that it worked satisfactorily. Then he glanced out at the door, and suddenly ducked quickly back in order to get out of sight. He decided to wait in patience for a moment or two. It was the arrival of Anne Crawford which had caused the immediate change in the detective's plans.

Anne was quite near to the barn, and Sharpe could distinctly hear her shouting in order to attract the attention of someone.

Through a window in the loft Sharpe could see that the man he had previously caught a glimpse of appeared in answer to her call.

Anne then dismounted from her horse, and, going over to him, she said:

"Potsdam told me I could get a car here."

He had evidently received instructions in advance, and, bowing, he asked her to wait a moment. He then walked in the direction of the barn, while Anne wandered over towards the house, where she was invited in to partake of some refreshment by a man and woman who were also connected with the gang.

John Sharpe could hear the man enter the barn, and then, in his excitement, he moved suddenly, and made a slight noise. The newcomer must have heard it, for immediately his attention was attracted, and, looking up towards the loft, he shouted angrily:

"Come down, out of there, who ever it is!"

Sharpe realised that unless he did something pretty soon he would be caught. In a moment his mind was made up. He suddenly seized the block and tackle, and swung down towards the floor of the barn.

The man, who was looking upwards wondering who the unexpected stranger was, received the surprise of his life, for the heavy weight of John Sharpe descended suddenly upon him, bowling him completely over.

Instinctively the other reached for his automatic pistol, but the detective expected such a move as this, and, grasping the axe which he had brought with him, he delivered a heavy blow on the fellow's head, rendering him unconscious.

John Sharpe then took possession of his pistol, and, attaching the hook of the crane to the man's belt, he quickly hoisted him up to the hayloft. In order to make quite certain that he would not come round too soon and spoil the little scheme he had in mind, Sharpe securely bound and gagged him.

The detective could not help chuckling to himself at the peculiar way in which things had turned out. But there was no time to be lost.

Sharpe snatched at the cap and goggles, and quickly put them on. Then he rapidly started up the car and drove it out. It was a good job he was not lacking in nerve.

Driving outside the house, the detective pulled up the car, and Anne and the man and woman emerged from the building. Waving them good-bye, Anne entered the car, and John Sharpe drove rapidly off with her. Nobody, so far, had penetrated his disguise.

At Eagle's Nest, Potsdam was busily giving instructions to a number of his assistants.

"Go out and fix up the trail again," he instructed them. "The road must be mined, and got ready for the next victim who dares to interfere in our business. Thank goodness John Sharpe has been put out of the way!"

Potsdam seemed greatly relieved to think that "the Needle" would no longer worry him. If he had only the gift to look into the future, he would not have been so satisfied with himself.

As soon as his men left to carry out their orders, Potsdam took a secret telephone from under his table, and called up the number he required. Potsdam was connected by this instrument with the house on the ranch, and the 'phone was answered by the man whom Anne had been talking to only a short while ago.

In answer to Potsdam's question, the man replied:

"Yes, Marna Black left for Iron Hand's lair an hour ago. Ludwig took her away in the motor-car."

"Good!" replied Potsdam briefly. "Now I have some important information for you. John Sharpe has been killed. I want you to pass the information along to all our agents."

Potsdam hung up the receiver of the private 'phone, and again hid it away out of the sight of prying eyes. The man in the house on the ranch did likewise, and then, going over to the ordinary Government 'phone, he called up "Coronado 735."

This was the number of the St. Francis Hotel, and when he was connected he asked for Mr. Bullow.

The man Bullow had a luxurious suite of apartments in the St. Francis Hotel.

Hearing the telephone-bell ring, he went to the 'phone, lifted the receiver, and, after listening for a few seconds, he replied:

"Yes, I understand. I'll tell him."

There was a look of crafty satisfaction on Bullow's face. He was yet another of Iron Hand's representatives and agents.

Bullow went over to a small picture on the wall, and, raising it slightly, he pressed a concealed button underneath. Immediately a secret panel swung aside, disclosing a niche, in which there was another 'phone. Bullow took the instrument out and spoke.

He was now directly connected by secret telephone to the underground headquarters of Iron Hand, the director of all the wonderful organisation of the great Crime Trust.

Bullow paused a moment in order to make quite sure with whom he was talking, and when satisfied on the point, with slow deliberation he said:

"I have a message from Eagle's Nest. They report that the Needle is dead. Marna Black is returning to you."

Iron Hand, masked as usual, was seated at his desk, examining various documents, when the call came. Iron Hand merely grunted in response to the man at the other end. Then he hung up the 'phone and turned round. His office was a mass of sliding panels, trapdoors, and buttons and levers.

