

SPLENDID FREE ART PLATES FOR READERS! (SEE PAGE 17.)

The GEM 1^D₂

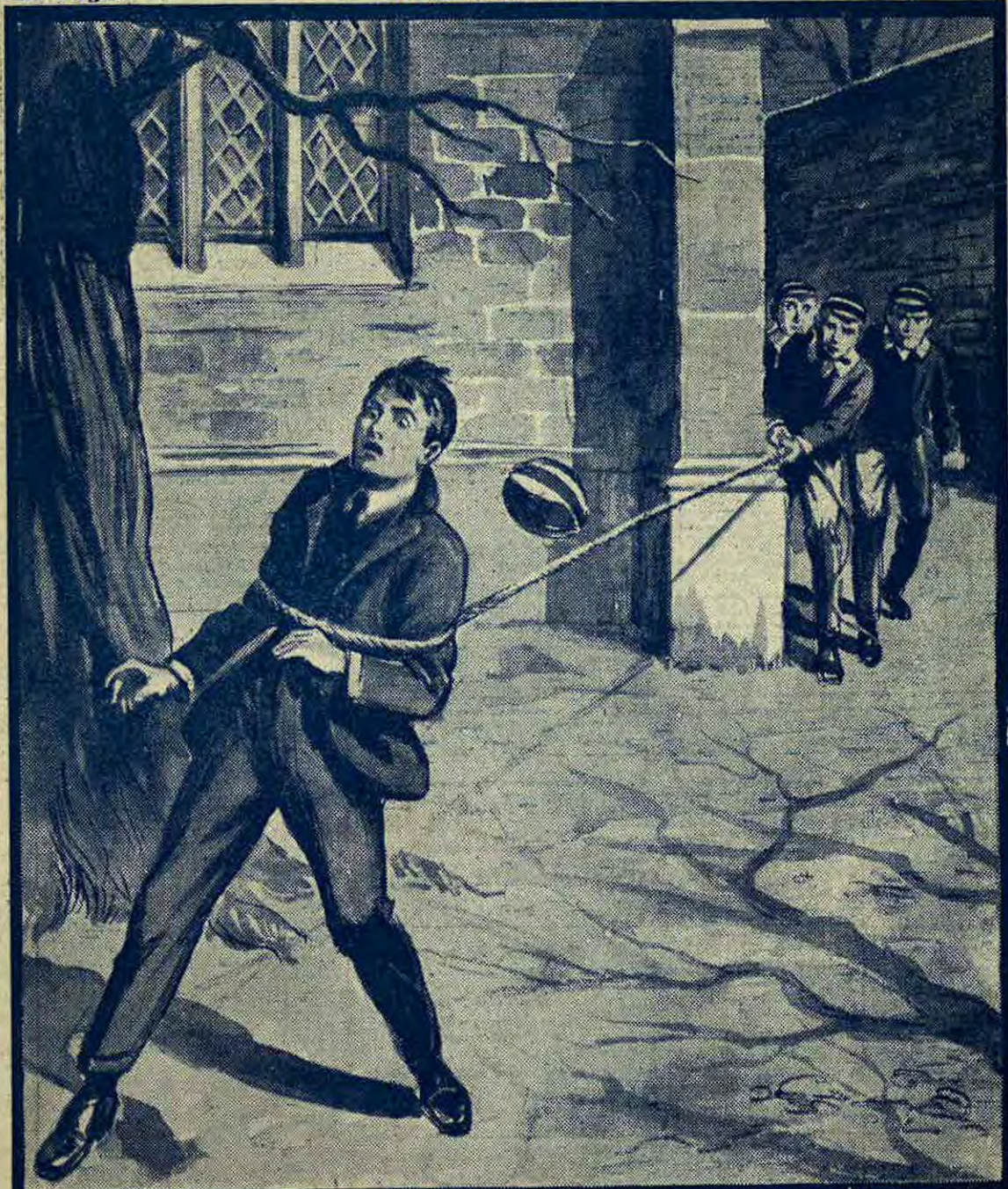
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20 Pages.

Every Wednesday.

April 8th, 1922.



ROPING IN THE CULPRIT!

(A Stirring Incident from the Grand Long Complete School Story Inside.)

EDITORIAL CHAT

OUR COMPANION PAPERS.

"THE BOYS' FRIEND" Every Monday.
 "THE MAGNET" Every Monday.
 "THE POPULAR" Every Tuesday.
 "THE GEM" Every Wednesday.
 "CHUCKLES" Every Thursday.
 "THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL" Published Yearly.

My Dear Chums,—

Mr. Martin Clifford never blows his own trumpet, so I have to undertake this part of the business. In next week's splendid long story of St. Jim's, entitled, "Mr. Racke's Protege," the famous author does better than ever. He describes the adventures of a youngster who has come badly to grief. This lad meets Mr. Racke, who has had a motor mishap, and is given a fresh start at St. Jim's. How things turn out you will see in the gripping pages of a particularly strong and dramatic tale.

Special notice should be taken of the Tuck Hamper Competition. A magnificent Tuck-Hamper will be awarded the best paragraph sent in each week for the "Readers' Own Corner." All other contributions printed in the Corner will win half-a-crown.

But please remember this point—all competitors for a Tuck Hamper must cut out the coupon found in each issue of the GEM, the special Tuck Hamper Coupon, and attach it to their attempt. Entries which do not have a coupon affixed cannot be considered.

I want you all to join the Rally-Round Club. You will see full particulars in the next column, and I know the new idea will be received with enthusiasm. You ought to see the number of letters I receive telling me that we ought to have a club. Well, at long last we have established one, and not a minute too soon.

The Rally-Round Club will serve to band readers together, and it will be a wonderful help to them in their hobbies and sports. A club develops as it goes on and feels its footing, that we all know. To my mind there are many brilliant possibilities—in fact, we will call them probabilities—ahead for the Rally-Round Club. It will be most useful to all supporters of the GEM, and to the old paper itself, and not alone here at home, but in the vast Dominions, all over the world, in short.

But as yet we are only at the beginning. Let's make this a record start. As has often been said, it is only the first step that costs. A good announcement is pretty well everything. That's why I ask my chums to respond to the call of the new Club, and—well, just rally round.

An excellent letter reaches me crammed full of sound suggestions for the further improvement of the GEM. Many of my correspondent's ideas are already in process of adoption—that concerning larger pictures, for instance, and the request to have more in the stories about what happened in the past. The "St. Jim's News" is looking pretty well after the history of the old days at the school. Of course, it stands to reason the author cannot check the action of an exciting yarn to refer to the past victories of St. Jim's on the football or cricket field.

Mind you look out for the new series of splendidly written health articles by the "Sporting Doctor" of St. Jim's, the first of which will appear in next week's GEM. They will be found to contain just the sort of advice a fellow wants when he is feeling off colour, run down, or over-worked.

A story which shall be really sensational is asked for about Tom Merry. There, too, I shall be able to oblige my enthusiastic supporter.

Now, my sound advice is that, in future, all readers should make a point of ordering their GEM well in advance as there is such a growing demand for this splendid school story paper.

YOUR EDITOR.

"MY READERS' OWN CORNER."

A Splendid Tuck Hamper filled with delicious Tuck is awarded to the sender of what the Editor considers the most interesting paragraph. Half-a-crown is awarded for each other contribution accepted.

(If your name is not here this week it may be next.)

This Wins Our Tuck Hamper.

WONDERFUL TREES.

The breadfruit-tree is a wonderful affair. You have but to put slices of its fruit on a grid-iron and you can soon have hot bread just as if it had come fresh from the baker. If we could only grow these trees in England bread might be cheaper. Then there is the pitcher-tree, each of its leaves being in the shape of a small jug with a lid, while, however hot the weather, each jug contains cold water ready for the traveller.—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious Tuck has been awarded to A. E. Bramwell, 7, Payton Road, Handsworth, Birmingham.

SNAKES.

The anaconda is the boa-constrictor. There is one in the British Museum measuring twenty-nine feet, but in the wilds the anaconda is said to measure forty feet. It lives chiefly in water, and is not active on land, but it can climb trees with speed and sureness. The Indian cobra can squeeze poison through holes in its two upper teeth and cause almost instant death. The African cobra has only two teeth in its upper jaw, but each of these makes a wound, and then injects the deadliest poison.—Half-a-crown awarded to W. E. Lawrence, 27, Binstall Road, South Tottenham London, N.15.

QUAINT.

A cheerful old bear at the Zoo Could always find something to do When it bored him, you know, To walk to and fro, He reversed it, and walked fro and to.—Half-a-crown awarded to M. F. Loeliger, 23, Duppas Hill Terrace, Croydon, Surrey.

THE COMMA.

The school inspector began to question the pupils on punctuation, when the local mayor, a pompous individual, who was visiting the establishment, interrupted him. "It is foolish," he said, "to bother about commas and such a like." This made the inspector angry. He turned to the class and told a boy to write on the blackboard, "The Mayor of Cheesington says the inspector is a fool." That was done. "Now," said the inspector, "put a comma after Cheesington and another after inspector." The mayor blushed, and said no more.—Half-a-crown awarded to J. Sutcliffe, 57, Laurel Grove, Penge, S.E. 20.

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Wildrake's Winning Way

A Grand Long Story of the Chums of St. Jim's, telling how the 'cuteness of Wildrake proves the Innocence of Darrell. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. Gussy First.

"YOU here—"
"Bai Joye! And you?"
Two juniors met at the door of the Head's study at St. Jim's.

One of them was Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell; the other was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the glass of fashion and the mould of form in the Fourth.

They stopped, and looked at one another.
"Goin' to see the Head, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy.

"Yes, And you?" asked Tom.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Not about Darrell of the Sixth?"

"Yaas!"

"Oh!" said Tom Merry. "But you don't know anything about the matter, Gussy."

"I wathah think, deah boy, that I can let in some light on the affiah," said Arthur Augustus. "I am goin' to speak to the Head vewy sewiously."

Tom Merry smiled.

"Perhaps you'd better cut off, Gussy!" he suggested. "I want to catch the Head before he goes to lunch—"

"Yaas; but I want to catch him, too," said Arthur Augustus. "It is wathah important, you see—as old Dawwell is goin' to-day, I undahstand."

"But—"

"Pewwaps you had bettah wun away, Tom Mewwy!" Arthur Augustus suggested, in his turn. "Leave the Head to me!"

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"The Head may be waxy, you know!" said Tom.

"I vegard that as quite pwob!" assented D'Arcy calmly. "But I shall insist upon his givin' me a heavin'. Wun away, deah boy, and don't intewwupt my important interview with Dr. Holmes."

"We'd better go in together, then," said Tom; and he tapped at the door of the Head's study.

"Come in!"

The two juniors entered the study together. They found Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, in the study with the Head. Both the masters were looking very grave and concerned. The recent happenings at St. Jim's had been more than enough to disturb their usual equanimity. Both of them glanced sharply at the juniors; and neither seemed at all pleased by the visit. The Head made a gesture of dismissal without waiting for them to speak.

"If you please, sir—" began Tom Merry.

"I have no time now, Merry! I will see you on another occasion, if you have anything to say to me," said Dr. Holmes curtly.

"It's about Darrell, sir!" said Tom.

Dr. Holmes raised his eyebrows.

"Indeed! If you know anything of the unfortunate affair, Merry, I will certainly hear you. I do not quite see, however, how you can know anything about it—or you either, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"Very well; you may tell me what you know, if you know anything," said the Head patiently.

"I—" began Tom.

"Pway leave it to me, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus gently but firmly. "We must not waste Dr. Holmes' time, you know. A headmastah's time is valuable."

Tom Merry breathed rather hard. But the juniors could not both speak at once; and the Head was already looking impatient. So the captain of the Shell left it to Arthur Augustus.

That happy youth ran on serenely.

"I twunst you will excuse me for buttin' in like this, sir!" he said. "The fact is, I have somethin' wathah important to say. I undahstand that Dawwell of the Sixth is bein' expelled fwom the school, sir—"

"That is true, D'Arcy."

"On the charge of baggin' some banknotes fwom your studdy, sir."

"Yes, yes!"

"It's supposed to have happened yestahday aftahnoon, sir."

"It happened yesterday afternoon," said the Head sharply.

"What do you mean, D'Arcy? If you know anything about the affair, tell me briefly!"

"I am pwetty suah, sir, that old Dawwell is incapable of doin' anythin' of the kind, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "But I have somethin' in the nature of evidence to offah, sir."

"You may proceed!" said the Head, while Mr. Railton looked very curiously at the swell of the Fourth.

"Owin' to Twimble, sir—I mean, owin' to a sillay tattlin' ass whose name I had bettah not mention—it was pwetty well known that Dawwell of the Sixth was hard up, and he was awfly hard hit by losin' the Foundah's pwize of fifty pounds," said Arthur Augustus. "Some of the fellows think this was the weason why he bagged your banknotes, sir. But I can let in some light on the subject, I think. Knowin' old Dawwell to be hard up, sir, I dwopped into his studdy on Tuesday, and offahed to lend him a fivah."

"What?"

"Really—" said Mr. Railton.

"Of course, I am awah that it is wathah unusual for a chap in the Fourth to offah a loan to a pwefect in the Sixth Form," said Arthur Augustus modestly. "But I wathah like old Dawwell; and I vegarded it as a transaction between one gentleman and another, you know. For some weason I am unacquainted with, old Dawwell did not see it in the same light, and he went for me with a cane—which was wathah a wude way of wefusin' my offah."

"Bless my soul!" said the Head, blinking at Gussy over his glasses; while Mr. Railton's grave face broke into an involuntary smile.

"I was not goin' to mention the mattah to anybody, sir, of course," continued the swell of St. Jim's. "It was a pwivate mattah between old Dawwell and me. But in the pwesent cires, I think I ought to mention it. Dawwell is accused of baggin' banknotes on Wednesday. But on Tuesday he wufused the loan of a fivah. Now, sir, it's all vewy well for a pwefect to stand on his dignity when a juniah offahs him a loan. But surely, sir, he would wathah have accepted a loan than have taken money that belonged to somebody else. So I have worked it out in my bwain, sir, that Dawwell could not possibly have taken your banknotes, sir, because if he had been so hard dwiven as to become a thief, he would certainly have accepted my fivah. A thief, sir, does not stand on his dignity about gettin' hold of money."

Having made that rather lengthy statement, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked at the Head inquiringly.

"Is that all, D'Arcy?" asked Dr. Holmes.

"Yaas, sir."

"You offered Darrell a loan of five pounds—an act of impertinence on the part of a Fourth Form boy—"

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"Bai Jove!"

"But it was a sum of fifty pounds that was taken from my desk," said the Head. "What you tell me, therefore, has no bearing on the matter. You did rightly in coming to tell me, D'Arcy, in the circumstances. Now you have done so, you may go."

