

GRAND NEW SCHOOL AND WILD WEST SERIES STARTS THIS WEEK!

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

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"Caught, sir!"

(A "Striking" incident in this week's grand complete school story of Tom Merry & Co.)

GUNMEN AT ST. JIM'S! St. Jim's is a long way from British Columbia, but distance is no object when Rube Redway and Poker Pete—two notorious gunmen—have a job of work to do. And their latest "job" affects Kit Wildrake, in what manner you'll discover in the ripping yarn of Tom Merry & Co. below!

KIT WILDRAKE'S PERIL!

An Absorbing Story of Tom Merry & Co., the Chums of St. Jim's, and Kit Wildrake, the boy from the Boot Leg Ranch.

BY

Martin Clifford.



CHAPTER 1.

An Unexpected Catch!

"D WOP it!"
 "Bow-wow!"
 "Weally, you fellows——"
 "Chuck it, Gussy!"
 "Wats!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy firmly. "I advise you kids to dwp it at once!"
 Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's advice was good.

There was no doubt whatever about that. Passage cricket was strictly forbidden in the House, and in the event of a master or a prefect dropping upon the cricketers, trouble was certain to ensue. And cricket really could not be played indoors without a certain amount of noise, which was quite likely to attract the attention of a master or a prefect.

Arthur Augustus, coming upstairs to the Fourth Form passage, had landed quite unexpectedly into a cricket match.

Tom Merry & Co. had been going down to Little Side after class when the rain came on. It came on hard and heavy. It had not rained for days and days, and no doubt that sudden heavy downpour delighted the farmers of the vicinity. But it had quite a different effect on the St. Jim's cricketers. They grumbled and grouched, and made emphatic remarks about the British climate. And some of the more strenuous spirits started passage cricket.

It was quite an informal game.

At the farther end of the long, broad corridor was the single wicket—a stack of grammars and dictionaries. Kit Wildrake of the Fourth was batting. The fieldsmen stood mostly in the open study doorways. The bowler

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stood on the landing, and was about to bowl when Arthur Augustus came up and bestowed his fatherly advice upon the reckless youths.

"I wepeat," said Arthur Augustus, "you had bettah dwp it at once. You will have Mr. Lathom up heek aifah you."

"Shut up, old chap!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"And get out of the way!"

"I wepeat——"

"If you stand there, Gussy, you'll get my elbow when I bowl!" said Blake.

"Wats! I advise you——"

"Shat up, Gussy!" shouted Tom Merry. "You're interrupting the game. Over!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Send that ball along, Blake!" called out Wildrake.

"I guess I'm waiting for you!"

Blake swung back his arm to bowl.

"Yawwoop!" roared Arthur Augustus, as Blake's elbow jabbed on his noble chin.

Bump!

"Can't say I didn't warn you!" remarked the bowler.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gwoooogh! You feahful ass! You have jabbed ewery tooth in my head!" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"Good!" said Blake heartlessly.

The round red ball flew along the passage.

"Look out!" shouted Monty Lowther suddenly.

"Cave!"

Lowther had sighted a mortar-board rising into view on the stairs.

There was a sudden scampering into the studies. The fieldsmen vanished from sight like rabbits into burrows.

But the warning came too late for the batsman.

Wildrake's bat had met the ball and sent it whizzing back towards the stairs.

"Oh, gee-whiz!" ejaculated the Canadian junior.

He stood as if rooted to the floor, watching the flight of the ball with mesmerised eyes.

Not another man remained in the passage. Even Arthur Augustus had picked himself up in time to vanish into Study No. 6.

The ball flew the length of the passage, without a hand raised to stop its career.

But every bullet has its billet! And the same rule applied to the round red ball whizzing from Kit Wildrake's bat.

Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, stepped on the landing. He had come up to inquire what was going on.

But he did not need to ask.
 With what a novelist would call a sickening thud, the cricket ball landed on Mr. Lathom's watch-chain.
 "Oh!" ejaculated Mr. Lathom.
 Then he sat down.
 The bump was heard in all the studies as the master of the Fourth sat down on the passage floor.
 "Oh, Jerusalem!" gasped Wildrake.
 "Grooogh! Hooogh!" spluttered Mr. Lathom.
 "What—what—what—ooch! Grooogh! Mooooooooooh!"
 "Oh, my hat!" murmured Blake, in Study No. 6.
 "Wildrake's done it now! Lathom's caught the ball!"
 "You will admit, Blake, that I told you so," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy severely.
 "Fathead!"
 "Weally, Blake, I warned you——"
 "Ass!"
 "I say, it sounds as if Lathom was in a bad temper!" murmured Herries.
 It did!
 Mr. Lathom struggled to his feet. He was rather winded, but otherwise not much damaged. But there was thunder in his brow, and his eyes gleamed wrath.
 "Wildrake!" he thundered.
 "Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Wildrake.
 "Groogh! Did you hurl that ball at me?"
 "Oh, no, sir!"
 "What? What?"
 "I—I batted it, sir!" stammered Wildrake. "I—I didn't know you were coming up, sir—not when I hit the ball. Oh dear!"
 "You are playing cricket in the passage!" snorted Mr. Lathom.
 "Hem! Yes, sir."
 "You know that it is strictly forbidden!"
 "Hem!"
 "You know that it is dangerous!" roared Mr. Lathom.
 "Is—is—it, sir?"
 As a matter of fact, Wildrake realised that it was—though the realisation came too late to be of any use to him.
 "I—I guess I'm sorry, sir!" he gasped.
 "Grooogh! No doubt! You will probably—grooogh—be sorer when you have received the—ooooogh—punishment due for your recklessness! Ow! Follow me to my study, Wildrake!"
 "Oh dear!"
 The junior from the Boot Leg Ranch laid down his bat and followed Mr. Lathom down the stairs. His sunburnt face expressed anything but happy anticipation.
 Tom Merry & Co. emerged from the studies when they were gone.
 "Are we going on?" asked Lowther.
 "Unfinished match!" said Tom, laughing.
 "Of course, Lathom was bound to butt in!" growled Blake.
 "I told you so, deah boy!"
 "Dry, up, ass!"
 "Weally, Blake, you must admit that I told you so."
 "Oh, bump him!" grunted Blake.
 "Weally, you fellows— Whooooop!"
 Bump!
 Somehow the fact that Gussy had told them so, and insisted upon reminding them of the fact, did not have a pleasing effect on the cricketers.
 "Bai Jove! Oh cwumbs! Gwoogh!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Of all the ungrateful wottahs! Gwoogh!"
 Tom Merry & Co. dispersed along the studies, leaving Arthur Augustus to waste his sweetness on the desert air. The swell of St. Jim's had picked himself up and was dusting his trousers in great wrath, when Kit Wildrake came back. Wildrake had looked serious when he followed his Form master down. He looked still more serious as he came up, and he was wriggling painfully.
 "Had it bad, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Ow! You've said it!" grunted Wildrake. "Six! Ow! And detained for to-morrow afternoon! Wow!"
 "Hard cheese, deah boy."
 "Wow!"
 "But you will wemembah that I told you so!"
 "Eh?"
 "I told you so, you know."
 "Is that any comfort, you pesky jay?" roared Wildrake.
 "Pwobably not, deah boy. Nevahtheless, it is a fact that I told you so, and—— Bai Jove! What are you up to, you fealful ass? Yoop!"
 Once more Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat down hard. And Wildrake, somewhat comforted, went wriggling to his study.

CHAPTER 2.

Rough on Wildrake!

"FINE!" said Tom Merry.
 "Oh, what a surprise!" sang Monty Lowther.
 It was the following afternoon.
 After the heavy rain of the previous day, which had led to passage cricket, and such painful results for Wildrake of the Fourth, the day had dawned bright and sunny, and the afternoon was glorious, and Tom Merry & Co. were in great spirits. There was a House match that afternoon, in which the School House were going to beat the New House hollow; while the New House, on their side, were going to knock the School House into a cocked hat. Both these sweeping victories were not likely to be won; but it was going to be a great game, and the St. Jim's junior cricketers were prepared to enjoy it. There was only one glum face in the School House crowd.

That was Kit Wildrake's.

The hardy Canadian junior had long since recovered from the effect of the "six" he had received in Mr. Lathom's study, severe as the infliction had been at the time. But he was detained for the half-holiday, and that was a more serious matter.

While Tom Merry & Co. were going down to Little Side, Wildrake had to go to the Form-room, with a nice little exercise in deponent verbs to keep him company.

"It's wathah wuff on Wildwake," Arthur Augustus remarked to Blake. "Howwid to be detained when a House match is on, you know."

"Wildrake's not in the team," said Blake.
 "No, but he could have stood wound and cheeahed," said Arthur Augustus. "He could have picked up some tips, too, by watching me at the wicket."

"He's not learning to be an acrobat, is he?" inquired Blake affably.

Arthur Augustus disdained to answer that frivolous question.

"I wathah think I will dwop in and speak to him befoah I go down," he said.

"Don't be late, ass!"
 "I am not likely to be late for a cwicket match, Blake, and I wefuse to be called an ass!"

And Arthur Augustus went into the House, with the benevolent intention of cheering up the detained junior with a few cheery words.

"D'Arcy!"
 Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, had just come out of his study.

"Yaas, sir?"
 "Kindly go to the Form-room and tell Wildrake that someone has asked for him on my telephone. He may come to my study."

"Certainly, sir!"
 Arthur Augustus walked away to the Fourth Form-room.

He found Wildrake there.
 The Canadian junior was sitting at his desk, with his

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task before him and a pen in his hand. But he had not started work yet. His usually sunny face was glum.

"Feelin' wathah down, deah boy?" inquired Arthur Augustus genially.

"Rotten!" grunted Wildrake.

"It's vewy hard cheese," agreed Arthur Augustus. "But pewwaps it will be a comfort to you to weflect that you weally asked for it, you know."

The detained junior began to glare.

"You see, deah boy, you were a weckless ass, as I told you. Bai Jove! What are you goin' to do with that inkpot, Wildwake?"

"Chuck it at a silly ass, if he doesn't vamoose the ranch instanter," said Wildrake.

"Weally, Wildwake——"

"Oh, can it!"

"I was goin' to tell you——"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"I weally do not wegard that as an intelligible remark, Wildwake. I was goin' to say——"

"Give it a rest!"

"But I came heal to tell you——"

Wildrake took aim with the inkpot. The Canadian junior seemed to think that detention was enough for that afternoon, without any homilies from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

D'Arcy beat a strategic retreat to the doorway. He did not want the inkpot, and still more he did not want the ink on his beautiful flannels. Kit Wildrake took up his pen again.

An eyeglass gleamed cautiously round the door.

"Pway listen to me, deah boy."

"You silly ass, give a galoot a rest!" roared Wildrake. "I'll jolly well come after you with a ruler if you give me any more chinwag!"

"I wegard that as ungwateful, Wildwake, when I have come to tell you——"

"Cheese it!"

"Bai Jove! Considerwin' your inexcusable wudeness, Wildwake, I have a gweat mind not to tell you Mr. Lathom's message!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly.

Wildrake jumped.

"A message from Mr. Lathom? You silly owl, why didn't you tell me? Cough it up!"

"I was twyin' to tell you, Wildwake——"

"What is it?" demanded Wildrake. "Am I let off detention?"

"Not that I am awah of. Mr. Lathom said nothin' to me about it. I wegard it as vewy impwobable, aftah you biffed Mr. Lathom with a ewicket ball."

"Then you can keep the message and be blowed!" grunted Wildrake.

"I am bound to delivah Mr. Lathom's message, deah boy. Besides, the fellow on the telephone will get cut off, vewy likely, if you do not go and take the call."

"What?" exclaimed Wildrake.

"Somebody has asked for you on Mr. Lathom's telephone," explained Arthur Augustus. "He says you are to go to his studay."

"You—you—you frabjous foozler!" gasped Wildrake. "Somebody's waiting on the telephone, and you hang around chewing the rag instead of telling me. You howling ass!"

"But I was twyin' to tell you, deah boy——"

"Br-r-r-r!"

Wildrake made a rush for the passage. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy staggered against the door as the Canadian junior rushed past him.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "The fwightfully wude wottah! Aftah I have taken the twouble to bwing him a message. I will give him a feahful thwashin' when he comes back!"

Heedless of Arthur Augustus and his wrath, Wildrake scudded away to his Form master's study.

It was unusual for a junior to receive a call on a Form master's telephone, especially for a junior from British Columbia who had no relatives in England. Wildrake arrived rather breathless in Mr. Lathom's study.

The Fourth Form master greeted him with a severe glance. He had not forgotten the cricket ball, and for

the present the Canadian junior was in his black books. Wildrake noticed that the receiver was off the phone.

"I sent you a message that you had been called up on my telephone, Wildrake," said Mr. Lathom crossly.

"You should have come at once."

"I—I came as quickly as I could, sir," said Wildrake.

"May I take the call, please?"

"It is unusual—most unusual—for such a call to be made," said Mr. Lathom. "I think it is some practical joke, as the person who rang up gave an extraordinary name—a very extraordinary name. You are not acquainted, I presume, with any person known by the extraordinary name of Long Jim—an absurd nickname, if it is a name at all."

Wildrake gave a start.

"Long Jim! My hat!"

"Have you heard of such a person, Wildrake?"

"He's the foreman of my father's ranch in British Columbia, sir," said Wildrake. "I had no idea he was in England. This is news to me, sir. May I take the call, please?"

"If it is some person from your home, Wildrake, you may take the call."

"Thank you, sir."

And the junior from the Boot Leg Ranch fairly jumped to the telephone.

CHAPTER 3.

Gussy to the Rescue!

"HALLO!"

"Hallo! Is that you, Kit?"

"Kit Wildrake! Who's speaking?"

"I guess you orter know my toot, young Kit. You ain't forgotten Long Jim while you've been at school, hay?"

"No fear!" said Wildrake. "But I don't know your voice, Jim—it's the telephone, I suppose. I didn't know you were over here. Where are you speaking from?"

"Wayland Post Office. I guess I looked out a school number and asked for you, Kit. I figure out you'd be glad to see an old chum."

"What-ho!" said Wildrake emphatically.

"It's a half-holiday at your school, ain't it? So a galoot has told me, being Wednesday."

"That's right, Jim. But——"

"Well, then, you come along and see an old pard, Kit. I guess you know your way about the country here now. I'll wait for you on the footpath. You know it—from the Wayland road to Rylcombe Lane."

"I know it all right, and I'll be jolly glad to see you, Jim. But——"

"I'll get off there right now and wait for you."

"Why not come up to the school?"

There was a hoarse chuckle on the telephone.

"I guess not, Kit. You don't want a rough old-timer like me butting into your school. Better see me outside, if you'd like to see me at all, that is."

"Of course I would, Jim. But——"

"Well, you hump it along as soon as you can, and you'll find your old pard waiting for you. I've got lots of news for you from the ranch. I guess I'll be glad to see you agin, Kit."

"I'll be as glad as you, Jim. Hold on a minute."

Kit Wildrake turned from the telephone. He looked at the frowning face of Mr. Lathom very anxiously. It was the hardest of luck that he should be detained for the afternoon when his old acquaintance from the Boot Leg Ranch called to him. Certainly Wildrake would never have played passage cricket the day before had he known that Long Jim of the Boot Leg Ranch was on hand.

"Mr. Lathom——" he began appealingly.

"Have you finished?" snapped Mr. Lathom. "Replace the receiver."

"No, sir. You see——"

"Replace the receiver and leave my study," said Mr. Lathom. "This is very irregular, and it must not occur again, Wildrake. You must warn this acquaintance, whoever he is, that boys are not allowed to receive telephone calls at the school."

"Certainly, sir. But——"



Arthur Augustus was hurled to the floor with a crash. "Oh!" he gasped. He sprawled dazedly on the floor, while Poker Pete unhooked his belt and doubled it. Then, with a savage face, the ruffian rained a dozen blows on the St. Jim's junior. "There, you pesky gink!" he roared. "Take that—and that—and that!" (See Chapter 6.)

