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ISSUE.

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20 Pages.

Every Wednesday.

May 20th, 1922.



H. GREGORY.

West Bromwich Albion F.C.

THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF INSPECTOR FIX!

(Read the Thrilling Long Complete School Story in this Issue.)

HOWARD GREGORY.

The Clever Outside-Left of West Bromwich Albion.

HOWARD GREGORY, a steadily improving man—is a very popular member of the West Bromwich Albion team, and his clever footwork at outside-left always invests his play with special interest. Like many other members of the West Bromwich side, he is a product of Birmingham district. His father was a great Aston Villa enthusiast, and when Howard was at school at Aston he was very prominent among his comrades. They were trained by a great enthusiast, Mr. Joe Bosworth, the Aston Unity cricket groundsman, and for four seasons the team won the Aston Schools' Championship, while Howard played for the Birmingham Boys against Wrexham Boys in the English Schools' Shield. He was captain of his school team during the greater part of his stay there, and his brother John was also a member.

After leaving school Howard Gregory played for Birchfield Trinity, and whilst assisting them in a cup final against Guest Street, Hockley, at the Grove Lane ground, Handsworth, he came under the notice of West Bromwich Albion, and he and his brother John (who was his senior) were invited to take part in an Albion trial match. A day or two later Howard figured in the Albion second team which met the first. He signed for the Albion four seasons prior to the war, and played in the reserves; while in the last season before the war it was a keen fight between him and Fred Morris for a position in the first team. During the war he played for Ward End Works, who had a won-

derful side, practically a First League eleven.

When the war was over, Gregory came back to the Hawthorns, and played regularly in the side which won the League Championship for the first time in the Albion's history. At his best Gregory is a fine, attractive, vigorous player; his footwork is deft, and he has a deceitful way of hugging the touch-line, and of hooking the ball past even the most watchful half, while he gets in his centres well, and is not above scoring a goal at odd times.

His exploits in the swimming world, too, were exceptional. For two years in succession his school team won the Ansell Challenge Shield; in the same two seasons he finished second in the 104 yards Junior Championship of Aston. After leaving school he won the 104 yards Junior Championship of the Aston Swimming Club, and, later, the three open championships, including the mile, of the same club, and the 220 yards Championship of Birmingham and District two years in succession, while he was a member of the junior and senior water-polo teams of the club. It was a bitter disappointment to him when he found that, being a professional footballer, he was ineligible to swim as an amateur.

(Next week's article will deal with Kenneth Campbell (Partick Thistle F.C.) and A. Grimsdell (Tottenham Hotspur F.C.). Look out for the wonderful photographs of these two popular footballers which will be given away FREE with next week's GEM.)

EDITORIAL CHAT.

The Editor would like to hear from his reader chums. Address all letters to Editor, "The Gem Library," The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

My Dear Chums,—

GEM readers are never behindhand in letting me know their opinions. It is a pleasure to be able to put on record that the splendid feature just introduced, consisting of real action photographs of popular football players, has been received with tremendous enthusiasm.

As a matter of fact, I do not think the GEM ever stood higher than it does now. The series of portraits was just what was wanted, and I feel extremely obliged to all my friends who have sent me word that they think the splendid photographs tip-top.

Next week the GEM will give two real photos of K. Campbell (Partick Thistle), and A. Grimsdell (Spurs), two grand players who have worked their way to the front by sheer grit and skill.

In the "Magnet" next week will be found a magnificent photograph of "Dicky" Dorrell (Aston Villa), as seen in action on the field of play. There is another treat for readers of the Companion Papers next Monday, for the "Boys' Friend" will include a grand free photo of ex-Guardsman Penwill, the finest heavy-weight Devonshire has produced.

I must point out, too, that the "Popular" is not left out in the cold. Next week's number of the record complete story paper contains a further coloured plate of one of the champion locomotives of the world—a really beautifully produced picture.

Mind you don't forget that a capital album for the sports photographs can be obtained from the GEM Album Office, 7-9, Pilgrim Street, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.4. All you have to do is to send a postal-order for 6d. to the Manager, and tell him you want an album. I have had these albums specially made for the portraits I am giving away, and you will say they are just the thing. Please write your name and address very plainly to avoid mistakes. By the way, if any reader has missed a portrait, 2½d. should be sent to cover cost of a new paper with the duplicate photo.

This week I have been compelled to devote most of my space to telling you of coming treats. I cannot name all the fresh attractions, but there are plenty more grand gifts to follow, so keep your eye on the Companion Papers, and mind you place a standing order with your newsagent for copies of all the weeklies, lest you get disappointed by missing some of the special attractions offered.

The GEM next week carries on with its thrilling series. I am convinced that these stories are stronger, more dramatic, and appealing than ever.

There is one thing more. Keep an eye open for the coming new GEM serial, "All On His Own." This yarn promises brilliantly, and, between ourselves, I can tell you that it is a real winner. You cannot fail to appreciate the fine character of the lad who finds himself alone in the wide world, for his only relative has paid the debt of Nature when the story opens. How he faces the world, and finds a loyal friend who places him at school, is all told with much sympathy. The author has a fine subject, and he has made the most of his great opportunity.

YOUR EDITOR.

"MY READERS' OWN CORNER!"

Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes-Awarded for Interesting Paragraphs.

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

TUCK HAMPER COUPON

The GEM LIBRARY.

No attempt will be considered unless accompanied by one of these Coupons.

PERSONAL.

Professor Jones was going to give a lecture on Fools. The morning before he approached a dustman and said: "My good man, to-night I am giving a lecture on Fools in the small hall at the back of the hotel. If you take this ticket you will be able to hear a splendid address." The dustman took the ticket, and saw the words, "Admit One." General Hospital Bulletin: "Professor Jones, who was picked up in the street yesterday unconscious, is slowly recovering."—Half-a-crown awarded to F. H. Rover, 46, North Brook Road, West Croydon, Surrey.

THE REASON.

Doctor to patient: "I am surprised to see you looking so well." "Perhaps that's because I followed the directions on the medicine bottle." Doctor: "What directions?" Patient: "Keep tightly corked."—Half-a-crown awarded to M. McGregor, 22, Vigor Brown Street, Napier, New Zealand.

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This Wins Our Tuck Hamper. BOY LOST.

Missing from Philadelphia about the 3rd of next month, 1780, a tall, dark-complexioned young man, about 5 feet 6 inches of age, height 37 years; had on when last seen a pair of swallow-tail sealskin trousers, with sausage stripes; fashionable mutton-chop waistcoat, with cast-iron trimmings; double-barrelled frock-coat, with tripe collar, tobacco lining; watertight canvas boots, with patent leather tops, laced up at the sole; is deaf and dumb in one eye, and hard of hearing with the other. Whiskers cut off short inside. Was carrying an empty carpet-bag in each hand, and a wooden bag in the other, containing screw-hammers, railway tunnels, and blacking. Was born after his younger brother. Anyone giving such information as will leave him where he is, will be prosecuted as the law directs. Monkeyshire, Superintendent of Police, Philadelphia, March 39th, 1790.—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to George Darrell, 2, Clarence Road, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire.



A Thrilling Long Complete Story of St. Jim's, telling how Inspector Fix, in his endeavours to capture the unknown kidnappers, is himself made a prisoner.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

A Surprise for St. Jim's.

"TOM MERRY!"

"Bai Jove! Tom Mewwy!"

"Great Scott!"

"Tom's come back!"

"Tommy!"

Had Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell, been his own ghost, his appearance in the quadrangle at St. Jim's could hardly have caused a greater sensation.

Old Taggles, the porter, stared and blinked as he walked in at the gates.

"My heye!" said Taggles.

From all sides there was a rush of fellows to greet the junior. Excited voices hailed him from near and far. Seniors, as well as juniors, joined in the buzzing crowd round him.

"Tom Mewwy, old chap!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Is it weally you, you know?"

"Tom!" yelled Manners.

"Hurray!" roared Figgins of the New House.

Fellows thumped Tom Merry on the back, and shook his hands with great enthusiasm.

Tom Merry was not looking his usual sunny self.

His face was pale, and his eyes had dark circles; he looked as if he had been through a troubled time.

But he was evidently glad to be back at St. Jim's, after his mysterious absence of a week from the old school.

"It's good to see you again, old man," said Manners, squeezing his arm. "Where have you been all this time?"

Tom shook his head.

"I don't know!" he answered.

"You don't know!" ejaculated Blake of the Fourth.

"No—only I've been a prisoner. I suppose you all knew that much," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We knew that," said Manners. "But——"

"Heah comes Wailton!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Make way for Mr. Wailton, you fellahs."

The juniors crowded back as the School House master came up. It was close on time for lessons that Saturday morning, but nobody was thinking of lessons for the moment—not even the masters. The return of the kidnapped junior banished all other topics. Like wildfire, the word ran through the school that Tom Merry had returned.

"Merry!" Mr. Railton shook hands with the Shell fellow. "You have returned, then—you have been released—"

"Yes, sir," said Tom. "I'm jolly glad to get back to the school."

"No doubt!" said Mr. Railton. "Come with me to the Head at once, Merry."

"Certainly, sir."

Tom Merry walked off to the School House with the Housemaster. He left the quadrangle behind him buzzing with excited St. Jim's fellows.

"Bai Jove! Isn't it wippin'!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"Wathah wotten of old Wailton to march him off befoah he could tell us all about it, though. I am weally cuwious."

"I guess it's a queer case," remarked Kit Wildrake of the Fourth. "We knew that Tom had been kidnapped, and that that galoot calling himself Nemo wanted a ransom for him. What have they let him go for?"

"Pewwaps the wansom has been paid, deah boy!" suggested Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

"The Head wouldn't!" said Blake.

"But he said he was weleased, Blake."

"Yes—but——"

"And Kildare of the Sixth, and Monty Lowther of the Shell, are still pwisonahs somewheah," said Arthur Augustus. "The wottahs have only weleased Tom Mewwy. I wathah think it will turn out that the Head has come to terms with that wotten kidnappah."

"I guess it looks like it," said Wildrake.

"Anyhow, Tom's come back!" said Blake. "It does one good to see his old chivvy again."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I say, the Head ought to give us a holiday, on an occasion like this," chimed in Baggy Trimble.

"There goes the giddy bell."

"Bai Jove! It's wathah wotten to have to go into classes this mornin'," exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Just atfah old Tommy has walked in, and he hasn't had time to tell us all about it. Lessons are a bore at any time—but this mornin'——"

"Horrid!" said Cardew of the Fourth. "Go and ask the Head to give the whole school a holiday, Gussy, just to mark the happy occasion."

"Bai Jove! I think I will, you know," said Arthur Augustus. "I weally do not think I could put my thoughts into Form work this mornin'. I will wequest the Head——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You won't, fathead," said Jack Blake, linking his arm in that of his noble chum. "The Head's busy with Tommy just now; besides, you've got pals to see that you don't play the giddy ox."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Come on," said Digby. "We shall be late."

"But I am goin' to wequest the Head——"

"Come on!" said Herries.

"Welease my arm, Blake——"

"Ain't I your keeper?" demanded Blake. "Come on, fathead."

"Bai Jove! I uttably wefuse to wegard you as my keepah, Blake," exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"I considah——"

"This way!" grinned Blake.

Arthur Augustus was marched off to the Form-room by his chums. The juniors, still in a state of great excitement, were dispersing for the various class-rooms. Arthur Augustus was not to be allowed to act upon Cardew's playful suggestion. Even in the midst of such excitement, the school work had to go upon the accustomed tenor of its way.

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But Arthur Augustus did not agree. It was, in Gussy's opinion, a day worthy to be marked with a white stone. A holiday was exactly the thing to meet the circumstances, in Gussy's opinion. He had no choice about going into the Fourth Form room, because Blake had a grip on one of his noble arms, and Herries on the other. But he went protesting. And when Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, came in to take his class, Arthur Augustus jumped up in his place like a Jack-in-the-box.

"If you please, Mr. Lathom—" he jerked out.

"Dry up, ass!" whispered Blake.

"I refuse to dwy up, Blake."

Mr. Lathom blinked at Arthur Augustus over his spectacles.

"What is it, D'Arcy?" he inquired mildly.

"Tom Mewwy has returned, sir—"

"I am aware of it, D'Arcy."

"In the cirs, sir—"

"The what?"

"The—the circumstances, sir, do you not think that lessons are wathah superfluous on such a happy occasion, sir?"

"What!"

"I twust, sir, that you agwee with me that a holiday would be the pwopah capah, sir."

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Lathom.

"I twust, sir, that you see—"

"I see nothing of the kind, D'Arcy. You may sit down."

"But, sir—"

"And you may take fifty lines, D'Arcy!" added Mr. Lathom severely.

"Oh, bai Jove! I was only suggestin', sir—"

"That will do."

"But I was only suggestin'—"

"Take a hundred lines, D'Arcy!"

"Oh cwumbs!"

Arthur Augustus said no more.

CHAPTER 2.

The Return of Tom Merry.

D R. HOLMES, the Head of St. Jim's, shook hands warmly with Tom Merry as the junior came into the study with Mr. Railton. It was obvious that the Head was very glad and relieved to see the kidnapped junior again, safe and sound.

"My dear boy," exclaimed the Head, "I am overjoyed to see you among us again! You may sit down, my boy!" He glanced at Mr. Railton. "The rascal who calls himself Nemo has kept his word, Mr. Railton. The boy has been returned to us now that the ransom has been paid."

The Housemaster nodded.

"So it seems, sir," he answered.

"Have you suffered in any way, Merry, in the hands of those rascals?" asked the Head.