"Yas, sir! But I hope I have convinced you, sir—"

"Darrell's guilt is a matter of evidence, D'Arcy, and the evidence is complete, by Darrell's own act. You may go."

"But, sir—"

"Leave my study, D'Arcy!" exclaimed the Head.

"Oh dear!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy faded out of the study. Evidently the Head was not in a mood for argument with a Fourth Form junior. Arthur Augustus retired to Study No. 6 in the Fourth, where he confided to Blake and Herries and Digby that the Head was uncommonly "cwoisty" that morning. And the Head turned his attention to Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 2.

Something Like a Shock.

TOM MERRY coughed. He had come there to speak in favour of the condemned prefect, whose expulsion had sent a shock through the school that day. But he realised a little more clearly than Arthur Augustus the tenacity of his action. He had determined upon it, after deep consultation with his chums, Manners and Lowther. But it was not an easy task.

"Well, Merry?" said the Head sharply.

"I think I ought to tell you what I know, sir," said Tom Merry diffidently. "I know you'd be glad to hear anything in Darrell's favour."

"Certainly—if there is anything to be heard."

"It's come out, somehow, sir, so I understand, that Darrell had fifty pounds—a lot of money," said Tom. "And it was fifty pounds that was taken from your desk. I believe, sir, that Darrell could have explained to you where the money came from, if he had liked."

"Indeed! Darrell has not confided the matter to a boy in the Shell, I presume?"

Tom crimsoned.

"N-no, sir! It was quite by chance that I knew anything about it, and I'm not certain now. But—but I believe I know, sir, where the fifty pounds came from."

"That is very extraordinary," said the Head. "You may proceed."

"I shouldn't have dreamed of mentioning it," said Tom. "It was a thing to get Darrell into a row, and Manners and Lowther and Wildrake agreed with me to say nothing of what we—thought. But it's better for you to know it than for you to believe Darrell a thief. That's what we've decided, sir, so I've come to tell you."

"Go on."

"We were in Wayland yesterday, sir, going to the pictures, and we dropped on Darrell in River Street, and he got awfully waxy and cleared us off. We couldn't make it out at first, and asked Wildrake what he thought about Darrell cutting up so rusty over nothing; and Wildrake figured it out. Darrell was just outside Gluck's office when we met him, and we came to the conclusion that he was going to the moneylender, and that he fancied we knew it, and so he got wild. I—I know, sir, it's jolly serious for a St. Jim's prefect to do such a thing, and you'd be angry about it, but as he's supposed to have stolen the money, I—we—we thought you'd better know, sir, that most likely he got it from a moneylender."

Dr. Holmes pursed his lips, and exchanged a glance with Mr. Raiton.

There was a short silence.

"This is not news to me, Merry," said the Head at last.

Tom gave a start.

"Oh, sir! I thought—"

"Darrell confessed, or stated, that he had been to Gluck, the moneylender in Wayland, and obtained a loan of fifty pounds," said the Head. "I did not give much credence to his statement."

"But surely the man could tell you himself, sir—"

"The man has a very evil reputation, Merry, and his statements could not be relied upon. I should not be in the least surprised if he were a party to Darrell's act of dishonesty."

"Oh!" ejaculated Tom.

"It was quite right, and very thoughtful of you, my boy, to come to me," said the Head. "But your statement does not affect the matter any more than D'Arcy's. I desire that everyone in the school should know that Darrell's condemnation is just. He was given every opportunity to clear himself. He admits having posted a registered letter containing fifty pounds in banknotes this morning, Merry; and by the comparison of the numbers, it could be ascertained whether these notes were the same that had been taken from

my desk. He refused to state the name and address to which they were sent—and he destroyed the registered receipt before my eyes, so that the discovery could not be made. He refuses still to state into whose hands the notes have passed, though that person's evidence would clear him absolutely, if he be innocent. That leaves no doubt upon the subject."

"Oh!" gasped Tom.

The junior's face was full of dismay.

His faith in Darrell of the Sixth was severely shaken by that information.

"So you see, Merry," said the Head kindly, "there is nothing further to be done. If Darrell be innocent the proof of it is in his own hands—and he refuses to produce it. He can have only one reason for that—he is guilty. There is nothing more to be said."

Tom was silent.

Certainly he could find nothing more to say.

"That is all, my boy," said Dr. Holmes. "I thank you for coming to me. You did your duty. You may go, Merry."

Tom Merry left the study in silence.

His heart was heavy.

He had always liked and admired "old Darrell." Next to Kildare, the captain of the school, Darrell was the most popular senior at St. Jim's. It was a blow to Tom to find that his faith in the fellow he had respected was undeserved—that Darrell was, after all, guilty of the mean and unscrupulous crime of which he is accused.

For the Head's words could mean nothing else. Darrell had the proof of his innocence in his own hands—if he was innocent.

Manners and Lowther were waiting for Tom Merry at the end of the corridor. They looked at their chum anxiously as he came up.

"Well?" they asked together.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I'm afraid it's all up," he said. "We—we've been mistaken in Darrell, I suppose."

Monty Lowther whistled.

"I know it looks bad," said Manners. "But we've told the Head—"

"He knew—Darrell had told him," said Tom. "But—but Darrell refuses to say where the notes are now. He won't allow the Head to know who's got hold of them to compare the numbers."

"Why on earth not?"

"Blessed if I know, unless—"

"It's a jolly queer thing for a chap to be sending fifty pounds to anybody," said Lowther. "Jolly queer! But if the person's straight and above-board, he'd come forward at once and show the notes, to prove that they weren't the stolen ones."

"Of course he would!" said Manners. "He'd only have to learn that Darrell was accused to rush here by the first train and show the notes."

"It beats me," said Tom. "If Darrell's innocent, he can prove it. It's in his own hands. He refuses."

The Terrible Three looked at one another. They had held out, so far, against the general opinion, in their belief in Darrell. But their faith was sorely shaken now.

"Well, we've done all we could!" said Manners. "After all, it's not our affair. It's up to Darrell himself."

"And when you come to think of it, it does look black," said Lowther. "It was fifty pounds that Darrell missed in losing the Founder's Latin prize, after swotting at Horace for weeks—"

"Just that," said Manners. "He helped himself, I suppose. But—but it's hard to believe that a fellow like Darrell would steal. It beats me!"

"Lost his head, perhaps—"

"There were other fellows keen after the Latin prize," said Tom. "Cutts of the Fifth, for example. He was more disappointed than Darrell, and he tried to bag the prize by foul play, too. It wouldn't be so hard to believe such a thing of Cutts. But—"

"What's that?"

A sharp, unpleasant voice broke in.

"Talk of angels!" murmured Monty Lowther.

Gerald Cutts of the Fifth had come suddenly round the corner, and he stopped, and stood looking at the chums of the Shell with glinting eyes. Tom Merry coloured deeply. He did not like Cutts, and he had no respect at all for the sportsman of the Fifth; but certainly his remark, which Cutts had evidently overheard, was rather an unpleasant one for Cutts to hear. But the Shell fellow did not flinch from Cutts' angry stare.

"So you were slandering me behind my back, you young scoundrel!" exclaimed Cutts savagely.

Tom looked at him fearlessly.

"I'll repeat my words to your face, if you like," he answered. "You know you tried to bag the Horace prize by foul play. Wildrake of the Fourth caught you after the exam paper in Mr. Raiton's study, and we—"



"Collar them!" growled Cutts impatiently. The Fifth-Formers made a rush at the occupants of Study No. 10. The juniors had no thought of yielding. Tom Merry's poker came down with a crash on Cutts' cane. Manners' bat landed on Prye, and Prye yelled. Ink flew at Gilmore, and he caught it with his nose and mouth and eyes, and staggered back, spluttering wildly. (See page 9.)

Cutts clenched his hands and advanced on Tom Merry. The Terrible Three promptly lined up to receive him. The Fifth-Former paused.

Three sturdy Shell fellows were rather more than a match even for the muscular senior; and, moreover, Gerald Cutts was rather anxious that there should be no talk on that little episode of the examination paper.

"You'd better be careful what you say, Merry!" he said, between his teeth. And with that, Cutts walked on, abandoning his hostile intentions, or perhaps reserving them for a more auspicious occasion.

CHAPTER 3.

Under Sentence.

GEORGE DARRELL, of the Sixth Form at St. Jim's, was in his study. With a pale, quiet face, the expelled senior was sorting out his books, and packing them on the table, ready to be transferred to his box. His sentence was known to all the school—in all the hundreds at St. Jim's, Darrell knew that there were few, if any, who doubted his guilt. The blow that had fallen upon him was a crushing one; and there was something like despair in Darrell's heart; but he was calm. Even this crushing disaster he had the courage to meet, flinching, perhaps, but not sinking under it.

On the corner of the study table Kildare of the Sixth was sitting. His face was the picture of misery.

Darrell was his chum—they had gone up in the school together, from the Third Form to the Sixth. It was hard for Kildare to realise what had happened—that this was Darrell's last day at St. Jim's, that he was leaving the old school in the shadow of shame and deep disgrace. Kildare looked as if he felt the blow more than Darrell himself.

He had sat there a long time in silence, watching his chum sorting out books and papers. A rather bitter smile crossed Darrell's handsome face as he turned out his well-marked Horace—reminiscent of his "swotting" for the Founder's prize.

Kildare broke his miserable silence at last.

"You're a fool, Darrell!"

"You've told me so a dozen times at least, old chap," said Darrell. "You must be a bit of a fool, too, Kildare, to believe me when all the school has turned me down."

"Believe in you, you silly ass!" growled Kildare. "I'd as soon believe that I was the thief as that you were one. You can't complain of the Head; he gave you every chance."

"I know he did. I don't complain."

"You fairly asked for it!" growled Kildare, his anger beginning to rise—anger with the fellow who would not save himself.

"I know."

"Oh, you're a fool—a fool!" exclaimed the St. Jim's captain, jumping off the table, and striding to and fro in the study. "There's time even yet—you've only got to state the name and address. You've sent fifty pounds in notes to somebody, and that somebody could clear you at once by showing the notes—showing that they're not the Head's fifty."

"I know."

"Well, then," almost shouted Kildare, "give me the name, and I'll buzz off and send a telegram."

Darrell shook his head.

"Oh, you're a dashed fool!" groaned Kildare. "Chivalry's all very well; but this is madness! Do you think I don't know—can't guess—what the game is? You let out that it was a woman you sent the fifty to; and you won't have her dragged into this—that's it."

Darrell did not answer.

"Isn't that it?" demanded Kildare.

Darrell stood still, with a book in either hand, and looked at his chum.

"We're parting to-day, Kildare," he said. "I want to leave you thinking as well of me as I can. I don't want you to think me a fool—not such a fool, anyhow. What you want me to do can't be done. It can't—it's not possible. She couldn't—"

He broke off.

"Well, tell me!" grunted Kildare.

The colour crept into Darrell's cheeks.

"You remember her," he said. "No need to mention names. She was an actress, and I—I admired her more than anybody else in the world. She was goodness itself; she married and went to America. It was by chance I heard of her afterwards—I got some news through somebody else. She's a widow now and poor and in ill-health. She was in a ship that was torpedoed in the war. I haven't seen her, Kildare—not since the time she went away. Don't think I'm a moon-struck fool—it's not that. But—but I wrote to her—I asked her to let me help her for the sake of old friendship. You'd have done the same."

"Yes; but—"

"I told her I had fifty pounds coming. That was the Latin prize," Darrell smiled bitterly. "It seemed like a cert; everybody thought I was going to bag it then. I believed so. I never told her what it was—I think she had some idea it was a legacy, or part of a legacy. I believe she only agreed to accept it because she would not wound me by refusing—though I know that she is in cruel want. Well, I lost the Latin prize; but though I was feeling pretty desperate, I think I'd have cut my hand off before I'd have thought of stealing. But I'd noticed Gluck's advertisements in the Wayland paper, and I thought of him."

Kildare grunted.

"I went over to him yesterday and got the money," continued Darrell. "Fifty pounds, in fives and tens. I signed a paper for it—not much good in law, of course; but old Gluck knows his customers, and he knew I should pay. He was glad enough to get a St. Jim's Sixth-Former into his hands, I fancy. Anyhow, he advanced the money. I brought it home with me, and wrote a letter to send with it. It was too late for registered post then, last evening; I went over to Wayland on my bike before brekker this morning, and posted the letter. She's got it before now. And she knows nothing—and won't know anything. Think of it a minute—she's ill, she's proud, and—and if she knew the trouble it had brought on me—"

He choked, and broke off.

"I unde stand. But—"

"It seems simple enough to the Head to ask for the name and address of the person to whom I've sent the notes," said Darrell. "But—but it isn't simple. I can't let her know. For one thing, she would return the money at once if she knew I'd borrowed it from a moneylender—and she needs it. And—and she's ill, Kildare. How could I drag her into this; she's not even fit to make a journey. I couldn't do it! Whatever happens to me, she's not going to know a syllable about it."

"I know—I understand!" muttered Kildare. "I thought it was something like that—I guessed it was. But your whole future's at stake—"

"I went into it of my own accord," said Darrell quietly. "Now I'm landed, I'm not going to throw the trouble on to a woman's shoulders. Women have enough to bear in a world like this, anyhow. It's a man's place to make things easier for them—not harder. It was just horrible ill-luck that the theft should have happened just now—a rotten coincidence. But—but I'd rather be in my shoes than in those of the fellow who stole the Head's money. He must be feeling pretty sick."

"If we could only find out who it was!" said Kildare miserably.

"I can't even guess; and now they've settled on me they won't look any further for the real chap," said Darrell. "Now—"

"But it's madness," muttered Kildare. "Look here, Darrell, tell the Head all that you've told me—"

Darrell smiled faintly.

"He hardly believes my confession about the money-lender," he said. "Do you think he would believe this? Not without the name and address of the person concerned."

"I—I suppose not."

"And I can't give them. The fact is, Kildare, you're a bit of an ass to believe me. Nobody else would, I think."

"I know you," said Kildare. "But—but but you can't go, Darrell! You can't leave the school like this. Your people—"

Darrell winced.

"I've thought it all out," he said. "I've got to go through it. I'm not without hope, either."

"Not?" exclaimed Kildare.

"Truth often comes out in an unexpected way," said Darrell quietly. "The proverb says that murder will out; it may prove to be the same with theft. Somebody bagged the Head's banknotes—and the numbers are known. If he passes them they can be traced. He may hold them over for a time for safety; but he's bound to pass them. He didn't steal them for keepsakes. That's where my chance comes in. The Head won't listen to me; but he will have to listen to

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my father. And the pater will make him put the matter in the hands of the police, and publish the numbers of the stolen notes through the whole country. That's my hope."