"It is most irregular. I cannot allow you any further conversation with this person, Wildrake."

"If you please, sir—"

"I have told you, Wildrake, to replace the receiver," said Mr. Lathom in a rumbling voice.

"But, sir—" stammered Wildrake.

"Bless my soul! Do you actually refuse to obey my commands?" thundered Mr. Lathom, rising to his feet. "Upon my word! This is too much!"

"If you'll let me explain, sir—"

"I will allow you to say nothing, Wildrake! You are a disrespectful and disobedient boy! Replace that receiver and leave my study instantly, or I shall cane you severely!"

"But, sir, Long Jim says—"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Lathom; and he picked up his cane and made a stride towards the junior.

There was no help for it. Wildrake replaced the receiver on the hooks. Mr. Lathom, with a thunderous frown, pointed to the door with his cane.

"Go back to your detention at once!" he snapped.

"I—I was going to ask you to let me off detention this afternoon, sir!" gasped the unfortunate Wildrake. "You see—"

"Silence! How dare you ask such a thing! Another word, and I will cane you and double your task! Go!"

"But, sir—"

"Bless my soul! Hold out your hand, Wildrake!"

Swish!

"Now go!"

Kit Wildrake, with feelings too deep for words, went. Mr. Lathom sniffed angrily and sat down to his papers again. There was still a slight ache, reminiscent of the

cricket ball, under Mr. Lathom's watch-chain. Certainly it had not been a judicious moment for the junior to ask to be let off detention.

Wildrake tramped back into the Form-room with a gloomy brow. Arthur Augustus was pushing back his cuffs, with the intention of administering a fearful thrashing to the junior who had offended his lofty dignity. But the swell of St. Jim's forgot all his belligerent intentions as he saw the expression on Wildrake's face.

"Bai Jove! What's the mattah, deah boy?" he exclaimed.

"I guess I'm not standing it!" growled Wildrake. "That call was from an old pal on the Boot Leg Ranch, who's in England for some reason. And he will be waiting for me. I shall have to go, and bother detention!"

"Bai Jove! Mr. Lathom will be fwightfully watty if you cut detention, old chap!" said Gussy.

"Can't be helped!" said Wildrake restlessly.

"You can see the merchant some othah time, deah boy."

"But he's fixed it up to wait for me on the Wayland footpath now, and I wasn't able to tell him I couldn't come. I can't leave him hangin' about all the afternoon."

"That's all wight, deah boy. Send him a message."

"Who'd go?" grunted Wildrake.

"I would, deah boy, if I wasn't goin' to play cwicket."

"Well, ass, what's the good of that? You are going to play cricket, you frumptions chump!"

"That is hardly polite, Wildwake, when I am twyin' to help you out of a difficulty," said Arthur Augustus with dignity. "If the New House bat first, I shall have time to go, and I will go with pleasuah."

"And if the School House bat first, fathead?"

"Then I will find some othah chap to go," said Arthur Augustus cheerily. "It's all wight."

Wildrake shook his head.

"I guess I'll vamoose the ranch," he said. "After all, it's only a licking if I cut detention, and I guess I want to see Long Jim and hear the news from home. I'm going to clear."

"I strongly advise you, Wildwake, not to bweak detention. I wegard it as bein' diswespctful and bad form."

"Bow-wow! I'm going!"

"Wildrake!"

It was Mr. Lathom's voice in the doorway of the Form-room. Kit Wildrake spun round in utter dismay.

"Oh, gee-whiz!" he ejaculated.

Mr. Lathom gave him a grim frown.

"So it is your intention to leave the House, Wildrake, in defiance of my commands? I suspected as much, and followed you here. D'Arcy, you should not be here speaking to a boy under detention. In view of the excellent advice I heard you give Wildrake, however, I will excuse you."

"Thank you, sir!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"Wildrake, you will bring your books to my study. As I cannot trust you to remain here, you will perform your task under my own eyes."

"Oh, sir, I—"

"Silence!"

With a dismal expression on his face that might have melted the heart of a stone image or a Prussian Hun, Wildrake gathered up his books. But Mr. Lathom showed no sign of relenting. The reminiscent pain under his watch-chain made him adamant.

"Come with me!" he said sternly.

Wildrake left the Form-room with his Form master. Arthur Augustus made him a sign as he went, and Wildrake understood that a message would be taken to the foreman of the Boot Leg Ranch, waiting on the footpath in the wood. From that he derived as much comfort as he could as he sat down to deponent verbs in Mr. Lathom's study, under Mr. Lathom's somewhat baleful eye.

CHAPTER 4. Kidnapped!

"TOM MEWWY—"

"Here's the ass!"

"Here's the footling chump!"

"Where have you been, fathead?"

"I've a jolly good mind to keep you on a chain!" howled Blake.

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Better late than never," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Another minute and I should have given you the chuck, Gussy."

Arthur Augustus had arrived rather breathless on

the cricket field. He was greeted by many voices, not with Chesterfieldian politeness.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I should wefuse to be given the chuck, as you wathah coarsely expwess it," said Arthur Augustus. "Who's battin'?"

"We are," said Figgins, of the New House.

"Wight-ho!" said Arthur Augustus. "The fact is, Tom Mewwy—"

"The fact is that we're ready to go into the field," said the captain of the Shell. "This is a cricket match, Gussy, not a conversazione."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Are you coming, fathead, now you've turned up?" bawled Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"It's his lower jaw that moves," remarked Monty Lowther, watching Gussy's face, "and it keeps on moving. Scientific johnnies say that perpetual motion has never been discovered. They've never watched Gussy's chin."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Are you playing, Gussie, or shall I call on some other silly owl?" asked Tom Merry good-humouredly.

"Of course I am playin', deah boy. I am not likely to allow the New House to win in the last match of the term."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for mewwiment in that remark. The fact is, deah boys, I have undahaken to do somethin' for Wildwake, who is undah detention, you know. I suppose you can put a substitute in the field, Tom Mewwy, for the New House innings. I shall be back in time to bat."

"All serene, if Figgys doesn't mind," said Tom.

"Right as rain," said Figgins. "Run away and play, Gussy."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Digby!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Do you think it will be wunnin' any sewious wisk, Tom Mewwy, if Dig fields instead of me?"

"Not at all," said Tom. "The real risk to a team is having you in it, old bean."

"You uttah ass!"

"Buzz off, Gussy, and get back in time to bat," said Figgins. "We may need your wicket to win."

"You mean that Tom Mewwy will need my wicket to win, Figgay."

"Not at all. I mean what I say."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as an ass, Figgins. I wegard all you fellows as cacklin' asses!"

And having delivered that sweeping opinion, Arthur Augustus walked off the cricket field.

Tom Merry & Co. went into the field quite cheerfully, apparently not greatly dismayed by the loss of Gussy's valuable assistance there. All the wonderful catches Gussy had been going to make would not now be made. But possibly they would not have been made in any case.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy strolled out of the school gates and took the road to Rylcombe.

He did not hurry. Hurry was inconsistent with the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere, and there was plenty of time to walk down to the wood and back while the New House innings was going on. Figgins & Co. were not likely to be dismissed very soon.

Arthur Augustus proceeded gracefully along Rylcombe Lane, and stopped at the stile which gave access to the footpath through the wood on to the Wayland road.

On that footpath Wildrake's old acquaintance from Canada was to be waiting. At what precise point Gussy did not know; but evidently if Long Jim was on the footpath at all Gussy was bound to find him by following it as far as the end.

The swell of St. Jim's was rather interested in Long Jim. He had heard many stories from Wildrake of life in the west of Canada, and more than once Wildrake had mentioned Long Jim, the burly foreman of the Boot Leg Ranch, who had taught him to ride and shoot and handle the "rope." A real live ranchman from the wild and woolly West was an object of great interest to the swell of St. Jim's, and he was quite keen to make Long Jim's acquaintance. He had an idea of persuading the ranchman to walk back to the school with him and have a look at the House match and



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wait till Wildrake was free of detention. All the St. Jim's fellows would be interested to see the man from British Columbia.

Arthur Augustus negotiated the stile and walked along the leafy footpath under the thick old trees, rich in their summer green. It was a little-frequented path, and Gussy passed no one on his way.

He was quite near the Wayland road, and caught a glimpse of the white high-road, and a motor-car standing there, through the openings of the trees, and still he had met no one.

He was beginning to wonder whether the ranchman had kept the appointment, after all, when there was a rustle in the thickets beside the path, and a burly man stepped out into view.

Arthur Augustus halted.

The man was a big, powerful fellow, rather roughly dressed, with a bronzed face and high cheekbones and keen, watchful eyes. He wore a large slouched hat, reminiscent of the West. His hard, rugged face was not prepossessing in looks, but Gussy had not expected the foreman of the Boot Leg Ranch to be a beauty. He had no doubt that this was "Long Jim."

He raised his hat politely as the man stared hard at him. Obviously the rugged-featured man was there to wait for someone, and took Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to be that someone.

"Lookin' for somebody, sir?" he asked, with civility. "Yaas, wathah! I'm expectin' to meet Long Jim, frowm the Boot Leg Wanch," said Arthur Augustus politely.

The man grinned.

"From the school, eh?"

"Yaas. You see—"

"Waal, you won't see Long Jim in a hurry," grinned the burly man. "Long Jim, fur as I know, is about six thousand miles from hyer."

"Eh?"

"Fur as I know, Long Jim ain't never left the ranch," chuckled the man. "But I'm hyer, young 'un, and that's what matters. Nail him."

He sprang forward as he spoke, and at the same moment another man leaped from the trees behind Arthur Augustus.

Before he knew what was happening Arthur Augustus was in the grasp of both of them.

"Bai Jove! What— Gweoooggh!" A rough hand was clapped over his mouth before he could get farther. "Gweooogh!"

The swell of St. Jim's, utterly amazed as he was by the unexpected attack, struggled manfully. But in the grasp of the two burly strangers he was helpless. He was picked up like an infant, the rough hand still closing his mouth, and carried into the trees away from the footpath.

Arthur Augustus wondered whether he was dreaming. Really, it seemed like it.

A dozen yards from the footpath he was dumped down on the ground, and the rough hand was removed from his mouth, to be replaced by a bandanna, which was wound round his face in thick folds, both blindfolding and gagging him. Under the folds he spluttered and gurgled helplessly.

Then, while the strong hands still held him, he felt a cord run round his ankles, and another round his wrists, and knotted.

"I guess this was easy, Rube Redway," muttered the burly man, with a hoarse chuckle.

"Easier than I reckoned, Pete. The young fool dropped right into it. I guess he's forgotten his cuteness since he left the ranch."

"Sure!"

"Bring him along!"

Arthur Augustus heard the words in dazed amazement. He was in the hands of kidnappers, he knew that—though what their object might be was a mystery to him. He was lifted and a heavy motor-rug was wound round him, hiding him from sight. Then he was carried away again, brushing against the foliage.

He felt himself thrust into a doorway and dumped down in the bottom of a car.

It came into his mind that this must be the car he had seen waiting on the Wayland road, at the end of the footpath.

There was a mutter of voices, and one of the men followed him into the car, the other taking the driver's seat. D'Arcy heard the buzz of the engine as it started.

He felt the man in the car bend over him.

"You hear me, young 'un?" It was the voice of the man whom the burly ruffian had called Rube Redway. "You're in my hands, and I guess I've got you fixed so that you can't give trouble. You ain't going to be hurt—yet, at any rate; not at all if your popper does the sensible thing. But if you try to give any trouble you'll get it sharp. You ain't never see'd me, but I reckon you've heard the name of Rube Redway—it's pretty well known in the country you come from. If you've heard of me, you know I'm a bad man to rile. Keep that in mind, Kit Wildrake."

The car was buzzing along the Wayland road now.

Arthur Augustus could not speak.

But he understood now.

The kidnappers believed him to be Kit Wildrake. It was a natural mistake, in the circumstances. Evidently they had never seen the son of the Canadian rancher, but knew that he was a schoolboy at St. Jim's. The telephone call in the name of the Boot Leg foreman had been a trick to draw Wildrake from the school to the lonely path, where he would be at the mercy of the kidnappers. Certainly it would have succeeded without a hitch—for Wildrake had not the slightest suspicion of treachery—but for the fact that the Canadian junior was under detention and that Gussy had come in his place with a message—which he had not been given time to deliver.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, inaudibly.

Whether he would be in danger when the kidnappers discovered their mistake he did not know. He grinned under the folds of the bandanna. Wildrake, sitting in Mr. Lathom's study at St. Jim's, deep in deponent verbs, was doubtless feeling a very disappointed and ill-used youth. He did not know what he had escaped—but he would know, when Gussy failed to return to the school; and the kidnappers were not likely to have another chance with the junior from British Columbia. And, whatever these ruffians wanted with the rancher's son, they could not possibly want Arthur Augustus D'Arcy; his release could only be a matter of time. The pair of rascals had travelled six thousand miles to kidnap the rancher's son, and at the very finish their scheme had been baffled by sheer chance, though they did not know it yet. And Arthur Augustus grinned as he thought of it, uncomfortable as the position was.

Then another thought came into his mind. The car was almost rocking with its speed; mile after mile was flying under the swift wheels—mile after mile, while the New House innings was ending, and Tom Merry would be looking for his batsman—who would not return for the House match. That meant a win for the New House in the last match before the summer holidays. At least, Gussy was sure that it did.

At that dismaying thought the swell of St. Jim's began to struggle in his bonds.

There was a movement, a muttered oath, and then something cold and hard and round was pressed to Gussy's forehead.

A shudder ran through him as he realised that it was the muzzle of a revolver.

"Quiet, you fool!" muttered the voice of Redway,



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in a savage, threatening growl. "Do you want me to pull the trigger?"

Arthur Augustus ceased to struggle.

CHAPTER 5.

Missing From School!

"Gussy!"

"D'Arcy!"

"Fathead!"

"Where's that ass?"

"Where's that chump?"

"Where's that foozling, frabjous fathead?"

Many voices were inquiring for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy on Little Side at St. Jim's.

The New House innings had ended for 96. The School House innings had started and was drawing to its close. Arthur Augustus had been No. 6, but he was not present when the wicket went down, and Tom Merry left him to the extreme tail of the innings. But with nine wickets down, last man called, last man had not put in an appearance.

So many voices called for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and called in vain. He was not in the pavilion and he was not in the field. Nobody seemed to have seen Arthur Augustus since he had walked off just before the game started.

"The frabjous ass!" said Blake. "The foozling frump! Where on earth has he got to?"

"Dropped in to see his tailor, perhaps," suggested Monty Lowther. "If he's looking at something new in trousers or ties, we shan't see him again till lock-up."

"D'Arcy!" roared Tom Merry.

"Well, he's not here," said Manners of the Shell.

"The howling ass!" exclaimed Tom wrathfully. "We can't keep the field waiting. Put on your pads, Dig."

"What ho!" said Dig cheerfully.

And Robert Arthur Digby went out to the wicket that should have been defended by the swell of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry was frowning.

Arthur Augustus, with all his elegant manners and customs, was a good bat, and he was wanted in the team. School House were only 80, with one wicket to fall, and it was a single innings game. Tom Merry doubted whether Dig, keen as he was, would be able to keep his end up sufficiently long against the New House bowling to pull the match out of the fire.

His doubts were justified.

Fatty Wynn was bowling, and Fatty was in great form. Digby stood up manfully to the first ball, just stopped the second, and had a lucky escape from the third. But the fourth spread-eagled his wicket, and Dig came dolorously out.

"Did my best, old man," he said apologetically.

"All serene!" said Tom, as cheerfully as he could.

"I'll scalp Gussy!" said Jack Blake, in concentrated tones. "I'll scalp him bald-headed!"

"What's the odds?" yawned Figgins of the Fourth. "New House were bound to win, you know."

"Rats!"

"Well, you win, anyhow!" said Tom Merry, with a laugh. "We'll give you the kybosh next term, Figgy!"

"I don't think!" grinned Figgy.

"You don't!" agreed Blake. "Nobody does in the New House!"

"Why, you School House ass—"

"You New House fathead—"

"Order!" said Tom Merry. "Keep it for Gussy when he comes in!"