"No, sir; only it was rotten being shut up so long without any fresh air," answered Tom Merry.

"You feel able to tell us exactly what happened, my boy?"

"Certainly, sir!"

"Then pray do so."

"I haven't very much to tell, sir," said Tom Merry. "I suppose Manners and Lowther told you how we were going over to Wayland, last Saturday, when I left them in the wood? I was collared there quite suddenly. Two men seized me in the wood, and they had me down before I could hit out."

"And then?"

"They put something over my face—something that smelt horribly sickly," said Tom. "It must have been a cloth with chloroform on it, I suppose. I tried not to breathe it, but I had no chance. I don't know what happened afterwards."

"But after you came to your senses?"

"I found myself in a room, sir, alone. How I had got there I don't know."

"Have you any recollection of being conveyed in a car?"

"None at all, sir. But I might have been in a car, or anything else, so far as I know. I don't know how long I was unconscious. I woke up with a headache, and feeling hungry."

"What kind of a place were you in?" asked Mr. Railton.

"A sort of hut, sir—a wooden building, anyhow. The walls and roof were of hard, thick planks, and there was no window. There was some sort of ventilator in the top, out of my reach. The only light came from a small lamp fixed high up on the wall. I never saw daylight at all."

"Good heavens!" muttered the Head.

"There were a few articles of furniture in the hut," continued Tom. "Not much in that way. I couldn't even discover whether it was a room in a building or a hut standing by itself somewhere."

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"And whom did you see during your imprisonment?" asked Mr. Railton.

"Only one man, sir; and I didn't see much of him, as he kept his face covered by a cardboard mask," said Tom. "I thought of tackling him several times, but he was too big for me; and I could hear others about the place, though I never saw them. The man came in twice each day, as I reckoned by my watch, though I couldn't tell night from day where I was. He brought me two meals regularly, and attended to the lamp, and twice he brought me a daily newspaper to read."

"A newspaper?" said Mr. Railton. "What paper?"

"The 'Manchester Guardian,' sir," said Tom. "I reckoned from that that I had been taken to a good distance from Sussex. I believe that paper circulates mostly in the North."

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"That coincides with the fact that the kidnapper telephoned to me from Birmingham, Mr. Railton," he remarked. "And the postmark on the letter he sent, demanding ransom, was that of Coventry."

"True, sir," assented Mr. Railton.

"And in what way were you released, my boy?" continued the Head.

"I don't know when it was, sir," said Tom. "The man came into my room—whether by day or night I don't know—and told me I was to be released. I was awfully bucked, of course. I—I'd been feeling frightfully rotten and down. I'd have liked to punch his head, all the same." Tom Merry paused and coloured.

"No doubt," said the Head, with a smile. "But what happened?"

"He told me I had to take a long journey, and that I was not to be allowed to see anything from the windows of the car," said Tom. "So he was going to give me chloroform. I—I think I should have put up a bit of a tussle at that. But two more men came into the room, with masked faces like the other villain, and they seized on me and put a cloth over my face. Then I went off again, just as I had done the previous time."

"My poor boy!" said the Head. "Depend upon it, the rascals shall yet be found and punished. And after that? Where were you when you came to your senses again?"

"In Wayland Wood, sir," said Tom. "I was quite alone, and lying in the grass not far from the footpath to the moor. I sat up, with the sun on my face, and thought I was dreaming at first. But I soon saw where I was, and—and I could have cried just then, sir. It seemed so ripping to be in the open air again after being shut up so long. I had to sit and rest a bit, as my head was dizzy; but it passed off, and I got up and walked here, sir."

"It is fairly clear," said the Head. "He was brought back to the neighbourhood of the school in a car, and left in the wood, to walk home when he recovered, Mr. Railton."

The Housemaster nodded.

"I am afraid he will not be able to give Inspector Skeat much information of value," said the Head, with a sigh. "I had hoped for something more. But the rascals seem to have taken every precaution for their safety. While you were a prisoner, Merry, did you see anything or hear anything of other prisoners?"

"No, sir."

"Then you know nothing of Kildare or Lowther?"

Tom Merry started.

"Kildare—Lowther!" he repeated.

"Kildare disappeared while searching for you, and is known to be in the hands of the same gang, Merry." "Good heavens!" breathed Tom. "And Lowther, sir—my chum! Has anything happened to him?"

"I am sorry to say, yes. A few days ago Lowther, Manners, and Wildrake went out to search for you, against my strict orders, and Lowther failed to return. He is a prisoner of the kidnappers."

"Oh, sir!" gasped Tom.

The gladness faded out of the face of the released junior. He was free again, and his chum was a prisoner in the same ruthless hands! It was more than sufficient to cloud Tom Merry's joy.

"The police are at work, my boy," said the Head kindly. "We hope for the best. As you have not been harmed, there is no reason to suppose that Lowther has suffered. Probably I shall receive a demand for ransom, as in your case."

"Ransom!" repeated Tom.

"You do not know why you were released," said the Head. "The kidnapper demanded five hundred pounds ransom."

"You did not pay it, sir!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"As your rescue appeared impossible, Merry, I considered it my duty to do so," said the Head. "Your guardian, Miss Fawcett, is not in a state of health to be consulted about the matter, and your uncle is abroad. The kidnapper demanded that the money should be placed in the hollow oak in Wayland Wood, and it was placed there, and the



"There is some secret means of access to the hollow of this oak," said Inspector Fix. He removed his hat, and inserted his head into the hollow trunk, at the same time turning on the light of an electric torch in the hollow. Mr. Railton watched him in silence. It was fully five minutes before the Scotland Yard man withdrew his head. (See page 8.)

spot watched by the police and Mr. Railton and two of the prefects. The packet was, however, taken without the man being seen.

"Is it possible, sir?" exclaimed Tom, in amazement. "But if the place was watched—"

"It is a mystery how the money was taken, Merry," said Mr. Railton quietly. "But it is being investigated, and there may be a discovery. The man certainly did not approach the oak—my eyes were upon it the whole time—yet the packet of currency notes was removed from the hollow in the trunk. We may, however, be thankful that the rascal has kept his engagement and sent you back to us."

"I suppose I wasn't any further use to him, sir," said Tom. "If he'd broken his word the money wouldn't have been paid a second time, and so it paid him to keep his word."

"Quite so, my boy."

"But about Lowther, sir?" said Tom Merry anxiously.

"I do not think you need be alarmed for him, Merry. I expect a new demand for ransom for him," said Dr. Holmes. "But I have every hope that the police will be successful in his case. But I think you have not breakfasted yet this morning, Merry?"

"Not yet, sir."

"You may go to the House-dame, and afterwards you may go into the Form-room or not, as you feel disposed," said the Head.

"Thank you, sir."

"I shall ask Inspector Skeat to call here as quickly as possible to hear your story," said the Head. "I will send for you when he comes."

"Very well, sir."

And Tom Merry left the Head's study, leaving the two masters deep in consultation.

Mrs. Mimms, the House-dame, made much of Tom Merry that morning, and he enjoyed a record breakfast. After that he went to the Shell Form-room, feeling quite his old self again by this time. There was a buzz in the Shell when Tom Merry came in.

Mr. Linton, the Form-master, greeted him with a genial smile, unbending his usual severity of countenance.

"I am very glad to see you among us again, Merry!" he said, shaking hands with Tom. "You may take your place, my boy."

And Tom Merry took his place, next to Manners, who beamed upon him. And if there was an unusual amount of whispering in the Shell that morning, Mr. Linton tactfully took no heed of it.

CHAPTER 3.

Wildrake Wants to Know!

TOM MERRY was surrounded by a crowd of fellows the minute that classes were dismissed that morning.

His face was very bright; it seemed almost like a dream to him, after his long imprisonment, to be back at the old school, among his friends and the old familiar faces and surroundings. It was only the thought of Monty Lowther, missing from the school, that clouded his satisfaction. He had fully expected to be greeted on his return by both his chums, Manners and Lowther, and it was a blow to him to find that Lowther was not there. In that very hour, Monty Lowther was in the same imprisonment from which Tom had been released, there was no doubt on that point. But Tom was hopeful of seeing his chum again soon. It was known that Lowther's uncle was to arrive at the school that day, and if other means failed, it was probable that the ransom would be paid, as in Tom Merry's case.

In the green old quad Tom Merry had to relate his strange adventure to a keenly interested and excited crowd. Kit Wildrake, of the Fourth, listened as keenly as any, but in silence. It was not till after the story had been fully told, and Tom walked away with Manners, that the Canadian junior came up to him.

"I guess I'd like a word or two with you, Merry," Wildrake remarked, "then I'll leave you to Manners."

"Go ahead!" said Tom.

Manners frowned a little. It was while following Wildrake's lead that Monty Lowther had fallen into the hands of the kidnappers. The Canadian junior read his expression and smiled.

"I guess I'm not going to put up a stunt," he said. "You can't reasonably blame me for what happened the other day. I guess I wanted us to keep together, and you and Lowther would separate. But I'm not putting up a stunt. I reckon I'm going into this thing on my lovely own. I only want some information."

"I think I've told everything I can," said Tom Merry. Manners was silent.

"I guess so. But I'd like to put a question all the same. You've said that they chloroformed you when they caught you, and you never knew where you were taken?"

"That's so."

"They gave you the impression that you'd been taken in a car?"

"Well, I was brought back in a car, so I suppose I was taken away in the same fashion," said Tom.

"How do you know?"

"Well, they told me I had to take a long journey when I was released."

"They told you!" Wildrake smiled. "They've told the Head things, too. No end of talk about a car—and no car seen! I guess I don't take much stock in that car!"

"But I was taken to a distance," said Tom.

"How do you know that?"

"It seems pretty clear, as this vicinity was ransacked and nothing was discovered."

"Anything else?"

"They twice gave me a paper to read, and it was a North-country paper," said Tom. "It wouldn't have been handy to give me if they hadn't been in the North, or at least in the Midlands."

"You don't reckon they sent for it on purpose?"

Tom stared.

"Why should they? They'd naturally hand me any old paper they had around, I should think."

"Why should they give you a paper at all?"

"I asked for something to read, to pass the time," said Tom.

"They didn't show you much consideration in other ways?"

"No."

"But they were kind enough to get you a paper—a North-country paper," said Wildrake. "Don't you kinder figure it out that they wanted to give you the impression that you were a long way from St. Jim's, so that you'd pass that impression on when you got back?"

Tom Merry started.

"It's possible, I suppose," he admitted, after some thought.

Manners broke in rather impatiently.

"I know you're jolly cute, Wildrake. But there's nothing in it. You are a bit too cute, I think. You worked it out before that all the evidence was N.G., and that Tom was a prisoner near the school, and we found out nothing, and Lowther was taken—"

"I was doing my best," said Wildrake composedly, "and I guess I keep to the same belief. Just one question more, Tom. You remember when you woke up after the drug, you found yourself in a wooden hut, with no daylight to be seen?"

"That's so."

"What state were your clothes in?"

"My clothes?" repeated Tom blankly.

"Yep."

"Blessed if I follow you, Wildrake," said the captain of the Shell in perplexity. "My clobber was rather rumpled and dusty, after the bit of a tussle I put up when they collared me."

"Anything like straw clinging to it?"

"Straw?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Yep!"

"Oh, draw it mild, for goodness' sake!" exclaimed Manners with great impatience. "Really, this is too thick, Wildrake. What the thump are you driving at now?"

"Hold on, Manners," said Tom, with wonder in his face. "I don't know why Wildrake has asked the question, but, as a matter of fact, there were several wisps of straw about my clothes and in my boots. I happened to notice them."

Wildrake's eyes gleamed.

"Suppose there were?" grunted Manners. "I don't see that it leads to anything."

"You wouldn't!" said Wildrake, rather dryly.

"Look here!" began Manners.

"That's all I wanted to know, I guess," said Wildrake; and he walked away without saying another word.

Tom Merry stared after him and then looked at Manners.

"What was Wildrake getting at?" he asked.

"Blessed if I know," said Manners with a grunt. "I know he came to our study the other day with his blessed theorising, and Lowther and I went out with him, and Monty never came back."

"Well, that wasn't Wildrake's fault, old chap," said Tom. THE GEM LIBRARY. No. 745.

Merry mildly. "He's a clever beggar, and he was doing his best."

Manners grunted. The disastrous result of the expedition to Wayland Moor worried Manners, and he blamed himself for having broken bounds on that occasion. Whether Wildrake was right or wrong, there was no doubt that if Monty Lowther had remained within bounds that day he would not have fallen into the clutches of the mysterious Nemo and his gang.

"If Wildrake's got any wheeze for looking for old Monty," continued Tom, "I jolly well want to know it! I want to take a hand!"

"That you jolly well sha'n't!" exclaimed Manners warmly. "Now you're safe back you're not going to land yourself with the kidnappers again. The whole school's gated, too."

"But—" began Tom.

"You can't break bounds," said Manners. "What would the Head think if you cleared out of bounds on the very day that you've got home from being kidnapped? You can't do it, Tom."

Tom Merry nodded.

"I suppose it wouldn't do!" he said. "I've no right to give the Head any more trouble. I've given him trouble enough already, goodness knows! My uncle will make good the money he paid, if it's not recovered; but he's risked losing it, and it's a big sum. I—I suppose we shall have to leave this bizney to others."

"The rotters are bound to be nabbed soon," said Manners. "I hope so. Hallo! Here's Monty's uncle!"

Two gentlemen were crossing the quadrangle to the School House. One of them, a tall and rather severe-looking man, the juniors recognised as Mr. James Lowther, J.P., the uncle of their chum, and his guardian. The other was a shorter, stouter man, whom the juniors had seen before, but did not immediately recognise.