He stood silently for a moment contemplating this ingenious mechanism, when he suddenly awoke from his dreaming mood and brought his fist down firmly on one of the buttons on the wall.

A few moments later, from an anteroom behind the panel, a man entered. He bowed before his chief.

"When Miss Black arrives admit her at once," he said.

The assistant bowed, and withdrew. Iron Hand sank down in his chair, the gloved hand lying limply, as usual, by his side. A faint smile crossed his face. He was pleased that the dangerous Needle had been killed.

What Sharpe Over-heard.

IN the crowded streets of San Francisco the motor-car driven by Sharpe was making its way. There was a brief stoppage in the traffic, and Anne, who desired to speak to the chauffeur, leaned forward. But the detective was afraid to speak lest he be discovered, and he put his hand to his lips and whispered:

"Be careful; do not speak here."

It was a very peculiar position this. Anne Crawford, whose object was really to assist Sharpe, was being driven by a man whom she firmly believed to be a member of the gang; while Sharpe, on the other hand, little realised that his passenger was not a member of the desperate gang, but a friend, anxious to help and assist him whenever the opportunity arose, providing, of course, she could do it without casting suspicion on herself and giving the game away.

Anne realised from Sharpe's signal that she could not question him, and she leaned back again in her seat.

A little later, however, Anne made another effort to speak. She had received instructions to visit Iron Hand's lair, but the chauffeur, curiously enough, did not seem to know the way. John Sharpe did not realise at the time that he would be up against this difficulty. But it was clear to him that Anne was becoming agitated because he was not taking her to the place according to her instructions.

Sharpe was puzzled. He wanted to get to Iron Hand's secret underground lair also but, of course, he had not the slightest idea where it was situated. No one, in fact, except those intimately associated with the gang, knew.

Sharpe realised that Anne would become considerably alarmed if he kept her much longer riding aimlessly about in the car.

He racked his brains for an idea. Glancing around, he saw Anne waving and signalling him to continue. Sharpe again held his fingers up to his lips, thus intending to convey that great caution was necessary. Then he held out his hand to Anne, without uttering a word.

Anne was puzzled for a moment, and hesitated. Then, jumping to the conclusion that perhaps the chauffeur had not been given instructions, after all, she opened her handbag and produced her bundle of documents. She quickly ran through the papers, and, taking out the one containing the address of Iron Hand's lair, she handed it to Sharpe.

The detective immediately started the car up again. He had obtained just the information he desired. And a short time later he arrived at a row of large, old-fashioned residences. It was under one of these that the entrance to Iron Hand's headquarters lay.

Sharpe took the car slowly down the street, and, after glancing at the numbers of the houses, he pulled up at one of them. He then alighted from the car, and, carrying Anne's bag, followed her to the entrance to the house.

Anne gave a secret tap at the door, and it was promptly opened, and the two detectives, unknown to each other, entered the house of mystery.

Immediately John Sharpe became all eyes and ears. Although he seemed to be listless and not on the alert, he was striving to see and hear every little detail that went on. Arriving at another door, Anne gave the necessary counter-sign, and it was promptly opened to her.

Soon a guide advanced towards Anne. He had expected her, and beckoned her to follow, at the same time ordering Sharpe to remain where he was until he received further orders. Reluctantly he obeyed.

After standing alone for a few moments, Sharpe decided to take a chance. And he crept silently after Anne and the guide, peering slyly round the corners of the corridor through which they walked, to make sure that he was not observed. He was just in time to see the door of a lift closing on the guide and Anne. Sharpe waited a moment until the lift had descended, and then knocked at the door.

At the bottom of the shaft the guide pressed a button, and the panel opened. It led directly into Iron Hand's luxurious room, and the next moment Anne was face to face with the great criminal chief. The guide waited by the lift for further instructions.

Meanwhile, the plucky Sharpe, deciding to take one more great risk in the extraordinary game in which he was playing, climbed on the cable of the lift and slid down towards the bottom.

Unfortunately, however, the door of the lift was a spring one, and about halfway down the detective heard it shut to with a click. Then the terrible truth came to him. He was a prisoner in the underground lair. What if he should be caught in this situation by the ruthless Iron Hand!

At the moment Sharpe had reached the top of the lift which was at the bottom of the shaft, Iron Hand signalled to the guide that he needed his services no further, and that worthy immediately entered the lift, closing the secret panel which shut the shaft off from Iron Hand's apartment. Then slowly the lift ascended.

John Sharpe at once realised his peril. On one side of the shaft the detective noticed that there was a niche in the wall large enough to hold a man. This was a time for quick action, and Sharpe immediately made for the niche.

Hardly had he gained it than the lift ascended almost on a level with him. Sharpe crouched down in his hiding-place, hoping against hope that he would not be observed.