"I'm going to take a stump to the study," said Blake, "and when Gussy comes in he gets the stump! The frabjous ass!"

The game was over, with a win for the New House, and the cricketers went in to change.

It was possible—certain, according to Figgins & Co., that the result would have been the same had Arthur Augustus turned up in time to bat for his House. But the School House cricketers were deeply wrathful. All the members of the House junior eleven wanted to see Gussy when he came in, and wanted to see him badly.

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They wanted to tell him what they thought of him for letting down the side; and it was extremely probable that they would proceed from words to action, in order to leave Gussy in no doubt as to what they thought of him.

Blake, in his eagerness, went down to the gates with a stump under his arm, to wait for Gussy.

But still Gussy did not come, and Blake returned to the House at last, his wrath improving, like wine, with keeping.

As he came in, he met Wildrake, released at last from his detention in his Form master's study. Wildrake called to him.

"Where's D'Arcy?"

"Nobody knows!" growled Blake. "We're going to lynch him when he comes in. He left us in the lurch."

"Gussy did?" ejaculated Wildrake.

"Yes, the ass!"

"Didn't he play in the House match?"

"No, the chump!"

"Why not?"

"Why not?" hooted Blake. "Because he walked off somewhere and never came back. He hasn't come in yet."

"Gee-whiz!"

Blake was passing on, when he paused suddenly and turned back. He remembered what D'Arcy had said on Little Side.

"Gussy said he was going to do something for you, Wildrake, and would be back in time to bat."

"That's right," said the Canadian junior. "He was going to take a message to a man who was waiting for me on the Wayland footpath."

"That wouldn't take him long."

"I guess not. I can't imagine why he hasn't got back. He can't have stayed on palavering with Long Jim."

Blake jumped.

"Long what?"

"Long Jim," said Wildrake, with a smile, and he explained about the telephone message.

"Blessed if I can understand it!" said Blake. "He's had time to walk to Wayland and back half a dozen times, but he hasn't come in yet. It's lock-up in a few minutes now, too."

"Beats me to a frazzle, too," confessed Wildrake, in perplexity. "No reason why he shouldn't have been back under the hour."

"Calling-over, you fellows," said Tom Merry, coming along with Manners and Lowther. "Gussy turned up yet?"

"No."

"What on earth's keeping him?"

"Goodness knows!"

The School House crowd went into Hall for the House roll-call. Mr. Railton was taking the roll, and when he came to D'Arcy's name there was a pause.

"D'Arcy!" repeated the Housemaster.

No reply.

Arthur Augustus was marked absent, and the roll proceeded. Blake's wrath had evaporated by the time the School House came out of Hall. His face was anxious.

"Nothing can have happened to the fathead, surely!" he said.

"What could have happened?" asked Tom Merry.

"Blessed if I know!"

"Gussy—even Gussy—wouldn't walk under a motor-car," said Monty Lowther. "But he can't be at his tailor's all this time."

"If anything hasn't happened, I'll jolly well stump him!" said Blake. "But—but if anything has happened, well—"

Blake tramped away to Study No. 6 in the Fourth in a worried frame of mind. Arthur Augustus did not come in for prep.

After prep the Terrible Three came along to Study No. 6. They found Blake and Herries and Digby with serious faces.

"Gussy not come in yet?" asked Tom.

Blake shook his head.

"Where on earth can he be?" Tom's face was anxious now. "It will be dorm soon."



Dr. Holmes listened until Kit Wildrake finished his story, and then he turned to Mr. Skeat. "What do you think of this?" he asked. The Wayland inspector gave a grunt. "Moonshine, sir," he said. "If Master D'Arcy has been kidnapped, it is quite probable that he was taken away in a car. But we did not need Master Wildrake to tell us that—that was probable!" (See Chapter 9.)

"Something's happened to him," said Blake.

"But what?"

"Oh, ask me another! He wouldn't have let us down in the match if he could have helped it, and—why should he stay out after lock-up? Goodness knows what can have happened, but something has."

The juniors went downstairs in a worried and disturbed frame of mind. Arthur Augustus' prolonged absence was utterly inexplicable, unless there had been an accident. But if an accident had happened to the swell of St. Jim's early in the afternoon, surely news of it should have reached the school by this time! It was utterly perplexing.

Kildare of the Sixth called to Blake as he came down.

"D'Arcy's not in yet," he said. "Mr. Railton wants to see you in his study, Blake."

"Right!"

Blake went to the Housemaster's study, where he found Mr. Railton looking very grave.

"Do you know why D'Arcy is remaining out of gates till this late hour, Blake?" asked the Housemaster.

"No, sir."

"Do you know where he has gone?"

Blake explained what Wildrake had told him. Mr. Railton listened in surprise.

"Send Wildrake to me," he said.

Blake left the study and called Wildrake. The Canadian junior was looking very disturbed when he came to his Housemaster. It was on his account that Arthur Augustus was landed in this scrape.

In reply to the Housemaster's questions, he explained once more the episode of the telephone message from Long Jim.

"This man was a friend of yours, a trustworthy man?" asked Mr. Railton.

"Oh, sure!" said Wildrake. "I've known him since I was a kid, sir. He's one of the best."

"You are sure that it was from the foreman of your father's ranch that the message came?"

Wildrake started a little.

"Well, I guess I never doubted it, sir," he said. "Why should anybody pull my leg about it?"

"Did you recognise his voice on the telephone?"

"No, sir. But voices often sound different over the wires," said Wildrake.

"That is true. But you have no proof that the man whom D'Arcy went to meet was in fact your father's foreman?"

"No, sir," said Wildrake slowly.

"Have you heard by letter from home that the man was to be in England now?"

"No, sir. I guess it was some surprise to me when I was rung up and the galoot said he was Long Jim."

Mr. Railton pursed his lips.

"It may have been some trick, then, possibly for purposes of robbery," he said.

"Oh, gum!" Wildrake was utterly dismayed. "And poor old Gussy walked into it instead of me! But—but even if some hobo went through his pockets, sir, he would be back before this."

"I presume so," said Mr. Railton. "But if there has been a robbery, D'Arcy may not have submitted tamely, and—" He paused. "If he does not return by bedtime I must communicate with the police. You may go, Wildrake."

Wildrake left the Housemaster's study with a clouded face.

Until half-past nine that night there was incessant discussion in the junior Common-room, with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as the topic. Then the prefects shepherded the juniors off to their dormitories, and Arthur Augustus was still absent and no word had come. It was obvious now that something had happened

to the swell of St. Jim's, and all faces were grave and concerned. All the House knew that Mr. Railton had telephoned to the police station at Wayland, and that half a dozen of the House prefects had gone to look for the missing junior. It was a late hour before Tom Merry & Co. slept that night.

CHAPTER 6.

In Desperate Hands!

"GWOUGH!" That was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's remark as the thick bandanna was jerked off his face. How long he had spent rolled up in the rug on the floor of the rushing car Gussy never knew.

But the hurried drive came to an end at last, and the car halted and he was lifted out.

The rug was thrown aside, and a knife slid over the cords that secured his ankles. His legs were freed, though his hands remained bound behind his back.

"Walk!" said Rube Redway's sharp, nasal voice.

With a grip on his arm, D'Arcy walked. He felt himself mounting a step, and he knew that he was indoors. A door slammed.

He was taken along a passage into a room. It was then that the bandanna was unrolled from his face.

"Gwoogh! Ooooch!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

He blinked round him dizzily in the light.

He was in a small room with a single window, across which planks had been screwed to the window-frame. Obviously, the room had been prepared for a prisoner.

The light came from a smoky lantern on a shelf. It was still daylight out of doors, but no gleam of the sun came to the interior of the room.

In the room was a small iron bedstead with a few blankets on it, and two or three other articles of furniture. It looked dirty and neglected, and not at all attractive to the eyes of the swell of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus stood rather numbly, his limbs stiff from the cords that had confined him so long. But his aristocratic face was full of courage as he looked at the kidnappers.

Rube Redway stood in the doorway watching him, a grin of triumph on his face. He was a man of about thirty, with narrow features and sharp, foxy eyes and a prominent thin nose. D'Arcy could see that Redway was the prime mover in the kidnapping, the ruffian he called "Pete" being his follower. The man Pete chuckled as he looked at the swell of St. Jim's. Both the rascals were plainly enjoying their success, neither of them so far having the faintest suspicion that they had made a mistake. They had expected Kit Wildrake to come along the Wayland footpath and inquire for "Long Jim," and he had come. That was all, so far as Reuben Redway and his associate knew.

Redway's glance ran over the swell of St. Jim's contemptuously. D'Arcy's elegant flannels were sadly rumpled and dusty, but he always looked a well-dressed fellow. His monocle was hanging at the end of its cord.

"I guess Old Man Wildrake's boy has grown a dude since he came to school in the Old Country," grinned Pete.

"He sure has," sneered Redway. "I guess that smart Alec wouldn't cut much ice out on the ranches."

"Bai Jove! Weally, you wottahs—"

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Pete, greatly taken by Arthur Augustus' inimitable accent.

Redway grinned.

"The young idiot won't give us any trouble, I guess, Poker Pete," he said. "But keep him safe while I'm gone."

"If he gives me any trouble I guess he will be sorry," said Pete. "But he don't look the shape for it."

"You uttah wascals—"

"You savvy that you're safe here, young Wildrake," said Redway. "You're a hundred miles from your school, and I don't figure that your friends there will catch on to where you are located."

D'Arcy's heart sank.

He had felt the rocking car eating up the miles. A hundred miles from St. Jim's! Certainly, a search in the neighbourhood of the school was not likely to do him any good.

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"Look here, you wottahs—"

"You're in desperate hands," went on Redway coolly.

"I dare say you can guess why we want you?"

"You have made a sillay mistake."

"Cut that out. Hasn't your father written you anything that puts you wise about this?"

Arthur Augustus grinned involuntarily.

Whatever Mr. Wildrake, of the Boot Leg Ranch, had written to his son at St. Jim's it was not likely to put D'Arcy "wise," as the man from the West expressed it.

Redway started at him, puzzled by his amusement.

"Hasn't the old man let on, then?" he demanded.

"I wepeat that you are makin' a widiculous mistake," said Arthur Augustus, "and I ordah you to welease me at once."

Redway laughed.

"You'll stay here till wanted," he said. "I guess you won't be found. Feed the young fool, Pete, and lock him in. If he makes a row or tries to vamoose, give him the end of a rope, hard!"

"You bet!"

"I guess I'm hustlin' back where we came from," went on Redway. "I'm goin' to hang round to-morrow morning and learn what they're thinking of Kit Wildrake's mysterious disappearance from school." He chuckled. "I guess I'll find a search going on, and I'll find out whether they guess that a motor-car was used."

I guess he's safe here, but, if not, we'll move him on. He's got to be kept safe till I'm back in British Columbia and have made terms with Old Man Wildrake. He refused all my offers so far for Pine Tree Patch, but I figure it out that he'll think twice about refusing again when he knows his bonnie boy's life is at stake. This is a cinch, Poker Pete. I'll tell the world!"

"Search me!" assented Poker Pete.

Reuben Redway walked off, and D'Arcy heard the door of the house close behind him. The snort of the car followed.

"Well, hyer you are, you young gink," said Poker Pete. "You be good and you won't get any harm, so long as your popper does what he's wanted to do. You get fresh and you get the rope. Savvy?"

"I wish my hands were fwce," said Arthur Augustus. "I should certainly give you a feahful thwashin' for your insolence!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"I wegard you as an impertinent wascal!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "And now it is too late for you to cawwy out your wotten twick on old Wildwake, I will tell you that you have made a widiculous mistake. I am not the chap you suppose."

"What's that?" Poker Pete stared at him. "What's that you're giving me, you young gink?"

"My name is not Wildwake."

"Can it!" said Pete.

"My name is D'Arcy," said the swell of St. Jim's, with great dignity. "I came out instead of Wildwake this aftahnoon, because he was detained by his Form mastah."

"Pile it on, young 'un!" said Poker Pete.

"Bai Jove! Do you mean to say that you doubt my word?"

"Just a few," grinned Poker Pete, "and then some!"

"I wepeat that Kit Wildwake is still at St. Jim's. I came out to bwing a message for him because he was detained."

Poker Pete laughed hoarsely.

"And now, there bein' a mistake, you'd like me to let you go, hay?" he inquired banteringly.

"Yaas."

"Like me to take your word for it and set you hittin' the home trail?" chuckled Pete.

"I demand to be weleased at once!"

"Stow the chin-wag!" said Poker Pete. "That is enough, and a little over. Now, I'm going to loose your paws so you can eat. Don't get fresh, or you'll get a pain."

He released Arthur Augustus' hands.

The swell of St. Jim's had been warned not to get fresh, and, indeed, he had little chance in a struggle with the burly ruffian. But his first proceeding was to make a rush for the door.

In a second the rough, sinewy hand of the Western "tough" grasped him and dragged him back.

D'Arcy's eyes blazed, and he turned on the ruffian and struck with all his might.

There was unexpected energy in the junior's elegant form. Poker Pete received a drive on his stubby chin that sent him reeling.

He staggered back with a howl, and D'Arcy darted out of the room. In a flash he was along the passage and tearing at the door by which Redway had left the house.

Before he could open the heavy lock, however, the racing footsteps of Poker Pete clattered behind him, and the ruffian grasped him again. His stubby face was red with rage.

"You young gink!" he gasped. "You'll smart for that!"

"You howwid wuffian!" panted D'Arcy.

He struggled desperately, but the powerful grasp of the ruffian dragged him off his feet, and he was whirled back along the passage into the room he had left.

There he was hurled to the floor with a crash.

"Oh!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

He sprawled dazedly on the floor, while the ruffian unhooked his belt and doubled it. With a savage face, he rained a dozen blows on the St. Jim's junior.

"There, you pesky gink, take that—and that—and that!"

Arthur Augustus scrambled dazedly up, but the rain of blows sent him crashing down again.

Poker Pete ceased at last. He buckled on the belt, staring savagely at the gasping, exhausted junior on the floor.

"Now, you get fresh agin, and that ain't a circumstance to what you'll get next!" he snarled. "And I guess you won't feed to-night, neither, you pesky little wildcat."

And Poker Pete stamped out of the room and locked and bolted the door on the outside.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus feebly.

He staggered to his feet.

Poker Pete had taken the lantern away with him, and the schoolboy was left in the darkness. He groped his way to the bed and sat down, panting for breath, aching in every limb.

It was borne in upon D'Arcy's mind that he was, as he had been told, in desperate hands. For a long time he sat, aching and panting, his brain in a whirl.

As the long minutes passed he heard an occasional sound from the other part of the house of his gaoler moving about. But Poker Pete did not approach the door of the room where the swell of St. Jim's was imprisoned. He was keeping his threat of leaving his prisoner without food. Arthur Augustus rose to his feet at last, dizzy and aching, and moved about in the gloom, feeling his way, with little hope of discovering a way of escape from his prison. The door was locked and bolted; the only window, covered with planks, screwed hard and fast; the chimney, round which he ran his hand, was too narrow to admit the slightest form.

Arthur Augustus turned to the bed at last.

There was no escape, and he knew it. He was utterly at the mercy of the ruffians from the West. He could only wait till they discovered their mistake, and then— He could not help realising that his fate was doubtful then. He could picture their savage rage on discovering that they had kidnapped the wrong victim, and by doing so had given warning to their intended prey.

The long minutes lengthened into hours, and Arthur Augustus threw himself on the bed at last and slept. And, strange and terrible as his situation was, he was sooner asleep than his anxious friends at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 7.

Wildrake Takes the Trail!

CLANG! Clang! Clang!

The rising-bell was hardly needed that morning at St. Jim's.

Tom Merry & Co., at least, were downstairs and out in the quadrangle before Taggles began to drag at the old bell-rope.

All Arthur Augustus' friends—and their name was legion—hoped that with the morning there would be news of the missing junior.

But there was no news.

Tom Merry had asked Mr. Railton, who was also a very early riser that morning, but the Housemaster could only shake his head.