"I know that chap's face!" said Manners.

"I've seen him," said Tom. "Oh, I know; it's Fix!"

"Fix!" repeated Manners.

"The Scotland Yard johnny, the detective who was here once," said Tom. "Mr. Lowther has brought him down on the case, I suppose. I'm jolly glad! It's pretty clear that the thing's above the weight of the local police."

The two gentlemen passed into the house.

CHAPTER 4.

Mr. Fix of Scotland Yard!

DR. HOLMES had a letter in his hand when Mr. Lowther and Mr. Fix were shown into his study. He laid the letter down, and rose, courteously to greet his visitors.

He was a little surprised to see Mr. Fix, the Scotland Yard detective. He remembered that gentleman, whose duties had once brought him to St. Jim's.

"I have taken the liberty of bringing Mr. Fix with me," Mr. Lowther explained. "As there was no news of my nephew, and the local police seem helpless—"

"Mr. Fix is taking up the case?"

"Exactly. The Wayland police have not called on Scotland Yard for help," said Mr. Lowther. "I blame them very much. I have been able to arrange for Mr. Fix to take the case, and as he has some knowledge of this district, it should help."

"I am very glad indeed to see a Scotland Yard man taking up the matter," said the Head heartily; indeed, his satisfaction was so open that Mr. Fix smiled. "I have no doubt that it will lead to good results. Pray be seated, gentlemen."

"No news of my nephew Montague, sir?"

"Only from the kidnapper," said the Head.

"You have heard from him?"

"In this letter."

Dr. Holmes passed the letter to the two gentlemen. It ran, in typewriting, on paper that bore no address:

"DR. HOLMES.—You will see that I have kept my word; Tom Merry has been freed. If Lowther's relations desire to see him again, the same sum—£500—must be paid. The same price must be paid for Kildare's freedom. I will communicate details to you later.

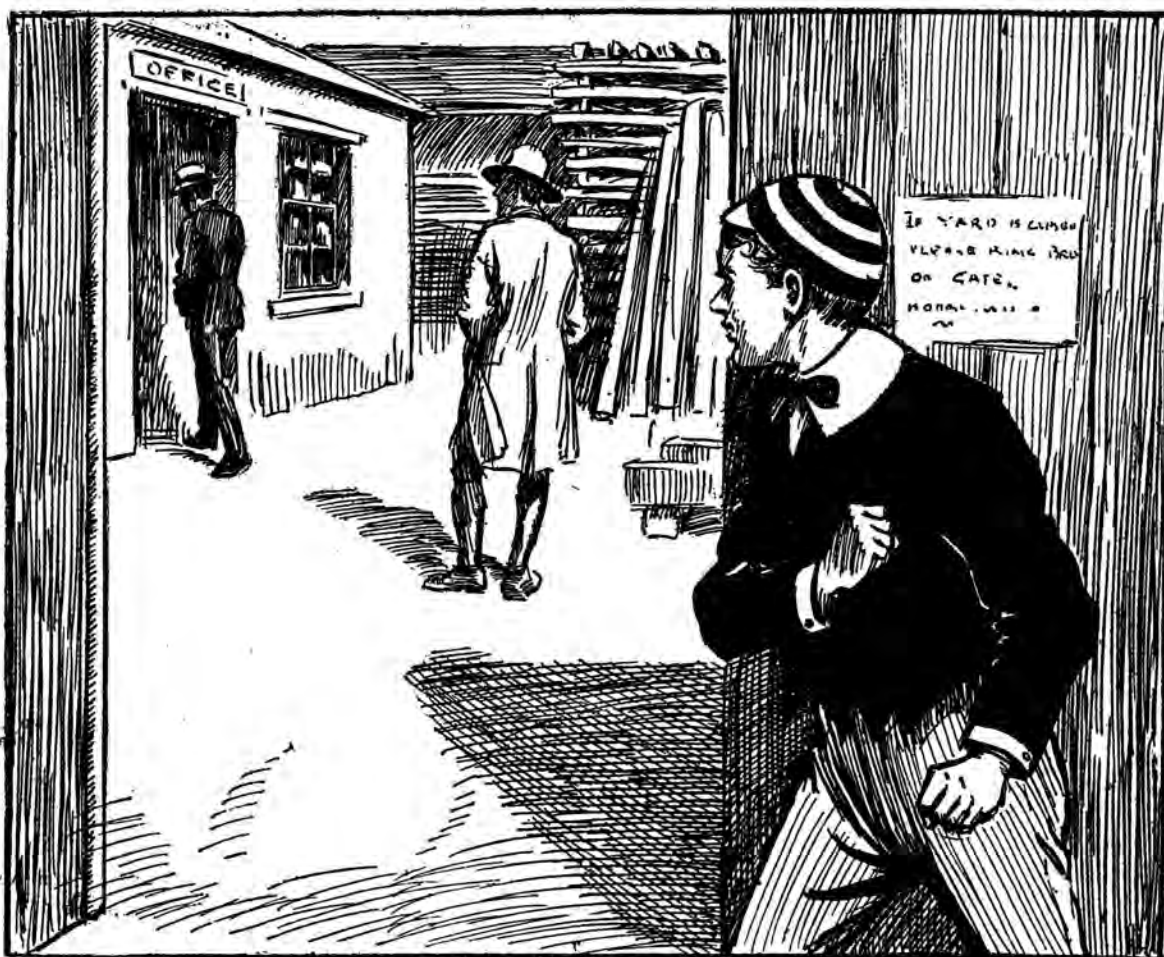
"NEMO."

"The insolent rascal!" exclaimed the J.P. indignantly. "Am I to understand, Dr. Holmes, that you yielded to this villain's threats, and actually paid over the money in the case of the boy Merry?"

The Head quietly explained the circumstances.

"You must excuse my saying so, Dr. Holmes, but it was a very ill-advised step to take," said the J.P. grimly. "The ruffian is now encouraged to keep on his rascally black-mailing."

"The boy had been missing so long, and I am responsible—"



As the miller entered the timber-yard, his eyes fell upon the figure of Inspector Fix just entering the office. For some moments Mr. Brown stood looking at the detective, then he walked on through the yard. Keeping in the shadow of a great baulk of timber, Wildrake kept his eyes on the man in the white hat. (See page 10.)

"Your kindness of heart does you credit, sir; but it was a very ill-advised step," said the J.P. obstinately. "I certainly shall not dream for one moment of paying a ransom for the release of my nephew. I would rather spend twice as much on hunting down the rascals and bringing them to justice."

"The matter is in your hands, sir," said the Head quietly. "In Merry's case, there was no immediate relation to refer to. In Lowther's case, your judgment will decide the matter."

"I refuse to be blackmailed!"

"So be it."

"It is extraordinary, sir, that boys in this school are not safe from the machinations of such scoundrels!" said Mr. Lowther sourly.

Dr. Holmes flushed.

"My care of my boys has never been questioned before," he answered tartly. "In the case of your nephew, he broke school bounds against my express orders, and I did not even know he was absent till after he had been taken by these ruffians."

"Then he deserves any sufferings that may fall upon him in consequence of his disobedience," said the justice of the peace grimly. "A little hardship may teach him the value of discipline! Nevertheless he must be rescued, and the lawless rascals brought to justice." Mr. Lowther rose. "As there is no news, and I am unable to act personally in the matter, I will not waste your time, Dr. Holmes. Mr. Fix is well able to deal with the case."

And after a few words more, Monty Lowther's uncle took his leave; evidently in a state of considerable annoyance and exasperation.

Mr. Fix remained.

The Scotland Yard gentleman was a man of few words; he had hardly spoken hitherto.

When Mr. Lowther was gone, however, he drew from the Head a succinct account of the strange happenings at St.

Jim's. After he had pumped the Head dry, so to speak, he repaired to Mr. Railton's study, for a talk with the House-master.

Mr. Railton gave him a clear account of the placing of the money in the hollow oak in Wayland Wood, and it's mysterious abstraction while a watch was being kept on the spot.

"Very remarkable!" said Mr. Fix.

"It is a complete mystery to me," Mr. Railton remarked.

"What is the opinion of Inspector Skeat?"

"He is quite puzzled," said Mr. Railton. "There has been an examination made of the tree, naturally; but nothing has transpired."

"After I have seen Merry, sir, perhaps you could find the time to guide me to the spot."

"With pleasure," said Mr. Railton. "Shall I send for Merry?"

"Pray do."

Mr. Railton rang, and Tom Merry was sent for. The captain of the Shell came in a few minutes.

Once more Tom Merry had to relate his story. Mr. Fix listened very attentively, only interrupting him with a question now and then.

When he had learned all that the junior could tell him, Tom was dismissed; and a few minutes later Detective-Inspector Fix and Mr. Railton left the School House together.

The detective was very thoughtful during the walk to Wayland Wood and along the footpath.

"A very unusual case," he remarked, at length. "This man who calls himself Nemo seems to have taken this scheme of kidnapping up as a regular business. It was injudicious of Dr. Holmes to encourage him by the payment of money, yet—"

"No other course seemed open, sir; and a careful watch was kept," said the Housemaster. "It still amazes me how

the rascal succeeded in abstracting the money without being caught."

Mr. Fix nodded.

"And although the police have been searching for traces of the car, nothing has been learned of it," added Mr. Railton. "That also is very perplexing."

"Ah, yes! The car!" said Mr. Fix vaguely. "It seems certain that the kidnapped boys were taken to a distance." The man from Scotland Yard coughed. "Yet a singular fact strikes me, Mr. Railton."

"And that?" asked the Housemaster, with interest.

"Only boys of St. Jim's have been kidnapped and held to ransom. If the man Nemo is really working from a distance, say, the Midlands, why should he concentrate on this school in Sussex?"

"I really cannot answer that, Mr. Fix."

"There are boys with very wealthy relations at other public schools, say, Eton or Winchester," said Mr. Fix. "The game would be at least as safe to play in those localities; yet the man devotes his whole attention to one school, though the whole neighbourhood here is on the alert for him, which is not the case in other quarters. That rather argues a close connection with this vicinity, does it not?"

Mr. Railton knitted his brows.

"It does seem so!" he admitted. "But you would not suggest that the man's headquarters are in this neighbourhood. The search has been very thorough."

"No doubt. But we shall see what we shall see!" said Mr. Fix, apparently not disposed to commit himself further.

"Here is the oak!" said the Housemaster, a few minutes later.

Mr. Fix stopped, and observed his surroundings with a very keen eye. The old oak, one of the most ancient trees in the wood, stood near the footpath, at a little distance from other trees. The hollow in the trunk was quite visible to the eye from the footpath.

"We were in cover in the surrounding trees," said Mr. Railton. "There was a clear starlight all night. It is incredible that anyone can have approached the oak without having been seen."

"Apparently."

Mr. Fix approached the oak, and stretched his hand into the hollow. It was deep and wide, and wherever his fingers touched, they touched solid wood that closed it in.

"The packet was dropped into this hollow?"

"By my hand," said Mr. Railton.

"No one approached the tree while you watched—?"

"No one."

"Yet the packet was gone when you looked again?"

"Yes; it is amazing."

"There was no sleeping on the watch?"

"I can answer for myself, and for Inspector Skeat, who was close to me in yonder thicket," said the Housemaster.

"There were also two constables and two senior boys of St. Jim's, and they assured me that they had not closed their eyes during the watch."

"Then only one explanation remains," said Mr. Fix quietly. "There is some secret means of access to the hollow in the oak."

"That occurred to me, of course—but the tree seems solid enough, excepting for the hollow—"

"Things are not always what they seem," said Mr. Fix. He removed his hat, and inserted his head into the hollow trunk, at the same time turning on the light of an electric torch in the hollow. Mr. Railton watched him in silence. It was full five minutes before the Scotland Yard man withdrew his head.

When he did so, he looked at Mr. Railton with a slight smile, and a glimmer in his eyes.

"The tree is not so solid as appearance would indicate," he said. "The bottom of the hollow is not natural. Formerly it extended deeper into the tree, but it has been blocked up—"

"Blocked up!" repeated Mr. Railton.

"Undoubtedly. It has been done very cleverly; but what appears to be the bottom of the hollow is, in fact, nothing but a kind of wooden lid, carefully secured," said the detective tranquilly. "Below it, I am fairly certain, is a deeper hollow, extending probably down among the roots. Large enough to shelter a man," added the detective with a grim smile.

Mr. Railton started.

"Mr. Fix! You do not think—"

"I do, Mr. Railton. A small man could squeeze into this hollow easily enough, and drop into the hollow beneath, which is evidently much larger. Once there, he would replace the wooden lid, as I call it, leaving any casual observer to suppose that the hollow was closed by the natural growth of the tree. It is a cunning hiding place, yet perfectly simple in construction. I fear, Mr. Railton, that while you were watching this tree, the man you expected to come for the money was crouching below the trunk—concealed from your sight. While you watched, he removed the lid from his head, took the bag of currency notes, and replaced it. He was still there, in hiding, when you missed the money, and gave up the watch. After you had gone, he emerged when the coast was clear."

Mr. Railton breathed hard.

"It is almost incredible!" he stammered.

"But indubitable," said Mr. Fix tranquilly.

"In that case, sir, if the rascal demands another ransom to be placed in the same spot, it will be easy to lay him by the heels," exclaimed the Housemaster.

The Scotland Yard man smiled.