Presently the cable of the lift stopped moving, and Sharpe knew that it had reached the top floor. He had scarcely dared to breathe, and felt greatly relieved now, for he knew that immediate danger had passed by.

Once more Sharpe, the dare-devil, climbed down to the bottom of the shaft. He quickly made his way to the door, and, applying his ear to it, he listened eagerly.

Unfortunately, however, in his enthusiasm, it did not occur to him that the guide would probably look round in search of him. Then what would happen?

Sharpe could hear perfectly what was being said at the other side of the door, and it was a queer experience for him to listen to Anne Crawford relating the story of his own death.

The Discovery.

SOME time after the departure of Anne, Potsdam made one of his periodical visits to the ranch on a tour of inspection, and as soon as he entered the barn he received an unexpected shock.

A queer gurgling noise came to Potsdam's ears, and instantly he glanced up in the direction from whence it came.

He was not long in discovering the

mazed to see his faith- trussed up like a fowl, h misery. He was in position as when John m, preparatory to his ne in the place of the eur. Potsdam hast- Ludwig, and he then with questions in his hat had happened. ort, for he was feeling ed and fed up, Lud- o explain to his master range plight.

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nted in both bunkers. e discovered. The fate ill be known only to nd myself. We can ance on the gold ship- ulty!"

n paused, Iron Hand a curious expression ntenance. His clever pidly, and as Anne hought he looked more Although she had not of him, she was begin- o read his thoughts a convinced that some d entered his mind. t far from the truth. delighted with the new recruit of his had thought of the conse- ld result if the truth ade him afraid, and was served, he had his man by the same d employed on many

to Iron Hand what that his own ends skin remained safe.

Hausen was a young man in the prime of his life who had fallen into the clutches of Iron Hand's gang, and he was now so mixed up in crime that he dared not turn back from the path he had taken even if he wished. There was nothing for him now but to go on and on, and Iron Hand or his servants were always at hand to push him further down the hill.

The criminal chief remained deep in thought for a moment or two, then he suddenly awoke from his dream and turned towards the young man Hausen.

"If it is ever found out, the consequences——"

Iron Hand's voice broke away, and he stared hard at the man who stood before him. It was his plan now to make him afraid of what he had undertaken.

Then suddenly the scheming master criminal gripped Hausen's hand.

"You have done well!" he said. "But it is a terrible secret for one so young to have. Come, let us drink to our future success!"

He indicated Hausen to sit down, and then, his face alight with evil determination, he went over to a small cupboard hidden in the wall. When the door was open, a number of bottles were disclosed. Standing in front of the cupboard so that his movements were hidden from the view of Anne and Hausen, Iron Hand carefully selected a peculiar-shaped bottle, and poured a small quantity of its contents into a glass. Then he took another bottle and poured the same amount of liquid into another glass. They were both of the same colour.

Iron Hand glanced craftily around, and the villainous intent on his face was plain to see. Anne Crawford was convinced that the man was up to some treachery, but she dared not speak, and she was powerless to act.

The chief walked back to where Hausen was sitting, and handed him one of the glasses, retaining the other for himself.

"To the success of the band," he said, raising his glass to his lips.

Hausen, unaware of Iron Hand's plot, followed, and Anne felt a terrible impulse to cry out, but she held firm. It would be for the good of the cause in the end, she argued, even if this unfortunate man was poisoned.

Iron Hand sat back in his chair, with his eyes fixed on the young man opposite to him. He had not long to wait, for his deadly poison soon had the desired effect.

Hausen immediately grew weak, he clutched frantically at his heart for a second or two, and then collapsed helplessly in his chair.

Iron Hand smiled, and his fingers sought for a lever beneath his desk. He looked coldly and calmly at Anne, who would have given anything at the moment to get this terrible man in her power.

Suddenly, as the chief pulled the lever, Hausen's chair tipped slightly, and Anne saw beneath a gaping hole, where a trap-door had silently opened. The next moment the body of Hausen pitched down through the hole and disappeared. It was all over in a few seconds.

Anne could not resist the desire to stand up. Peering over the hole made by the trap-door, she saw what resembled a deep well, which extended beneath the floor of the main room in which they were sitting.

One one side of the wall of the well was a ladder, and the tunnel down was dimly lit the whole way.

Poor Anne shuddered as she contemplated the terrible fate which had befallen the young man.

(Continued at foot of page 17)

John Sharpe realised his peril from this quarter, and climbing rapidly up the side of the lift shaft, he clutched the unsuspecting guide and dragged him down. He fell head-foremost to the bottom of the deep shaft.

THE TWO SWAGGIES

By HASTINGS DRAPER.

A SHORT COMPLETE STORY DEALING WITH QUEENSLAND.