Search had been made by the Sixth Form prefects in the vicinity of the school, and the local police had been notified, but no news had come of Arthur Augustus.

It seemed as if the swell of St. Jim's had vanished into thin air when he had walked out of the gates of St. Jim's the previous afternoon.

"It's a gum-game of some sort," Kit Wildrake told the chums of the School House dismally. "Some galoot wanted to get me, and Gussy walked into it instead."

"But who— Why?" asked Tom.

"That's got me beat. But it wasn't Long Jim who telephoned me yesterday—I know that," said the Canadian junior. "If he was waiting for me on the footpath all the afternoon, and I never came, he sure would have phoned again. I could see last night that Mr. Railton thought it was a trick to get me out of the school, and I figure it out now that that was the how of it. And Gussy got it instead of me."

"But why?" exclaimed Tom again. "If it was some thief who wanted to get a schoolboy into a lonely place to rob him, surely he would have picked out some fellow known to be wealthy—Gussy himself, for instance."

"It wasn't that," said Wildrake. "It was somebody who knows me—or, at least, knows about me. He used the name of Long Jim, my father's foreman. What galoot in this country knows that name? I've mentioned it to a few fellows here, talking about the ranch at home, but that's all. Nobody outside the school has ever heard of Long Jim."

"Then—" said Tom blankly.

"It's some galoot from the other side," said Wildrake. "It's somebody from the West who knows the Boot Leg Ranch."

"But that only makes it thicker," said Blake. "Mean to say that some man has come here, all the way from the west of Canada, to play a trick on you, Wildrake?"

"Just that, though I can't understand it—unless it was really Long Jim who telephoned, and I know now

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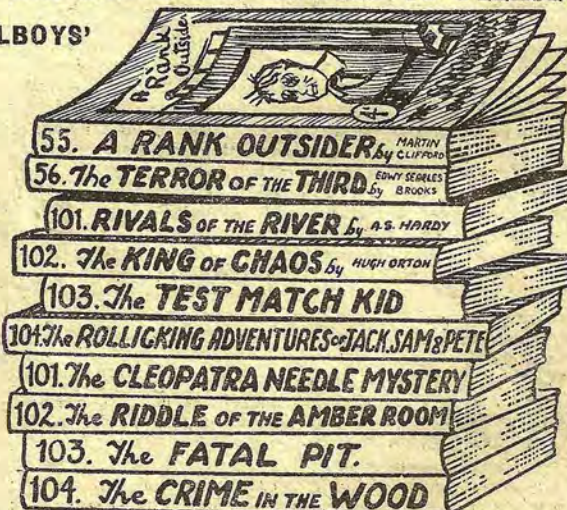
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it wasn't. If Gussy had met Long Jim on the Wayland footpath nothing would have happened to him, of course. I guess he met somebody else—some galoot who had it in for me."

"But, then, why should he harm Gussy?" said Tom. "He would know that it wasn't you as soon as he saw Gussy."

"Yep—if he knows me by sight," assented Wildrake, with a nod. "Maybe he doesn't."

"But Gussy would tell him!" urged Blake.

"He might have got it before he could speak," said Wildrake in a low voice.

"Oh!"

"You see, my father's got enemies out there," said Wildrake quietly. "It's a rough country, right out on the border, and I guess there are some bad hats there. My popper may have made an enemy, who wants to get back on him through me. That's the only way I can account for it. I guess I wish to goodness I'd gone yesterday and taken what was coming to me, instead of poor old Gussy. Whatever it was, he's got it!"

"But—but you don't mean—" Blake's voice trembled, while the other fellows stared speechlessly at Wildrake. Into the quiet old quadrangle at St. Jim's there seemed to come a breath of wild lawlessness from a new wild country, a land where men carried deadly weapons and lives were held cheap.

"I can't say," said Wildrake. "You see, the bootleg section in British Columbia isn't like the Canada of Quebec and Montreal—it's a new land, and rough. There are gunmen there from the States, rustlers from Oregon and Montana—a man who rides the trails in the Porcupine Hills generally packs a gun. If my popper's woke up some gunman gang, they may be getting back on him this way, and goodness knows what would have happened to me if I'd met that hombre yesterday, as he wanted. I can't figure it out; it's got me beat. I've had it in letters from the popper that a man named Redway has been trying to get hold of some of his land—the Pine Tree Patch, it's called—and that galoot Redway is a bad egg. I've never seen him, but he's got a reputation all along the border as a gunman. The popper's told me that Redway has gone as far as threatening him, and last time the gink called my father saw him off the ranch with a gun in his hand. That may be at the bottom of it. I don't know—but I'm going to know!"

Wildrake's teeth set.

"But how?" asked Tom.

"I guess I'm going to look for Gussy. We know where he went, and I can raise a trail as well as any Kootenay Indian. I'm going to ask leave—but I'm going, anyhow!"

The breakfast-bell rang and the juniors went back into the House.

It was a gloomy breakfast for Tom Merry & Co.

According to Wildrake—and they could not help feeling that his surmise was well founded—D'Arcy must have met some enemy of the Canadian junior the day before who had perhaps taken him for Wildrake—and then vanished. If some terrible act of revenge had taken place, had it cost Arthur Augustus D'Arcy his life? It was terrible—almost unthinkable—and yet the possibility existed. What terrible secret might be hidden in the thickets of Wayland Wood?

After breakfast Wildrake went at once to Mr. Railton's study. The Housemaster met him with a very grave face.

"No news yet, sir?" asked the Canadian junior.

"None," said Mr. Railton. "We cannot learn of any accident in the neighbourhood. The Head has telephoned to D'Arcy's house, and he certainly has not gone there."

"I want you to let me search for him, sir."

"Search is now being made by the police, Wildrake. It cannot be long before we shall receive news."

Then Mr. Railton paused.

The Housemaster took a keen interest in the work of the Boy Scouts of St. Jim's, and he had noted more than once the almost uncanny skill of the Canadian junior in picking up a trail where to less-experienced eyes there was no "sign." Wildrake had learned trail-

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ing from Indians and trappers in the Far West, and Tom Merry & Co. had had many valuable tips from him.

"I think, Wildrake, that I will give you leave to make a search," said Mr. Railton, after a pause. "It is scarcely possible that there can be any danger in your doing so, but you may take with you half a dozen of the Scouts of this House. You may remain out of gates until dinner."

Wildrake's face lighted up.

"Thank you, sir," he said. "I feel sure I shall be able to pick up sign if D'Arcy left any."

"Very well, Wildrake. You may report to me when you come in."

"I'll take three fellows of the Fourth and three of the Shell, sir, if I may," said Wildrake.

"Give me their names, then, and I will speak to Mr. Latham and Mr. Linton."

"Blake, Herries, Digby; Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther, sir."

"Very good."

Mr. Railton made a note of the names, and Wildrake left his study. He sought out Tom Merry & Co. at once. The Terrible Three were waiting for him eagerly.

"Leave for you fellows and me and three of the Fourth," said Wildrake. "Like to get into your Scout rig and come along?"

"What-ho!"

"Pronto, then," said Wildrake.

Blake and Herries and Digby were equally pleased. They were deeply anxious for their chum, and they jumped at the chance of helping in the search for him. While the other fellows were going into class that morning seven juniors in Scout rig walked out of the gates and down the lane towards the wood.

"You see, we know Gussy went to the Wayland footpath to meet the man who gave the name of Long Jim," said Wildrake. "We shan't find any sign on the road, but I sure hope we shall pick up something on the footpath."

"After so long?" asked Tom Merry.

"It was a fine day yesterday, but it was raining hard the day before," said Wildrake. "The ground was good to hold a trail. And there isn't much traffic on that footpath, and if anything happened to D'Arcy—and we know something did—we shall find traces of it."

"You don't think it possible that—that—" Blake faltered.

"I can't figure out what happened without knowing who that galoot was who used Long Jim's name and what he wanted. But I guess I shan't believe that there's been bloodshed unless I'm driven to it," said Wildrake. "The hobo may have wanted to get hold of me for some reason, and Gussy, butting in, got it instead. Anyhow, we know that D'Arcy is either dead or kidnapped, or he would have come back to the school; we know that he meant to be back under the hour and that no accident can be heard of. The chances are on the kidnapping. Even a Western gunman would be jolly slow in pulling trigger on this side of the pond. But we're going to know what happened, anyhow, if my eyes are still any use."

The juniors reached the stile and climbed over it to the woodland path.

Wildrake went ahead of the party as they followed the path towards the Wayland high-road. He had in his possession an elegant patent leather boot, which was easily recognisable as belonging to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. With eyes keen as a hawk on the footpath, Wildrake led the way, Tom Merry & Co. willingly leaving the lead to him. Good Scouts as they were, they acknowledged that in that line the junior from the Boot Leg Ranch was a long way ahead of them.

Wildrake stopped suddenly.

A sunny day had dried up most of Tuesday's rain. But there were still pools in the hollows of the wood and damp patches on the deeply shaded path. In a spot of soft, damp earth Wildrake bent and compared the boot in his hand with a track in the ground.

"The same?" asked Tom eagerly.

"Yep."

"Then we know for certain that Gussy came as far as this yesterday?"

"Sure!"

"That's something," said Blake.

Wildrake nodded and led the way on, the juniors following him with eager, watchful eyes.

CHAPTER 8.

Reading the Sign!

WILDRAKE scarcely paused as he followed the grassy footpath under the overhanging trees. His keen eyes watched the ground, and again and again he pointed to "sign" which, on closer examination by the juniors, showed that they were close on the track of the missing swell of St. Jim's. Other footsteps—a good many of them—had passed since, but here and there the traces of D'Arcy's elegant shoes were picked up easily by the keen eyes of the Canadian.

The end of the path and the stile on the edge of the Wayland road were in sight when Wildrake halted at last.

"Well?" asked Blake.

"We've overshoot the mark, and we've got to try back," said Wildrake. "Gussy never got to the end of the path."

"Sure of that?" asked Digby.

"Look at that muddy patch right across the path," said Wildrake. "You can see footprints in it where other people have passed. Not a sign of Gussy's shoes. He came nearly as far as this, but not quite."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Whatever happened to him happened on the footpath," he said. "We guessed that, of course, but now we can be sure."

"That's so."

Kit Wildrake turned back and began making a minute examination of the thickets on either side of the footpath, close to the last track he had picked up of D'Arcy's shoes.

Tom Merry & Co. stood clear, watching him.

They were more than willing to leave this to the boy from the Boot Leg Ranch. Skilled as they were in scouting, the path and the trees and the thickets told them nothing. They could scarcely believe that Wildrake saw anything that was hidden from their

eyes, yet the keen animation of his face told that he was making discoveries.

His eyes gleamed, and they saw at last an expression of relief on his face.

For half an hour they stood and waited, while the Canadian junior, his investigations narrowed down to one spot at the side of the path, observed and pondered.

He came back to them at last, and smiled as he met their anxious gaze of inquiry.

"Thank goodness!" he said. "It was kidnapping. D'Arcy's alive, at all events. I thought so when I found that there were two of the scoundrels."

"Two?" said Tom.

"Yep. If the villain had meant murder he wouldn't have wanted help to pull trigger on a schoolboy, and he wouldn't have been likely to bring a witness along—what? Two of them meant more likely kidnapping than murder; but I've made it certain now."

Tom Merry & Co. gazed at Wildrake.

They knew his almost uncanny skill, and their faith in him was great; but the confidence with which he now spoke put their faith to a strain. He spoke as assuredly as if he had been a witness to the happenings of Wednesday afternoon.

"You've worked it out?" asked Manners at last.

"Sure."

"What do you think happened?"

"Two pesky rascals were waiting here for me when poor old Gussy came along. A tall man in a rough brown coat, and a shorter man, better dressed and better off—the leader, I should guess."

"Oh!"

"They collared Gussy and carried him away into the wood," went on Wildrake. "He was struggling as they carried him. They dumped him down and tied him up, and then carried him away to the high-road. I guess they had some sort of a go-cart ready there for him—a car, very likely. But he was alive. It's a case of kidnapping, and I guess that is what we wanted to know."

Blake drew a deep breath.

"That's what we wanted to know," he agreed. "If Gussy's kidnapped, we shall see him again alive and well some time. But—"

(Continued on next page.)



Unlucky Thirteen!

A FIFTEEN-YEARS-OLD reader chum wants to know if thirteen is really an unlucky number. It is regarded so by many people. I'll admit; but personally I don't dislike "13" any more than I do the letter "Z." This same correspondent asks me to give him instances where "13" has proved to be an unlucky number. I'm afraid that would entail too much digging into old newspaper files, etc., and although such work might be very interesting, what about the poor old GEM in the meantime? Perhaps some of you other chaps have facts and figures at your elbows in regard to this much discussed subject, and if you care to send in short pars, I'll do my best to publish a number of them for the benefit of my correspondent.

He Talks in His Sleep.

Now, I suppose some of you will be saying that the fellow who's guilty of this sort of thing ought to make the ideal speaker, because he gets a lot of "extra" practice chinwagging. But it's not the case. "Constant Reader,"

of Nottingham, tells me that he suffers in this way. His brother chips him every morning about the yarns he's been telling in his sleep. But really there's nothing serious to worry about here. I expect "Constant Reader" is a highly-strung, excitable fellow, otherwise he's just as normal as his brother. But it's not nice to be chipped unmercifully over something one doesn't know that one's said. I advise "Constant Reader" not to get excited over anything just before retiring at night, to avoid reading any sensational tales just before turning in, not to worry about trivialities, and to keep regular hours—and the bed-room window open! By paying attention to these points he may cure himself of talking in his sleep.

A Cold Tub!

"Jerry," of Liverpool, tells me that he's been taking a cold tub first thing every morning since the beginning of June, and he wants to know if it will do him any harm. If Jerry's heart is sound, and his general health good, the cold bath every morning shouldn't do him any harm. But don't hang about in that cold bath too long. And remember that a brisk rub down after-

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wards is very necessary to restore the circulation to normal working order. If, on the other hand, Jerry suffers with any heart trouble, I strongly urge him to say good-bye to those cold baths in the morning, for they are not good for him.

NEXT WEDNESDAY'S PROGRAMME:

"WESTWARD BOUND!"

By Martin Clifford.

This is the second story in the excellent holiday series dealing with Tom Merry & Co. and Kit Wildrake. The St. Jim's chums are bound for the Boot Leg Ranch in British Columbia, and stirring adventures await them there.

"SHOPPING WITH GUSSY!"

Is the title of our next jolly poem, and it's distinctly good. Look out, too, for another rousing instalment of

"BEYOND THE SILVER GLACIER!"

Our grand adventure serial, by Arthur S. Hardy. The wise Gemite will make certain of this bumper issue by ordering his copy in advance. 'Nuff said. Cheerio, chums!

Your Editor.

"But—" murmured Lowther.
 "If that's certain, Wildrake, it's a weight off our minds," said Tom Merry slowly. "But—" Wildrake smiled faintly.
 "But you don't see how I've figured it out?" he asked.
 "Well, no."
 "It sounds rather steep," said Herries. "A bit too much like Sherlock Holmes, if you ask me."
 "It's all written here," said Wildrake. "A trapper in Western Canada would tell you all that, and more, in five minutes. I dare say there's a sign I haven't read, but what I've told you I'm sure of."
 "Well, tell us how you worked it out," said Blake.
 "That won't take long. You see, they waited a good long time before Gussy came along—that accounts for so much sign."

"Did they?" murmured Manners.
 "Yep. I guess that the rotters, whoever they were, humped along to this footpath as soon as they'd finished on the phone. But it was a good time later that Gussy arrived. He didn't leave the school at once, and I reckon he never hurried—he never does. I figure it out that they were here an hour before Gussy got here. Anyhow, they waited a good time, and left a lot of sign."

Tom Merry smiled.
 "I don't doubt what you say, old chap, but I'd like to see that lot of sign they left. I don't see it at present."