Kildare looked at him. Almost any other fellow in the school would have said that Darrell's words were sheer effrontery; but Eric Kildare knew him better. And there was hope, if Darrell was speaking the truth—a faint hope, but a real one.

"The fellow may be frightened, and keep them back for weeks or months," muttered the captain of St. Jim's.

"I think not. He must be pretty desperate for money to get hold of it in such a way."

"That's true."

"He will feel pretty safe as soon as I've gone," said Darrell. "When it's fixed on me definitely, he will not think there is anything more to be afraid of. The Head's not giving the numbers to the police—he prefers losing the money to publishing a disgrace to the school. That's known. I believe the notes will be in circulation within twenty-four hours after I leave."

"It's likely," said Kildare, with a nod.

"Then my pater will see that the proper steps are taken, whatever the Head thinks. And if the numbers are traced—"

"They mayn't be."

"It's possible, at least. Don't be a Job's comforter, old chap. It's all I've got to hope for."

Langton of the Sixth looked into the study.

"You're late in class, Kildare," he said.

"Oh, I forgot! I'm coming!"

Langton of the Sixth looked rather embarrassed as he caught Darrell's glance. He coloured.

"Sorry you're going, Darrell!" he said awkwardly.

"Thanks!"

Langton hurried away. It was obvious that his opinion of the matter was not the same as Kildare's.

"I shall see you again, old chap," said Darrell, with an affectionate glance at his chum. "I'm not going yet. Cut off."

And Kildare, with a heavy heart, made his way to the Sixth Form room.

CHAPTER 4.

Wildrake Figures It Out.

"WILDRAKE!"

Mr. Latham spoke severely, in the Fourth Form room. Kit Wildrake, the junior from British Columbia, started out of a brown study, and coloured as he met the severe glance of his Form-master.

"Yes, sir!" he stammered.

"You are not paying attention," said Mr. Latham, frowning. "In this Form-room, Wildrake, I expect the attention of my pupils."

"Oh, yes, sir! Certainly!"

"I am not aware," continued Mr. Latham, in a sarcastic vein, "of what matters of deep import may be occupying your mind at the present juncture, Wildrake. Doubtless some affair of much greater importance than mere lessons."

The Fourth Form smiled dutifully.

Mr. Latham's ponderous sarcasm was obviously intended as humorous; and when a Form-master deigned to be humorous, it was up to his Form to smile. Like a horse, a Form-master had to be given his head. Besides, a humorous interlude—even if lacking somewhat in humour—was a welcome interruption to the lesson. So the Fourth Form smiled dutifully, and Baggy Trimble even ventured on a fat chuckle.

"Yet even lessons," pursued Mr. Latham, in the same vein—"even lessons may be worthy of a little attention, Wildrake. I suggest a division of your time, Wildrake. I suggest devoting the time spent in the Form-room to lessons, and the time spent out of the Form-room to the matters of far greater importance that doubtless occupy your mind just now. Does this division of your time, Wildrake, strike you as reasonable and just?"

Wildrake's face was crimson.

"I—I guess so, sir!" he stammered.

"Very good!" said Mr. Latham urbanely. "Then we will devote the present hour, Wildrake, to our work, and leave consideration of other matters till later—such as football, and cricket, and marbles, Wildrake."

And the Fourth Form smiled even more broadly then. Mr. Latham, in the innocence of his heart, lumped together football and cricket and marbles—evidently in the belief that, as they were all games, they were much of a muchness, so to speak. Mr. Latham was being really humorous at last, though this time it was unconsciously.

The lesson went on, and Wildrake endeavoured to give it just attention, though his mind was occupied with other things. But the Canadian junior was not thinking about football or cricket, or even marbles!

He was glad enough when lessons were over, and the



"What do you want, Wildrake?" asked Darrell. "I guess you won't be leaving the school in the morning, if things go well," answered Wildrake. "You never had the Head's banknotes, Darrell, I know that. I guess I didn't bag them myself, but I reckon I've got a clue." "Good heavens!" muttered Darrell; "You're speaking seriously, Wildrake?" (See page 13).

Fourth Form were dismissed. Generally Wildrake was rather keen at work; but on this especial afternoon matters of really greater import filled his mind—as Mr. Lathom had suggested sarcastically, without knowing in the least that he was stating the actual fact!

The Fourth-Formers streamed out into the quadrangle, but Kit Wildrake lingered in the corridor, waiting for the Shell to come out. The Shell were dismissed a few minutes later, and the Canadian junior joined the Terrible Three.

"I guess I want a pow-wow with you fellows," he said.

The chums of the Shell looked rather embarrassed. They knew what the pow-wow was to be about.

"Darrell?" asked Tom Merry.

"Sure!"

"Nothing doing," said Tom.

Kit Wildrake gave him a keen look.

"Changed your opinion?" he asked.

"Well, yes, a little."

"I guess I haven't," said Wildrake composedly. "But if you fellows are going with the crowd, I reckon I can get on on my little lonesome. I'm going into this biznai—deep."

"Hold on," said Tom, as the Canadian junior was turning away. "No harm in a pow-wow, anyhow—and, besides, I'd better tell you what the Head's told me. Come up to the study. If there's anything to be said for old Darrell, I know I'd be jolly glad to hear it."

"Same here," said Manners. "Fact is, I can't quite believe it against him yet, though it looks clear enough."

"You don't believe it, Wildrake?" asked Lowther.

"Nope."

"But—" said Tom.

"I guess I can go no farther than that," said Wildrake coolly. "I calculate it's a ten to one chance that Darrell never did it, and I'm banking on that. I got my eye teeth cut early on the Boot Leg Ranch, you know." He grinned. "I've been thinking it out, and I sort of seem to see light ahead. If you fellows care to go into it with me—"

"Come up to the study!" said Tom.

"Sure."

Wildrake accompanied the Terrible Three to Study No. 10 in the Shell. Tom threw shut the study door.

Then he told the Canadian junior what he had learned from the Head. Kit Wildrake listened with a very serious face.

"I guess that looks about as bad as it can look!" he admitted. "No reason that I can see why Darrell shouldn't give the name and address."

"That would clear him if he's innocent," said Tom.

"It sure would," agreed Wildrake. "But let's figure it out. Darrell's got fifty pounds from a moneylender to send to somebody—according to his own version. That somebody must be a pretty near pal, and hard up. Must be hard up to want the money."

"I suppose so," said Tom.

"If that galoot was applied to for evidence, that galoot would know the whole story," said Wildrake. "That may be what Darrell jibs at. For reasons of his own he doesn't want his hard-up pal dragged in. I know it's steep—it sounds steep when a fellow's whole future and reputation are at stake. But we don't know the circumstances. If we did, it mightn't sound so steep—what?"

"That's possible, of course."

"Figure it out, for instance, that some relation of Darrell's is in debt, and he's helping him out," said Wildrake. "Might get the Johnny into a row if the facts became known. I don't say that's the explanation, but that would cover the facts."

"Ye-e-es."

"Might be something of the sort, at least. Darrell's following a queer line; but there's half a dozen explanations that would cover it. Leaving Darrell out. I guess there's goods to go upon," said Wildrake. "I'm going to show you the goods."

"Trot them out," said Tom, with a smile.

"If Darrell didn't bag the spondulics," said Wildrake—"take it that he didn't, for the sake of argument—somebody else did."

"True, O king!" said Monty Lowther, with a touch of sarcasm. "Might a chap inquire whether you worked that out in your head, or whether you got it out of a specially deep book on the higher mathematics?"

"Can it," said Wildrake calmly. "I'm putting the thing into words of one syllable, I guess, to suit the intellect of the Shell."

"Why, you cheeky ass—"

"If it wasn't Darrell, it was another party," said Wildrake. "That party is a St. Jim's fellow, and he's got the goods, and he's just hugging himself now at the chopper coming down on somebody else's cabeza. That's the jolly galoot we want to get an introduction to."

Tom Merry made a hopeless gesture.

"What is there to go upon?" he asked.

"I tell you I've got the goods. Darrell was in for the fifty-pound prize, and lost it. Cutts of the Fifth was in for it, and lost it, too. Most fellows chinned quite a lot about Cutts swotting for a prize. Swotting's not in his line at all—what?"

"That's a fact," assented Tom. "A lot of fellows thought he had been losing money on horses, and was pretty hard driven for money, to make him take on swotting for a prize."

"Well, Darrell was hard hit when he lost it, and so was Cutts," said Wildrake. "Now, if Cutts owed a big sum of money on his merry gambling transactions, he couldn't pay it with a prize he'd lost. Darrell went to a moneylender to raise the wind—Cutts may have raised it in another way."

"Cutts!" said the Terrible Three, with one breath.

"We've always known Darrell to be straight as a string," said Wildrake. "It's a bit of a facer for everybody to think Darrell dishonest. But I guess Cutts of the Fifth is about as straight as a corkscrew—and no straighter. He was mad keen after the Latin prize—we caught him trying to steal the exam paper in Railton's study. If he'd succeeded he would have cheated the other competitors out of the spondulics, which I reckon isn't much better than stealing them. We know he was pressed for money, or a slacker like Cutts wouldn't have swotted at all. It was a thundering grind, you know, mugging up Horace for a stiff exam in the giddy classics. Well, then, Cutts isn't a particular chap. When he's in want of money, he's ready and willing to get it by cheating in an exam. It's about one step farther down to steal it. Looking at the two of them, which is the likelier, Darrell or Cutts?"

"Cutts, of course," said Tom Merry at once. "But Cutts isn't mixed up in it at all. Darrell had fifty pounds at the time fifty pounds were stolen. No one supposes that Cutts had."

"I know all the evidence is against Darrell; but I'm sorting out fresh evidence. It is a coincidence that Darrell had the fifty at the time the fifty was stolen, but not such a coincidence as it looks, putting it that both Darrell and the thief were in for the exam. The result was made known on Tuesday. Darrell and Cutts were both out of it. So it stood to reason that both of them would be trying to raise the wind on Wednesday—the day that Darrell went to the moneylender, and that somebody bagged the Head's banknotes. So your coincidence puffs away like a bit of smoke."

"Yes, that's clear enough. Both things were bound to happen about Wednesday, I suppose."

"The thief, of course, never dreamed of this bit of luck—of the suspicion falling on Darrell. He's a rotter—but not rotter enough to have planned that; and he couldn't have planned it. It was a sort of windfall for him. But he's letting it rip, to keep his own carcass safe. He took the risk of an innocent fellow getting lagged—as every thief does. And it's happened in this case."

"But—" said Tom.

"Cutts is my man," said Wildrake. "He tried to get the fifty by cheating in the exam—that's the start. He must have been fairly desperate to get down to that. Well, after losing the prize, he still wanted the money. We know how Darrell got his, taking the moneylender tale as true. How did Cutts get his little lot? He wanted it bad—very bad—as we know! Badder than Darrell, I reckon. Is he still pining for the money he needs, or has he helped himself from the Head's desk, and left it to old Darrell to stand the racket?"

The Terrible Three looked at one another. The cool, crisp way the Canadian junior had of advancing his theory had a good deal of effect on them.

"It may be so," said Tom Merry at last. "But without an atom of evidence, Wildrake—"

"There's plenty of evidence to be found."

"What is it?"

"The banknotes!" said Wildrake coolly. "If the thief isn't Darrell, but some other St. Jim's chap, Cutts or not, THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 739.

the stolen banknotes are still in the school, and if they're in the school they can be found. And I guess that that's the trail this galoot is going to follow, like a bloodhound, whether you chaps take a hand in the game or not. I guess—hallo—"

Wildrake broke off suddenly, as the study door was hurled open, and the fat face of Baggy Trimble looked in, wildly excited.

"Look out!" gasped Trimble.

"What—"

"Cutts is after you!" chirruped Trimble. "He's got Gilmore and St. Leger and Prye with him."

Baggy Trimble did not stop for more; there were heavy footsteps in the passage. Tom Merry & Co. jumped up, as Gerald Cutts appeared in the doorway of the study, with three more Fifth-Formers behind him.

"Found you at home, I see!" smiled Cutts.

And he came into the study with his grinning comrades after him, and shut the door. There was trouble ahead for Study No. 10 in the Shell.

CHAPTER 5.

The Fifth-Form Raid.

TOM MERRY & CO. faced the invaders of Study No. 10—with the table between. Cutts of the Fifth had a walking-cane in his hand, and he had evidently come for trouble. The Terrible Three eyed him, across the table, and Kit Wildrake lined up with them at once.

"Well, what do you want, Cutts?" asked the captain of the Shell coolly.

Cutts smiled grimly.

It was pretty clear what he wanted. He had come to Tom Merry's study for vengeance. Tom Merry & Co. had baffled his attempts on the examination paper the week before; and it had suited Cutts that nothing should be said—at that time. But he had not forgotten, and he had been biding his time, and now he was on the war-path. And he had planned his little raid very cunningly; for at that hour, just after lessons, there were very few juniors in the studies, and rescue was not likely to be at hand for the juniors.

"I've come here to give you the licking of your life, my boy!" said Cutts smoothly.

He glanced round.

"Lock the door, St. Leger. I believe most of the fags are out, but anyhow, we don't want a scrubby gang of young rascals butting in."

St. Leger grinned and turned the key.

"You can let that Fourth Form kid cut," said Prye.

Cutts shook his head.

"He's goin' to have the same as the others," he said.

Wildrake laughed.

"I guess the Fourth Form kid doesn't want to cut," he remarked. "The Fourth Form kid is on in this circus, I reckon."

Tom Merry's blue eyes glinted.

Four juniors, however sturdy and plucky, had little chance in a scrap with four seniors. But there was not going to be an easy licking in Study No. 10.

"So that's your game, Cutts?" he remarked. "And these chaps have come to help you—what?"

"You fags are too cheeky!" said St. Leger. "A licking will do you good, by gad!"

"You've been cheeky for a long time," remarked Gilmore.

"The fags have to be kept in their places, you know."

"Has Cutts told you the trouble?" asked Manners, sarcastically. "Has he told you that he's ratty because we stopped him from cheating in the Horace exam?"

Cutts' comrades looked at one another.

"What's that?" said Prye.

"I guess Cutts wouldn't mention that," chuckled Wildrake.

Cutts set his teeth.

"Take no notice of their cheek," he said. "All lies, of course."

"There's only one liar here!" said Monty Lowther.

"His name happens to be Cutts."

"If you fags had anything to say about the exam, you should have said it at the time," said Cutts, with an evil smile. "It's rather too late in the day to begin now."

"Oh, we know that!" said Tom Merry scornfully. "And we never intended to give you away to the beaks, either. You know that."

"You've made an accusation," said Cutts pleasantly.

"Can you prove it?"

"Not now," said Tom. "It's left over too late, if we wanted to. That's why you're here now!"