"No doubt. But he is not likely to take the risk," he said. "He has done with the hollow oak, Mr. Railton." The detective looked at his watch. "I will walk on to Wayland now, and call on Inspector Skeat. Doubtless he will have the ground here excavated to ascertain exactly what transpired that night. Good-afternoon, Mr. Railton."

The Scotland Yard man walked on by the footpath, and Mr. Railton, in a very surprised frame of mind, returned to the school. Startling as the detective's explanation was, Mr. Railton had little doubt of it, and it gave him a high opinion of Mr. Fix's acuteness. For the first time, Mr. Railton had a real hope that the mystery would be solved, and the kidnapping gang brought to justice.

CHAPTER 5.

Wildrake Speaks.

MR. FIX, of Scotland Yard, was the cynosure of all eyes at St. Jim's during the next day or two.

The detective had taken up his quarters at the school, a room being assigned to him in the School House; and he was frequently seen walking in the quad or the Head's garden. On Sunday he attended service in the school chapel, and probably received more attention from the St. Jim's fellows than the Head did.

Tom Merry & Co. were, of course, keenly interested in him. Upon him depended the rescue of Monty Lowther, and of Kildare, the captain of the school.

And already they thought a great deal of his abilities, for his theory with regard to the hollow oak had been proved to be precisely correct.

Inspector Skeat, of Wayland, though inclined privately to pooh-poo the expert's theory, had acted upon his suggestion, and on Saturday afternoon a discovery had been made at the hollow oak.

Deep digging under the ancient tree had disclosed the fact that the huge trunk was hollow to the roots—hollow to the extent of affording room for a six-foot man to hide himself easily in the recess.

The hollow had been barred by carefully-fitting wood, at some feet above the ground.

It made, as Mr. Fix had put it, a kind of lid, and it was

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upon that lid that Mr. Railton had placed the packet of currency notes.

The mystery of the oak was a mystery no longer; it was obvious that a member of the gang had been concealed in the hollow chamber below, and had removed the lid and taken the bag, then replacing the lid and securing it hermetically from below.

Inspector Skeat fairly gritted his teeth as he thought of it, and realised that at the very moment he had given up the watch, the kidnapper's agent had been concealed below the hollow tree, with the five hundred pounds in his possession—within a few feet of the baffled watchers!

The secret would probably never have come to light but for the visit of Mr. Fix of Scotland Yard; and, in consequence, he was honoured with a good deal of admiration by the juniors of St. Jim's.

What Mr. Fix's next step was to be, the St. Jim's fellows did not know, and could not guess, curious as they were.

"I would give a great deal to know what's goin' on in his brain box, you know," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked. "The old beggar's awfully deep, you know. I wathah think that he will be too much for those wascals, deah boys."

Gussy's opinion was generally shared, and on Monday the St. Jim's fellows were expecting to hear that there was news. But there was no news; they were only aware that Mr. Fix was taking long walks, but where his long walks led him they did not know.

Wildrake of the Fourth was keenly interested in Mr. Fix's movements—perhaps more than the other fellows. From the detective having taken up his headquarters at the school, Wildrake guessed that Mr. Fix's theory was similar to his own—that the mystery, if it was solved at all, would be solved in the neighbourhood of St. Jim's!

him with regard to the details of the unlucky expedition in which Monty Lowther had disappeared.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Fix," said Wildrake. "I—I was coming to your room to speak to you—"

"Well, here I am," said Mr. Fix.

"You're going out, sir?"

"I can spare a few minutes if you have anything to say, my boy."

"I wanted to ask you a favour, sir," said Wildrake, colouring. "I—I want very specially to go over to Wayland, and, as you know, the whole school is gated. I—I thought perhaps you'd let me walk with you next time you went over to the town—the Housemaster would let me go then. I—I know it's a cheek to ask you—"

Mr. Fix smiled genially.

"Something awfully important?" he asked. "Looking for a new cricket bat, or something weighty like that?"

"Not exactly that, sir, but I should like to go, and if you'd be so kind, and wouldn't think it a cheek—"

"Well," said the detective thoughtfully, "perhaps it is rather a cheek. Master Wildrake. But I was a boy myself once, and was considered a cheeky one." He laughed. "I am going to Wayland now, and if you would like to walk with me, I shall be glad of your company, on the understanding that your Housemaster gives you leave."

Wildrake brightened up at once.

"Oh, I guess Mr. Railton won't mind, if he knows I'm going with you, sir," he answered.

"Then let us ask him."

"He's in the quad, sir—"

"Get your cap, and we shall pass him, and will ask him on our way," said the good-natured gentleman from Scotland Yard.

"Oh, thanks, sir!"



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Once or twice Kit Wildrake thought of interviewing the Scotland Yard man, and propounding his own surmises to him; but he naturally hesitated to do so. Mr. Fix seemed a very genial gentleman, but it was not likely that an expert detective from Scotland Yard would lend his ear to the theories of a Lower School boy. While Mr. Fix retained his inscrutable silence, Wildrake also was very silent as to the thoughts that were passing in his mind. The disaster to Monty Lowther made the Canadian junior decide to keep his theories to himself, and to act alone if the time came to act. He was irked by the fact that the school was still strictly gated, and a second breaking of bounds was so very serious an offence that Wildrake hesitated to commit it.

After lessons on Tuesday, Wildrake was thinking the matter out, and at last he went to the detective's room, in the hope of finding Mr. Fix there. Mr. Fix occupied a rather spacious room, which was called the Blue Room, on account of the chief colour in its rather ancient decorations. It was approached, from one direction, by a passage that gave on the Fourth Form corridor, and it was from this direction that Wildrake came. Near the door was a large passage window looking on the quadrangle, and at this window Wildrake paused a few minutes before knocking at the detective's door. Below him in the quad he caught sight of Tom Merry and Manners, walking together by the old elms in deep talk. He could guess the subject of their earnest conversation—their missing chum, Monty Lowther.

Wildrake was hesitating. He had a favour to ask of Mr. Fix, and he wondered how he would be received. He was still standing by the window, in a state of doubt, when he heard a step behind him, and turned to see the Scotland Yard man coming away from his room, with hat and coat, evidently going out.

Mr. Fix gave the junior a nod and a smile. He had already made Wildrake's acquaintance, having questioned

A couple of minutes later Wildrake and Mr. Fix stopped to speak to the School House master in the sunny quadrangle. Mr. Railton gave his consent at once; certainly there could be no danger to Wildrake in leaving the school in company with the detective.

"But you will find the boy a trouble perhaps," he added. "If he goes with you, Mr. Fix, he must return with you. In the circumstances, the Head would never allow a junior boy to be out of gates alone."

"He shall return with me," said Mr. Fix. "My business in Wayland will not keep me half an hour, and in that time the lad shall visit the shop, or whatever it is he has in view."

"Very good!" said the Housemaster.

And Mr. Fix and Wildrake quitted the school together—followed by a good many glances from the St. Jim's fellows.

They walked through the wood to Wayland, passing the hollow oak on their way. Mr. Fix glanced at it, and noted with a smile the excavations made by Inspector Skeat's men. Mr. Fix said little during the walk, but he encouraged Wildrake to talk, and Wildrake told him a good deal about Canada and the Boot Leg Ranch. He was wondering whether to venture upon the subject of his theory with regard to the kidnappers when they arrived in Wayland.

"And now," said Mr. Fix, "I will leave you in the shop you have to visit, and call for you afterwards."

"I'm going to the timber-yard, sir," said Wildrake.

Mr. Fix raised his eyebrows.

"The timber-yard!" he repeated.

"Yes—Mason's," said Wildrake. "It's the only one in Wayland, I guess—near the railway-station."

They walked on in silence for a few minutes along Wayland High Street, the detective giving his schoolboy companion several sidelong glances. He spoke at last.

"It happens, Master Wildrake, that my destination is Mason's timber-yard," he said.

"Is it, sir?"

"May I ask, my boy, why you are going there? I suppose a boy in the Fourth Form is not buying timber?"

Wildrake smiled.

"I guess not, sir. I just want to ask a man a question there."

"What man, may I ask?"

"The foreman."

"It is a very odd coincidence that I am going there to ask the foreman a question," said Mr. Fix. "Come, Wildrake, this needs explaining. What is it you have in your mind?"

The Canadian junior was silent. Mason's timber-yard was in sight now—a large enclosure near the railway sidings, with great baulks and stacks of timber in sight, and a wooden office near the wide-open gates.

"Will you tell me what question you want to ask the foreman of the timber-yard, Wildrake?" asked Mr. Fix, with a note of insistence in his voice.

"Sure!" said Wildrake at last.

"The question, then?"

"You know, sir, I suppose, that the Wayland timber-yard is the only one in this neighbourhood," said Wildrake slowly. "Any man that wanted timber to build a new hut would naturally go there."

"Most probably."

"Even if he didn't want to draw attention to his building, sir, he would still go there, as having timber brought by road from a greater distance would attract still more attention."

The detective eyed the junior narrowly.

"You are a very sharp lad for your age, Wildrake," he said quietly. "You are thinking of Tom Merry's statement that he was imprisoned in a wooden hut."

"Sure!" confessed Wildrake.

"You think it was a new hut?"

"I'd gamble on it, sir," said Wildrake confidently.

"And why?"

"Because every older building for a good many miles round is known, and has been looked into," said the Canadian junior, "and Tom says that there was no daylight—and a hut built where there is no daylight must have been put up specially."

"Quite so," said Mr. Fix. "You have learned to use your brains, my lad. But is it not common knowledge that a car was used, and that, therefore, the place of imprisonment was not in this neighbourhood at all?"

"So everybody seems to think, sir."

"But you do not think so!" exclaimed the detective sharply.

"Nope!"

"Why not?"

Wildrake, now that the subject had been raised by the detective himself, did not hesitate. He explained his reasons, as he had explained them to Manners and Lowther before the ill-fated expedition of the previous week.

Mr. Fix listened very attentively.

"Too much talk of a car, I guess," said Wildrake finally. "I figured it out that that was only a blind. Of course, I may be wrong. But I guess I want to know whether Mr. Mason has supplied timber for a hut during the past few weeks—"

"Doubtless he has supplied timber for a dozen huts in that period, Wildrake."

"Very likely, sir; but I want to know whether he has supplied it to Mr. Brown, the miller, of Wayland Moor."

Mr. Fix gave a violent start.

"Wildrake, what do you mean?"

Wildrake coloured a little.

"It's very vague, sir, I guess," he said, "but Mr. Brown, the miller, has been in this neighbourhood only a few weeks, and there's precious little trade on that spot for a windmill, now that most of the land's turned into pasture; it was different when the old mill was built long ago."

"Is that all?"

"Nope! The miller keeps half a dozen men, with hardly any trade doing, and only a potato field to look after, so far as I've been able to see. He keeps a few horses and a cart or two, and some pigs; but there can't be much work for half a dozen men. I've asked a good many fellows, and hardly anybody's seen the mill grinding. The miller seems a very good-tempered chap. He looks right as rain, but—"

Wildrake paused.

"Carry on!" said Mr. Fix tersely.

"It was somewhere near the mill that Kildare must have vanished when he was looking for Tom Merry, sir. And Manners and Lowther and I were around the mill when Lowther disappeared. And—"

"And—"

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"I asked Tom Merry whether he found any straw about his clothes when he woke up a prisoner."

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Fix in astonishment.

"Why did you ask Tom Merry such a question?"

"Because, sir," said Wildrake quietly, "after Lowther disappeared, and Manners and I were looking for him, a cart full of straw drove up to the mill. I didn't think of it then—not till afterwards—but I figured it out that if a kidnapper wanted to carry a prisoner in safety he couldn't put it better than that. Any chap could have lain out of sight under a load of straw; and what could look more innocent than a cart of straw?"

Mr. Fix breathed quickly.

"What was Tom Merry's answer to your question?" he asked.

"He found wisps of straw about him."

"Ah!" said Mr. Fix.

"He didn't pick them up in a motor-car, buzzing off to the Midlands," said Wildrake. "But he might have picked them up in a farm-cart, hidden under trusses of straw."

"I shall begin to be very glad that I made your acquaintance, Master Wildrake," said the Scotland Yard man, with a rather curious smile. "Now, here we are at the timber-yard. As we are both on the same quest, you had better leave it to me. Wait for me at the gates, and I will undertake to tell you the result of speaking to the foreman."

"I guess I'll leave it to you with pleasure, sir."

Wildrake remained in the gateway, while Mr. Fix walked on to the wooden office in the yard. From the street a man in a white coat and hat, alighting from a trap, entered the timber-yard. Wildrake gave a slight start as he recognised Mr. Brown, the miller of the moor, whom he had been discussing with Detective-Inspector Fix a few minutes before.

The miller did not heed the schoolboy. He entered the timber-yard, and glanced round him as if in quest of someone, and his eyes fixed upon the figure of the Scotland Yard man, just entering the office. For some moments Mr. Brown stood looking at the detective, and then he walked on through the yard.

Wildrake's heart beat a little faster.

His suspicions with regard to the miller were vague enough. But vague as they were, they had made an impression on Wildrake's keen mind. Keeping in the shadow of a great baulk of timber, he kept his eyes on the man in the white hat.

Five minutes later Mr. Fix came out of the office, and returned to the junior in the gateway.

"Come!" he said briefly.

Wildrake followed him. But a few yards down the street he stopped.

"Excuse me a moment, sir," he said hastily.

He ran back to the gate of the timber-yard. The man in the white hat was just entering the wooden office.

That was all Wildrake wanted to see. He hurried after the detective, and rejoined him.

"Well?" said Mr. Fix rather grimly.