"Nor I," grunted Blake.
 "Follow my finger," said Wildrake, and he pointed out the sign that had met his keen eye. "That rain on Tuesday, which landed me into trouble and was the real cause of Gussy taking my place yesterday, has helped a lot. The earth is still damp under these thickets. Now, look here, and you'll see where a man stood under this tree, a yard from the footpath. See his tracks in the earth here?"

"I see two dents," remarked Herries.
 "Look closer, and you'll see that they're footprints; closer still, and you'll see that the heels are towards the tree and deeper than the toes. He was leaning his back on the tree."

"Right!" said Tom Merry.
 "Was that the tall man or the short man?" asked Blake, with a slight touch of sarcasm.

"The tall man," answered Wildrake.
 "The man in the brown coat?" asked Digby.

"Brown coat or jacket—rough brown stuff, anyhow. Just pipe the bark of the tree here about the height of a man's shoulders," said the Canadian junior. "The bark's rough, and the brown stuff was a rough material. There's threads of it rubbed off—a dozen—probably a heap if we looked sharp for them. But a dozen will do for us."

"Well, that's so," admitted Blake, after a careful inspection of the bark. "How do you know he was tall?"

Wildrake smiled.
 "Measure from those tatters on the trunk to the ground," he answered. "You'll see that the man couldn't have been much under six feet high."

"Right!" said Tom Merry again.
 "And was he the rich or the poor man?" asked Blake, still a trifle inclined to sarcasm.

"I said that one man was better off than the other," said Wildrake. "You can see for yourself. This tall hobo was the poorer of the two. He was smoking a pipe while he waited—you can see five or six spots where he knocked out the ash, if you look. Here is a half-burnt fraction of the baccy—you can see it's a coarse common shag. The other man smoked Havana cigars, so I reckon he was better off than the man with a pipe of shag."

"Good—if he did—" said Wildrake.
 "Oh, he did, I guess!" said Wildrake. "Come along a few paces—this is where the shorter man stood. See the heel-marks pressed into the ground, not so deep as the other's—he weighed less; probably a couple of stone less. That's a cigar tip—he finished one cigar while he was waiting, and chucked the stub away. There's cigar-ash close by those heel-marks, too. It wants looking for, but it's there."

"You make out that he was a shorter man because you think that he weighed less?"

"That's probable in itself, but I shouldn't go on that; he might be a thin fellow."

"Then what—" said Wildrake. "Look at the position from the heel-marks," said Wildrake. "There's a bough juts out just over where he stood. I've measured it with my eye, but if you put a foot-rule to it I think you'll find it juts out rather less than six feet from the ground. He couldn't have been a six-footer to stand there, even if he took his hat off."

"Oh!" said Blake.
 "No reason to suppose he took his hat off to stand under a tree. I should say the man who stood there



Tom Merry & Co. scanned the ground and picked up the sign you fellows," said Kit Wildrake suddenly, "the trail runs on from steps it's fairly obvious that

wasn't much over five-foot-six, if any, while the other man was close on six feet."

"Well done!" said Tom Merry.
 And Blake nodded.

"You told us the shorter man was better dressed," said Manners. "I don't doubt it for a tick, old scout. But how did you know that?"

"The cigar-smoker was better off than the shag-smoker, so he had better clobber—what?" asked Herries.

"Quite likely," said Wildrake. "But there's more to it. Look at his boot-marks. Quite nice boots—a good shape. The big man's boots were coarse and had big nails in them, and were worn down at the sides. You can pick all that up if you look. The man in the expensive boots was better off than the man in the worn boots, I guess."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake.

"From all that I judge that he was the king-pin and the other man was at his orders," said Wildrake. "I guess one was leader in this game, and in any line of business I reckon the follower is not generally better off than the leader."

"I believe that's correct," said Tom Merry, with a smile.

"Well," said Manners, "we've got as far as two men—one short and one tall, and the short man the leader. It looks pretty reasonable to me. But the proof of kidnapping—"

"Look where the tracks are," said Wildrake. "The short man was posted nearer the school. Gussy passed him and met the tall man, and the short man stepped



Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been dumped by his captors. "Look, to the Wayland road, and as there's no further trail of Gussy's was carried." (See Chapter 8.)

out behind Gussy. That's why they were posted a little distance apart—to cut him off from running, I guess. That alone looks as if they wanted a prisoner. A bullet could have been fired as he was walking up the path, and it would have stopped him quite as well as a man behind him."

"True," said Tom.

"They mayn't have wanted to use firearms on a public footpath," said Blake. "This path isn't much used, but people might come along it any time."

Wildrake nodded.

"Quite," he assented. "But a man who set out to kill an unarmed schoolboy would not want another man to help, I guess. But that isn't all you see. Come farther into the wood and see the trail they left after

they'd nailed him. They carried him, struggling, a dozen yards into the wood."

"Struggling?" repeated Blake.

"Look where these twigs and tendrils are broken away. I guess Gussy's arms and legs were thrashing round a good bit."

"They had to shove through with him," said Blake. "They may have broken away those twigs themselves."

"Farther on, after he was tied, they don't leave half the sign," answered Wildrake.

"Oh!"

The Canadian junior halted again. Tom Merry & Co. scanned the ground. They were good enough Scouts to pick up the sign where Arthur Augustus had been dumped down by his captors. There were plenty of traces where he had lain, and marks where one man had knelt beside him.

"The trail runs on from here to the Wayland road," said Wildrake. "No trail of Gussy's steps—he was carried. No sign of the twigs and brambles being clawed at—he was tied. Plenty of sign of two pairs of boots—one pair worn, with nails in them, the other a good pair of boots in good condition. Hardly a sign where they brushed against the thickets—they went carefully. Not that they expected to be trailed like this in England, but I guess they were used to being careful in the country they came from, and were cautious from habit."

He paused.

"Either they did not know me by sight, and took Gussy for me, or else they nabbed him to keep him from giving me a warning that I was in danger," said Wildrake. "The first is right, I guess."

"They took him for you?"

"It seems pretty clear. They wouldn't want to be burdened with him if they could help it. Their only motive for that would be to keep him from putting me wise, if they knew it wasn't little me. But that doesn't wash; for, of course, his disappearance was bound to give me the alarm. They couldn't play the Long Jim stunt on me afterwards. I was bound to get on my guard, whether they took him or let me go."

"That's so," said Tom.

"Looks like it," said Blake. "They expected Wildrake, and, not knowing him by sight, supposed Gussy was Wildrake when he came along to keep the appointment. I suppose they collared him quick and he hadn't a chance to explain. They would naturally collar him as quick as they could and get him away from the footpath."

"That's the how of it, I reckon," said Wildrake. "When they got him away they reckoned they'd got me. If he's explained since they mightn't believe him—might take it for a yarn to get loose."

"Very likely."

Wildrake was following now the trail that led on to the Wayland road. Once or twice he lost it on a stony patch, but he tried on and picked it up again. It led to an open space by the road fence, whence a view was obtainable of the high-road for a good distance in both directions.

"They saw from here whether the coast was clear before they got out into the open," said Wildrake.

"And then—"

"Then they went on to the footpath, and I guess they got over the stile into the high-road. You can pick up their tracks close to the footpath, with the toes pointing towards the stile."

Tom Merry & Co. emerged into the footpath and reached the stile. They crossed it into the road.

There the Canadian junior resumed investigation.

There were the traces of many cars to be picked up on the Wayland road, which was well frequented by motor travellers. But in the mud beside the road, near the stile, Wildrake pointed out the sign of tyres.

"A car has waited here," he said. "I guess I couldn't date it, but we don't need much imagination to figure it out that those two ginks had a car waiting for them here. They wouldn't carry a prisoner along a public high-road in the daylight. They watched for an opportunity to slip out of the wood with him and slip him into something out of sight, and as we can see

that a car has waited here, we can jump to it that they had a car."

"Pretty clear," said Tom.

"Then he's alive?" said Blake, with a deep breath.

"Sure! A galoot might be killed without any blood sign left, though it's not likely. But I guess they wouldn't carry a dead body out of the wood into a car. No reason why they should. They'd be in a hurry to get clear, but they wouldn't take along with them the evidence that would be enough to hang them. That's not sense."

"Kidnapping, clear enough," said Tom.

"I reckon so. Those scoundrels have come over from Canada for me, and they reckon they've got me," said Wildrake. "They didn't want to cash my-chips for me, they wanted me a prisoner, and they've got the wrong rabbit. They'll find that out sooner or later, I guess."

"And then?" said Blake.

"Well, they must keep Gussy close and have another try for me," said Wildrake. "But I don't figure it out that we need suppose they'll hurt him. Murder is a bit too serious a thing. More likely to let him go than to keep him, I guess, when they find he's no use to them."

"They—they might, to make themselves safe——" muttered Dig. "They might——"

Wildrake shook his head.

"They'd be safer to let him go than to kill him, whatever he could tell about them. The police will hunt for the kidnappers, but not like they would hunt for murderers. The kidnapping will never be heard of outside this locality. A murder would wake up the whole country and make it jolly difficult for them to get away. If they've got any hoss sense they won't hurt Gussy when they find out he's the wrong bird."

"And where is he now?" said Manners.

Wildrake laughed.

"Ask me another. I don't undertake to trail a car on a high-road. I've done all I hoped to do, and more."

"If it's all O.K., we've got it for certain that Gussy's alive, that he's kidnapped in mistake for you, and that he's most likely not in any great danger," said Tom Merry. "That'll be jolly good news at St. Jim's. We'd better get back and report."

And Tom Merry & Co. walked cheerily back to the school, feeling quite satisfied with their morning's work.

CHAPTER 9.

Wildrake Reports!

"COME in!" said Dr. Holmes.

The Head of St. Jim's wore an anxious frown. He was in consultation in his study with Mr. Railton and Inspector Skeat, of Wayland, when a tap came at the door.

The disappearance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had deeply disturbed the Head. Thrice that morning the telephone-bell had rung, Lord Eastwood inquiring whether there was yet news of his son. The headmaster had had to reply that there was no news, and that Arthur Augustus' disappearance was absolutely inexplicable. Inspector Skeat inclined to the view that the junior had, for some reason known only to himself, run away from school. Neither the headmaster nor the Housemaster believed so for a moment. If D'Arcy had taken French leave, which was improbable in itself, certainly he would not have left his friends, and his father, in a state of anxiety. Some word would have come from him. But, apart from the inspector's suggestion, his disappearance seemed quite unaccountable.

It was Kit Wildrake who entered the study in response to the Head's "Come in!" Tom Merry followed him.

Dr. Holmes contracted his brows a little.

"What do you boys want?" he asked. "I am busy now; you should not come here."

"We've been searching for D'Arcy, sir," said Wildrake.

"Indeed!" Dr. Holmes raised his eyebrows. "Have you not been in class?"

"I gave some of the school Scouts leave to search for

the missing boy, sir," said Mr. Railton. "Have you any news, Wildrake?"

"Yes, sir."

The two masters made a movement of interest, and Inspector Skeat looked very curiously at Wildrake.

"You have not found D'Arcy?" asked the Head hastily.

"No, sir; we've only found that he was taken away in a motor-car yesterday," said Wildrake. "But that is something."

"Indeed it is, if you are sure," said the Head. "Kindly tell Inspector Skeat what you have learned."

"I shall be glad to have any information," said the inspector rather dryly.

"D'Arcy has been kidnapped by two men, sir, who were waylaying me in the wood yesterday," said Wildrake. "Owing to my being detained by my Form master, D'Arcy went in my place."

"You speak with certainty," said the Head.

"Yes, sir; I feel certain."

"And how have you learned this?" asked Mr. Skeat, staring at the Canadian junior. "My men have been searching for the missing boy since last night, and I have received no news of a kidnapping, or of two men being engaged in any such enterprise. Are you allowing your imagination to run away with you, young man?"

"I think not, sir," said Wildrake respectfully.

"Wildrake's worked it all out from the sign, Mr. Skeat," said Tom Merry.

The inspector smiled sarcastically.

"Well, let us hear this discovery," he said. "You say that two men were engaged in kidnapping Master D'Arcy?"

"Yes," said Wildrake.

"No doubt you can give me a detailed description of the two rascals," said Inspector Skeat ironically.

"Not a detailed description, sir," said Wildrake quietly. "But I can give a few points. One of them was a tall man in a rough brown coat and nailed boots, who smoked a pipe and coarse tobacco; the other was a shorter man, better dressed, who smoked cigars."

Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton stared at the Canadian junior. Inspector Skeat opened his eyes wide. Tom Merry smiled at the expression on the official gentleman's face.

"You are speaking seriously, Wildrake?" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "You surely would not jest on such a subject."

"I guess I'm quite serious, sir."

"I cannot understand how you have found this out," said the Head. "Have you seen either of the men you speak of?"

"No, sir."

"Somebody has told you?"

"No, sir."

"Then I fail to see how you can possibly know what you have just stated," said the Head somewhat sharply.

"And I," said Inspector Skeat. "It appears to me, sir, that we are wasting time."

"Wildrake will explain," said Mr. Railton. "Let us at least hear what the boy has to say."

Dr. Holmes made Wildrake a sign to proceed.

The Canadian junior proceeded to describe the whole matter from the beginning, succinctly, but leaving out no detail.

The Head was impressed as he listened, and Mr. Railton nodded several times approvingly. But there was strong unbelief in the plump, ruddy face of the Wayland inspector. Evidently the methods of the Boot Leg Ranch did not recommend themselves to Mr. Skeat.

He gave a grunt when the Canadian junior had finished.

"What do you think of this, Mr. Skeat?" asked the Head.

Another grunt.

"Moonshine, sir," said Mr. Skeat.

"Hem!"

"If Master D'Arcy has been kidnapped, it is quite probable that he was taken away in a car," said the inspector. "But we did not need Master Wildrake to tell us that that was probable."

"It was not only probable—it happened," said

Wildrake quietly, "and if you make inquiries, sir, you may trace the car. It must have waited a good time on the Wayland road yesterday, as those men were in the wood at least an hour. Dozens of people must have passed it, and some of them may have noticed the make of the car and its general appearance."

"And its number," said the Head.

"It would have a false number-plate, sir, if the fellows knew what they were about."

"Dear me! That is very probable."

Grunt from Mr. Skeat.

"May I make a suggestion, sir?" asked Wildrake.

"Certainly, my boy."

"As it seems to me, these two men were after me, not after D'Arcy at all, and they came from the west of Canada. It is not likely that they own a car in England. If not, they must have hired a car for their purpose yesterday. Certainly they would be careful enough to hire it from a distance—not near Wayland. But it might be possible to find the garage where the

curious crowd of fellows. There was a buzz of surprise and incredulity as they told what they knew.

"Gammon!" said Gore of the Shell.

"Too jolly thick!" said Cardew of the Fourth, shaking his head.

"Some Scout!" grinned Julian.

Wildrake smiled.

"Well, you'll see," he said. "I'm satisfied."

"Give us a few more details, Mr. Sherlock Holmes!" grinned Cardew. "Now, about that man in the brown coat. What sort of trousers did he wear?"

"Fathead!"

"And what did his grandfather do for a living?" asked Cardew gravely.

"Ass!"

"Couldn't you find that out from the tobacco ash?" inquired Cardew in surprise.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And the other johnny—the one who smoked cigars," pursued Cardew. "Did he buy them one at a time, or

TERM EXAMINATIONS

By The St. Jim's Rhymester.

I WOULDN'T like the measles,
I shouldn't like the mumps,
I'd hate to have those funny palpitations.
But I'd rather be all spotty,
And come out in little lumps,
Than have to do the term examinations!

They give you eucalyptus
If perchance they hear you sneeze,
Or rub in oil to ward off complications.
But they think you're only shamming
When you're knocking at the knees
Through thinking of the term examinations!

You try to master spelling,
And your dates of queens and kings,
Your senates, governments, and federations.
And if you really know them,
You'll be sure that all these things
Are never set in term examinations!

The questions that they ask you
Are the very ones you've missed
Through reading yarns at evening preparation,
The master seems to know them
Just as if he kept a list
All ready for the term examination!

I wish I'd studied harder,
But, of course it's now too late,
And I'm just full of horrid trepidations.