"I say, what's all this about?" asked St. Leger. "I never heard—"

"Only cheek," said Cutts. "If the cheeky rats say anything of the kind in public, I'll have them up before the Head fast enough."

"Is that the way you thank us for letting you off, after catching you rooting in Mr. Railton's study after an exam paper?" asked Wildrake.

Cutts breathed hard.

"Enough said!" he rapped out. "You cheeky young rotters are going through it. You first, Merry."

Tom Merry dived at the fender and picked up the poker. Manners caught up a fives bat, and Lowther an inkpot.

"Come on!" said Tom. "We're ready!"

"Better take it quietly," said St. Leger. "You're for it, anyhow, you know."

"Study No. 10 never takes a licking," said Monty Lowther cheerfully.

"Collar them!" growled Cutts impatiently.

And the four Fifth-Formers made a rush round the table. If they expected the juniors to yield to "force majeure" they were disappointed. There was no thought of yielding in Study No. 10.

Tom Merry's poker came down with a crash on Cutts' cane. Manners' bat landed on Prye, and Prye yelled. The ink flew at Gilmore, and Gilmore caught it with his nose and mouth and eyes, and staggered back, spluttering wildly. St. Leger grasped Wildrake, and, much to his astonishment, was tripped by the Canadian junior, and went with a crash to the floor.

"Yaroo!" roared Cutts, as the poker clumped on his arm. "Why, I'll—I'll smash you!"

He dropped the cane, closed with Tom Merry, and bore him with a crash to the floor.

Manners and Lowther were struggling with Prye and Gilmore the next moment, punching desperately.

Wildrake for the moment was unassailed, as St. Leger was sprawling on the floor dazedly.

The Canadian junior whipped to the door and turned the key, dragging the door wide open. He put his head into the passage, and bawled:

"Rescue! Back up! Rescue!"

Only Trimble was visible in the passage—at a safe distance. Baggy Trimble was not joining in a scrap with seniors, not if Baggy knew it!

"Keep that young villain quiet!" panted Cutts.

St. Leger struggled up and grasped Wildrake again. The junior from the Boot Leg Ranch returned grip for grip, and they struggled. He had no chance of tripping St. Leger again, but he was a tough handful to hold, and St. Leger had plenty to do.

And the door was wide open now, and the uproar of the unequal combat rang along the Shell passage.

Tom Merry was fighting hard, but Cutts of the Fifth was too much even for the sturdy captain of the Shell. Age and size and weight told. Tom was jammed on the study carpet, and Cutts planted a gripping knee in the small of his back. Then he reached for the cane, grasped it, and began to lay it on savagely.

An eyeglass gleamed in at the doorway.

"Bai Jove! What's this fearful wow, you fellows—"

"Rescue!" yelled Manners.

"Pile in, Gussy!" gasped Wildrake.

"Bai Jove! Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stopped only one instant to shove his celebrated monocle into his waistcoat pocket, and to push back his spotless cuffs. Then he sailed into the scrap in great style.

Cutts was lashing savagely with the cane, and Tom Merry struggled and roared under the castigation. Arthur Augustus selected Cutts as his victim. Tom was certainly the most in need of help. Arthur Augustus came across the study with a rush, and his aristocratic fist landed with a crash on Cutts' ear.

It was a hefty drive—there was plenty of strength in the elegant swell of the Fourth, and he put it all into that drive. Gerald Cutts went spinning sideways, and he rolled with a crash on the fender.

Tom Merry was on his feet in a twinkling.

With a crimson face and blazing eyes he hurled himself on Cutts as the senior sprawled in the fender.

Before Cutts could rise the Shell fellow was on him, crashing him down again as he strove to struggle up.

"My turn now, you rotter!" gasped Tom.

"Yaas, wathah! Wag him, deah boy!" yelled Arthur Augustus. And Gussy turned to Prye, who was getting much the better of Manners. Gussy grasped Prye by the collar, and dragged him back, and he went to the floor. Another face looked in at the doorway—that of Roylance, the New Zealand junior. He did not stop to ask questions. He could see that it was a raid of the Fifth, and that was enough. He rushed into the combat without a word.

There were six juniors now, and the odds on the side of the Fifth were not so great. Numbers told against weight and size now. The Fifth-Formers were getting as much as they gave.

And now there came a scurry of feet in the passage, and

Levison, Clive, and Cardew arrived. The news of the raid had reached them.

"Pile in!" shouted Levison of the Fourth.

"Give 'em socks!" roared Clive.

"What a game!" grinned Cardew. "The merry Fifth have come like lambs to the slaughter! Slaughter 'em!"

That reinforcement decided the matter. With nine sturdy juniors against them, all full of fight, the four seniors had no chance. Cutts & Co., sprawling on the floor, were quite overwhelmed. They were still fighting savagely, however, against odds, when Grundy of the Shell arrived, with Wilkins and Gunn. Then the Fifth-Formers almost disappeared under the crowd of assailants.

"Bai Jove! Our win!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Sit on 'em!" panted Lowther.

"Lenime gerrup, you cheeky young rotters!" bawled St. Leger.

"Squash 'em!"

"Hurrah!"

It was a victory for Study No. 10, after all.

CHAPTER 6.

In Black and White.

TOM MERRY gasped for breath, and rubbed his nose—from which a stream of crimson ran. The tide of battle had turned. On the floor sprawled the invaders, with two or three juniors sitting on each of them, pinning them down. Cutts & Co. gasped and spluttered and glared and wriggled; but there was no help for them.

"Keep still, old bean," said Monty Lowther, taking a comfortable seat on the back of Gerald Cutts' neck. "Don't keep on wriggling; it makes me uncomfy and doesn't do you any good."

"Grooooooh!"

"Don't you like your nose in the ashes, Cutts, old fellow? Well, you should keep out of our fender."

"Yurrrgh!"

"Bai Jove! What did these wottahs come waidin' for, Tom Mewwy?"

"They came for a licking," said Tom, laughing breathlessly.

"Now they're going to get it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"If you touch us—" spluttered Gilmore.

"I'm touchin' you now, old bean," said Cardew, taking Gilmore by the back hair, and tapping his nose on the carpet.

"Whooooop!"

"They came to give us a licking," said Monty Lowther, "but it's a boot on the other foot now. It's more blessed to give than to receive—especially a licking. Take that cane, Wildrake, and begin, while I keep Cutts' nose in the ashpan."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you young rotters—" spluttered Cutts. Probably by that time the sportsman of the Fifth regretted his visit to Study No. 10 in the Shell.

Wildrake picked up Cutts' cane and started.

Cutts roared and wriggled and struggled. But he was securely held, and he had to go through with it.

By this time there were a dozen more juniors crowded round the doorway of Study No. 10, and there were roars of laughter as Cutts received his licking. It was a terrible downfall for the dandy of the Fifth. And Wildrake did not spare the rod, he put plenty of "beef" into it. If sparing the rod is likely to spoil the child, Cutts ran no risks of being spoiled.

Whack, whack, whack!

St. Leger and Prye and Gilmore looked on apprehensively. They felt that their own turn was coming. They had backed up Gerald Cutts in his raid on the Shell without much thought. They had food for thought now, as they wriggled on the floor and watched Cutts being thrashed.

Whack, whack, whack!

"I guess that's the allowance," said Wildrake. "Cutts will remember this, I opine."

"Yaas, wathah—" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"Gilmore next—"

"Look here—" spluttered Gilmore.

"Roll him over!"

"You young villains—yaroooh—"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Now for St. Leger—"

"Hold him down!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Oh, gad!" gasped St. Leger. "You little ruffians—you—you— Oh—oh—ah—oh—ah—whoop!"

"Now for Prye—"

"If you dare—" shrieked Prye of the Fifth.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Oh, my hat! I'll—I'll— Oh dear! Oh crumbs! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now kick them out!" said Tom Merry. "All you fellows out there stand ready. Everybody's to put in a kick!"

"Yes, rather!" came a delighted yell from the crowded passage.

"Cutts first—on his neck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Struggling furiously, Gerald Cutts was whirled to the door in the grasp of six or seven pairs of hands.

He went spinning into the passage, into the midst of the thickening crowd there.

Cutts went down the passage as if he were on the cinder-path, with every yelling junior punching or kicking as he went. Cutts was glad when he reached the stairs.

One by one his comrades were pitched out of the study, and they fled along the passage in a shower of kicks.

Loud laughter and yells of derision followed them; but the hapless Fifth-Formers did not heed—they had had enough of scrapping with juniors for that day. They were thankful enough to get back to the safety of the Fifth Form quarters, and it was a very dusty, dishevelled, and breathless quartette that gathered there. And as soon as Prye and Gilmore and St. Leger recovered their breath they expended most of it in slanging Cutts.

But there was joyful triumph in the Shell passage. The

to pay. If Cutts couldn't meet the call, I guess he would be feeling rather worried about this time—and I reckon he wouldn't be thinking of raiding junior studies and scrapping with a worry like that on his mind. I guess he sees himself clear—what?"

"Listen to the giddy oracle!" grinned Lowther. "There's something in it."

"If he's got the money in hand, we can guess whose money it is," said Wildrake. "He's kept it back so far for a good reason—not knowing whether the Head would call in the police. Now Darrell's sacked for it—it's fixed on him. Darrell's people will pay the money, or the Head will lose it—to keep the disgrace as quiet as possible. I reckon Cutts would rather keep the money in hand longer. It depends on how much he's afraid of this fellow J. B.—what?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"We know that Cutts sneaks down to the Green Man sometimes after lights out," he said, "and that fat racing man there is named Joseph Banks. That's the J. B., of course."

"Then, as I figure it out, Cutts has an appointment to-night at the Green Man to hand Banky his money," said Wildrake.

LOOK OUT FOR THE SPLENDIDLY WRITTEN HEALTH ARTICLES By The "Sporting Doctor" of St. Jim's

IN NEXT WEEK'S "ST. JIM'S NEWS."

invaders had been defeated—the Fifth had been licked.

Tom Merry & Co. were looking rather damaged, but they rejoiced. In great spirits their rescuers cleared off, and the Terrible Three and Wildrake repaired damages as well as they could, and proceeded to put the study to rights—the room looked rather as if a cyclone had struck it. Wildrake stayed to help. It was Wildrake who, in putting the fender into its place, picked up a paper from the hearth.

"This belong to you fellows?" he asked.

"I suppose so," said Tom. "Looks like a letter. Toss it over!"

Kit Wildrake tossed the paper over to him, and the captain of the Shell unfolded it and glanced at it.

Then he jumped.

"My only summer hat!" he ejaculated.

"What is it?" asked Manners.

"Look!"

The four juniors looked at the paper together. It was a letter—a brief one, and certainly the most extraordinary letter they had ever read. It ran:

"Dear Sir,—I've waited over the date, and I ain't seen the colour of your money yet. I'll give you till to-night, and if you don't square by then, look out for squalls! That's all."
"J. B."

"Great snakes!" ejaculated Wildrake. "You fellows heading for the bankruptcy court in this study?"

"Fathead!" said Tom. "The letter doesn't belong to us. It was dropped here in the scrap, of course."

"Somebody—" said Manners.

"Might have been anybody," said Monty Lowther. "Not a junior, I fancy—one of the Fifth Form gang. There's no name on it, but—"

"Cutts!" said Wildrake quietly.

Tom Merry whistled.

"Cutts, of course!" he said. "He was sprawling in the fender—"

"And I picked that letter off the hearth," said Wildrake. "It belongs to Cutts. It's pretty clear now why he was swotting for the Horace prize—and pretty clear who had a big motive for bagging banknotes out of the Head's desk."

"It looks—" said Tom.

"I guess this backs up what I was saying to you galoots," said the Canadian junior.

"It does, by Jove!"

"There's no date on the letter," continued Wildrake. "I fancy it's pretty recent, though. Cutts wouldn't be likely to carry a letter like that about in his pocket for days. Pretty risky such a letter coming to the school at all. Of course, they don't open seniors' letters; still, it was risky. I guess that letter came by to-day's post, or it wouldn't have been still in Cutts' pocket."

"Most likely," said Manners.

"I guess I don't know who J. B. is," said Wildrake. "But if he isn't a bookmaker, or something of the kind, I'll eat my hat! Cutts has got to hand him money to-night or look out for squalls—a good sum, too, or Cutts could have managed it before it came to this. He's got enough jewellery about him to raise a fiver or a tenner. I guess he wants more than that. And he's got it in hand—now."

"How on earth do you know that?" demanded Manners.

Wildrake smiled.

"Here's a galoot threatening him for money that he's got

"I guess the question is—will he feel safe in doing it? If he does—"

"If he does, the money disappears, and we're at a loose end," said Manners. "So if it's hidden about the school, we haven't much time left to find it."

Wildrake smiled again.

"I guess you fellows have seen me handle the lasso. I brought with me from the Boot Leg Ranch," he remarked.

"What about that now?"

"Only this little bit. I've sat up nights in the timber at home watching for elk and moose, and I guess I can sit up watching for Cutts of the Fifth. And if he puts his head outside the School House to-night or any other night, he's going to be roped in—with the money on him!" said the Canadian junior coolly.

"Phew!"

And Wildrake strolled out of Study No. 10 with a satisfied smile on his sunburnt face.

CHAPTER 7.

The Mouse and the Lion.

DARRELL of the Sixth sat in his study alone. He had been writing a letter, but the letter lay unfinished on his table. His handsome face was gloomy and overcast.

There was no work to do—his work in the school was over now. By the first train in the morning, Darrell was to go—to-night was to be his last night at St. Jim's.

His heart was heavy.

Now that the hour was at hand the unfortunate prefect realised more and more clearly what he was losing—what he was giving up. The thought hammered in his troubled mind, that, after all, he was carrying chivalry too far—that he ought not to sacrifice himself to so terrible an extent—that the sacrifice was uncalled for. His faint hope that circumstances might yet arise to prove his innocence was faint indeed.

But if he had gnawing doubts, he did not falter. His mind was made up, and he did not shrink.

Kildare had left him—more miserable than himself. No one else came to the study. Darrell's own action had convinced the school of his guilt; and the outcast was left to himself. As a sudden tap came at the door, Darrell looked up, taking it for granted that it was Kildare returning—he did not expect a visit from anybody else. He raised his eyebrows as Wildrake of the Fourth stepped in.

The expelled senior made an impatient gesture.