"He's in there, sir," said Wildrake. "The miller—he came into the yard while you were in the office. He hung about till you came out, and then went into the office himself. I guess he knows you by sight, sir, and doesn't want to run into you."

"You guess that, do you?" said Mr. Fix. "And what more do you guess, my amateur detective of the Wild West?"

"I guess he saw you in the street, sir, and followed you here to see what your business was," said Wildrake; "and I reckon that by this time he knows what questions you've been asking the foreman."

Mr. Fix's eyes glimmered.

"You promised to tell me, sir, what the foreman answered, if I left it to you," hinted Wildrake.

"Quite so. I have learned from Mason's foreman that, nearly a month ago, a thousand square, as they call it, of strong matchboard was supplied to Wayland Moor Mill, with a number of beams of two-by-two. For outbuildings, as the foreman supposes."

"I guess those outbuildings aren't up yet," said Wildrake. "I've spotted the place all over and haven't seen any."

"You have made some suggestions, Master Wildrake, that I was very glad to hear," said Mr. Fix. "I trust that I need not mention to so very keen a youth that a still tongue shows a wise head."

"I guess I'm not likely to chew the rag, sir. But if you'll let me, I'd like to ask Tom Merry whether he noticed what kind of timber the hut was built of that he was imprisoned in."

"You shall ask him, and you shall convey his answer to me," said Mr. Fix amicably. "Now let us return to the school."

The detective and the schoolboy walked back to St. Jim's. Mr. Fix uttered hardly a word the whole way, and Wildrake was silent. Both of them were thinking deeply.



"I see no weason whatevah for wibald laughtah, you fellows," said Arthur Augustus, rubbing his noble palm, which appeared to have suffered. "I simply cannot undahstand the Head. I was simply arguin' with him, and he suddenly told me to hold out my hand. He did not even mention the reason—." "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake & Co. (See page 13.)

The Scotland Yard man, evidently, had thought of the clue that might be afforded by the timber used in constructing the prison of the kidnapped junior. But he had known nothing of the mill on the moor or of Mr. Brown, the miller. Wildrake realised that Mr. Fix had plenty of new food for thought now. Wildrake was well aware that in all probability he had put the man from Scotland Yard on the track; but he was very careful not to indicate as much by his manner. Mr. Fix might be sensible enough to listen to suggestions from a schoolboy, but he would certainly have resented any trace of "swank" on the schoolboy's part. But there was no swank about the junior from the Boot Leg Ranch; he was honestly anxious to help in the solution of the mystery, and so long as he helped, he cared nothing at all for getting any credit thereby.

When they arrived at St. Jim's Mr. Fix went to his own room, and Kit Wildrake proceeded to Study No. 10 in the Shell.

CHAPTER 6. News for Trimble!

TOM MERRY greeted the Canadian junior with a friendly nod. Tom and Manners were at tea, and their talk had run on the subject of their missing chum—as their talk generally did now. Manners nodded to Wildrake, but there was no smile on his face. Poor Manners could not forget the hapless expedition which had ended so disastrously. He blamed himself and, naturally, blamed Wildrake, too. He was not ungrateful, but he felt that the expedition had been a hare-brained one, and that it had led to the kidnapping of his chum. Perhaps Manners was a little unreasonable in the view he took, but he was so worried by his chum's misfortune, and the feeling that he was partly responsible for it, that he could be forgiven for being a little unreasonable. Wildrake read his thoughts easily enough, and there was no sign at all of resentment in his looks.

"Take a pew, old chap," said Tom Merry cheerily. "Just in time for tea. I've heard from Trimble that you've been taking a walk with the great man."

"Mr. Fix was kind enough to let me," said Wildrake. "I guess it's rather a treat to get out of gates these days. I've

got a hunch that Mr. Fix won't be so jolly long in seeing Lowther."

Manners looked up quickly.

"You think so?" he asked.

"I calculate he's a clever man and a deep card," said Wildrake. "I've got a lot of faith in him. But I haven't come to tea, Tom. I just wanted to ask you a question."

"Pitch in," said Tom.

"I dare say you used your eyes a bit when you were a prisoner in that hut," said Wildrake. "It was built of wood, you told us."

"Yes; just an ordinary hut."

"Was it built of matchboard?"

Tom raised his eyebrows.

"Yes," he answered.

"Lots of huts are," said Manners. "What about it. Wildrake? Have you got after another of your blessed clues?"

"What sort of beams was the timber fastened to?" asked Wildrake, without heeding Manners.

"Just uprights in the corners and round the roof," said Tom.

"Thin or thick?"

"Blest if I noticed." Tom Merry made an effort to remember. "Not very thick, I know. Two or three inches; not more than three."

"Two by two, perhaps?"

"Something like that," assented Tom.

"Did it look to you like an old hut, or fairly new?" asked Wildrake.

"Oh, pretty new," said Tom, at once. "The boards were unpainted, you know, and the matching was quite clean."

Wildrake's eyes glimmered for a moment. It was what he had more than half expected to hear; but he was very glad to hear it, all the same.

"But what are you driving at, Wildrake?" asked Tom. "If you've got on to anything, you ought to tell us. You know how anxious we are about Lowther."

There was a faint but audible grunt from Manners. Wildrake smiled.

"I guess the least said the soonest mended," he answered.

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"You can't go out of bounds, Tom. It wouldn't be the thing. And Manners is quite fed up with following my lead."

"Quite!" said Manners frankly.

And, with a cheery nod, the Canadian junior walked out of Study No. 10, leaving Tom Merry looking puzzled.

"I fancy he has hold of something, Manners," the captain of the Shell remarked slowly.

"Or fancies he has," said Manners.

"Well, he's a cute chap!"

"It's possible to be too cute," said Manners dryly. "He's after some dashed clue about the dashed timber now, and thinks he will lay his silly finger on the hut where they kept you. If there was such a hut in this neighbourhood it would have been spotted long ago."

"I suppose it would," said Tom thoughtfully, "unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless it was built underground somewhere," said Tom. "I'm certain that there was no daylight in the place where I was kept."

Manners laughed.

"You'll beat Wildrake at that rate," he said. "How the thump could a hut be built underground?"

"There's the quarries on the moor—"

"They've been searched from end to end."

"Well, it beats me," said Tom candidly. "But I wish that Wildrake would be a bit more communicative, all the same. You've frozen him off, old chap. It wasn't his fault about poor old Monty."

"No more than it was mine," said Manners. "But until Monty comes back I want to kick myself for helping to get him into danger. And I feel much the same about Wildrake. If it's unreasonable, I can't help it; there it is, anyhow."

And the subject dropped.

Meanwhile, Kit Wildrake had gone to the Blue Room, where he found Mr. Fix, and reported to him what he had learned from Tom Merry. The dusk was falling now, and Mr. Fix was seated by a cheery, blazing fire in slippers, with a pipe in his mouth. He looked very cheery and genial and comfortable, and, in the light of what happened later, Wildrake remembered the detective as he looked just then. It was, perhaps, as well that the near future was veiled to both the Scotland Yard detective and the schoolboy. Mr. Fix listened attentively to what Wildrake had to tell him, and then dismissed the schoolboy, with a renewed caution to say nothing—a caution that the Canadian junior did not need.

Wildrake arrived in his own study, No. 2 in the Fourth, for prep a little later, and found his study mates, Trimble and Mellish, there, yawning over their work. The Canadian junior set to work at once in his quiet, steady way, putting other matters out of his mind for the time. Baggy Trimble eyed him very curiously.

"You've been out with the detective bird!" he remarked. "I saw you going, you know. I say has Fix told you anything?"

"Likely to!" grinned Mellish.

"But has he?" asked Trimble inquisitively.

"Well, he said one thing I thought was about correct," said Wildrake. "I think I might tell you, Trimble."

"Go it!" gasped Baggy eagerly. "You can trust me, Wildrake. Of course, I wouldn't repeat it."

"Sure you'll keep it dark?"

"Honour bright!"

"You won't mention it to a soul?"

"Not a syllable!" gasped Baggy Trimble, fairly boiling with curiosity now. "I say, go ahead, old chap. What?"

"Quite sure you won't mention it?" asked Wildrake hesitatingly.

"Quite! Honest Injun, you know! What did Fix say?" almost howled Baggy.

"He said it was a fine afternoon!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"A fine afternoon!" said Wildrake.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Mellish.

Baggy Trimble's fat face was a study as he received that valuable and interesting information.

"A—a—a fuf-fine afternoon!" stuttered Baggy.

"Yep," assented Wildrake.

"You—you silly idiot!" howled Trimble. "Was that all that he said?"

"Nope."

"Well, then, what else did he say?"

"He said it might rain to-night."

"You silly ass!" roared Trimble. "Are you pulling my leg, you chump?"

"Just that!" assented Wildrake, with a smile.

"Yah!"

And Baggy Trimble turned to his prep, and did not seek to extract any more thrilling information from his study-mate.

CHAPTER 7.

"N. G."

"LET'S ask Wildrake!"

It was the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and Kit Wildrake heard it as he was passing the open doorway of Study No. 6 in the Fourth. The Canadian junior was going down to the Common-room after prep, but he stopped, with a smile, as he heard Arthur Augustus' remark.

His cheery, sunburnt face looked into Study No. 6. Blake & Co. had finished prep, and were apparently engaged in a discussion—or, rather, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was propounding some "wheeze" which his chums were riddling through and through with criticisms. It was not infrequent for Arthur Augustus' wheezes to be received in that manner in his own study. When the swell of St. Jim's set his powerful brain in motion, he generally looked upon the result and said that it was good; but this opinion was not often shared by Blake & Co. Being true pals, they generally told Gussy with great frankness what they thought of his wheezes, and their observations were seldom flattering.

"Bai Jove, here's Wildwake!" said Arthur Augustus. "Let us ask him what he thinks. He is a wathah keen chap, you know, though he hasn't pewwaps so much tact and judgment as some chaps."

"Oh, ask him," yawned Blake. "If Wildrake agrees with you, Gussy—"

"Then you will think it a good ideah, Blake?"

"Oh, no! I shall think that Wildrake is as big an ass as you are!"

"Weally, Blake!"

"Give it a name," suggested Kit Wildrake, with a grin.

"What's the latest brain-storm, Gussy?"

"It's about those wascally kidnappahs," explained Arthur

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Augustus. "Nothin' has been done so fab. Mr. Fix has found out how the wottahs bagged the wansom, but he hasn't found out how to bag the wottahs. And the Head won't allow us to go out on our own and help. I have already wemonstated with the Head, and he only gave me a hundred lines. He appeahed to be waxy."

"Go hon!" said Herries sarcastically.

"Weally, Hewwies!"

"But what's the wheeze?" demanded Wildrake.

"I am comin' to that, deah boy. The Head will not let us woom awound huntin' for Lowthah and poor old Kildare, because he thinks it is dangewous. The kidnappah might bag some more of us, you know."

"Jolly likely, I think," said Digby; "especially you, old man. You're just the ass to walk right into his arms."

"Weally, Dig—"

"Why not come to the point, Gussy?" suggested Wildrake.

"Does Gussy ever come to the point?" yawned Blake.

"My dear man, he'll keep you standing another hour yet."

"He jolly well won't!" grinned Wildrake. "I guess I'll give him another minute and a half."

"Weally, Wildwake!"

"Cut it short, old bean, or can it!"

"How can I help it, when I am intewwupted by asinine remarks fwom sewewal asses at once?" said Arthur Augustus warmly. "Howevah, to come to the point, seein' Mr. Brown to-day put the ideah into my head."

"Mr. Brown!" Wildrake displayed interest all at once.

"Do you mean the man from the mill on the moor?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How on earth could you see him when you're gated?" asked Wildrake.

"Quite simply, deah boy, as he called at the school."

"Mr. Brown called at the school, did he?" said Wildrake.

"That was while I was out, I suppose?"

"Shortly befoah you weturned, old chap. He dwove up in his twap."

Wildrake nodded.

Considering his own curious suspicions of the Wayland miller, Arthur Augustus' great wheeze struck him very oddly.

"Isn't it wathah a good ideah?" asked Arthur Augustus. "I am suah the Head would see weason."

"So you've been chatting with the giddy miller," said Wildrake. "I suppose he was rather interested in hearing about Mr. Fix?"

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"Yaas, wathah!" he said. "Vewy intewested indeed. He is a gweat admiwah of Mr. Fix, and he asked me evah so many questions about him."

"Like his cheek!" grunted Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Well, everybody in the neighbourhood is keen on the giddy mystery, by this time," said Blake; "and a Scotland Yard detective in this quarter is something a bit unusual."

"I guess he would be interested in Mr. Fix," said Wildrake. "But you couldn't have had much to tell him, Gussy."

"Not about Mr. Fix's plans," said Gussy. "I don't know anythin' about them, you know; and, besides, I wouldn't have mentioned them. But he took quite a kind intewest in Mr. Fix, and how he was put up heah, and all that, you know. I told him that Mr. Fix had the Blue Room, and pointed out the balcony fwom the quad. He said he was vewy anxious to heah that our twiends had been found, and told me that any time I was passin' the mill he would be glad to see me and my fwriends, which was vewy polite of the old johnny, I considah. Aftah he had gone, it flashed into my bwain that through him we might get permish to go out of gates to-morrow aftahnoon, you know."

"It was the kind of stunt that would flash into your brain!" commented Blake.

"Wats! What do you think of it, Wildwake? You have wathah more sense than these unthinkin' youngstahs—?"

"These what?" roared Herries.

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"I guess he covered it quicker than we did," he remarked. "We walked back. I happened to see him in Wayland, you know," he added.