I shall have to work like blazes
And leave results to Fate;
They're dreadful things, these term examinations!

Now the dreaded hours grow nearer
And I'm feeling rather blue,
But horrid things all have their compensations.
For when the worst is over,
There's something grand in view—
We break up after term examinations!



car was hired by Americans yesterday—especially if Mr. Skeat should find anyone who noticed it standing on the Wayland road and can give a description of it."

"Very true!" said Mr. Railton.

Mr. Skeat rose.

"This appears to me to be a waste of time, Dr. Holmes," he said stiffly. "You may be sure that every effort will be made to trace Master D'Arcy. I will now take my leave."

Dr. Holmes made the juniors a sign to go.

Tom Merry and Wildrake left the study. They went out into the quadrangle, which was crowded with St. Jim's fellows now, morning classes being over.

"Mr. Skeat doesn't seem very keen on following up your clues, Wildrake," Tom Merry remarked.

The Canadian junior smiled.

"No; but I guess he will be looking for that car all the same, and he will want to know if anybody saw a car driven on the Wayland road yesterday by a big man in a brown coat, or with a big man in a brown coat sitting in it. He's rather ratty, but he won't throw away chances."

Tom Merry nodded; he thought that very probable.

The Scouts were surrounded in the quadrangle by a

by the box? I suppose you could tell that by the matches he used?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I think you fellows will see that Wildrake's right," he said. "We shall know when Gussy comes back, anyhow."

"But why hasn't Wildrake brought Gussy back?" demanded Cardew. "Surely he could tell the number of the car by the tyre-tracks in the mud?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors went in to dinner discussing the matter, and there was a very general scepticism as to Wildrake's discoveries. The Canadian junior did not mind in the least. He was sure of the meaning of the sign he had read in Wayland Wood.

And that Inspector Skeat, in spite of his sarcasm, had not failed to act on the hint he had received was made clear when the Head returned to his study after lunch. The telephone-bell rang, and Dr. Holmes heard the inspector's voice from Wayland.

"We have made a discovery, sir," the inspector said. "I have certain information that yesterday afternoon

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a car was seen standing on the Wayland road for more than an hour, close to the end of the footpath. Of course, it may mean nothing; but it may mean a great deal. I am already in touch with three people who noticed the car, one of them a wood-cutter who was at work near the spot for half an hour and noticed the car there all the time. From him I have a complete description of it."

"That is very good!" said the Head.

"Oh, quite," said Mr. Skeat.

"This appears to confirm what Wildrake told us, does it not?"

A grunt was audible on the telephone.

"I am afraid I attach little importance to Master Wildrake's fanciful story," said Mr. Skeat.

"Oh!"

"It is a coincidence, however, that one of the persons who saw the car, saw it drive up and stop at the stile, and noticed two men leave it and go into the wood. One of them was a very large man wearing a brown coat."

"Bless my soul!" said the Head.

"He drove the car," went on the inspector. "I have been in touch with every garage in this district, and the car is not known. Apparently it came from a distance. If nothing is heard of Master D'Arcy, it will appear probable that a kidnapping has taken place, and, in that case, this may prove a valuable clue."

"I trust so," said the Head.

"At all events, the description of the car will be circulated all over the country, and it will be traced. The description will be broadcast by wireless also, and that may produce something. In the event of something further being learned, I will telephone at once."

"Thank you, Mr. Skeat!"

The Head smiled slightly as he put up the receiver. Inspector Skeat did not seem to be disposed to admit that there might be anything in Master Wildrake's fanciful story. But, obviously, what he had now learned confirmed what Wildrake had discovered, and the Head had little doubt that the Canadian junior had read accurately what had happened the previous afternoon. And Mr. Railton, when the Head consulted him, fully concurred.

CHAPTER 10.

The Prisoner!

"HOWWIBLE!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered that remark in disconsolate tones.

He had slept soundly enough in his strange quarters, and he had been given breakfast by Poker Pete. At midday he had been given bread and cheese and a jug of water. In the intervals between the meals he was locked in the room.

The fare was hard and scanty, and the imprisonment in the little room very irksome. But Arthur Augustus was able to rough it with some equanimity, so far as these details were concerned.

But there were no facilities for washing—so far from taking a morning bath, the swell of St. Jim's had not even been able to wash.

This was the limit!

Feeling exceedingly grubby that warm afternoon, Arthur Augustus felt his wrath intensify against the unutterable rascals who kept him a prisoner without providing even soap and water.

"Howwible!" he said for the twentieth time.

He almost regretted that he had not tackled Poker Pete again when that burly ruffian had brought in his lunch.

But it was of little use to tackle Poker Pete, who was a match for two or three fellows like D'Arcy—and the swell of St. Jim's was still sore from the ruffian's belt. He could only wait as patiently as possible, but Gussy had very little patience left by this time.

He paced the shadowy room restlessly.

Only a few gleams of light came in through cracks in the boards screwed over the window; but D'Arcy was used to the gloom, and it troubled him little.

He moved restlessly about the room, wondering what was happening at St. Jim's. There was no doubt that

a search was being made for him; but if he was, as the kidnappers said, a hundred miles from the school, a search in Sussex would not help him much. He had one consolation, and that was that his disaster would put Wildrake on his guard. And the Canadian junior had more to fear from the kidnappers than the swell of St. Jim's had.

It was late in the summer afternoon when D'Arcy heard the sound of a car outside the house.

For a moment his heart beat faster with the hope of rescue, but he realised at once that it must be Redway returning.

He stopped his restless pacing about the room and stood listening.

The sound of voices came to his ears—the deep gruff voice of Poker Pete, and the sharper tones of Reuben Redway, now raised in anger.

"Bai Jove, he's found out!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

Heavy footsteps approached the door. Lock and bolt were unfastened and the door thrown open.

Rube Redway strode angrily in, Pete following with the lantern. Both of them stared savagely at the swell of St. Jim's. Redway had a revolver in his hand, and D'Arcy's heart beat sharply at the sight of it. But he faced the two rascals coolly and steadfastly.

"You young hound!" Redway's voice was thick with rage. "What is your name? Tell me your name!"

"My name is D'Arcy," said Arthur Augustus composedly.

"You knew that I believed you to be Wildrake."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And you let me go on believing so?" exclaimed Redway, with a threatening motion of the revolver.

"You did not give me a chance to explain," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "Not that I should have explained if I had thought in time, even if you had given me a chance. I wathah think I should have let you wun on, you wascal."

Redway gritted his teeth.

"But I told that othah scoundwel last night!" said Arthur Augustus, with a nod towards Poker Pete. "He had the astoundin' impudence to doubt my word!"

Redway glanced at his associate.

"He allowed he wasn't young Wildrake," said Pete. "Course, I thought it was a trick to fool me into letting him loose."

"You are a greater fool than wogue, my man," said Arthur Augustus, "or you would have been awah that I was tellin' the twuth."

"Look hyer, Redway! Are you sure?" demanded Poker Pete. "P'r'aps you've been fooled. It may be a trick."

"Fooled nothing!" snarled Redway. "I've made inquiries up and down Wayland since I caught on to it first that the missing schoolboy was named D'Arcy and not Wildrake. There's no mistake. You can bet I guessed it might be some trick at first—but I've asked five or six people who'd know. We've got the wrong bird!"

Pete gave the swell of St. Jim's an evil look.

"Then what was he doin' coming along when we was expecting young Wildrake?" he demanded.

"That's what he's going to tell!" snarled Redway. "How did you come to take Wildrake's place, you young fool? Did Wildrake suspect that that telephone call did not come from Long Jim?"

"Not that I am awah of."

"Then why did he get you to take his place?"

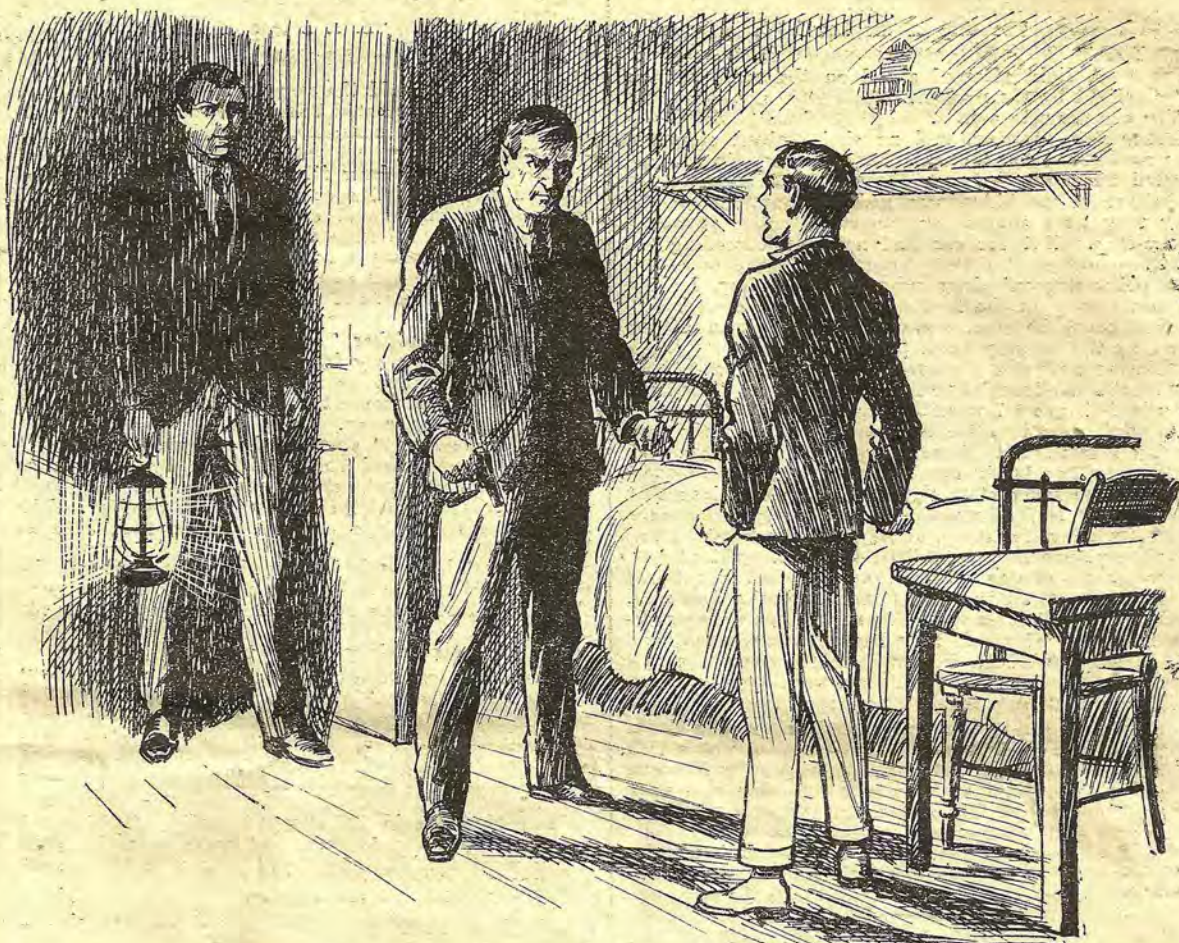
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's lip curled contemptuously.

"Wildwake would have been the last fellow in the world to get me to take his place in goin' into dangah," he said. "He supposed that his father's foreman was waitin' for him on the footpath, and he was detained, so I offahed to take a message. If you had allowed me to uttah a few words befoah you collahed me so butwally, you would have known that I was not Wildwake."

"I guess I was surprised to see Old Man Wildrake's son such a pesky dude," remarked Poker Pete. "I reckoned he must have gone mighty soft since they sent him over here."

"Weally, you wuffian—"

Redway drew a hard breath.



Both Redway and Pete stared savagely at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Redway had a revolver in his hand, and the swell of the Fourth's heart beat sharply at the sight of it. But he faced the two rascals coolly and steadfastly. "You young hound!" turned Redway, his voice thick with rage. "Tell me your name!" "My name is D'Arcy," said Arthur Augustus composedly. (See Chapter 10.)

"It was an accident," he said—"an accident that couldn't have been foreseen. Nobody could guard against such a chance. We were waiting for Wildrake, and this young gink came along. I guess we've slipped up on our game, but we can't blame ourselves."

"We can keep the gink safe hyer while we try for Wildrake agin," said Poker Pete.

Redway muttered an oath.

"He will be on his guard now. He knows by this time that Long Jim isn't in England and that we got this young fool. He can't help guessing that much. It's doubly—trebly dangerous now. He's warned of his danger, and he will keep in the school; and all the time there's a search going on for this young fool, and we may butt right into it if we go near the school again."

"But we ain't giving it up!" exclaimed Poker Pete. "You figured it out that it was the only way of making Old Man Wildrake part with Pine Tree Patch. And you was right there, too. He ain't parting worth a cent, unless you get the bulge on him this-a-way."

"I know it!" growled Redway.

He bit off the end of a cigar and lighted it. He scowled savagely at D'Arcy over the cigar.

"I guess we're trying again," he said. "If we slip up on it we've got to hit the trail pronto; we haven't come over here to see the inside of an English prison. Anyhow, this young fool is safe here."

"I guess he could be made safer," said the gunman, with a black look at the swell of St. Jim's. "He ain't no use now."

"Don't be a fool!" snapped Redway. "An alarm of murder would be enough to stop us getting out of

the country. You're not in Montana now, Poker Pete, or in the Bowery of New York. Have a little sense."

The ruffian snarled and stamped out of the room. Rube Redway followed him, chewing savagely on the cigar. Obviously, the plans of the kidnapers had been utterly disarranged by the capture of D'Arcy in the place of the victim they had sought.

"I insist upon bein' weleased, you wottahs!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "And if you are not goin' to welease me, I insist upon bein' pwovided with soap and watah—"

Slam!

The door closed, and was locked and bolted again upon the swell of St. Jim's.

"You wassally wottahs!" roared Arthur Augustus, quite forgetting, in his wrath, the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

He heard the sound of the car outside an hour or two later, and, from the stillness of the house, he was aware that both the rascals had gone in it. It was easy to guess that, in spite of the miscarriage of their plans, they intended to make some desperate attempt that night to get Kit Wildrake into their hands—an attempt that was desperate, as they knew, now that the alarm was given at the school; but much more desperate than they dreamed, owing to the discovery that Kit Wildrake had made, and upon which Inspector Skeat had acted. Arthur Augustus remained alone, in darkness and silence, and something almost like despair. The discovery of their mistake had not caused the kidnapers to release him—and rescue seemed a remote possibility. And Arthur Augustus' heart grew heavy as the night advanced.

CHAPTER 11.

The Grip of the Law!

"STOP!"

A light gleamed ahead on the road, another light by the roadside.

The car drew to a halt.

Poker Pete, driving, had no choice about stopping. The road ahead was blocked. Rube Redway, in the car, gritted his teeth.

Neither of the kidnappers had any suspicion so far why they were stopped on the road, unless it was a police-trap. But the car had not been exceeding the limit.

A police-sergeant drew near to the driver, looking at him closely in the lantern-light. Four or five constables could be seen, shadowy in the gloom of the trees by the country road.

"Excuse me," said the sergeant politely.

"What's the trouble?" asked Poker Pete. "Road up, or what? I guess I wasn't doing over twenty."

A glint came into the sergeant's eyes, and the men behind him stirred. Something in the driver's speech had evidently struck them.

It was the unconscious "guess" of the American that had done it. Inspector Skeat had pooh-poohed Wildrake's fanciful story, as he called it; but that was only the plump inspector's little way. In point of fact, Inspector Skeat was no fool, and he had not failed to take note of all that the Canadian junior had said. And on all roads for a very wide radius men were watching for a car of which they had the description, and which, they had been informed, might contain a tall man and a shorter man, the former possibly in a brown coat, both of them probably Americans.

And the sergeant, who had already stopped a dozen or fifteen cars on that road without result, was struck at once by the "guess" of Poker Pete—and by the fact, instantly observed, that he was a tall man and wore a rough brown coat. This car, in the sergeant's opinion, was worth examining carefully.