"What do you want, kid? Don't bother me now." He flushed suddenly, and rose to his feet. "If you've come to—to—"

Only half an hour before a voice had squeaked "Thief!" through the keyhole—a fat voice very like Trimble's. If his junior had come to taunt him—

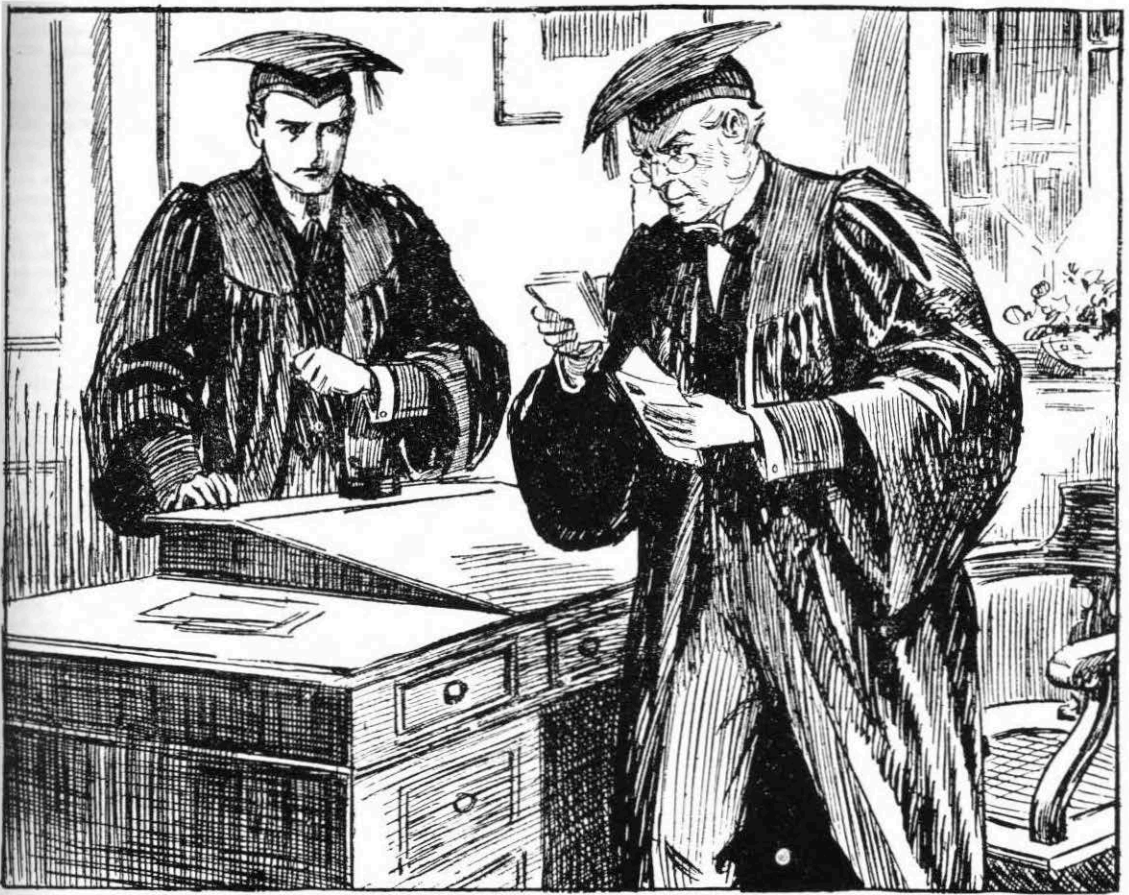
But a glance at Wildrake's frank, honest face drove that suspicion from Darrell's mind.

"What do you want?" he repeated.

"I guess I've something to say, old bean," said the Canadian junior coolly. "I've heard that you've packed your traps to clear first thing in the morning."

"That is not your affair, Wildrake."

"I opine that it is," said Wildrake coolly. "I reckon there isn't much sleep for you to-night, Darrell, as matters stand. You look fairly done, and no mistake. I guess I'm going to ease your mind a bit."



The Head hurriedly picked up the envelope and slit it with a paper-knife. From the envelope he drew a wad of banknotes. In silence he compared the numbers with those on his list. The old gentleman breathed a deep sigh of relief. "These are the banknotes that were abstracted from my desk on Wednesday, Mr. Railton!" he said. (See page 15.)

"What on earth do you mean, Wildrake?"

"I guess you won't be going in the morning, if things go well," answered Wildrake. "You never had the Head's banknotes, Darrell; I know that. And there's a chance—a good chance—that they may turn up."

Darrell started violently.

"How can you possibly know anything about it?" he exclaimed.

Wildrake grinned.

"I guess I didn't bag them myself," he said. "But I'm from the Boot Leg Ranch, you know—a keen galoot on a trail. I'm after those banknotes, and I reckon I've got a clue."

"Good heavens!" muttered Darrell.

He stared blankly at the junior.

"You think they are still in the school?" he asked.

"Sure!"

"And—and you know—"

"I don't know, but I'm on the giddy trail," said Wildrake. "I reckoned I'd drop in and tell you, Darrell. There's hope—lots of it—tons of it. I'm after those banknotes, and I reckon if they turn up, that will convince the Head that they weren't the lot you sent away in a registered letter this morning—what?"

Darrell smiled faintly.

"Yes—of course! Wildrake, you're speaking seriously—you really have some hope of finding the banknotes—"

"Honest Injun!"

"Tell me how—why—"

Wildrake shook his head.

"I guess I've told you all I can so far," he said. "You may have noticed, Darrell, that I'm a square fellow, and not given to talking out of my hat. I tell you there's hope that the banknotes will be found, and I'm the galoot that's on the trail. That's all! Sleep on it!"

And without waiting for the Sixth-Former to reply, Kit Wildrake quitted the study, closing the door after him.

Darrell stood staring at the door, his heart throbbing. The quiet, earnest manner of the junior had impressed him.

and he knew Wildrake, too; he knew that he was not the fellow to talk idly. The junior believed in his innocence—and he must have a good reason for believing in him against the overwhelming evidence.

Darrell moved to and fro, pacing the study in almost uncontrollable agitation.

Was there hope, after all? Was that fearful blow to be averted—the shadow of black shame to be lifted from his name?

He was still pacing to and fro when Kildare came in. The captain of St. Jim's looked at him in astonishment—he read the hope in Darrell's face, and it amazed him.

"Nothing's turned up?" he asked.

"I don't know—listen to this!" said Darrell, and he told what the Canadian junior had said to him.

Kildare's face grew very thoughtful as he listened.

"I know that young scamp," he said. "He's a bit wild at times, but as straight as a die, and no fool by any means. If he thinks he's on the track of the stolen notes, Darrell, there's something in it. I wish you'd got more from him. By Jove, if it should turn out—"

Kildare's eyes danced. "If that young sweep in the Fourth Form should be able to let in light on the matter, and save you—"

"A case of the mouse and the lion over again!" said Darrell, with a smile—his old smile again. "The lion's pretty helpless in the net now; it all depends on the mouse!"

"That's it!" said Kildare. "Oh, old fellow, only think of it—if the young sweep should find the banknotes—find them in the school—and he's as sharp and clever as they make them! I've seen him at scouting, and the way he reads 'sign' is wonderful. He may have picked up some sort of a clue—"

"Heaven grant it!" said Darrell, with a deep breath.

It seemed but a flimsy hope; but in utter darkness the faintest gleam of light was welcome. In the old fable, the lion was caught in the net, and the mouse gnawed through the net and released the king of beasts. If only the story

of the mouse and the lion repeated itself—now—at St. Jim's?

Darrell went to bed that night more hopeful at heart, more peaceful in his mind, than he had dared to expect. He little dreamed of what was happening, near at hand, while he slumbered.

CHAPTER 8. Roped In!

MIDNIGHT had chimed out over the sleeping school. Not a single light glimmered in the dark mass of the school buildings.

All was dark and quiet, and in the darkness a shadow moved. Faintly, almost inaudibly, a window creaked, a shadow moved among shadows, and there was a light footfall.

From the dark mass of the buildings, the shadow detached itself, and skulked silently away.

It stopped suddenly.

The sky was dark, but there was a glimmer of moonlight among the rolling clouds. As the clouds rolled on, the moon was revealed, and a ghostly light fell on the buildings and the old trees, and gleamed on a white, anxious face—the face of Gerald Cutts of the Fifth Form. Cutts stood motionless, silent, his head bent, listening.

Some faint sound had come to him—it might have been only the sigh of the wind in the old elms, the creak of a cowl on a chimney. But Cutts was in a mood to be alarmed that night. He was out of his dormitory—out of his House—at midnight—a serious enough matter in itself. But there was more than that weighing on the mind of the sportsman of the Fifth at that moment.

He listened—and did not move again for a full minute. The sound, if sound there had been, had died away.

Cutts moved on again quickly. He was anxious to get outside the school walls—anxious to get his dangerous mission over—a mission that he would never have dared to undertake, save in the dead of night, when all others were sleeping.

Whiz!

Cutts heard that sound of a hurtling rope without understanding it. He gave a violent start; and at the same moment a noose dropped over his shoulders.

He staggered, almost dazed.

A sharp pull on the rope tautened the noose, and it bound tightly round him, and at the same time he was jerked backwards, and sprawled on the ground.

Four dim figures came speeding towards him—one of them holding the rope and gathering it in quickly as he ran.

Cutts, dazed, terrified, amazed, made a frantic effort to throw off the gripping rope and spring to his feet.

But a jerk on the lasso dragged him over, and the next moment the four shadowy figures were bending above him.

"It's Cutts!"

The Fifth-Former knew Tom Merry's voice. He struggled fiercely to free his arms from the rope.

"You young hound!" he breathed.

"Cutts, right enough!" said Manners. "Wildrake, old infant, you roped him in a treat."

"I guess I know how to throw a lariat!" said Wildrake coolly.

"The giddy bird's caught!" said Monty Lowther. "You'll want a new set of teeth, Cutts, if you grind them like that. Take it smiling!"

Cutts sat up breathlessly.

"You young villains! Let me go at once! Instantly—"

"Not likely!" said Tom Merry contemptuously. "You're going—to the Head. You can make up your mind on that!"

Wildrake took a turn in the rope, securing Cutts more tightly. He was not running risks with his prisoner.

Cutts stared blankly at the juniors. As yet, he hardly realised what was happening; he looked on the affair as a "jape" of his old enemies in the Lower School. He was to learn that there was more than that in it.

"To the Head!" he repeated. "Are you mad?"

"Not quite, I hope!"

"I should get into a row for being out of House bounds at night," said Cutts. "But what about you fags? It's a more serious matter for fags than for a senior, and you know it!"

"If it were only a question of bounds, certainly," said Tom Merry.

"Let me go at once! I'll say nothing about your being out, if you keep your mouths shut!" muttered Cutts.

He was enraged at the necessity of making terms with the juniors. It would have been well for him if he had had nothing worse than that to face.

"You don't catch on yet," said Lowther.

Cutts gritted his teeth.

"I missed a letter," he muttered. "I suppose you young rotters found it. There was no name on it, but you guessed, and you laid this trap for me. Well, you've had your jape, now chuck it! I'll cry quits if you'll chuck it at once."

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"I'd better explain," said Tom Merry quietly.

"Let me go, I tell you, you young fool!"

"You're going to the Head. We're going to wake him," said Tom. "You've got his banknotes on you, unless we're mistaken."

Cutts fell back with an inarticulate cry.

The blow was too sudden for him to be prepared. Not for an instant had he dreamed that this was anything more than a junior rag. And now—His face was as white as a sheet; his eyes stared, almost bulging from their sockets. The horror and fear in his face were so terrible that even the juniors could not help feeling a touch of compassion. The fellow was a thief—they did not need any more proof of that now—and he had been willing, if not eager, to let an innocent fellow suffer in his place. But his look at that moment would have touched a heart of stone. Never had they seen any fellow so utterly crushed and broken, and they hoped never to see such a sight again.

Lowther stirred uneasily.

"Dash it all, pull yourself together, Cutts!" he muttered. "You've done it, and you've got to face the music! You can't expect us to stand by and see Darrell sacked for it. Have a little nerve."

Cutts' answer was a deep groan.

All the coolness, all the iron nerve, the effrontery of the sportsman of the Fifth were gone—at a blow! He saw before him utter ruin, and he was broken.

"Poor rotter!" muttered Wildrake pityingly. "I guess I feel sorry for him. But he's got to go through it. Darrell can't suffer for him."

"Get him along," said Tom. "We've got to ring the Head up and tell him how it stands."

"For mercy's sake—" breathed Cutts.

He did not attempt to deny the charge. The stolen banknotes were in his breast pocket; his hands were fast. It was useless to stammer denials when a search would reveal the truth.

"Come!" said Tom.

"Listen to me! For mercy's sake listen! You've got me down!" muttered Cutts. "I'm in your hands! I'm down—right at the bottom! Don't pile on a chap who's down."

It did not sound like the cool, hard, sneering sportsman of the Fifth now! Cutts was down—down and out—but it surprised the juniors to see him so utterly crushed. They had expected to see him face the music with some show of nerve, at least.

"There's nothing doing," said Tom. "Look here, Cutts, we suspected this—at least, Wildrake figured it out—and we laid for you, to clear Darrell. Darrell's got to be cleared. Do you think we can stand by and see him shamed for life, while the real thief gets off scot-free? You must be mad to think of such a thing. It's you or Darrell—"

"The guilty or the innocent," said Wildrake. "I guess there isn't much choice for us."

Cutts groaned.

"It's ruin!" he said thickly. "Disgrace and the sack! Oh, Heaven!"

"It's that for Darrell if you're not shown up!"

"Hold on—hold on!" Cutts panted, as Wildrake made a move. "Give me a minute—only a minute!"

"What's the good?" muttered Wildrake impatiently.

"Get it over! You called the tune, and you've got to pay the piper!"

"Give me a minute! Let me think!" panted Cutts.

"You've got me down! Oh, a thousand curses—"

"Don't waste your breath in swearing," said Tom Merry.

"That won't help you, Cutts. I—I'm sorry for you, but a thief knows what to expect if he's caught."

"I—I was driven to it," whispered Cutts. "That hound Banks was threatening me, and I—I lost the Founder's prize. I was desperate! I—I swear that I went to the Head's study by chance, to speak to him—I swear it! The desk was unlocked, and I—I—Of course, I was mad to do it! But—but it seemed such a chance, and—and that rotter Banks was cutting up rusty, and I'd lost the Founder's prize—"

His voice trailed away in a groan.

"And you let Darrell stand the racket for it?" said Wildrake scornfully.

"I couldn't confess, could I?" groaned Cutts. "I'd have put the money back, if I could have, when Darrell was taken up, but it was too late."

"I hope that's true," said Tom Merry dryly. "But there's nothing for it now, Cutts. The Head's got to know the truth."

"Stop, I tell you! I—I've got the banknotes here. I'll hand them over to you, and chance it with Banks," said Cutts huskily. "Take the money, and let me alone!"

"It's impossible—you know it!"

"Don't kick a fellow that's down!" breathed Cutts.

"Take the money—say you found it—say it was hidden—anything!"

"Tell a pack of lies to shield a dirty thief!" said Manners.