LITTLE Kaboonga was sitting under a high "ti-ti" tree, up on a bank of fallen leaves, weaving a basket for the "missee." She was a black girl of about fifteen years old, whom the "boss," whose name was Jack Marsden, had, four years previously, rescued from her tribe of North Queensland aboriginals, when she was being brutally thrashed by her father for some trivial fault. Marsden had soon squared matters with the father by the purchase of Kaboonga for a few "tickee-pennies," or sixpences, and both parties separated with mutual satisfaction; the parent with having got rid of an extra mouth to feed upon "goannas,"* snakes, tree-grubs, etc., and the boss with having acquired a girl who, after a little time and training, would be converted by his wife into a useful maidservant.

Kaboonga had nearly completed her basket, when she started at hearing sounds in the distance. She laid down, with her ear to the ground, and, after a minute's listening, took her basket, and glided as silently as a snake into a thick bush of leicharts, the large, laurel-like leaves of which effectually concealed her.

Presently two ragged, rough-looking swaggies (tramps) came within the view of the black girl, as she eagerly listened to the following conversation:

"I tell you, Jim, for a cert. that the boss and all the farm-hands will be away, for I was on the scout while you were still snoring by the creek this mornin', and saw the boss and the whole male outfit start off. I heard one of them say that he was taking tucker for the day, as they wouldn't be back before sundown. So there will only be one or two women at the homestead. But as I don't want to be tracked down for bushrangin', and I know you don't, for takin' a little dough (money) to get along with, I tell you what we'll do. Go up to the caboose, see the boss' wife, and ask 'er for a little tin to 'elp you to get 'ome; and as she's pretty sure not to give you any, you cheek 'er, and when she gives it you 'ot, you get into a fantigue, and lay 'old of 'er. Then I'll come cavortin' along, and pertend to lam into you, and you vamoose (run away). She's then pretty sure to stump up somethin' 'ansome to me for my galliant be'aviour. See?"

"Yus, I sees, but I ain't a-goin' to be such a jolly fool as to let you give me a hidin'. See?"

"In course you ain't! You puts up your mauleys, and pertends to 'it back, only soft-like, yer know, and I'll only brush your whiskers, and you slopes, and I stops to get patted on the back, and rewarded for my 'eroism. Then I'll meet you 'ere, and we'll share the swag honest-like, as between man an' man."

"Right-ho! But mind you don't 'it 'ard."

And then the worthy pair of swaggies passed on out of Kaboonga's hearing.

The black girl waited a few minutes only, until they were out of hearing, and then, making a slight detour, ran as a Queensland aboriginal can run.

Kaboonga soon reached the homestead, and, springing up the back veranda steps, as soon as her breath would allow her, exclaimed, in her pidgen English:

"Oh, missee, two debble-debbles comin' to steal um money!"

And, upon being questioned by Mrs. Marsden, told the whole of the conversation she had recently overheard.

Mrs. Marsden listened to the narration without the slightest symptom of "nerves," and, when the black girl had finished, a slight smile spread over her firm, well-cut features, as she said:

"Kaboonga good girl! Kaboonga no get scared; guess missee know how to treat debble-debbles of this kind."

Mrs. Marsden was a tall, strongly-built Scotchwoman, of about forty, to whom dairy and house-work had given both strength and agility, with pluck inherited from her Scottish forbears.

About twenty minutes after Kaboonga's return, Mrs. Marsden was leaning over the front veranda balcony, when a tall, rough-bearded swaggie came up the front path. Mrs. Marsden went down the steps to meet him, and asked:

"What do you want, my man?"

"Well, marm, to cut a long story short, I've got a pore wife up Mareeba way, and as I can't tramp all the way to 'em, I wants to get the train from the nearest station, which is only ten miles from 'ere. I can stump that easy, but then when I gets there I ain't got the needful for the railroad fare, and so, as you be a lady, I thought you might lend it me?"

"Do you suppose I am going to take in that thin yarn? Man, if you want any tucker, I'll give you some, but not one halfpenny of my money do you get."

"Oh, so you calls me a liar, does you? But I'll jolly soon show you're one when you says I sha'n't get a 'a'porth o' your tin!"

Saying which, he made for the veranda steps, as if to go up and help himself, when Mrs. Marsden caught him by the arm, and a struggle began. Just then there was a shout, and a short, sturdy figure in the ruins of a shirt and pants came running up the pathway, and made for the scene of action.

The newcomer, on arriving, called out:

"'Allo, Jim Jones! Wot, up ole tricks agin? You'd better lady alone, or I'll jolly soon ma a disturbin' a 'ighly respectable like that with your bushrangin'

"You be blowed!" exclaimed called Jim. "Don't you me wot ain't your business, or I'll g quick and lively!"