"Yaas, deah boy. Well, you know that Mr. Brown has a mill on the moor, a feahful distance fwom any othah habitation of any sort."

"Yes; I've taken note of that," said Wildrake, with a very curious look at the swell of St. Jim's. It seemed impossible that his own strange suspicions could have taken root in the innocent mind of the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. But the mention of the miller of the moor startled the Canadian.

"Both Kildare and Lowthah disappeared on the moor," continued Arthur Augustus. "It is genewally believed, but not pwoved, that they were whisked away in a motah-cah. It is quite poss. that discovewies might be made if the Head would let us wansack the moor fwom end to end. You could help, Wildwake. You are as good at scoutin' as I am."

"You don't say so!"

"Yaas, wathah! I weally think so, deah boy. I do not see what you are gwinnin' at, Blake. But to wesume. My ideah is to ask the Head to let a partay of us go to the mill to-morrow aftahnoon, as it is a half-holiday—"

"To the mill?"

"Yaas, wathah! And as the Head will not twust us on our own, that vewy good-natured millah might be asked to look aftah us."

"Oh, my only hat!" ejaculated Wildrake.

"I am suah the millah would do it, for he is a most good-natured old gentlemah," said Arthur Augustus. "He called heah, you know, to inqulah whethah there was any news of the missin' chaps; which was vewy kind of him, wasn't it? I dwopped on him talkin' to Taggles at his lodge, you know, and had a few minutes' conversation with him. I liked him vewy much; he has vewy good mannahs. I feel suah that if we asked him, he would offah the Head to take a partay of us undah his wing for a visit to the mill, you know, and we could make the mill our headquartahs for searchin', and take one of the millah's men with us, just to satisfy the Head that we were quite safe, you know."

"By gum!" said Wildrake.

"Unthinkin' youngstahs. What is your opinion, Wildwake?"

Kit Wildrake laughed.

"About the same as that of these unthinking youngsters, I guess," he answered.

"Bai Jove! You weally seem as big an ass as Blake or Hewwies or Dig," said Arthur Augustus crossly. "I wegard it as a weally wippin' ideah myself! I shall certainly speak to the Head."

"And get another hundred lines for cheek!" grinned Blake.

"Wats!"

Wildrake walked out of Study No. 6 with a thoughtful brow. But he was not thinking of Gussy's great wheeze. He was thinking of the miller of the moor. Apparently Mr. Brown had driven over to the school, immediately after seeing the detective at the Wayland timber-yard, and doubtless learning there what the detective had wanted. Why had the miller called at St. Jim's? If Wildrake's suspicions were ill-founded, the visit might be explained by a neighbourly interest in the missing schoolboys. But Wildrake did not think that his suspicions were ill-founded. If the man was guilty, was he alarmed—had the detective's inquiries at the timber-yard shaken his sense of security? Wildrake wondered.

With that problem in his mind, the Canadian junior forgot all about Arthur Augustus and his great stunt. It was a sound of merry laughter in the Common-room that drew his attention to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy a little later.

"Licked?" howled Digby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no weason whatevah for wibald laughtah," said Arthur Augustus, rubbing his noble palm, which appeared to have suffered. "I simply cannot undahstand the Head. I was simply arguin' with him, gently but firmly, aftah he had wufused permission for a partay to visit the mill to-morrow, and he suddenly told me to hold out my hand. He did not even mention the weason—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He gave me wathah a hard swish," continued Arthur Augustus. "I have not the faintest ideah why he caned
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me; but, of course, I did not condescend to argue with him any further. I walked out of the study—I twust with dignity."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you fellows are only goin' to cackle at my wemarks——" said the swell of St. Jim's hotly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake & Co.

"Oh, wats!"

Arthur Augustus walked away, still rubbing his noble palm. It was evident that the great wheeze was not a success, and only Arthur Augustus was surprised by the result of his arguments with the Head. When Darrell of the Sixth marched the juniors off to their dormitory, however, the pain in Gussy's aristocratic palm had subsided, and he had recovered his usual lofty equanimity. He confided to Jack Blake that he was not goin' to be down on the Head.

"You see, the poor old scout is awfully wowwied by these remarkable goin's on—kidnappin', and so on," said Arthur Augustus benevolently. "I pwesume that his nerves are suffewin', you know, and he took it out of me. It was walthah unweasonable, but I am not goin' to be down on him."

"If he could hear that," said Cardew of the Fourth solemnly, "he would feel no end bucked! Why not cut down and tell him?"

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus turned in, in a placid frame of mind, having nobly determined to forgive the Head, and not to be down on that stately old gentleman. Soon after lights out, the Fourth Form were fast asleep—with one exception. Kit Wildrake did not close his eyes, and the hours that boomed out from the clock-tower, in the darkness of the night, found the Canadian junior still awake.

CHAPTER 8.

The Tragedy of the Night!

ONE!

The dull boom of the hour came faintly through the night. Not a light glimmered in the buildings of St. Jim's, a dark mass against the starlit sky.

Wildrake heard the stroke, in his sleepless bed.

Why he was so wakeful, the Canadian hardly knew. But he knew that his nerves were tense; that he had a sense of something impending—a sense of something that threatened. It was the thought of the mysterious miller that haunted his mind. Why had the man called at the school? Why had he pumped the unsuspicious Arthur Augustus with regard to the detective—with regard to his quarters in the School House?

There was always the possibility that the man had been chatting idly. But Wildrake did not think so for a moment.

To his mind, the miller's visit meant something. His guarded inquiries meant something. But what did they mean? Had the villain—if villain he was—sensed his danger from the Scotland Yard detective? Had he planned that Mr. Fix should share the fate of the kidnapped schoolboys? Even so, it was likely that the attack, if an attack was made, would take place in some lonely spot, when Mr. Fix took his walks abroad. That reasoning had satisfied the Canadian junior at first; and he knew that Mr. Fix was armed, that he was wary, and was not likely to be caught napping.

But in the deep silence of the night, sleeping and thinking deeply, new ideas came into his mind. Because the detective was armed, because he was wary, an attack on him in the open would be a dangerous business for the criminals. Was it possible that an attack was planned in the night, while the man from Scotland Yard slept peacefully and unsuspectingly within the walls of St. Jim's?

When that thought came into his mind, as it came at last, Kit Wildrake realised what had been the subconscious cause of his uneasiness. He started up in bed, his heart beating, his ears strained to listen. Only the faint sigh of the wind in the old elms of the quadrangle came to him. The night was still.

He sank back in bed, thinking. Was that it—was there danger for the man from Scotland Yard, behind locked and barred doors, under the roof of the old school? If he had thought of that solution earlier— But even now, as he reviewed it calmly, he realised that it was a wild suspicion. It was only the darkness, the silence, the solitude, that made it seem at all feasible, by influencing his nerves.

And yet, what if there was something in it? He could not think of such a step as awakening the detective at midnight; that was not to be dreamed of. It was probably only a wild surmise. Indeed, there was always the possibility that his suspicions of the Wayland miller might be wholly unfounded; that the man might be innocent of all wrong-doing, and the solution of the mystery quite a different one. He did not think so; but he admitted the possibility. He could do nothing—only sleep, as the other fellows in the dormitory were sleeping.

But he could not sleep. Vague possibility or not, the thought haunted him—the consciousness of possible tragedy in the silence and the darkness. The Blue Room was too far from the dormitory for a cry to be heard. The stroke of one had died away, and Wildrake, uneasy, restless, closed his eyes resolutely, and determined to sleep. But the closed eyelids opened as if of their own accord. He lay and stared at the high windows—at the stars that glimmered in the vault of heaven, looking down in their vast calmness upon a slumbering earth, where only he seemed awake.

What was that?

Suddenly, through the night—through the silence, there came a sound—loud, racking, deafening. It was not a sound loud in itself, but in the deep stillness it struck the ear with the crash as of an earthquake.

It was the report of a firearm.

Crack!

The sound echoed in the still night. For an instant, Wildrake lay, panting, unbelieving—half-thinking that the sudden sound was an effect of his own feverish imagination. But the next second he bounded out of bed, grabbed a great-coat which was handy, and rushed to the door.

That he was but a schoolboy, that he was unarmed—he did not stop to think of that. Whence had come the sudden report, he could not tell by hearing; it seemed to fill the house with sound. But he tore open the dormitory door, and raced away in the direction of the Blue Room. He knew, as if he had seen it, that it was in the Blue Room that a revolver had been fired.

He ran, colliding several times with walls or banisters in the dark, but speeding on again. That the report had been no trick of the imagination he soon had proof—doors were opening, and two or three voices called in startled tones. He reached the door of the Blue Room, panting, breathless, and clutched at the handle. The door was locked. In desperation Wildrake beat on the panels with his fists.

"Mr. Fix! Mr. Fix!" he shouted.

He heard a movement in the room. He hammered on the door, and shouted desperately.

The corridor was suddenly flooded with light; someone had turned on the electric switch below. Mr. Raiton's voice called. The hammering had drawn him to the spot, half-dressed.

"Wildrake—what—"

"It's Mr. Fix, sir!" panted Wildrake. "You heard the shot—"

"I heard it—but where—"

"In the Blue Room, sir. For mercy's sake, get the door open!" almost shrieked Wildrake. "They've got him, sir."

"What—what—who—"

"The kidnappers—"

"Impossible!"

(Continued on page 17.)

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When Rogues Fall Out.

DONALD GORDON and his brother Val, together with Tommy Binks and Septimus Todd, left St. Christopher's School on an expedition to the Solomon Islands to join Hector Gordon, an uncle of the two brothers, who is on a big plantation there.

Captain Targe, captain of the Wittywake, and a scoundrel at heart, heard of the party's quest. He planned to abandon the boat, and leave the party to their fate—this, in order that he might carry out his plans and more easily overthrow the wealthy plantation owner and obtain hold of his land. His dastardly scheme proved futile, however, Targe, the black cabin-boy, warning the party and assisting them in making their escape. They were about to leave in one of the ship's small boats, when Anna, anxious to get away from the harsh treatment of her father, joined them.

Not long after they started on their perilous sea journey a severe storm arose, and the party got washed up on the Island of Pleasure.

They prepared their new home, living on the products the island offered. Shortly afterwards the happy party were startled by the reappearance of the Wittywake out at sea. Don kept watch, and, to his surprise, saw Targe, together with Ralph, land carrying with them a metal box, which they deposited in the bed of a pool, to be guarded by a slimy, tentacled monster of the deep. Don wisely decided to keep the grim secret to himself.

It was some time afterwards, when the party were returning from a picnic, that a severe storm broke over the island. The chums were only just able to escape from their hut, which, with the combined forces of wind and waves, was brought crashing to the ground. The party underwent a terrible time that night, the angry waves carrying them hither and thither in their fury.

The storm subsided with the break of dawn, and of the separated party, Don, Anna, and Targe were reunited, but of the others there was no sign. Targe and Anna, tired after their night of terror, fell asleep, but the ever-watchful Don kept on the alert.

Meanwhile, of the others, what had happened? Tommy had luckily managed to get a footing on the roof of the hut, which, having fallen in, had acted as a raft. He found Val struggling with Scat, and the two had dragged the exhausted tutor on to the crazy raft. Washed on the sands, the three chums fell into a deep slumber. Val dreams of his old enemies, and, waking up suddenly, is horrified to find himself looking into the very faces of the men who had haunted his dreams—Captain Targe and Ralph Siddeley.

The chums are made prisoners and taken on board the Wittywake. Targe, having to make a special journey to the island, leaves his prisoners in charge of a trusty lieutenant, and with Ralph puts off in a small boat to be rowed to the beach. Val makes a daring escape from the schooner and follows the two rascals.

They had not gone far, however, when Val saw Targe turn suddenly upon Ralph, shaking his fist in his face.

"Quartelling, eh?" mutters Val to himself. "This makes it even better for me."

And now began the hardest task of all.

It was Val's need to pass Targe and his companion, and get ahead of them, so that he might reach the camp on the other side, and search for Don to warn him.

But across that black, barren stretch, on which they were moving, it seemed impossible that he should be able to succeed in passing the other two without being observed.

He had worked his way to the right, and yard by yard he came nearer and nearer to the two.

Finally there came a patch of ground which

was broken into deep crevasses, with here and there a mound of higher rock.

There was even a slight sulphury tang in the atmosphere, indicating that the underground forces of the vast volcano had not yet spent themselves.

Val found himself working his way along the rocky outcrop of black rocks, and, when he had cleared it, he looked across the moonlit space in search of the other two.

For a moment he failed to locate them, then he saw first Captain Targe, then Ralph, appear from out of a slight hollow.

Targe was moving beside a black gap in the broken surface, a deep ravine which ran along the surface for some two or three hundred yards before it closed.

Val watched the two figures moving on, then something in Ralph's attitude made the watching youngster direct his gaze on the figure behind.

Val saw Ralph stop and lift something from the ground; then he moved nearer and nearer to Targe; until at last he was only a yard or so behind the tall, black-bearded skipper.

"By Jove, what's he up to?"

Breathless with excitement, Val watched the slow-moving figures.

Targe was picking his way along the crevasse, his whole mind centred on the task.

Where the ravine began to narrow, Targe slackened his pace.

Val saw Ralph close up, then suddenly his arm was raised, and the huge stone which he had lifted was cast full into the back of his leader.

Targe stumbled and swayed, made an effort to turn round, then, giving a hoarse, frightened yell, the great burly figure reeled over the edge of the black ravine, and vanished into its depths.

Mute with horror, Val stared at the scene.