"Think of my people!" said Cutts, in utter wretchedness. "The mater—what will she think if I'm sent home branded as a thief? I never meant to be one. I—I— For pity's sake let the money be found somehow, and give me a chance!"

The wretched fellow almost grovelled in his terror and misery. Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another. Cutts' reference to "the mater" had gone to their hearts. The innocent had to suffer for the guilty—it was one of the penalties of crime. Tom Merry's brow was clouded.

"After all, if Darrell is cleared—" he muttered. "The rotten thief ought to be shown up, but—but if Darrell's cleared, we could give him a chance. Can Darrell be cleared without Cutts taking his gruel? It depends on that."

"It won't be so simple!" said Manners. "Easy enough!" broke in Cutts eagerly. "Take the notes. I'll go straight back to the dorm. Put them where they can be found—in the Head's study, if you like. For mercy's sake give me a chance. Darrell will be cleared if the notes are found—that's all you want. You don't want to ruin me, and disgrace my people. Give me a chance. I swear—"

"You're leader in this business, Wildrake," said Tom Merry. "You say the word."

Wildrake was silent for a long moment—it seemed an age to Cutts of the Fifth. The Canadian nodded at last.

"Give him a chance!" he said. "He's a poisonous sort of polecat, but I guess this will be a warning to him. Give him a chance."

Five minutes later, Cutts of the Fifth, trembling in every limb, sick with the stress of those terrible minutes, was stealing back to his dormitory—not to sleep, but to greet the morning sun with haggard eyes. And in Kit Wildrake's keeping was a bundle of banknotes—fifty pounds in all! Wildrake of the Fourth held the proof of Darrell's innocence.

CHAPTER 9.

Amazing!

"B LESS my soul!"

Dr. Holmes uttered that exclamation in tones of great astonishment.

"It is very extraordinary!" said Mr. Railton. The Housemaster's face showed great surprise. "Toby drew my attention to the matter—he observed the envelope in dusting the study—I thought I had better acquaint you with it at once, sir."

"Undoubtedly!" said the Head. "It is extraordinary! You do not surely think that the envelope contains the—"

"I have not examined the contents, sir, as it was evidently intended for you. But I certainly think—"

"I will see to it at once!" said the Head.

It was not usual for the stately Head of St. Jim's to show haste or hurry, fluster or flurry. But certainly on this occasion he displayed a combination of all of them. The two masters lost no time in reaching Dr. Holmes' study—where that truly amazing discovery had been made.

On the Head's desk, under a paper-weight, lay a thick envelope—an envelope of a common kind, and rather grubby to look at. On the face of it was written, or, rather, "printed" in capital letters, evidently for the purpose of leaving no clue to the writer:

"RETURNED WITH THANKS!
ALL SERENE!
THIS IS WHERE YOU SMILE!"

"Upon my word!" ejaculated the Head.

"I have felt the envelope, and there was a rustle like that of banknotes," said Mr. Railton. "I hope and pray, sir, that it may prove that the banknotes are there—that the supposed theft was, after all, only a foolish, wicked trick by some reckless practical joker."

"Heaven grant it!" said the Head.

He hurriedly picked up the envelope and slit it with a paper-knife. From the envelope he drew a wad of banknotes.

In silence, but eagerly, he compared the numbers with those on a list he drew from his pocket-book.

Then the old gentleman breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"The numbers are the same. The amount is correct!" he said. "These are the banknotes that were abstracted from my desk on Wednesday, Mr. Railton."

"I suspected as much when I saw that impudent inscription on the envelope," said the Housemaster. "It proves, then, that the supposed theft was no theft at all. It was a wicked, unscrupulous practical joke."

"That seems clear enough!" The Head's brow darkened.

"Upon my word, that wretched practical joker shall be found, and the severest possible punishment—"

"Certainly he deserves it, sir," said the Housemaster. "Yet we must be thankful that the foolish fellow relented

in time—that he has returned the notes before Darrell has left the school."

"Darrell!" repeated the Head, with a start.

"He was to leave by the nine o'clock train, sir!" said Mr. Railton. "It is as yet only a little past eight. As the notes are here, sir, it is certain that the notes sent away by Darrell, by registered post yesterday, cannot be the same."

"Obviously!" said the Head.

"Thank Heaven they have been found!" said the Housemaster. "Whoever abstracted them is deserving of the severest punishment; but the immediate business, I think, is to let it be known that Darrell is not guilty, and to relieve the poor fellow's mind."

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"Darrell has very much to explain," he said. "His condemnation was caused by his own act. He has only himself to thank. He has done wrong in more ways than one, but I am thankful it has proved that he is not a thief. Lesser offences can be forgiven, when he has so nearly suffered the penalty of a crime he did not commit. Will you send him to me at once, Mr. Railton. And then I shall be glad if you will put a notice on the board, to the effect that the missing money is found, and that there was actually no theft."

"Certainly, sir!"

The Housemaster quitted the study. Darrell of the Sixth entered it a few minutes later.

His face was a little pale, but very bright.

"Mr. Railton has told you—" began the Head.

"That the notes are found, sir!" said Darrell, his voice shaking a little. "I am very thankful, sir. You know now that I am not a thief!"

"I am thankful to know it, Darrell. It was not by my own desire that I judged you to be one. You had the proof of your innocence in your own hands—undoubted proof, as it turns out—and you refused to produce it. The fault was your own—the blame is yours."

"I know it, sir!" said Darrell in a low voice. "I—I don't complain, sir. I'm only too thankful the truth is known." He paused a moment. "May I ask how the money was found, sir?"

"It was left here for me to find, obviously by the person who abstracted it from my desk. A wicked and foolish practical joke," said the Head.

Darrell did not answer. He was thinking of Wildrake's words of the previous evening, and he was strangely amazed. That Wildrake had something to do with the return of the money was clear to him; but that he was the author of such a cruel practical joke as the Head described was impossible. Darrell realised that there was something behind it, and he resolved to seek Wildrake as soon as he could. The Head went on:

"A great injustice has nearly been done, Darrell, by your own fault! Your innocence is clear, but there remains the fact that you have dealt with a moneylender. I must now accept that explanation of your possession of such a sum of money, and the fact that you have sent such a large sum to an unknown correspondent. I am still waiting to hear your explanation of this before I can regain my confidence in you."

"If you can believe me now, sir!" muttered Darrell.

"I advise you to make a frank confession of the whole matter," said the Head. "Matters cannot remain as they are, and the proof of your innocence of the theft gives me back my reliance upon your word. Surely, Darrell"—his voice became kinder—"surely you can confide in your headmaster? I have always thought that I was your friend as well."

"You are very kind, sir!" faltered Darrell. There was a lump in his throat. "I—I don't want to keep a secret from you, sir, but while this horrible disgrace was hanging over me I couldn't let an innocent name be dragged into it—a woman's name! I will tell you everything now, sir!"

And with downcast eyes and flushed cheeks, Darrell told his story, as he had told it to Kildare. Still he mentioned no names; but the Head did not require it. His face grew kinder as he listened, and there was a rather long silence when Darrell's voice died away.

"I am afraid, Darrell, that you have carried chivalry to the extent of romance," said the Head. "I am far from blaming you for that, but—" He paused. "You have acted generously, nobly, but at the same time you have done what a school prefect, in whom I have confidence, ought not to have done."

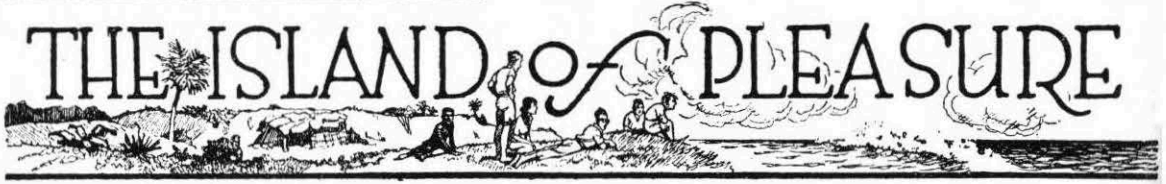
"I know it, sir!" muttered Darrell.

"But," said the Head, in a soft voice, "I think I understand; and I think, Darrell, that in spite of one false step, I should be justified in resuming my confidence in you. You will, of course, remain here, and you will remain a prefect. Your dealings with this man Gluck, the moneylender, will

(Continued on page 17.)

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This Wonderful Story is Pleasing Everybody!



Our Magnificent Story of Daring and Adventure.

READ THIS FIRST.

Donald Gordon and his brother Val leave St. Christopher's School, in company with Tommy Birks and Septimus Todd, a junior master, commonly known as "Scat," to join their uncle who is on a big plantation in the Solomon Islands.

Captain Targe, in charge of the schooner Wittywake, learns of the party's quest. He plans to abandon the boat and leave them to their fate with the intention of overthrowing the wealthy plantation owner and obtaining hold of his land. Taga, the black cabin-boy, hears of this, and warns the party. Unknown to the villainous captain, he places the boys in one of the ship's boats, and they are about to make their escape when Anna, the captain's daughter, taking the opportunity of getting away from the harsh treatment of her father, joins them.

Not long after the party has started on their perilous journey a severe storm breaks out. The party are thrown from their boat, but, luckily, get washed up on the "Island of Pleasure."

Cast on the island, they at once set about preparing their new home, refreshing themselves with various fruits which they find growing there. Later, one night the happy party are startled by the sudden appearance of a schooner's lights out at sea. Don's suspicions are aroused. He swims out to the reef, and makes a startling discovery. Leaving Anna in charge of the camp, the party then leave for an exploring expedition. Climbing a huge boulder, they look over the other side.

(Now read on.)

Taga's Warning!

IMMEDIATELY in front of the party was a huge, saucer-like depression on the top of the hill. The rugged sides and the caked mass of black lava indicated that it was the mouth of a burnt-out volcano.

To the left the ground sloped steeply, and three hundred yards below the growth of trees began again, forming an emerald belt.

All round the black lava ran a huge wedge of wind-swept palms, and on the right they could see the lower growths of the scrub running over a shoulder of the hill.

Lower down, the island formed a gentle slope, and four or five miles away, so far as Don could judge, was the sea.

But it was the view on the left that held their attention, for half-way down the belt of trees the growth formed a correct angle and the ground there was laid out in a regular formation.

"Cultivated land!" said Scat, in an awed whisper.

There was no doubt about it! That wedge-like cutting in the trees had not been formed by Nature. It was too regular, too correct, and gradually piece by piece the explorers picked out certain proofs that man was there, or had been there.

"There's a road, Don! Look, just along beside the trees, and winding towards us."

Val indicated a spot, and they picked out a white thread, which was a path or a road-way, winding up beside the trees and on along the base of the hill.

There were patches where rows of small trees in regular formation stood, and Don saw that channels ran between them, indicating that irrigation had taken place there. But there was no sign of life, no smoke or movement no sound.

It seemed as though the four white youngsters turned to Taga as one, and Don voiced the question that they all desired an answer to.

"What does it mean, Taga?"

Taga looked down at the forlorn plantation, then turned to the leader. There was THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 739.

a troubled expression in the native's brown eyes, as he shook his head.

"I no sure," Taga said slowly, "but I think now that this am Makatai, and him a very bad island!"

He leaned forward, looking down at the scene below, then turned to the right, where the scrub and jungle stretched down to the sea.

Don saw that here the jungle ran right into the sea, forming a mangrove swamp. A shoulder of the hill hid what lay beyond the jungle.

Taga, turning round, began to walk along the crest, heading to the right, and the little party followed him round the crater and on until at least they were on the right slope.

Taga came to a halt again, and when Don reached him, the native pointed downwards. "I think I right. This is Makatai Island. It a bad place, Mr. Don."

He was looking down at another beach, a semicircle, surrounded by jungle, on which the sun shone. Two spurs of land ran out seaward, making the bay a sheltered one. There was no sign of the protecting coral reef out at sea, and Don mentioned this to his native companion.

"No, that right. Him no come along there," said Taga. "Reef stop just above the cliffs on our side."

"Well, I can't see anything very alarming down there," was Tommy's comment. "It seems to me a jolly nice place, well sheltered, too; besides, it looks south, and ought to be warmer."

Again Taga's easy-going nature asserted itself.

"Yes, him look very nice," the native boy agreed. "Praps I wrong, but I no like it, and I think we better go back."

He gave the suggestion, however, as a man might give advice that he does not expect to be followed, and the murmur of protest that went round was met by a grin, which revealed the brown fellow's white teeth.

"I believe Taga's funking it," said Tommy. "I'm hanged if I go back without having a look at that plantation! Besides, I'll bet there's something good to eat down there."

This remark brought a laugh from the group, and Scat shrugged his shoulders.

"If there were a cream-bun shop at the South Pole you would have reached it years ago," the tutor commented dryly.



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The sun was beginning to sink, and Don had to make his decision swiftly. His personal desire was to go and examine the landlocked bay that seemed to have had such a sobering effect on Taga; but the others were obviously desirous of visiting the plantation, and the leader finally agreed to take that direction.

So began the final stage of the journey, a long climb down the other side of the dead crater.

On rounding a clump of boulders, Val, who was ahead, came to a halt with a quick gasp of surprise.

"Why, the road's here, Don!" he called.

The others hurried forward, and saw the clear tracks of the road running at a gentle angle down the hill. It headed straight for the trees and turned along them, then on towards the plantation.

"Why on earth did anyone want to make a road here?" Tommy demanded.

"That's what we're going to find out, old chap," said Don, "and we might as well do it now."

He turned back, however, and followed the road for another twenty or thirty yards or so, then saw that it came to a halt close to a ledge of rocks; and above the ledge was a small working that had been carried on for some distance into the heart of the mountain.

"It is a mine," said Scat. "Someone has been at work here all right. Look, they have been using explosives, and the grime from the smoke is still left on the rocks."

He drew his finger along one of the blackened surfaces and proved that his words were correct. Here and there heaps of rubble lay on the level ground, and, entering the tunnel, Don found that it had been carried inward some twenty or thirty yards.

Finally, Tommy stumbled over a broken spade. The handle had rotted away, and the iron spade was rusted so that the stout youngster could pick off flakes of the once hard metal.

"It must have been years since anyone was here," said Don.

The discovery had sobered the party, for these proofs that man had laboured on the island brought with them vague misgivings and fears.

"Well, it's no good hunting round here," said Don at last. "Whoever it was that worked this mine, he's gone years ago, and cudgelling our brains to try to find the truth won't help us any. I suppose you can't explain it, Taga?"

Taga shook his head.

"I never been on this island before. I only heard about it. If it am Makatai, it very bad island—no good to anybody!"

This steadily repeated warning of Taga's made Tommy snort.

"I believe Taga's getting cold feet," the stout youngster observed indignantly.

They returned to the road and commenced to follow it down towards the trees.