"Shut off your engine," said the sergeant crisply.

"I guess we're a bit pushed for time."

"We've orders to search all cars," said the sergeant. "If you're all right, we won't detain you long."

Rube Redway looked from the window.

"What's the trouble, officer?" he asked politely. "I'm in a bit of a hurry, but, of course, you must do your duty. What is it?"

"Order to search all cars, sir," said the sergeant civilly. "Will you kindly step out?"

"Sure!"

The sergeant's eyes glinted again.

A tall man in a brown coat, a shorter man in the car, and both of them Americans! He murmured something to his men, and they drew closer. Poker Pete, at a request that was an order, stepped down. The sergeant proceeded to make an examination of the car by a lantern's light.

"I shall have to detain you, sir," he said civilly to Redway. "I dare say it's all right, but I've my instructions. As you're going towards Wayland, I'll come with you with one of my men. I dare say you can explain quite satisfactorily at the station."

Redway's eyes glittered.

He was beginning to see that something was known, though how it had become known was a mystery to him. But he remained calm.

"You won't mind telling us what you're looking for, officer?" he said. "Is it a case of burglary?"

"No, sir."

"Well, what?"

"Kidnapping," said the sergeant.

"Gee-whiz!" ejaculated Poker Pete, and, without waiting to consult his associate, he reached for a hidden revolver.

Before he could draw it, two of the constables had grasped his arms. The gunman struggled fiercely and went over in the road, dragging the two policemen with him. They rolled in the road, struggling.

Rube Redway made a bound to escape, but two pairs of hands were on him at the same moment. There was no doubt in the minds of the police now.

Crack!

Redway was quicker "on the draw" than his comrade. There was a cry from one of the constables who had seized him, and he fell into the road, groaning. The other for a moment relaxed his grasp, and the kidnapper sprang away.

"Seize that man!" shouted the sergeant.

A truncheon missed Redway's head by an inch as he bounded desperately away.

Crack, crack, crack! came from his revolver. The man was utterly desperate now, and he fired back as he fled.

The constables rushed after him, heedless of the whizzing bullets. Rube Redway plunged madly through the hedge beside the road, and tore away across the dark fields.

The darkness swallowed him up.

Poker Pete, less fortunate than his associate, was still struggling in the road with the two policemen who had seized him. Two or three more men went to their aid, and the gunman, powerful and desperate as he was, was overcome, and the handcuffs snapped on his wrists.

He was dragged to his feet, pouring out a stream of curses.

"Stop that!" said the sergeant curtly. "We've got the car, and we've got you, and we'll have the other before morning. What have you done with the school-boy D'Arcy?"

"Find out!" snarled Poker Pete.

"We'll find out in good time. Just now we'll take you to the station."

The wounded constable was placed in the car and taken away. Poker Pete was walked off, his wrists handcuffed and a constable grasping either arm. A quarter of an hour later he was in a cell.

At St. Jim's Dr. Holmes was sitting late in his study with Mr. Railton, when the telephone-bell rang. It was very late, but both the masters had sat up, in the hope of news coming through. Dr. Holmes took off the receiver.

"Inspector Skeat speaking."

The voice was jubilant.

"There is news at last?" exclaimed the Head.

"We've got one of them," said the inspector, "and we've got the car. The other man shot a constable and fled; but we shall have him. The country is being scoured for him; we shall have him by morning, I hope. There's no doubt that they're the men we want—the car tallies exactly with the description I have, and both of them were Americans, and their resisting arrest and using firearms speaks for itself. We shall show them that their American gunman tricks will not pay over here."

The fat inspector was almost chuckling in his satisfaction.

"And D'Arcy?" asked the Head.

"We haven't got him yet, sir, but we've got one of the men, and there's little doubt he will talk. I have every hope of sending Master D'Arcy safe back to the school to-morrow."

"Thank you, inspector—thank you from my heart," said Dr. Holmes.

"Not at all, sir—duty, sir!" said Mr. Skeat.

The Head replaced the receiver.

"I think we shall soon see D'Arcy again, Mr. Railton," he said. "And one at least of the kidnapping rascals is in the hands of justice. Inspector Skeat hardly seems

PEPLER, Mina, Gerrard, O.K.R.
1912. Will the friend of
May Cubitt please write . . .

*What was the meaning of the mysterious
"Agony" advertisement that appeared in the
"East London Despatch"? For the answer, see
the long complete story of Sexton Blake in the
UNION JACK this week.*

ON SALE, THURSDAY, - - - - PRICE 2d.



Arthur Augustus received quite an ovation when he stepped out of the taxicab. His clothes were soiled, dusty and dishevelled, and his aristocratic face was actually in want of a wash. But he was beaming with satisfaction. "Jollay glad to see you fellows again," he said. "I feel as if I had been away for yabs and yabs and yabs!" (See Chapter 12.)

to realise it, but I think we may thank Wildrake of the Fourth Form very largely for this."

"I think so, too," said the Housemaster, with a smile.

And the two masters went to bed, much relieved in their minds.

At breakfast the following morning Dr. Holmes had another call from the jubilant inspector, still more jubilant now.

"The fellow we've got has confessed where D'Arcy is imprisoned, sir," said Mr. Skeat. "It's only a matter of a few hours now before you'll see him."

"Thank goodness!" said the Head.

And that news was communicated to all St. Jim's after breakfast, and was received with a cheer that made the School House ring.

CHAPTER 12. Gussy's Resolve!

"**B**AI Jove, you fellows——"
"Hurrah!"

"Here he is!"

"Here's the one and only."

"Gussy!"

"Bravo!"

It was quite an ovation when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stepped from a taxicab at the school just after classes had been dismissed that morning.

He was not looking quite his old self.

His clothes were soiled, dusty, dishevelled. His

aristocratic face was actually in want of a wash. His collar looked like a rag. But he was beaming with satisfaction.

"Jollay glad to see you fellows again," he said. "When the bobbies wooted me out I didn't even stay for a wash——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I feel fwightfully soiled and wumpled," said Arthur Augustus, "but I'm no end bwaced at seein' St. Jim's again. I feel as if I had been away for yabs and yabs and yabs!"

"Good old Gussy!"

"I twust——"

"Bravo!"

"I twust——"

"Hurrah!"

"I twust you fellows beat the New House on Wednesday."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How could we beat the New House without you here to help us, old bean?" chuckled Tom Merry.

"Impossible!" grinned Blake.

Arthur Augustus nodded gravely.

"Yaas, wathah! I suppose that's so——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows, I see nothin' in that remark to cackle at. I say, I've been through a fwightful time. I got actually dirtay——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Come, D'Arcy," said Mr. Railton, "the Head wishes to see you."

"Shall I go and bathe and change my clobber first, sir?" asked Arthur Augustus anxiously. "It will not take me much more than an houah."

"Come as you are," said Mr. Railton, smiling; and he led the swell of St. Jim's to the Head's study.

Dr. Holmes shook hands with Arthur Augustus.

"I am delighted to see you back safe and sound, my dear boy," he said. "I hope you have not suffered in the hands of those rascals."

"Fwightfully, sir."

"Bless my soul! What—"

"I was not allowed to wash, sir—"

"Dear me!" said the Head.

"I feel fwightfully gwubbay, sir."

Dr. Holmes smiled.

"Thank goodness you are safe back, my boy!" he said.

"You may go now, and I will see you again later."

"Thank you, sir!"

Arthur Augustus retired from the Head's study, to be surrounded at once by a mob of excited fellows. Everybody wanted to know at once what had been his thrilling adventures. But the swell of St. Jim's declined to say a word until he had had his bath and changed his clothes. When he came into the dining-hall of the School House he was himself once again, a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. Indeed, Monty Lowther at the Shell table shaded his eyes with his hand, as if the dazzling vision was too much for him.

After dinner Arthur Augustus told his tale to half St. Jim's in the quadrangle. The juniors listened with intense interest.

"And the johnnies who bagged you?" said Cardew.

"Was one of them a tall man in a rough brown coat?"

"Yaas, wathah! How on earth did you know, deah boy?"

"My hat! And was the other a shorter man, better dressed?"

"Yaas."

"Great pip! Did the short man smoke cigars?"

"Yaas, I saw him smokin' a cigar."

"Holy smoke! Did the other man smoke a pipe?"

"He had a pipe in his mouth neahly ewewy time I saw him," said the perplexed swell of St. Jim's. "But how on earth do you know anythin' about it, Cardew? It weally seems like magic."

"Oh, Wildrake told us!" grinned Cardew.

"How on earth did Wildwake know? How did you know anythin' about it, Wildwake, deah boy?"

Kit Wildrake smiled.

Cardew took off his hat to the Canadian junior with a graceful bow.

"I didn't swallow it," he said. "My mistake! I believe now you could have told us the pattern of their trousers' buttons, if you'd set your mind to it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I take off my hat to the King of Scouts," said Cardew gracefully. "Three cheers for the Boot Leg Ranch."

And Tom Merry & Co. gave them with a will.

"But, weally, you fellows," said the mystified Gussy, "I weally fail to undahstand—"

"Wildrake did it all," said Tom Merry, laughing. "He picked up the sign in the woods, Gussy, and set Mr. Skeat on the track, though I feel sure that Mr. Skeat will forget to mention that in his official report."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All's well that ends well," said Wildrake. "It wasn't much, really. I guess it does me good to see you safe again, Gussy. You got what was meant for me, old chap."

"Yaas, wathah! And I can give you some tips in

(Continued on page 28.)

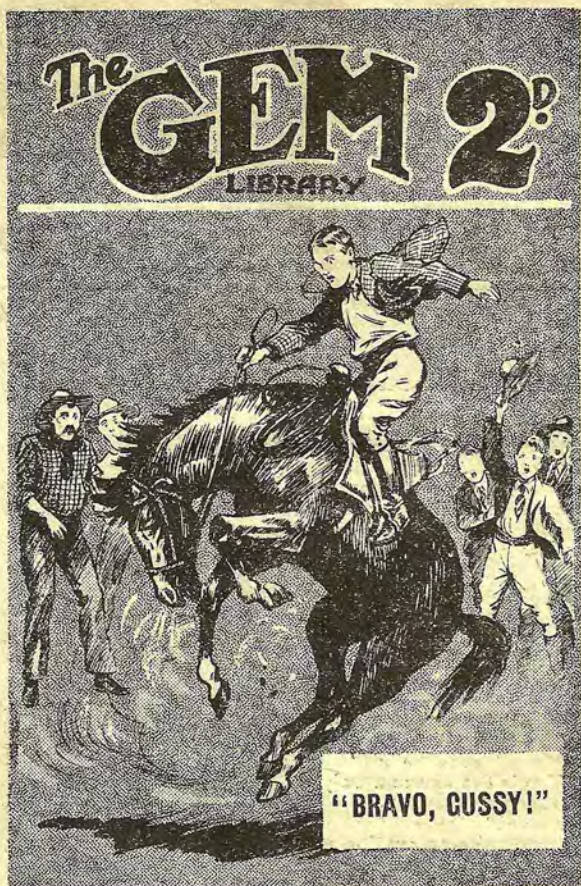
HERE'S A REPRODUCTION IN MINIATURE OF NEXT WEEK'S COVER!



They all expected the "dude"—that's how they refer to the immaculate Arthur Augustus D'Arcy at the Boot Leg Ranch—to come a cropper first go. But Gussy's not so soft as he looks. Certainly he knows a thing or two about horseflesh. Read how he handles this buck-jumper in next week's glorious yarn:

"Westward Bound!"

It shows Martin Clifford bang in form. Your newsagent will reserve a copy of the GEM for you if you give him the tip to-day, chums.



HOMEWARD BOUND! Professor Byrne and his party had almost given up hope of ever seeing England again, for they were virtually prisoners in the hands of an unknown race of people. But the coming of an airship altered the complexion of things: even the heart of the African jungle didn't seem so very far away from home when they boarded the airship for Blighty!

BEYOND the SILVER GLACIER!

A Magnificent Story of Peril and
Adventure in Central Africa.

By **ARTHUR S. HARDY.**

(Introduction on page 24.)



The Departure!

OBEYING a sudden impulse, Adam, who had before this discussed the question of Muta's remaining behind in Barcoomba with Muta himself, unfastened his shirt, took the sacred charm Oyorara from his neck, and calling upon Muta to bow his head, hung it round the neck of the black man, so that it glistened and sparkled against his sable skin.

At this gesture Del Rivo cursed. To see a wonderful fortune cast aside like that enraged him.

"No, give the charm to me!" he shouted, and he stretched his hand out as if to snatch it.

Muta struck his arm down.

"Nay, white killer!" he cried. "Already once thou hast offended. It has been written that thou shalt die a terrible death and be devoured alive by the wild beasts, and even the charm Oyorara would not save thee."

He swung round, his great ears seeming to stand out more prominently from his head than ever, his white teeth flashing, his eyes blazing, his tremendous arms upflung.

"Many, many moons ago," he cried, "when Muta, the black god of the Hokahulas and son of the Queen O-Kam, was but a child, the exiled queen foretold that one day he would be led past the waterfall of which he had no knowledge, save from what she told him, to the City of Barcoomba. She predicted that there the magic charm, Oyorara, which protects him who wears it from death by treachery or ill-adventure, should be restored to her people through her son, who would be proclaimed King of the Hokahulas. Whow! So it has come to pass. Now, Muta has indeed heard the call."

He turned to Adam and bowed his head.

"So thou wilt leave Muta behind when thou goest with the rest of the white gods, O white flyer of the air," he said solemnly, "and thou wilt take Kyhte, the guide, with you because his life would be forfeit here, and even his king might not save him. But beware of him, the killer!" And he pointed at Del Rivo, the Portuguese.

The day that followed was spent in preparations for the flight.

Though crowds thronged to the square and surrounded the palace, where armed guards barred the way, only the privileged chieftains and priests were allowed to pass the cordon. Gifts were brought in profusion—great heads of unknown beasts, of wonderful antelope, beautiful skins, fresh fruits, beads, and jewels, in such quantity that it was impossible for them to carry all aboard the airship.

Some skins and some of the jewels the white men took. But there were no precious stones for Del Rivo, Muta having stated that the white killer, who was no god, should in no way be honoured.

The Portuguese swore, and he raved at that. Even the man Symes was honoured and loaded with presents, but there was none for Del Rivo.

His manner when addressing the professor upon the subject was insulting.

The professor, eyeing him in mild surprise, retorted with some heat, for the first time on record when addressing Del Rivo, perhaps.

"Since you adopt such an unreasonable tone, Del Rivo," he said, "I shall not give you that share of my own gifts I had intended to give you!"

"Then keep them!" shouted the Portuguese savagely.

"I used to think you were a white man and a gentleman, Byrne. Now, from what I have seen since I came here, I see that you are nothing but a mountebank. Go your ways with your airship. I shall remain behind in Barcoomba."

This Muta heard.

"If thou dost, white killer," he warned, with a broad grin, "I shall set my warriors on to thee, and their spear-points hurt."

And so at last the day of departure came. The sun shone almost with the break of dawn. In solemn procession the white gods left the palace, marching through a double lane of Hokahula warriors, beyond whose ranks surged a mighty populace. To the beating of drums and the sounding of horns, to the singing of the people, and the chanting of the horned priests, they made their way to where the great silver airship rode at anchor.

The Mirawala had been hauled down so low that the climb to the gondolas was a simple matter to any active person.

Rosa was the first to ascend and to be helped into one of the great cages. Adam, Harry, and the professor came next, their going being a signal for a wild outburst of lamentation on the part of the people. In one magical movement the warriors raised their flashing spears in the blinding sunshine—a parting salutation.

Next followed Jimmy Brown, the man Symes, and Sandy McTavish—then the guide Kyhte.

Muta stood below waving a farewell, a crown upon his head, the flashing charm Oyorara suspended from his thick neck.

He had already wished Adam and Harold, and Jimmy Brown, Sandy McTavish, and the White King of the Hokahulas good-bye in a pathetic and touching scene in the privacy of the palace.

"Farewell," he called now, in English, "and may your days be long and blessed with peace."