"Come on, then!" shouted valiantly. And with that the ra squared up to each other and little fancy boxing.

Mrs. Marsden retired to the where, taking up a position by of the half-frightened Kaboo began rallying her champion.

"What are you cat's-pawing that for? Are you trying to 'skito' off his face? Are you hurting him? Why don't you like a man? Why, I could than that myself! A pretty chicken-hearted champion you don't think!"

These cutting remarks, called high tone, so stung Bill that h rather viciously with his left, a Jim full on the bridge of the then lost all thought of a mock countered Bill savagely on This set the latter's temper on the pair set to with an energy w championship.

Mrs. Masters now ceased he which had done its work well, a on at the fight with increasing

The two continued to batter each other, and showed signs ment in each feature. As the timekeeper they kept on with e both gasping for breath, and signs of exhaustion. Mrs. Mar whispered a few words to Kabo disappeared into the house, a returned carrying one or tw thin, strong rope. Just t dropped like a log upon the s lock grass" of the lawn from a blow from Bill, who stagge mango-tree, which he leant wildly gasping for breath.

* A large species of lizard, the iguana of Australia.

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"Now's my time, you beauties!" exclaimed Mrs. Marsden.

She and Kaboonga ran down the steps with the coils of rope, and before the utterly-exhausted Bill could offer any resistance, securely lashed him to the trunk of the tree he was leaning against, and then knotted the cord firmly at the back of it, after tying his wrists and relieving him of the sheath-knife which he had in his belt.

I have omitted the gasping remarks of Bill during these operations for obvious reasons.

Mrs. Marsden and Kaboonga then turned their attention to the fallen champion, Jim, who was returning to consciousness, by tying his wrists and ankles and taking away his business-looking knife; they also passed a rope round his arms and body, knotted it, and tied the other end of the cord to one of the veranda-posts, to prevent him from rolling away into the shrubbery and perhaps escaping.

"Now," said Mrs. Marsden, "don't either of you try to get away, or indulge in any of your high-faluting language, or I shall use this." And she produced a neat little "Smith & Wesson's" revolver from her pocket. With which caution she left Kaboonga on guard on the veranda, with strict orders to call her if the swaggies attempted to escape.

But they did not. Either the fear of Mrs. Marsden's revolver, or the hope that they would get better treatment by obedience, prevailed over them, and in this latter they were not disappointed, for towards midday Mrs. Marsden and Kaboonga brought them out some drink and food, with which the black girl fed them in their helpless condition, as if they had been infants.

An hour before sundown Jack Marsden and the farmhands returned from their day's work.

Marsden was much surprised to see the two captive swaggies until his wife told the whole story of their attempt and capture. When she had finished, he patted Mrs. Marsden on the back, and said:

"Bravo, old woman! You did a cute thing by egging them on to a real scrap; although I am afraid you took rather a high hand with your champion in tying him up to the post like a dangerous dog. However, it was the best thing you could have done with any safety. I shall let them have a good supper, lock them up in a safe shed until morning, and then start them off with a caution that they'll have a good belting from the farmhands if they are seen on this run again while we are here."

In the morning, after a big breakfast, the two dejected swaggies were allowed to slink off.

Each went in a different direction without even saying "So-long!" to each other.

THE END.

MY READERS' OWN CORNER.

HALF-A-CROWN IS PAID FOR EVERY CONTRIBUTION PRINTED ON THIS PAGE.

THE LIMIT.

He knew the result of every match since '88. He was acquainted with the personnel of every team from Aston Villa down to the Viking Rovers. That afternoon he had seen his favourites walk over their opponents, but, all the same, the game ended in a draw. "Well, dear, what was the score?" asked his wife. "One, one!" snapped her husband. "Quite so, dear," said the lady, "but which one won?"—J. M'Master, 10, Fairlie Park Drive, Partick, Glasgow.

AWKWARD.

A stout woman always took two seats for herself at the theatre so as to be comfortable. On one occasion the attendant said, "Excuse me, madam, but who is going to use your second ticket?" "I am going to sit in both seats," was the reply. "Just as you like, madam, only they happen to be on opposite sides of the gangway!"—Louis Ellis, 88, Gilman Street, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs.

A SLIGHT ERROR.

A school inspector was much worried by the noise of the scholars in the next room. Unable to stand the row any longer, he opened the door, burst upon the class, saw a tall boy who was talking a lot, and, grabbing the disturber by the collar, carried him into his own room, where he put him in a chair. "Now, you just sit there and be quiet!" he said. Ten minutes later a small boy put his head round the door, and a meek little voice said: "Please, sir, you've got our teacher!"—W. A. Stewart, Elswick, Kilmacolm, Renfrewshire.