It was a very rudely constructed affair—a mere levelling of one side—and there were ample indications that it had not been used for a long long time. Under the trees the grass had almost covered the once bare surface, and, when they reached the spot where the wedge-like cutting was formed in the trees, they found a broken-down gate-post and the remains of a gate. There were also a few stakes left of a hedge that had formed a barrier running away to the right.

Passing the posts, Don found a clearance opening in front of him, and, on entering it, discovered to the left, in a position that had been hidden from their view while they had been on the hill, a heap of tangled creepers, from whence there arose one or two jagged ends of beams.

The party hurried towards the spot, and a swift investigation showed that under the creepers were the charred remains of what had once been a house.

"Perhaps they set fire to it before they left," was Tommy's ingenious suggestion.

"Well, they certainly made a clean sweep of it," Don returned grimly.

A couple of hours were spent by the party in exploring the cleared space. They found a well, also the remains of a primitive pump, worked by a beam, and a circular track round the well indicated that a draft animal of some sort lifted the buckets from the well and tilted them into the channels from whence the little irrigation canals flowed through the cultivated patches.

"By James, there was some work put in here!" Tommy declared at last. "I wonder why on earth they chucked it all up. It must have taken years to get the space cleared out like this."

Night overtook them, and they found a suitable sleeping quarter close to the well.

Tommy was very anxious to have a cup of coffee, and tried to persuade Don to let Taga make a fire, a trick that the native boy was very expert at.

"No, I don't think we'll have a warm meal, old chap," Don returned. "Taga doesn't seem to want us to light a fire, and we'll let him have his own way."

They were all very tired and hungry, and, after the meal, Scat noted that Don and Taga drew apart. The tutor tried to keep awake and watch the two figures seated on the edge of the well for a long moment, but gradually nature asserted itself, and Scat dropped off into a deep sleep.

He was awakened by someone touching him on the arm.

"Scat—Scat, old chap! Get up—quick! There's something happening, and I want you to come along and help me," whispered the voice of Don.

The Strange Spectacle.

SCAT, still heavy with sleep, found himself picking his way through the recumbent figures of his chums, with Don's hand on his shoulder to guide him along.

They emerged from the ruins of the house, and, going on across the cleared space, reached the edge of the beach, and here the slim figure of Taga arose from behind a cluster of boulders.

It was a clear, moonlight night, and Taga's gesture was answered by Don.

"Don't make a sound, Scat!" Don whispered, under his breath. "You will see what's happening in a moment."

When they reached Taga, the slim, brown native turned and began to move along the beach. Scat and Don followed him, and presently they swung up to the right, pacing through a clump of tall palms, and finally reached a clearing.

Taga dropped on his hands and knees now, and Scat found himself crawling laboriously over rough, broken ground, until at last he was lying flat on his face between Don and Taga on the edge of a precipitous slope, looking into a saucer-like depression which ran down to the beach.

Don's hand fell on Scat's shoulder, and his other arm was extended. Following the direction of the arm, Scat saw something which made his heart leap for a moment.

A long, slender, black canoe, with high-carved bow and stern, was gliding towards the beach. It seemed like some prehistoric monster as its double line of paddles moved in rhythmic cadence, urging it onward.

"A war canoe!" Scat whispered.

"Yes, I think so, old chap!"

In silence the three youngsters watched the long canoe glide ashore. A torrent of black shapes leapt from it, then the canoe was lifted clean out of the water, and carried by a double line of wet, naked shapes which came on up the beach.

"It—it looks like a giant caterpillar!" the tutor breathed.

Taga turned his head for a moment.

"You no make noise. Dem very bad fellas. They go make magic, you see."

The canoe was lowered, and Scat saw now that there was still a solitary occupant in it, a huddled, grotesque shape seated in the centre.

As though by magic flaring torches appeared, and presently the canoe was surrounded by a circle of flaming, smoking lights.

There were only some forty or fifty yards between it and the youngsters, and the lighted torches made every movement visible.

The squat shape in the centre of the canoe moved and stepped out on to the

sand, then four or five tall, bronzed figures clambered into the canoe, and Scat saw them handing out a number of round objects. These were pieces of mat, caught up at the corners, and tied round some object in the centre.

Presently the mysterious cargo had been removed, and now, as though at a signal, the torch-bearers formed into a double line, while between them came a dozen figures, each bearing one of the packages. Ahead of them walked the stunted shape which had been carried up in the canoe.

"Bad man—very bad man, dat!" murmured Taga.

The procession came winding up the slope, and Scat, watching it with breathless interest, saw now that the centre bearers were hideously painted, while the leader was wearing a grotesque mask, which gave him an uncanny, diabolical appearance.

The torches flared and flickered as their bearers strode on through the changing lights and shades of the scene, and the two English youngsters watched the snake-like procession as it went along the slope and finally vanished under the growth of trees beyond.

When they had gone Don rose to his feet with a quiet word to Taga.

"Come along, old chap; we must see what they are after."

Taga jumped up, and caught Don by the arm.

"No, no! We no go any farther. Dem very bad men."

It seemed to Scat that Taga was obviously afraid. It was the first time the native had shown any sign of fear, and the tutor nudged Don on the arm.

"Better take Taga's advice, old man!" he whispered. "He ought to know more about it than we do."

Don swung round, his strong young face stern in the moonlight.

"We've got to see this thing through, Scat. These people have come on to our island, and it would be madness for us not to know what they are up to."

He drew away from the lanky tutor.

"I am going on, anyhow," he said. "You can wait here until I return if you like."

As he moved off along the slope, Scat shook his head at Taga.

"No good, Taga," he said. "It will have to be done. We'll have to go—we can't let him go alone."

Ten minutes later they were in among the trees, and the resinous scent left by the torches hung heavy in the air. It was a long and trying march which they made, for it was pitch dark under the trees. Presently there came from the silence ahead a low, chanting sound, which increased in volume as they drew nearer and nearer to it.

Scat was walking in front of Taga, and again and again the tall tutor heard the native boy gasp out something from between his set teeth.

Taga was in a blue funk, but his devotion to Don had conquered his terror. It was superstition which had gripped at Taga, and Scat realised that the brown fellow must be suffering agonies of fear.

They climbed a rough ledge, then the trees began to thin, and presently a low, warning cry came from Don.

"Steady on, Scat! Be careful, now!"

Scat stumbled on, and reached his leader's side. Don had halted behind a tall boulder, and, slipping round to the side of the massive stone, Scat had a view of the scene in front.

They had climbed half-way up the hill, and immediately in front of them was a scarred stretch of rough, broken ground, treeless and barren.

The moon shone full on the slope, and revealed the fact that a huge, cleft space occupied the centre of the hill, and in this great gap the torch-bearers were slowly winding their way, chanting as they went.

"Better we no go any farther!" Taga's voice came in a hoarse whisper. "They very bad fellas along there, and they go make magic."

But it would have taken much more than Taga's doleful warning to stop Don Gordon. It was not only the fact that the mere presence of these natives on the island meant danger to his chums which urged him on his present course, but he also felt a desire to know what it was which brought these strange, wild islanders to this lonely, forbidding place.



The leader came slowly out of the gap, drawing a low wooden sledge behind him. On the sledge, seated in a carved throne, was a hideous idol. As the image came into view the torch-bearers swung their flaming faggots aloft.
(See page 16.)

There was a sense of mystery and secrecy about the whole affair which had an irresistible appeal to the intrepid youngster. "Look here, Scat," Don said, turning and facing the tutor, "I don't want to drag you into this affair. After all, there is no reason why you and Taga should not remain here, and I'll go on alone."

"Oh, there's no reason why I should," Scat returned, "except that I happen to refuse to stay here without you; but Taga's different. The poor beggar has got the wind up, and I dare say his fears are real enough. Let him remain behind."

Taga had drawn up to them now, and Don turned to the brown-skinned native.

"You had better stay here, Taga," he said. "Keep an eye on the beach, and see no one else comes along. Scat and I are going to do a bit more scouting. No need for you to follow."

Taga's face had a very woebegone expression on it, and there was no doubt he was in a blue funk. He looked at Don for a moment, then shook his head.

"Go where you go," he said. "Taga badly scared, all right, but he no coward."

And, indeed, Don was the first to admit this fact. That Taga insisted on accompanying them proved his courage was greater than the two white lads, for, after all, Scat and Don were educated, intelligent youngsters, whereas Taga had been brought up in that atmosphere of superstition and witchcraft which holds sway over all the islands. He was afraid, and yet he went on—the greatest test of bravery.

They reached the edge of the gap, and found themselves looking down into a ravine, which ended abruptly in the face of the hill.

By this time the torch-bearers had formed into a semicircle, and were seated on the rocky ground, the grotesque, masked figure of their leader in the centre, with his group of painted bearers.

The chanting had died away into a low, murmuring sound but now a new voice—a thin, eerie cry—arose. It came from the lips of the masked leader, and he moved forward towards the face of the hill, his arms extended, his head thrown back.

"What is he saying, Taga? Don't you understand?"

Scat whispered the query to Taga, and the native shivered.

"He calling on the Fire Spirit, the debbil-debbil who lives in the hill," Taga murmured through his set teeth.

The grotesque shape strode on until it halted at the tall, dark cliff which marked the end of the ravine.

Don, watching the figure carefully, saw it lunge forward and tug for a moment at a great slab of stone, which was wedged in the black surface. The slab of stone turned slowly outward, falling forward until it formed a platform, revealing a dark gap behind it.

The grotesque figure stumbled on to the platform, shrieked out another torrent of words, then, at a signal from him, two of the nearest torch-bearers arose and came

forward until they reached the stone slab. They thrust their torches over the head of their leader, and, stepping forward, the masked figure darted into the black, tunnel-like opening.

A shout went up from the circle of seated torch-bearers, and the chant arose again, deep-throated, vibrating.

"Look, there he is! What is he bringing out?" whispered Don.

The doubled-up shape of the leader appeared once more. He was leaning forward, his naked feet fighting for foothold on the smooth, sloping slab. He came slowly out, a broad, leather belt across his shoulders, and as he drew nearer to the gap they saw the belt was attached to a low, wooden sledge. On the sledge, seated on a carved throne, was a hideous idol.

As the massive image was drawn out into view, the torch-bearers arose to their feet and the flaming turgots were swung aloft; then, as though at a signal, every brown shape fell flat on its face, and another deep-voiced cry arose.

"The debbil-debbil!"

Scat heard a quick clicking of teeth from his right, and, turning his head for a moment, Taga's face appeared. He was peering over the edge of the ledge, and it was from him that the chattering sound was coming. His teeth were rattling together in his head, and his whole tense, rigid attitude indicated the depths of fear he had fallen into.

Don, staring at the idol on the stone platform, noted now that all round the base of the seat and on the sledge itself were round objects, while on the carved knees of the idol was another heap of similar things.

"What's it got on its lap, Scat?" Don whispered.

"Dunno; they look like coconuts!"

Don touched Taga on the arm.

"What are they, Taga?"

"No, no; you no bother about them."

"What are they, Taga?"

Don repeated the question firmly.

Taga's breath came in a thin, shivering sound.

"They skulls! Them very bad fellas down there. They cannibals. Kill their enemies, smoke 'em skulls, and give to Fire Spirit."

Both Don and Scat had read of the savage islanders which were known to exist in this part of the world, and Taga's explanation opened their eyes at once.

"He's right—of course he's right!" Scat whispered excitedly. "They are smoked skulls. I have read about how these brutes collect the heads of their enemies and smoke them. By Jove, I—I never thought I would see any!"

Another ceremony was about to be enacted then, and the two youngsters watched it in grim silence. One by one the painted bearers came up to the leader, and each matting-covered package was untied, revealing its gruesome contents. They were placed one by one on the knees of the idol, and each fresh addition to the pile brought another shout from the watching torch-bearers.

"Government boat come shoot 'em up if they knew they did this," Taga stammered. "They no dare do it on own island, so come

along here. I hear about dem bad fellas long time ago; they belong to Matata. They very bad fellas!"

"Yes, you have said so before, old chap," said Scat, "and I agree with you. They are by no means a friendly-looking lot."

He had drawn himself nearer to Don, and was staring down at the scene below through his lensless spectacles.

Presently Don heard him snort, and turning round, caught sight of Scat's face. An amazing change had taken place; the long, cadaverous, meek countenance was twisted into a look of grim ferocity such as Don had never seen on it before.

"What's the matter, Scat?"

The tutor started as though awakening out of a trance.

"Oh—oh, nothing, old chap; but I—I do think those brutes down there ought to be taught a lesson."

"No doubt you are right," Don returned. "But how are you going to manage it?"

"I have been thinking, Don," Scat went on. "I mean about the house and the plantation and everything here. Nothing will convince me that anyone would leave such a lovely place unless he were forced to do so. I believe that down there is the solution of the mystery. There can be little doubt that these people attacked the settler here and murdered him, wrecking his plantation, and burning his home. No doubt they had their idol hidden away in this hill for years, and they could not carry out their diabolical worship while there was a white man on this island. I am convinced this explains the mystery."

"I should not be at all surprised if you are right, Scat," Don returned. "They are certainly unwelcome visitors, and it means we shall have no peace on this island while they come here."

Scat was fumbling in his pocket, and Don saw him produce something which he began to unwind. It was a sling, and the leader of the camp remembered Scat's dexterity with this simple missile-thrower.

"What are you up to, Scat? What are you going to do?"

"Do you forget the e-concerts we used to have at home?" Scat whispered. "Don't you remember a little p-parlour trick I have got?"

Don started, as a glimmering of the truth came to him.

"You are going to give a ventriloquial performance here?"

"I am going to try," said Scat. "You stay where you are and watch events."

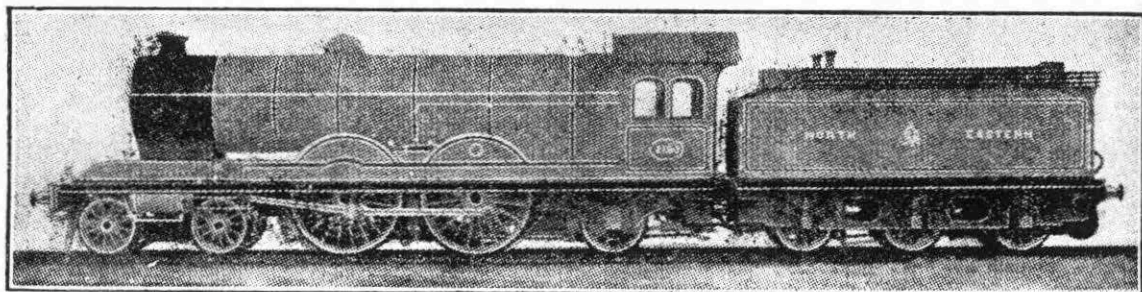
And before Don could stop him, the lean, ragged figure had moved away into the darkness, and presently Don saw it slipping from boulder to boulder along the top of the gap. It worked its way steadily forward, until at last it was immediately above the open tunnelway, where a huge boulder concealed it from the view of the circle below.