Ralph leaned out over the edge, and peered down for a moment; then the treacherous rascal turned, and darted on over the rough ground, moving on steadily until he vanished behind a clump of boulders.

Val watched until the sound of footfalls had died away, then, rising to his feet, the youngster darted across the broken ground. Reaching the edge of the ravine, and kneeling there, he looked down into the depths.

The moon was striking full into the black gap, and Val saw the huddled figure wedged in the ironlike ground.

The Last of Captain Targe.

AS Val knelt there, peering into the gap, he saw a movement from the wedged shape, and Captain Targe's massive head fell back so that the moon struck down full on the distorted face.

Targe's eyes were open, and he was peering up out of the crevasse.

EX-CROWN PRINCE'S MEMOIRS!

Amazing Revelations!

The most sensational book of the year is undoubtedly the *Memoirs of the ex-Crown Prince*, "Little Willie's" own Life Story.

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No reader of the GEM LIBRARY should miss this startling work, which appears exclusively in this week's "ANSWERS," on sale at all news-agents TO-DAY.

This man was Val's enemy, and deserved but little sympathy from the youngster. Yet the agony on the face, and the terrible position in which the huge ruffian was situated, awakened a feeling of pity in the youngster's heart, and then Val Gordon revealed himself as the best type of English youth.

"I—I can't leave him there. I'll—I'll have to try and save him."

It was a mad, reckless thing which he attempted to do then.

The sides of the crevasse were almost sheer, and the previous night's rain had made them wet and treacherous; yet Val, after a moment's hesitation, lowered himself over the edge, and, spreadeagled out on the rough surface, he worked himself down into that pitlike gap.

Down and down he went, until at last his feet touched the rocky bottom, and he found himself within a few yards from where Targe was wedged into the narrow cleft.

"Who's that? Who's that?"

Targe's voice, thin and drawn, sounded, and Val, after standing for a moment to regain his breath, answered.

"All right, Captain Targe! I—I am going to help you!"

"Who—who are you?"

"I am Val Gordon."

The youngster began to make his way cautiously along the bottom of the crevasse, and at last he found himself standing above Targe.

"Val Gordon, eh? You—you mean to say you have come down here to help me?"

There was a note of mute wonder in the voice, and the man's face, looking up into the youngster's, was twisted into a mask of incredulity.

"Someone's got to help you," Val replied.

"You certainly could not get out of here yourself."

He saw now that the captain's huge body was wedged deep into a narrow cleft and his arms were pinioned by his side.

The rift was in the solid rock, and Targe was held there as in a vice.

"You are—you're a good youngster, but I am afraid you can't do anything."

"I am going to have a jolly good try."

Val reached out and managed to slip his hands under the wedged shoulders, then he commenced to pull with all his might; but at the first tug a terrible groan came from Targe's lips.

"No—no, don't! It's all up with me, young'un; my—my back is broken."

Val fell away from the groaning creature, and, leaning against the side of the wall, watched the agonised face.

"Your back broken! Are you sure?"

"Yes. That treacherous hound got me all right, and I'm booked."

A spasm of pain distorted the features for a moment, then Val heard Captain Targe draw a deep breath through his set teeth.

"I won't mind it so much. I have lived rough, and I expected to die rough, but I didn't think I'd be bowled over by a treacherous hound."

"I saw him," said Val. "He waited his opportunity, and attacked you with that stone. Why did he do it?"

Again the Herculean frame made a mighty effort to release itself. It was as though a giant hand had gripped Targe, and was holding him helpless.

"Why did he do it eh?"

"Because he wanted something that I wasn't going to give him; but he doesn't know the truth, and I—I'll have my revenge. It's waited for me and for him."

"What do you mean?"

Again there was a silence.

In the yellow light from the moon the black-bearded face of Targe began to go pale.

His head fell forward, then it was raised again by an effort of will.

"Put your hand in my breast-pocket. You will find something there which I want you to have. Quick!"

The coat was rucked up under the arms, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 745.

and Val had to search for a few moments before his fingers came in contact with a round, hard cylinder.

He drew it out, to discover there was a length of flexible wire attached to it, and another tiny cylinder at the other end of this wire.

"Listen to me, boy," Targe's voice was beginning to fail now. "There's a pool in the reef on the other side of this island, and there's—there's something in that pool which Ralph is after. I told him what it was as we came along here to-night. I thought I could trust him, but I was mistaken. Only you can take it from me—he'll never get what's in that pool and come away alive. I didn't tell him how I meant to get at it, but you have got the way in your hands there."

"What do you mean?"

Targe could only speak in a thin whisper now.

"You'll have to kill the devil-fish in that pool with the dynamite cartridge," he answered. "Drop the cartridge into the pool and connect the battery, and the devil-fish won't trouble you any more; but don't try and dive into that pool while the devil-fish is alive. That's what Ralph is going to do, and he'll pay the penalty."

Again the massive head slid forward, and Val, slipping the wire and cartridge and battery into his ragged shirt, stooped over the wedged shape.

Little sympathy though this ruffian deserved, there was something horrible, awesome, in the manner of his death.

The great head slid down over the broad breast, and Val saw the tortured body rise and fall for a moment in quick, heavy breathing.

He reached out and slipped his arm round the head, raising it.

"Captain Targe! Captain Targe!" he whispered.

The eyes opened, looked at him for a moment, then closed.

"Still here, boy? Go away; don't mind me. I am done, I tell you."

"But I want to help you if I can," Val said. "Can't I do anything? I wouldn't tell you at first, but your daughter Anna is here on the island, with Taga and Don."

The bearded face was turned upward, and the glazing eyes fixed themselves on Val's face.

"Anna alive?"

"Yes."

Val was not sure that this was the case, but he felt justified in giving that assurance now.

The bearded lips twisted for a moment.

"I—I wish I had known that," the deep voice said. "It was because—because I thought she was gone that I did what I did. Ralph knew something about me, and I was in his power. I killed a man back in San Francisco, and Ralph's father knew about it. They held the truth over me, and made me agree to their plans; but it was only after you youngsters vaulted with my daughter that I really consented to do what Ralph wanted. I thought she had gone, and—nothing seemed to matter then."

His head began to sway, and Val steadied it.

"And she's been with you, has she?" the voice trailed on. "Well, that's good; she was better in your hands than in mine. Don't tell her that I did like this. Promise me that! Let her think I—I went out some other way. I didn't treat her very well, but I was always fond of her."

Again the head fell forward, and this time Val heard the ominous rattle that, although he had never heard it before, could not be mistaken.

As he turned to climb out of the pit-like gap it was a dead man that Val Gordon left behind him.

He regained the top of the crevasse, and moved on again over the rough ground.

The terrible scene which he had witnessed had unnerved him, and for the best part of an hour the youngster hurried on blindly, hardly noting where he was going.

He cleared the levelled stretch of turfy soil at a trot, then found himself entering the virgin forest, and presently he struck a path which was familiar to him; it was a track which ran up to the pasture where the goats were found, and once he had reached this Val knew his journey was almost over.

He was still in the heart of the jungle, following the path, when the dawn came, and at the end of another hour he found himself dragging his weary limbs out from the jungle, to pace across the grassy slope, and finally reach the edge of the cliff.

His first glance over the edge brought a gasp of dismay from his lips, as he saw below the wreckage which marked the site of the camp.

The huge beams tossed here and there, and the litter of palm-fronds and bamboo-poles made him fear the worst.

Turning to his right, Val ran along the edge of the cliff, and on down the slope, to clamber over the rough boulders, and emerge into the little hollow where the hut had stood.

As he cleared a heap of broken bamboo he caught sight of a thin feather of smoke rising from a cleared space beside the spring, and a quick cry came from his lips as he darted forward.

Half-way up the cliff was a ledge, and presently out on to the ledge a slim figure rolled, to sit up and peer for a moment; then the silvery, girlish voice of Anna sounded.

"Oh, Val—Val!"

Anna scrambled down the cliff with a rush to throw herself into Val's arms and give him a warm hug.

"Where are the others? Where are the others?" she cried.

"They are all right—quite safe," answered Val. "How about Don and Taga?"

"They are safe, too," said the girl. "Don has gone off to get some yams, and Taga is along at the cove seeing if he can get some fish for breakfast. I am so glad to see you, Val. Come on; help me to build a fire. We'll have breakfast when they come back, then we'll go and find the others."

It was difficult for Val to play the part he did, then, but he had promised Targe to keep Anna in the dark concerning the terrible fate which had overtaken her father, and it was a promise which he felt he had to fulfil.

Under the pretext of searching for dried brushwood for the fire, Val slipped off across the cleared space, and was half-way up the slope when Don emerged from the trees with a bundle of yams under his arm.

Val started forward, and he and his brother shook hands, then Val gave Don a quick account of what had happened, finally winding up with the grim scene on the wind-swept hills.

"Ralph here? I haven't seen him!" said Don, in surprise.

"Well, he's come here, anyhow," Val returned, "and we must find him. I believe that Captain Targe was right when he said Ralph was out to try and get to the reef, and it means that he'll go to his death if he attempts to dive into the pool after that iron box."

Don lifted the heap of yams, and they began to move towards the boulders, when suddenly a quick report sounded, a report which echoed and re-echoed along the bay. It was the crack of a revolver, and a moment later another shot was fired.

The sound was coming from the direction of the cove beyond the cliffs, and Don, dropping his burden, gripped Val by the arm.

"Quick, Val!" he said. "Come along; it must be that beast Ralph, and he's attacking Taga."

They sprinted over the boulders, then on over the sand above the cliff.

Anna appeared in among the rabble, and called to them, waving her slender arms. Don gave her a shout as they passed.

"All right, Anna; wait for us!" he called.

Three or four minutes later they had reached the spit of land which guarded the cove, and, as they rounded it, Don came to a halt with a gasp of anger.

"Look! There he goes!"

About fifty yards out from the beach was the catamaran, and they saw a solitary figure seated in the centre of it, wielding a paddle with all its might. It was Ralph, and he was heading for the reef.

"By Jove, I was right!" Don broke out. "Look, the beggar must have got Taga! There he is!"

Half-way up the beach the bronzed body of Taga was seated in a heap. The native was holding his arm, and, as he caught sight of them, he made as though to rise to his feet, but dropped back again.

"The skunk—the murderous skunk!" Val broke out. "He's—he's shot Taga!"

The two brothers sprinted off together, and presently Don was kneeling beside Taga, examining the native's arm.

"I all right. Dat fella come on me 'or I have time to hear him!" Taga broke out. "He go for catamaran, but I try stop him, and he shot—twice!"

To Don's relief, he found that the wound was only a flesh one, and, when he had tied it up, Taga managed to rise to his feet.

A shout from Val made Don look into the bay. The catamaran was now two or three hundred yards from the shore, and was moving steadily towards the reef.

"What about it, Don?" Val asked. "Can we let him go? You know what's going to happen to him!"

Don's face went hard for a moment, then he shook his head.

"We must try and stop him, Val," he said. "Right or wrong, we can't let him go without being warned."

They raised a shout then, and, running down to the edge of the beach, called again and again: until at last Ralph turned his head and looked shoreward.

"Come back—come back!" Don Gordon called. "You are in danger! You will never come out of that pool alive!"

His voice must have carried clearly to the ears of the scheming youth in the catamaran, for Ralph, raising the paddle, waved it derisively, then once again he turned his back to the shore and piled the broad-bladed paddle, driving the catamaran nearer and nearer to the reef. At last they saw it touch the edge of the coral growth, and the figure of Ralph scrambled on the reef.

The seas had calmed down now, and they watched the figure move on steadily over the broken coral, working its way along between the rough edges, vanishing now and again, and emerging as it followed the ramifications of the great barrier.

A feeling of horror took possession of Val as he stood beside his brother, watching the scrambling shape, and finally they saw Ralph gain the wider part of the reef, where the deep pool was situated.

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THE GEM LIBRARY.

May 20th, 1922.

He clambered down to the edge of the pool, then stepped out on to the broad, platform-like space, where Don had seen Targe's figure kneel on the memorable night many months ago.

"His fate is on his own head!" Don said. "Look, there he goes!"

They saw Ralph's body straighten up, then, with a quick spring, Captain Targe's treacherous companion took a header, and vanished into the pool.

A Strange Find.

"I SAY, Scat, I wish you would come here for a moment! There's a whacking great hole in the bulkhead. I—I think it leads to somewhere."

Tommy's vibrating whisper sounded through the dark saloon, and Scat, who had been standing on guard at the open door, turned his head in the direction of the sound.

"Where are you, Tommy?" he asked.

"Here, under the table."

The native, who had been bowled over so neatly by the chums, had been rolled under the long table which occupied the centre of the saloon, and it was Tommy's task to tie the fellow up.

In order to cover their movements, they had extinguished the light, and while Hector Gordon had remained at the top of the saloon, listening there, Scat had been on guard at the doorway through which Val had vanished.

"Quick, Scat! It is—it's a hatchway or something!"

Half an hour had passed since Val had gone up the stairs, and there had been no indications of his departure having been discovered.

Scat turned now, and, crossing the saloon, he dropped on his hands and knees, crawling under the heavy table.

His hands came into contact with the trussed-up, strained body of the native; then he reached Tommy's side, and felt a breath of cold air on his face.

By groping in the darkness, Scat discovered that Tommy had removed a square trap from

the centre of the deck, and there was a black gap beneath it.

"What is it?" Tommy asked. "Where do you think it leads to?"

"What's that?"

The quiet voice of Mr. Gordon sounded, and they heard his footfalls as he came along the saloon.

"It's a hatchway, sir," Tommy whispered. "Just under the table, here. Do you happen to know where it leads to?"