TERRIBLE!

Miss Jones: "I got a letter from an old friend this morning. He says that every rib is gone, that he has only one shoulder, and that he expects to lose his legs before the day is out."

Mis Roberts: "Poor fellow! Is he in the hospital?"

Miss Jones: "Good gracious, no! He's in a butcher's shop!"—Stanley Allmark, 16, Eaton Place, Breck Road, Liverpool.

THE GEM.

During the years the GEM has been in circulation I estimate that it has produced, roughly, the following: 656 issues, 15,000 pages, 6550 chapters, 151,000,000 words, 3330 illustrations, 90 extra serials and series. Cost of all issues £3 15s.—Allan Smethurst, 1648, Great Western Road, Anniesland, Glasgow.

"THE INVISIBLE HAND!"

(Continued from page 15.)

Iron Hand must have noticed her look of horror and amazement, but he calmly shrugged his shoulders, and, with a smile, he said:

"He was too young to have such a secret!"

The Alarm.

BUT there was a further shock in store for the distracted girl. On the disc which had but recently told of the arrival of Hausen another message appeared. This time the lighted letters recorded one word—"Telephone."

Iron Hand hurried over to the secret wire, and hastily put the receiver to his ear. The next moment he swung round and faced Anne, and in a terribly agitated manner he asked:

"Where is the chauffeur who brought you here?"

In a puzzled manner, Anne replied that she left him upstairs. She was, of course, quite innocent of the fact that Sharpe had taken his place in the motor-car.

"Why?" she asked of the almost crazy Iron Hand.

"He is a traitor!" flashed out the chief. "Potsdam 'phones that he half-killed Ludwig and took his place. Well, he's in the building somewhere, and he can't get away alive!"

John Sharpe, still in his hiding-place at the bottom of the lift-shaft, had overheard Iron Hand's inquiry, and he decided that the best thing for him to do would be to declare his presence at once, and take the chance, while he had only the chief to deal with.

Unfortunately, however, the guide had just become aware that the chauffeur was missing, and he decided to come down and investigate. The detective realised his peril from this quarter, and, without hesitation, he climbed rapidly up the lift-shaft. Springing at the unsuspecting guide, Sharpe dragged him down, and, head foremost, he fell to the bottom of the deep shaft. Thus one of his antagonists was put out of action.

The detective then hastened to the bottom again, and, opening the panel-door which separated him from Iron Hand's room, he rushed into his headquarters.

"Hands up!" he yelled to the astonished chief.

Iron Hand recognised the intruder at once.

"John Sharpe, or his ghost!" he muttered.

The detective was in no mood for tricks, and he waved his revolver menacingly.

"You, too—up with them!" he shouted, turning to Anne, whom he little knew was there on the same errand as himself.

But the crafty Iron Hand was taking things very calmly under the circumstances. He lowered one hand suddenly and pressed a button. John Sharpe immediately fired, but his shot went wide, and he felt the floor give way beneath him. As he fell he heard the mocking laugh of Iron Hand.

(NEXT WEEK! This thrilling story will be continued in the next number of the GEM. Do not miss the thrilling account of John Sharpe's amazing visit to Iron Hand. Order your GEM early, boys!)

WHO'S WHO IN THIS WEEK'S "GEM" STORY.

(For the Benefit of New Readers.)

KIT WILDRAKE, a new arrival at St. Jim's. Hails from a far-away country—British Columbia, from a home called the "Boot Leg Ranch." An extremely clever horseman. Quite as safe without saddle and bridle as with. Has a knack of guiding his mounts with his knees. His big trunk contained cowboy clothes, a Stetson hat, and a coiled lassoo. Baggy Trimble even goes as far as saying that together with his belongings there was a loaded revolver.

TOM MERRY, the respected junior captain of the school, and leader of the Terrible Three. Liked and respected by all the decent fellows. Interested in sports of all sorts, and is clever with his fists. Can take a joke, and is always ready to give one. A real, all-round good fellow.

HARRY MANNERS, another member of the Terrible Three. More studious than either of his chums. A good photographer, and a very clever mathematician. Always bright and cheerful, and interesting in his conversation. Perhaps not much of an athlete.

MONTY LOWTHER, a further member of the Terrible Three, known as the humorist of the Shell. His jokes and puns are most remarkable. Very fond of impersonating, and can always carry same out to effect. Always ready to give others a helping hand.

AUBREY RACKE, the son of a war-profiteer, purse-proud, snobbish, cunning, unscrupulous, and dissipated. He is known to be the leader among the rotters. Will partake in any low-down and shady trick.