Don saw Scat's head appear above the boulder for a moment, then it vanished.

"What he go do?" Taga murmured anxiously. "Dat fella get himself into trouble if he no careful."

(Continued on page 19.)

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WILDRAKE'S WINNING WAY.

(Continued from page 13.)

cease at once. I shall take that matter in hand. I shall repay the money!"

"Oh, sir!"

"I shall deal with the man directly and settle his claim on you, and the money will be repaid to me later, when you are able to find the amount," said the Head. "This is, of course, on the understanding that nothing of the kind shall ever transpire again."

"On my word, sir!"

"I accept your word, Darrell!"

Darrell of the Sixth left the Head's study looking as if he were walking on air. Kildare met him in the passage, his face excited.

"Darrell! What—"

"All serene, old fellow."

"There's a notice on the board in Mr. Railton's list," said the captain of St. Jim's. "Half the school's reading it now, Darrell!" Kildare gripped his chum's hand. "Oh, old chap, this is good!"

St. Jim's was in a buzz that morning with the startling news on the notice-board. Nothing else was talked of in the school, and Darrell of the Sixth received something like an ovation. The seniors of the Fifth and Sixth crowded round him to voice their regrets; the juniors cheered him in the quadrangle. It was clear that no news could have delighted the school so much as the news of Darrell's innocence. The Sixth-Former was kept pretty busy until lessons with congratulating friends, and it was not till after morning

classes that he had an opportunity of seeking Kit Wildrake. He found the Canadian junior sauntering in the quad with a cheery face.

"All O.K.—what?" asked Wildrake, as Darrell came up.

"Yes," said Darrell. "You knew—"

"I guess so!"

"You found the notes?"

"Little me and some others," said Wildrake.

"It was not a practical joke?" said Darrell.

"Who said it was?"

"The Head thinks so, now."

"I guess the Head's at liberty to think what he likes,"

said Wildrake with a smile. "After all, it's better to call it a practical joke than to know a St. Jim's chap was a thief."

Darrell looked at him keenly.

"I understand, Wildrake! You found the thief?"

"Little me and some others," said Wildrake again. "I guess he begged hard and we let him off. Mum's the word, of course? You're not talking as a prefect now, Darrell?"

"Of course not! I'm only too much obliged to you," said Darrell. "But for you, I should be at this moment—"

He broke off. "I shan't forget this, Wildrake!"

"All serene! As for the rotter concerned—I won't mention names," said the Canadian junior—"but he's had a lesson fit to turn his hair grey, and I guess it won't be lost on him. That's all I can say."

"And I must be satisfied with that?" said Darrell with a smile.

"Just that!" agreed Wildrake.

THE END.

(Next week's grand long story of the chums of St. Jim's is entitled "MR. RACKE'S PROTEGE!" Be sure of reading this strong, dramatic tale, but order your GEM early!)

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I want you to be with me in helping to form one of the largest clubs ever yet known.

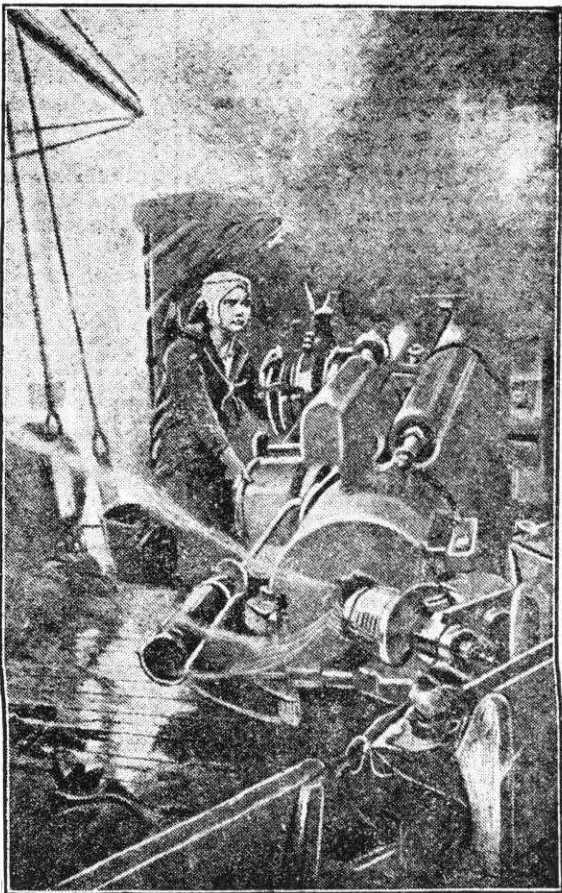
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April 8, 1932

The ST JIM'S NEWS

Edited By TOM MERRY.

Grundy on the "High Horse."

By GEORGE WILKINS.

I WONDER how many fellows could stick Grundy as Gunn and I do. I reckon he's jolly lucky in his study-mates. If he was with some chaps in the school, he'd have been cold meat long enough ago. I know there are other johnnies at St. Jim's who take a bit of putting-up with—Skimpole, for instance—but one thing about them is that you can ignore them a bit, and try to forget that they exist. But there's not much chance of forgetting Grundy, or of ignoring him. He takes jolly good care of that.

He's always under your nose, and bobbing up in unexpected places with fatheaded ideas. Gunn and I often try to get out of his road, but it's hopeless.

We can always reckon on his missing us within the first five minutes, and coming after us, and it's ten-to-one that he manages to find us. He hasn't got much brain, but he's the dickens of a stickler!

Last week he had a brand-new idea, so new that nobody had never had such an idea before, he said. Perhaps it was because nobody else was scatter-brained enough to want to think of anything so idiotic.

He wanted to challenge the Grammar School to a point-to-point race across country—on horses, mind you!

"It's a great wheeze," he said in our study after tea one evening. "We'll mark out a course—about ten miles will be enough for the first time—and appoint about a dozen riders for each school. Of course, in one way it'll be a bit tame, because the result will be a foregone conclusion, as naturally I shall be the winner, but there'll be plenty of fun in watching who comes in second and third. What do you think of the idea?"

"Just the same as any other sensible chap would," retorted Gunn. "And what's that?" inquired Grundy eagerly.

"He wouldn't think of it at all," replied Gunn. "And neither am I doing."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Needless to say, it was I who was laughing at Gunn's opinion of the idea, and not Grundy. He was fuming, but as the table was between him and Gunn, who was also nearer to the door, he knew from past experience that it would be impossible for him to get round to old Gunn in time.

"You ass!" he roared. "It's a jolly good wheeze, I think!"

"Your thinking so is enough to condemn it," I murmured; but as I was rather near to the great George I was careful not to speak in too audible a tone.

Gunn, however, heard me, and winked across with the eye that was turned away from Grundy.

"Well, if Cardew and his pals could get up a midnight motor-race, with the High-chiff crowd," he growled, "I don't see why we shouldn't be able to do a blessed horse-race in broad daylight."

"Ass!" said Gunn. "You don't suppose that race ever took place, do you?"

"Why not? Didn't Cardew write an account of it for Tom Merry to put into the 'News'?" demanded Grundy triumphantly.

"Cardew was pulling your blessed leg,"

replied Gunn. "It was a fake all through. Any ass with half an eye could see that."

"But I saw it in print," persisted Grundy obstinately.

Grundy has a great respect for the printed word, and he'd believe anything that he read in a paper.

"What about that?" grinned Gunn. "You saw the news of your sale of Government surplus goods in print, on nice coloured paper handbills, but you said it wasn't true."

"Ha, ha, ha!" I roared.

"Anyhow," snorted George Alfred, "I mean to try it, and what's more, you fellows are going to help!"

"What?" yelled Gunn and I together; but Grundy waved his hand as though the matter was settled.

"Of course," he said, "I look to this study to back me up. You'll both ride for St. Jim's, and I shall expect you to do your best. Anyway, if you don't come in well to the front you'll have to reckon with me."

"B-but, you ass," gasped Gunn, "I can't ride a horse!"

"Did I say you could?" replied Grundy. "Don't try to make excuses, Gunn. Neither can I ride—in fact, I've never been on a horse in my life—but you don't hear me making idiotic excuses."

"M-my hat!"

"But if you can't ride, what's the use of your going in for the race?" I asked.

Look out for the splendidly written health article by the St. Jim's "Sporting Doctor." The first will appear in next week's issue of the "St. Jim's News."

"Well, I can learn, can't I?" said Grundy disdainfully. "There's a riding-school at Wayland, and you'll see it won't take me more than an hour or so to become a first-class rider. I'm pretty quick at picking things up, and I—I'll bet I astonish the riding-master when I start."

"I bet you will," I assured him; and he looked a jolly sight more pleased than he would have done had he known exactly what I meant by the remark. I had no doubt that Grundy would astonish the riding-master, but I fancied it would not be by his brilliance. On the other hand, his colossal stupidity generally has the effect of astonishing most of the people with whom he comes into contact.

Grundy arranged that we should all go down to Wayland on the following Wednesday afternoon, but Gunn and I agreed privately afterwards that we had no desire to learn the art of horsemanship—at least, not in the company of George Alfred Grundy, and for the purpose that he proposed—and so, when he was ready to start, he looked for us in vain. For once he failed to find us, and he was so determined to carry on with his idea that he set out for Wayland on his own.

He came back about six o'clock, just as we were finishing tea, and when we saw him standing in the study doorway we jumped to our feet pretty quickly and grabbed a cushion apiece. Having dodged him earlier in the day, we expected that he'd be on the giddy warpath, because he usually takes it out of us when we work off a wheeze of that kind on him.

But we needn't have bothered. Grundy was not in the mood for taking revenge. He simply came in and limped across the study, sinking into a chair without a word.

In the Saddle.

"What's up, Grundy?" I asked, letting go of the cushion.

He looked up wearily.

"Eh?" he said. "Oh, nothing!"

"What have you been doing to your chivvy?" inquired Gunn, staring at what was the first stages of a promising black eye.

"Nothing!" repeated Grundy, as though it didn't matter much.

Gunn and I stared at each other in silence. "Have you been collared by Gordon Gay and ragged?" went on Gunn, at length.

"Gordon Gay?" repeated Grundy, as though he'd never heard of him. "Oh, no!"

"Well, have you been to Wayland?" I asked, beginning to get a bit exasperated.

Grundy nodded his head.

"To the riding-school?"

He actually shuddered as I asked that.

"Ye-es, I've been there!" he muttered. "I—oh, crums, my ribs!"

He commenced to wriggle in the depths of the chair, and Gunn winked across at me. We were tumbling to the state of affairs now. Evidently Grundy's riding-lesson had been less successful, and more painful, than he had anticipated.

"Did you astonish the riding-master?" chuckled Gunn.

"It's not a riding-school at all!" groaned Grundy. "It's a blessed torture-chamber! You never saw such a collection of vicious brutes as they've got there. Their backs are too broad to get across, and the saddles are too slippery to hang on by! I'm black and blue all over! I fell off about a dozen times. I tried about four different ones, and I think the rotten brutes threw me off on purpose. Anyway, I'm jolly certain that they were grinning all the time!"

"As soon as I got on one side I slipped off the other, and when I got the hang of the thing, and learned how to stick on by holding the mane—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gunn.

"What the heck are you laughing at, you ass?" snapped Grundy, with a slight return to his old manner. "As I was saying, I began to get the idea, and got the nag to gallop, and then, somehow or other, I found myself among the tan on the floor again. I think every blessed bone in my body's broken, and all my teeth are loose, yet all you idiots can do is to stand there and grin. If I could only get up to you—"

"I'm sorry!" gasped Gunn. "But really I should like to have been there, and seen you hanging round the horse's neck, and bumping on the ground. Ha, ha, ha!"

In the ordinary way Gunn would have suffered for that, but Grundy was too sore to be capable of doing more than promising him what he would do later.

"And how did it finish up?" I inquired.

"Well, after I'd fallen off the last time I turned round and saw the blessed instructor laughing like a giddy hyena. I wasn't going to stand that, so I went up and whopped him—"

"You—you whopped him!" gasped Gunn.

"Yes, of course! I only got in one good buff, and then the beast, who was about six-foot-two, called a couple of attendants, and the three of 'em flung me out! Me, mind you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

He drank a cup of tea in moody silence, and soon after went up to the dormitory to soak himself in embrocation. It was several days before he had fully recovered from the effects of his afternoon at Wayland, but he has not taken any further riding-lessons, nor have we heard any more about his great idea of a cross-country steeplechase.

ISLAND OF PLEASURE!

(Continued from page 16.)

By this time the ceremony of placing the hideous relics on the idol had been completed, and now the painted skull-bearers had retired to the end of the lighted circle, while the figure in the mask, standing in front of the stone platform, began a long harangue. He was telling his people the history of the tribe, and was warning them of the power of this fetish hidden in the heart of the hill.

Taga translated part of the speech to Don as they lay there.

The grotesque idol had once been in their head village of Matatai, but the British

Government had visited the island and insisted on head-hunting stopping. One or two raids had been carried out, and several of the villages shelled, so at last they had been forced to find another sanctuary for their idol.

The droning voice continued to speak for a long ten minutes or so, then the first startling disturbance took place. There was a clean, sharp thud, and one of the skulls from the heap on the knees of the idol rolled over, and came trundling down, to fall first on the stone platform, then to bounce forward until it halted at the feet of the masked figure.

For a moment a hush fell on the circle, then a long-drawn cry came.

Thud!

Another quick sound followed, and this time Scat's aim was truer. The stone smote

the pile of skulls full in the centre, and the heaped-up relics were scattered, falling in a shower from the knees of the carved shape. Then came a voice—a thin, clacking, angry voice, which wheezed out a torrent of strange noises. They seemed to come from the carved, wooden lips of the idol.

Suddenly the weird sounds changed, and it was now animal cries which filtered through the hushed air—the barking of a dog, the call of a night-bird, the bellow of cattle.

Never in all his career had Scat reached such high perfection the quaint art he had cultivated. Even Don, well accustomed to the tutor's skill, lay spellbound, listening to this tornado of sounds. The effect on the rest of the audience was electrical!

(Another grand long instalment of this splendid serial next week.)

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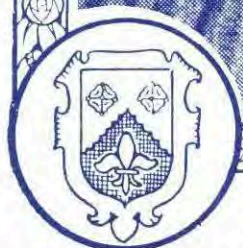
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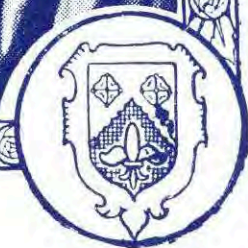
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