"A hatchway! By Jove, wait a moment." A match spluttered in the darkness, and a second later a small lamp was lighted.

Mr. Gordon, kneeling on the deck, held the lamp over the gap.

There was a narrow iron ladder running up from the gap, and, by lowering the lamp, they saw the space below.

It was a small hold, apparently filled with miscellaneous boxes, and after studying it for a moment, the plantation owner turned to his two companions.

"Unless I am very much mistaken," he said, "this leads into the main hold, and I think it is worth while making use of our discovery. Sooner or later those brutes are bound to wonder what has happened to their friend, and they will come here. As they are armed, and we are not, there is not much doubt as to what would happen to us. We might find a safe hiding-place down there, and, in any case, it is wiser to explore it."

Scat was the first to descend into the hold, to be followed by Tommy, and finally Mr. Gordon slid through the hatchway.

After descending one or two rungs of the ladder, he reached for the square hatch, and managed to wedge it into its place over the ladder.

The space in which they found themselves was a rather low one, and Scat and the planter had to move very carefully through the rows of packing-cases and boxes.

At the other end of the hold they found a partition and a moving panel, which, on being thrust aside, revealed a wider space beyond.

It was the main hold of the schooner, and there were a number of boxes of copra

placed in it, together with four or five casks which stood at the far end of the hold.

Near to the casks were several cases with crude, painted designs on them, and as soon as Mr. Gordon caught sight of the cases, he came to a halt and grabbed at Scat.

"Be careful, for Heaven's sake!" he gasped. "Those are dynamite cases, and you had better not flash that lamp about, or we'll be sky high!"

"Dynamite, eh? Oh, my hat!"

Scat had been ahead of Scat, and had reached the cases, and was stooping to examine the marks on them; but at Mr. Gordon's alarming announcement the stout fellow leapt back a pace, turning round a scared face towards the light.

"Better put that lamp out altogether!" he exclaimed.

"There's enough dynamite in those cases to blow this vessel to pieces," Mr. Gordon went on. "I remember that Targe mentioned his dangerous load to me."

The lantern was held aloft by Scat, and Mr. Gordon went across to examine the piles of cases.

Presently Tommy saw him prise open a loose portion of one of the cases, then the planter thrust his hand into the case.

When it appeared again, Mr. Gordon had a cylinder between his fingers.

"One of the cylinders has gone from this case," he said, "and as it has only recently been opened, I should think that Targe probably took it away with him."

He came towards the youngsters, carrying an innocent-looking cylinder carefully.

"What are they used for, sir?" Tommy asked.

Mr. Gordon smiled.

"The natives use them for fishing," he explained. "Of course, their use is illegal, but it isn't always possible for the Government to keep a watch on the natives in the outlying islands."

"For fishing?" Tommy remarked. "Curious sort of bait, isn't it?"

(Will the strange find be found useful to the prisoners? Read next week's grand long instalment of this splendid serial and see for yourself!)

"THE HAND OF THE UNKNOWN."

(Continued from page 14.)

Wildrake beat frantically on the door.

"Why doesn't he open the door, then—why doesn't he answer?" he exclaimed. "I tell you they're there—they've got him. Oh, heavens! Can't you break in the door, sir?"

Mr. Railton struck on the panels.

"Mr. Fix!" he shouted. "Answer me!"

There was no answer.

Wildrake suddenly clutched the Housemaster's arm, and with his other hand pointed downwards. His face was white as chalk. Under the door, something was oozing—something that glimmered red in the blaze of the electric light. Wildrake's bare feet were stained in it, though he had not noticed it till now.

He choked.

"You—you see—sir—you see—" he articulated.

Mr. Railton shuddered. On the stairs, Darrell and Langton, and several more of the Sixth, appeared, some with pokers in their hands, alarmed out of their sleep. Mr. Railton cast a hurried glance round, and seized a heavy chair that stood under the corridor window. He bore it to the door of the Blue Room, raised it with an effort in the air, exerting all his strength, and crashed it on the lock with terrific force.

The door flew wide open, the lock smashing into pieces under that terrible impact.

Within, all was darkness; but there was an electric light switch by the doorway. Mr. Railton pressed it, and rushed in. The room was flooded with light before him.

The window stood wide, the curtains blowing out on the balcony in the draught from the door. The bed, wildly tumbled and disordered, was empty. It was still warm, but its occupant was gone. The Housemaster stared blankly round the room.

But there was nothing to be seen, nothing, excepting that deadly pool of crimson on the polished wood, spreading slowly, and oozing under the door. In the doorway appeared the scared faces of five or six Sixth-Formers staring in.

"Mr. Fix!" exclaimed Darrell. "Where—"

"Gone!" breathed Wildrake. "Alive or dead—gone!"

Mr. Railton strode to the window, and passed out on to the little balcony that overlooked the quadrangle. From the iron

rail of the balcony a rope hung and fluttered. He caught at it—it was a double rope, with wooden slats—a rope-ladder. Down that ladder the intruders had gone, taking with them the man from Scotland Yard—leaving the rope-ladder behind them in the wild haste of their flight.

The hapless detective, awakened by the attack, had time to fire one shot—for it was clear that it was the detective who had fired. In the empty bed lay his revolver, with one chamber discharged. As he bent over the bed, Wildrake was conscious of a faint sickly odour, and he remembered what Tom Merry had told him.

"Chloroform!" he muttered.

Mr. Railton swung back from the window.

"Follow me!" His voice was tense. "They cannot be far—one of them perhaps wounded—follow me!"

He rushed from the room, and down the stairs, Darrell and the rest following him fast. A minute more, and they were in the quadrangle, shouting the detective's name, searching far and wide under the stars. Wildrake stood on the balcony and watched, breathless. He saw lights darting to and fro in the quad below. He listened to the shouts. He felt—he knew—that all was too late.

He turned back into the room. The detective had fired as he was seized in bed. He knew that. But what had happened then? That crimson stain on the polished floor—he shuddered as he saw the stain upon his own bare feet—was that from one of the assailants? Struck by the bullet, perhaps, while locking the door against interruption? Or had a murderous blow been struck in answer to the hurried shot? Was it the blood of the detective that stained the floor? Was it a dead man that the ruffians had borne away, to hide their guilt—the hideous guilt of blood? Wildrake almost staggered from the room, his face like chalk, his heart throbbing. If only he had warned the detective in time; if only he could have warned him. But his knowledge had come too late—too late! With almost a sob he threw himself upon the bed, listening to the shouts from the quadrangle, the scurrying of feet, as the search proceeded—the search that he knew in his heart was too late, and would be vain.

THE END.

(Be sure you read next week's grand long story entitled: "WILDRAKE'S DESPERATE VENTURE!" By Martin Clifford. You will vote it the finest story you have ever read. Order your next week's GEM early.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 745.

The ST JIM'S NEWS

Edited By TOM MERRY.

"Tighten Your Belt."

A CHATTY HEALTH TALK.

By the Sporting Doctor.

SEE if you can do this: Lie down on the floor quite flat. Stretch out your legs as straight as you can, keeping your feet together. Cross your arms over the front of your chest, and then try to sit up without moving your legs or feet at all.

It sounds easy enough. It isn't. Very few grown-up people can do it, and not very many boys at first attempt.

Because most of us have flabby muscles down the front of our bodies. The belts old Mother Nature gave us are too slack.

And yet old Mother Nature means us to keep our belts tight.

If we keep them tight we have more blood for our arms and legs and chests. If we let them get slack the blood stays in our stomachs. You don't want to be a sort of walking "stomach," do you?

A few days ago I went to see a doctor. He had been ill, and very nearly died. But he was getting better. He said he was doing the lying-down and sitting-up exercise I've just told you about 100 times every morning.

"And it's saving my life," he said.

I don't think he was talking "through his hat." I think that exercise might save a man's life if he had got too flabby. Because I've noticed that when a man gets too big a stomach he usually gets ill.

You boys are young, and so you can stand a lot more than grown-up people. But, all the same, if you keep the muscles of your stomachs strong you will be much fitter. Because, as I told you before, blood can't be in two places at once. It can't be in your brain and muscles if it is in your stomach.

So what about doing this exercise yourselves, say, twenty times a day. It doesn't take long, and you can do it anywhere where there is a floor.

If you do it regularly your muscles in front and also your back muscles will get as strong as your arm muscles. You'll hit better, you'll run better, you'll jump better.

And you'll breathe better, too, for a strong body means a strong chest, and so a good, easy-working heart.

As I've tried to tell you, that means good nerves. The best way to fight funk is to get fit.

Do it this way: Have your tub, and a good rub down with a hard towel. Then, when you're all glowing and warm, lie down and go through the sitting-up exercise ten times. Then have another rub with the towel, and go through the exercise ten times more.

It only takes about three or four minutes; but they will be about the best spent minutes of the whole day.

Now I'm finished. I only want to say one thing more. It's this: Remember that keeping fit means a little trouble. You can't be fit if you never try to be.

It's much easier to keep fit than to get fit again once you have "gone slack."

Jack Blake Causes Trouble.

MR. RATCLIFF ON THE WARPATH.

By Cousin Ethel.

IT was evening, just after preparation at St. Jim's, and Mr. Raiton, the House-master, was out. Eric Kildare was also out—in fact all the School House prefects with the exception of Gerald Knox were out. It was a strange coincidence that the School House should be left entirely under the weak authority of a person like Knox. But there it was, and Jack Blake of the Fourth speedily discovered how matters stood. It was not very long after, that his study-mates, Digby, Herries, and my cousin Arthur were informed of the new situation.

To make doubly sure that the School House should be completely minus authority, Blake thoughtfully tied the handle of Knox's study door to that of the adjoining study, leaving Knox a prisoner inside. This left the juniors free, and they meant to make the best of it. It was high time they had a lark.

And "lark" those young scamps did! Four or five doughty champions immediately made for the Common-room and began to fight and spar in the approved Carpenter fashion. Their chums gathered round and cheered every thump and hiss to an echo.

Roller skates were swiftly dug out, and some two dozen juniors (some of whom had never been on skates before in their lives) commenced to make a Holland Park of the Fourth Form corridor.

Of course, it was not very long before the deafening din reached the ears of Gerald

Knox. The prefect gathered up an ash-plant, and trying to open his door discovered he was a prisoner in his own study. He made one or two attempts to force it, but he had to give it up as a bad job.

As time went on the noise grew louder and louder.

It could even be heard in the New House, some distance away, and eventually brought Mr. Ratcliff down to his door to find out what was going on.

BLAKE, THE CULPRIT.

Mr. Ratcliff quickly surmised that Mr. Raiton and his prefects were out, and it dawned upon him that here was a golden opportunity to score off his rival.

Mr. Ratcliff always considered that Mr. Raiton managed his house very badly, and was far too lenient when administering the rod. By nature, the New House master always interfered with what didn't concern him, and after debating a few moments longer strode across to the miniature Tower of Babel, with a cane in his hand.

His sudden appearance naturally acted as a bombshell upon the hilarious juniors, and the skating and boxing and uproar ceased as if by magic.

Then, the interfering intruder—not content with quelling the disturbance—cross-examined the boys with the intention of singling out the author of—as Mr. Ratcliff called it—the outrageous infraction of all the laws of the school!

Jack Blake owned up to the charge.

Then a thrill ran through the School House as Mr. Ratcliff commanded Blake to hold out his hand!

The cut was a stinger such as Blake had never experienced before in his whole career at St. Jim's. This was followed by a second, even more cruel. Then for the third time Mr. Ratcliff commanded Blake to extend his hand. Jack did so.

But, as the cane swept down with even greater force than on the two previous occasions, the Fourth-Former withdrew his hand smartly. Meeting with no resistance, the ash-plant cut into Mr. Ratcliff's leg with a sound that rang like a pistol shot.

"Oooh!" gasped the unfortunate Ratty, skipping and howling like a dervish in his anguish.

Blake did not know whether to laugh or make himself scarce, but before he could decide, Mr. Ratcliff grabbed him again, and began to thrash him in a most savage way. Jack Blake howled and roared with pain.

Mr. Ratcliff was a public school master, and should above all things have been able to keep a check upon his temper. As it was he lost it.

The juniors around began to protest, but their protests only had the effect of making him lash Blake more and more. The murmurs became shouts, but died away suddenly as a stalwart figure entered the room. It was Mr. Raiton! He looked at the scene for one brief moment and then sprang forward.

BITTER FEELING.

A stormy scene followed Mr. Raiton's dramatic appearance, and the two House-masters, after a few heated words, repaired to Mr. Raiton's study.

There, Mr. Ratcliff informed his rival that he had interfered solely because the place had been devoid of authority to quell the

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uproar. He also explained that he had thrashed Jack Blake for insolence.

Mr. Railton accordingly sent for Blake to hear his story.

Mr. Railton, in the course of his questioning, learned that Knox's door had been fastened.

"Do you know who did it, Blake?" asked Mr. Railton.

"Yes, sir," said Blake.

"Then tell me at once," said Mr. Railton. "I must know who is primarily responsible for what happened. I hold you blameless, Blake; you are under my protection, and need have no fear or compunction about speaking out."

"Well," said Blake demurely, "it was I, sir."

"You!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "I thought it only my duty to tell you, sir, as you promised that I should not be punished," concluded Blake.

Mr. Railton looked rather grim, but kept his word and dismissed Blake.

Although Mr. Railton and Jack Blake promptly forgot all about the affair, Mr. Ratcliff didn't, and when the next opportunity presented itself, he made a point of getting his own back by presenting Blake with a stiff imposition.

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