GEORGE GERALD CROOKE—one of the worst fellows at St. Jim's. Would be still more dangerous if he had more courage. The chief ally of Racke, who usually leads all the shady escapades. Hates Tom Merry and all his chums because they are not of his sort; but even in the hating line he is inferior to Racke.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY, known as the "Swell of St. Jim's." The famous aristocrat is liked and respected by all. Immaculate in attire, and as interested as any in the latest fashions. Is the recipient of a large number of "fivahs" sent him by his "patah," Lord Eastwood.

MR. VICTOR RAILTON, M.A., Sixth Form-master, and Housemaster of the School House. Thoroughly liked and respected by the majority at St. Jim's. Always ready to give a helping hand, and a real good fellow in every way. His one aim is to lead, and not to drive. Different in every way to Mr. Ratcliffe, the tyrant of the New House.

JACK BLAKE, may be considered the leader of the Fourth in the School House. A fine, manly specimen of British boyhood. The staunch chum of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Jack and Gussy stand shoulder to shoulder in loyalty, straightforwardness, and courage. Practical like most Yorkshire folk, always ready to stand against tyranny and to help a fellow down on his luck. A splendid all-round athlete.

EDITORIAL.

My Dear Chums,—

I think you will agree with me that the present number of the "Gem" is excellent in every way. Our long complete school story, "The Boy from the Wild West," is certainly one of the finest yarns we have ever published, and Kit Wildrake will no doubt prove a popular character. Judging by the large number of letters I have received, our new serial, "The Invisible Hand," is a great success, and you will no doubt find this even more thrilling as the story unfolds itself week by week. The situations which arise are really extraordinary, and it takes John Sharpe all his time to unravel the baffling mysteries and deep-laid schemes planned by Iron Hand. Next week's "Gem" will be a splendid number in every way. Our special long complete school yarn will be entitled, "The Cowboy of St. Jim's," and any of my readers who do not read the story will miss a rare treat. Every word of "The Cowboy of St. Jim's" will thrill and amuse you. Our special art portrait next week will be one which I hope will please you all. I have received a great many letters from my chums in praise of our portrait feature. These readers state that the photographs make an interesting gallery of celebrities, and they hope they will continue in order that they may add to their collection. By the way, the circulation of the "Gem" is increasing very rapidly just now, so all my regular readers should make a point of obtaining their copy early, in order to make quite certain of getting the paper. There are many splendid features coming along in the "Gem" which you really must not miss!

YOUR EDITOR.

GOSSIP ABOUT ST. JIM'S AND GREYFRIARS.

It is rumoured:—

That George Gerald Crooke has been noticed wearing somewhat tired looks of late. This undoubtedly is due to the scarcity of his "naps."

That there has been great activity in the bath-room at Greyfriars School. We are informed that William George Bunter has condescended to divest himself of collar and tie to allow for the annual washing of his much-begrimed neck. A procedure quite un-neck-spected by all his Form-fellows.

That Arthur Augustus D'Arcy fancies himself in the role of detective. Perish the thought that with a further monocle he would be able to see the folly of such an undertaking.

That George Francis Kerr's birthday is very near at hand. He will in no way be surprised to receive the "presents" of his esteemed friend, David Llewellyn Wynn.

That the said David Llewellyn Wynn's presence, like the inevitable ashplant, is likely to be very much felt.

That Cyril Chowle is seriously thinking of visiting one of the circuses now running in London. We strongly advise our "hero" not to venture an inch further than "Oxford" Circus.

That the news of George Francis Kerr's birthday has also reached the ears of "Tubby" Muffin at Rookwood. Should Reginald Muffin make an appearance at the festive board, we trust that Herbert Skimpole will readily oblige with his Professor "Balmy-crumpet."

That Arthur Augustus D'Arcy is making a special visit to the local hatters who are at present holding their annual sale. You may be sure there is some "hat-traction."

That Richard Holmes, M.A., D.D., the respected headmaster of St. Jim's, is advertising in the local "rag" for a competent typist. We fully expect the lucky recipient of the post will have a "tapping" time.

That Bagley Trimble has actually lent his minor, Teddy, a sixpence. Wonder what other surprises the New Year has in store for us?

That Joe Frayne has suffered muchly in the hands of Stanley Gibson for the bent pin he planted on that worthy's chair. We trust that he will "refrain" from doing a like action again.

That Walter Adolphus D'Arcy, whilst fagging for Knox, was ordered by that worthy to go to the village and purchase some cigarettes for him. D'Arcy minor strictly refused, stating the fact that he was in no way a member of the "Fags' Union."

That Gerald Knox eventually persuaded Teddy Trimble to run the necessary message for him. He had no doubt reached the "fag-end" by this time.

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3. **A Free Trial Bottle of "Uzon," another preparation that has won world-favour and world-praise from all sorts and conditions of people for giving the final touch of radiant beauty to the Hair.**

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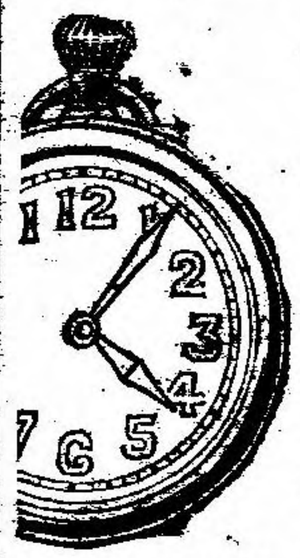

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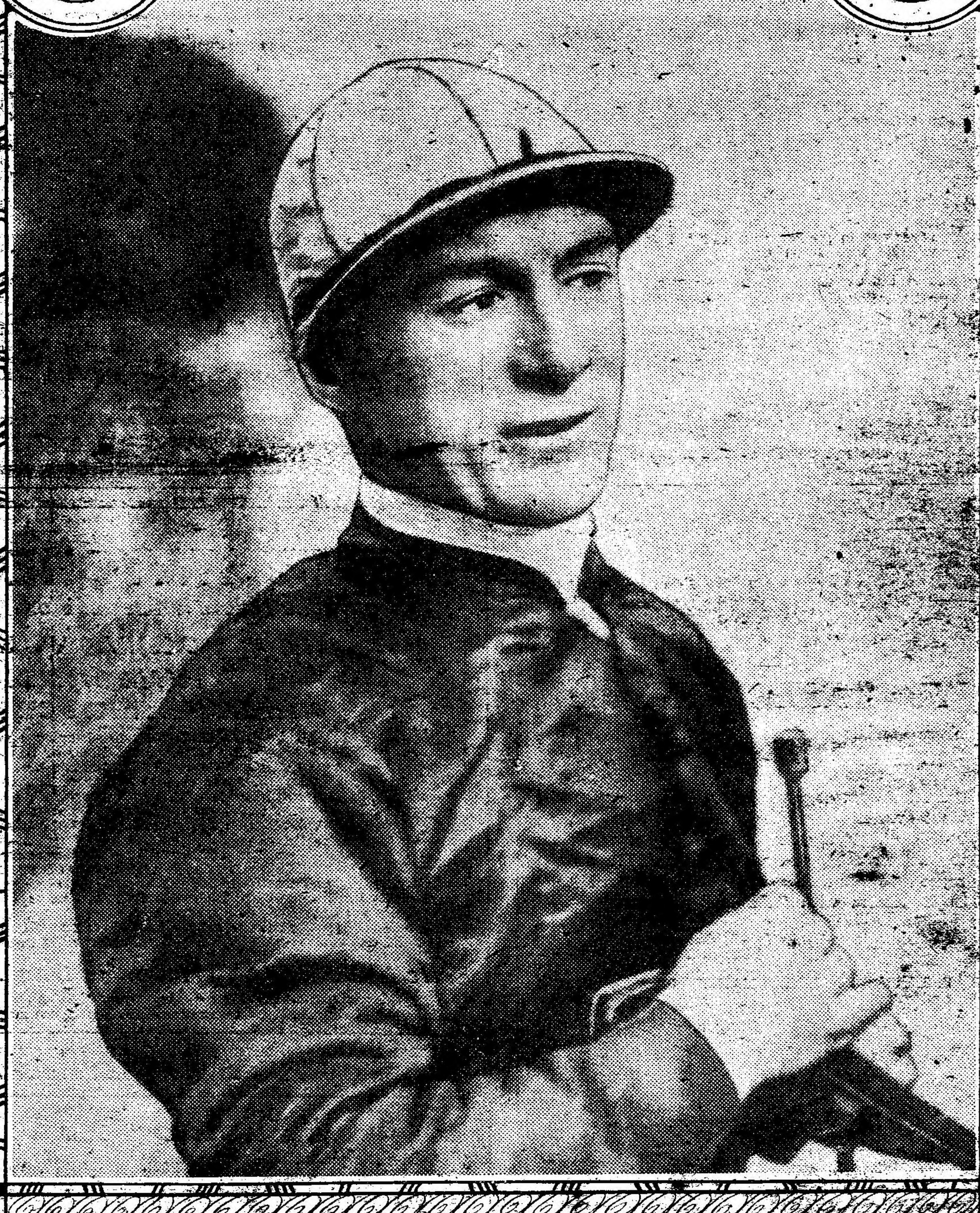

PICTURES FOR YOUR DEN!

No. 8. "STEVE" DONOGHUE.

Another Splendid Portrait of a Great Favourite in next week's "Gem." Don't miss it.