The party waved farewells to him.

"Now, Del Rivo, come on, unless you want to be left behind!" called Captain John Skinner impatiently. "We are about to cast off."

"Cast off, then, and go to Blazes with your Mirawala!" snarled the Portuguese.

As the hundreds of natives obeyed the instructions that had been given to them through the professor, the airship

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was slowly warped out into the middle of the great square, the warriors and the people following.

The ropes were paid out.

"Now let the ropes go!" called the professor through a megaphone.

His words were greeted by one great and deafening shout.

Del Rivo stood beneath the airship, staring upward.

"Man Killer," said Muta, pointing at him, "there is no place for you in Barcoomba. I have given orders to my warriors to kill."

With a start, Del Rivo saw the warriors advancing upon him, their spear-points levelled at him, and, realising his doom, ran after the swinging ropes, and, seizing one, clung on to it.

The upward sweep of the silver airship bore him high above the heads of his would-be executioners, and as the Mirawala headed gracefully in the direction of the great stone god Booma, the Portuguese, shrieking in terror, clung swinging to the rope, turning and twisting round and round.

The Hidden Crest Revealed!

IT was only the sheer desperation and nervous terror of the Portuguese which saved him.

Whilst the armed warriors waited for him below, expecting him to fall sheer down upon their broad spear blades, he dangled and swayed like a dancing doll, whilst the Mirawala, with slowly turning propellers, soared upwards into the heavens.

Del Rivo's face was distorted, his eyes bulged in terror. He had planned on second consideration to remain in a country which seemed to be loaded with priceless treasures and was full of abundant promise, no doubt intending to escape when time and occasion suited him. The implacable enmity of Muta, the black, had thwarted this ambition, and now he saw death awaiting him.

He shrieked and he screamed as he climbed desperately a few feet higher and twisting his legs around the dangling rope obtained more secure purchase there.

"Haul that swab aboard," commanded Captain John Skinner; "though for my part"—and he turned to smile grimly at the professor—"I would rather the Hokahula warriors had him down there than we aboard this airship."

"Once I held Del Rivo in considerable respect, for I am a simple man," answered the professor, as he leaned out of the window to peer down at the clinging Portuguese. "But after hearing what my son Adam and Harry and Kyhte and the black King Muta had to say about him, I have altered my opinion. Still, we must give him a chance. He is a white man when all is said and done, John Skinner."

"A dirty yellow-skinned swab, you mean?" snapped the commander of the Mirawala. "I doubt even if he is true Portuguese. I have met many men of that race and some fine men among them—but few like this dog! But—up with him, my lads!"

The crew of the Mirawala began to wind in the rope. It hauled the Portuguese with it just as a line thrown by a schoolboy from a pier or jetty brings with it the shore crab which has stuck its nippers into the bait.

By the time Del Rivo reached the cabin the Mirawala was five hundred feet above the ground and rising rapidly, its nose pointing into the sun.

In his impatience the Portuguese would have met his death even then, for, loosening his hold, he must have fallen had not John Skinner himself laid hold of his collar and yanked him aboard to safety.

Del Rivo tumbled, lay shaking with fear upon the floor, his face livid, and when he had sense to realise that the danger was past, he burst into a stream of oaths and revilings. One might have thought he would have been grateful to the captain of the airship—but it was not so.

"You nearly killed me! You tried to throw me overboard!" he snarled.

John Skinner, with arms folded and peaked cap set at the back of his head, stared into the evil eyes of the Portuguese and smiled.

"I saved you," he said. "Yet if I obeyed my instinct I'd heave you overboard now and let you take your chance!"

He swung his back upon Del Rivo then and looked down with the others upon the amazing scene that stretched far and wide below them.

The sunlight falling upon the spears and the bright robes of the Hokahula chieftains touched them with points of fire. Everywhere could be seen the people streaming, dancing, waving, shouting.

The white men could make out Muta where he stood in front of a group of chieftains and horned priests waving to them.

As the Mirawala soared higher these objects grew smaller and smaller.

For the first time Adam was able to make out the full extent and splendour of the City of Barcoomba, which, built in straggling fashion, seemed to spread for miles amid the trees and the rising ground beyond. The great stone idol Booma assumed gigantic proportions even from where they sailed.

But when John Skinner gave the word and the engines worked at full power, turning the propellers at amazing speed, the City of Barcoomba was soon left behind. As the airship turned its nose southward the party could see in the far distance, many, many miles away, a winding streak of silver, which they knew to be the great river, and a cloud of white which marked the position of the great waterfall, a cloud formed by the spray thrown up by the torrent as it tumbled from the level of the upper river into the great basin hundreds of feet below.

As they drew nearer to it they saw the glorious and luxuriant vegetation beneath them thin out and rocky ground take its place.

At first the thunder of the distant fall was like a hum, and they had to strain their ears to catch it above the noise of the propellers. But it grew louder and louder. John Skinner brought the airship down as they came close to the fall, and the magnificence of the spectacle seen from the cabins or gondolas of the airship almost took their breath away.

They had seen nothing like it before, and as Adam, pointing excitedly, explained how they had walked along the narrow ledge which terminated upon the very brink of the fall, the officers and crew of the Mirawala stared in wonderment.

"It must have been along that narrow walk upon the face of the towering cliff that they bore Rosa and myself when they brought us into the land of the Hokahulas," said the professor. "Yet I have no remembrance of it. We were very ill at the time. I have no recollection of passing behind the fall of water, and yet the natives must have brought us that way. Truly, the wonders of the world will never cease!"

They drifted lazily above the fall with silent engines, driven by a gentle breeze. It seemed that they were scarcely moving. Yet when they had got beyond the fall and the whirlpool of water in the basin below it, and the engines were started anew, they soon left it far behind, and steering a course almost due south came to the rocky ground that rose upward and ever upward to the Silver Glacier.

"Have you enough fuel for the journey, Skinner?" questioned the professor, as, with Adam and Harry, he passed through a narrow corridor scarcely wider than their shoulders and reached the engine-rooms and steering-house.

"Sufficient, I think," was the reply. "We started with a full store. The motors are economical. I believe we shall manage."

The air grew ever cooler. In the far distance they could see the sun shining upon the great snow field christened by the professor the Silver Glacier, and to the left of them the mighty Mountain of the Hidden Crest, whose top was hidden always by a great cloud.

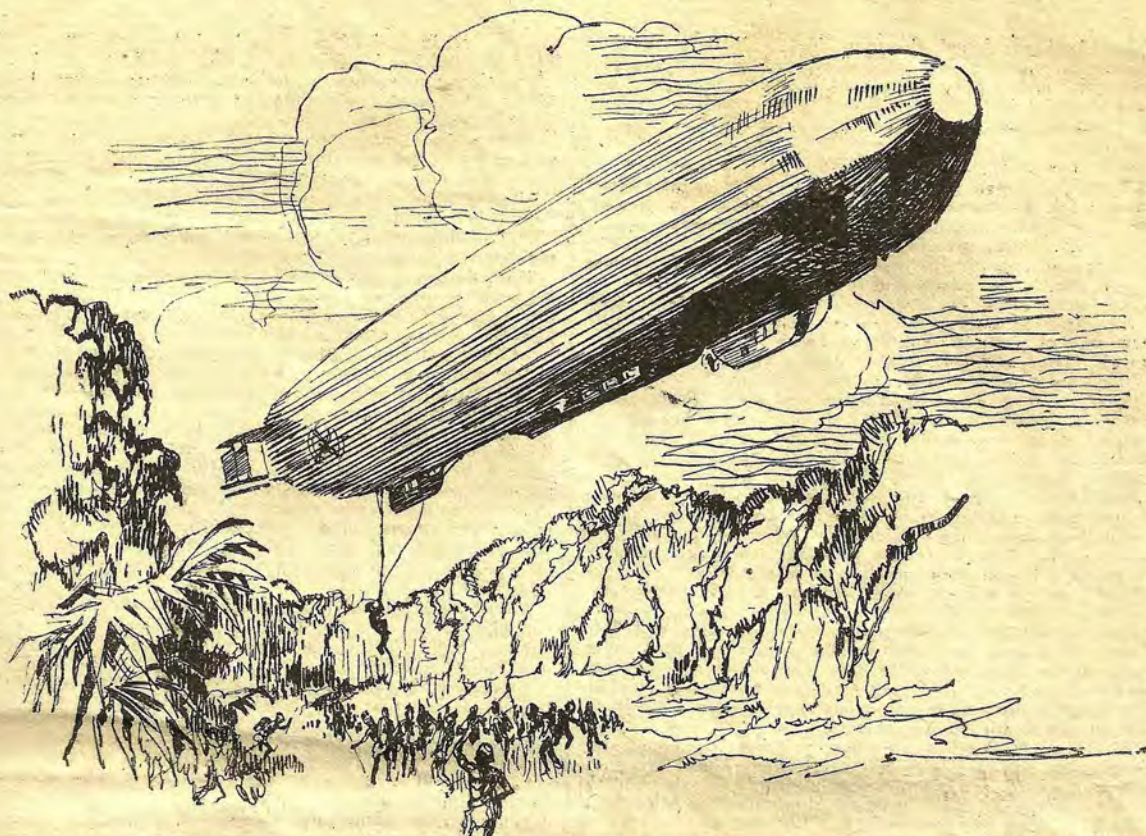
"That is truly an astonishing thing," remarked the professor, as he craned his neck to see the better. "Even on such a glorious day as this and from such a height one cannot see the summit of the mountain. Yet I would like to see it. They say back in Barcoomba that no mortal man has ever set his eyes upon that summit, Captain Skinner."

WHAT'S GONE BEFORE.

For four years or more Professor Byrne and his daughter Rosa have been virtually prisoners in the hands of the Hokahulas, a race of skulking natives who inhabit the secret city of Barcoomba, hitherto unexplored by a white man. These Hokahulas regard Professor Byrne as a white god, and they make him their king. But when the professor's son Adam and a party of white men, led by Muta, a giant black, penetrate the secret African city in order to rescue the professor and his daughter, the high priests of the Hokahulas are all for wiping

out these white men who, they now declare, are not gods. At the critical moment, however, a giant airship, the Mirawala, piloted by Captain Skinner, reaches Barcoomba, and the superstitious natives prostrate themselves in worship, for Captain Skinner and his crew are looked upon as white gods from the air, sent specially to carry the other white gods home. Preparations are made for departure, and the wily high priest's suggestion that Muta should be left behind to reign in the professor's stead is received with great acclamation.

(Now read on.)



Whilst the armed warriors waited for him below, expecting him to fall down upon their broad spear blades, Del Rivo dangled and swayed like a dancing doll at the end of the rope as the Mirawala soared majestically upwards into the heavens. (See page 25.)

They had sighted the mountain hours ago. Yet, despite their progress, it seemed always the same distance ahead of them.

"It might not be possible to see it," observed the skipper of the airship. "Maybe if we soared to the necessary height we could not breathe. We are high up now. It might be possible to overtop that cloud and see the summit. We could not rise much higher. The day is closing in fast. Shall we ride without our engines and make the essay after dawn to-morrow?"

"Truly," smiled the professor, "it would be a great thing to do."

Skinner's eyes twinkled.

"Then we will do it," he said. "Anything to please a king!"

"To say nothing of a princess, captain," observed Rosa, linking her arm with Harry Franklin and flashing her dark eyes at him.

They went on at half-speed. The cold was so intense up there in the rarefied air that they were all obliged to don additional clothing. Julian Del Rivo had sunk into sullen silence again. He was the personification of gloom these days. The man Symes shivered every time he looked at the Portuguese and begged earnestly to be allowed to occupy a second car. He did not want to be near him, he said.

The party ate and drank their fill, and the night shut down. Electric lights were switched on, and as the giant airship travelled slowly through the air Adam could hear the crackle of the wireless apparatus as the captain sent his messages out in the hope that a far distant station might pick them up and broadcast to the world the fact that Professor George Willis Byrne, his daughter Rosa, and the gallant adventurers who had flown to rescue them were safe and sound and being brought back to civilisation just as fast as the Mirawala could carry them.

Despite the creak and squeak of the airship as she travelled on at the instance of the wind, despite the sighing and the humming of the moving air about them, the travellers managed somehow to sleep. They had to stretch themselves prone upon the floor, some of them lying in the corridors, all wriggling themselves into sleeping-bags that gave them warmth and comfort.

So the night passed in blissful unconsciousness, and day came again to the ringing of voices and a call to breakfast.

The party had food in plenty and water to drink, and after they had breakfasted they rushed to see what was to be seen.

Below them lay a field of billowy white—the great cloud bank which Captain Skinner assured them screened the mountain top from the view of dwellers upon the earth below.

Above them was the clear, open vault of the heavens, in which the sun shone gloriously and with great power.

And upon their left in all its mighty and imposing majesty the Mountain of the Hidden Crest towered, its summit no longer hidden but open to the view—and towering yet thousands of feet above the track that the airship was taking.

Cries of wonder burst from the lips of all who saw.

Del Rivo had come to look with the rest.

The mountain was one great peak of dazzling white. Its summit must always have been capped by the eternal snow.

None could soar to such a height as to overtop it and expect to live.

They were sailing at an altitude of 20,000 feet above the level of the ocean, and yet the great mountain rose in its might far, far above them. How high was it—30,000 feet? More? The professor could only conjecture.

He studied the dazzling brilliance of the amazing scene in wonder and admiration.

"At last living man has seen the crest that they say no man would ever see!" he cried. "The Hokahulas have a legend that none may ever set eyes upon it and live. We have disproved that theory, at all events, captain. Now let us descend to a more comfortable level and head straight for Baruda."

John Skinner, captain of the Mirawala, uttered a breezy laugh.

"Before we go let us dip our flag in salute," he cried, and swiftly the command was issued. Whilst crew and passengers stood to attention, the men with heads bared, the flag was lowered and raised again. Eagerly the party stared at the snow-clad peak which the morning sun seemed to convert into living fire, and a half a minute later the airship dived nose downward and they flew towards the bank of cloud which lay thousands of feet below them.

The cloud enveloped them in fog. With propellers whirling they passed right through it and beneath it, moving downward, and the air grew cold once more, whilst they could see the crumpled ice drift and the great white sheet of the Silver Glacier spread like a cloth below.

Back in Baruda!

THEY dropped lower and lower. There came a time when they could make out quite distinctly the line of posts which showed the way across the snow.

An hour's speeding and they were past it, and saw stony ground spread around them; then sparse and stunted growth, finally the woods, and then the forests.

They came to pigmy land, the land of the Warakees, and as they flew low above the tree-tops they saw the little men come out of their hiding-places to salute them as they passed. They saw uncountable hordes of wild beasts, the sight of which made Del Rivo's mouth water.

They flew over Warakee villages and small towns. And at last they could see a great city ahead of them, and beyond the city in an open glade, raised upon a mound, an aeroplane, around which great masses of diminutive people were kneeling in worship.

Just to please them, for they were friends, were those little men down there, Adam caused firearms to be exploded out of the windows, and at sound of the noise and sight of the smoke the pigmies, raising a mighty shout, saluted.

Again the Union Jack was dipped in salute.

The Mirawala was speeding fast, now the air was becoming warmer and warmer.

They passed the confines of the pigmy country and flew above the land of the Hekebus. Every now and then these truculent warriors, still adorned in their skeleton war paint, showed themselves. And such was their warlike spirit that they actually drew their arrows and hurled them from their bows at the airship passing overhead.

"And now," said the professor, rubbing his hands and glancing at Captain John Skinner, "what about Baruda? Can we reach the settlement before nightfall, do you think?"

"I am afraid not," answered the skipper of the Mirawala. "We have done wonders as it is. But we must reach the station soon after daybreak to-morrow. We will drift with the wind to-night. We all need sleep. I will only set the engines going if it is necessary to keep us on our course."

As they journeyed onward Adam tried to make out the place where they had buried the Queen O-Kama, and he told of the wonderful jewels that had been placed beside her in her stone grave in the upper room of the great cave.

Del Rivo, listening, ground his teeth with impotent rage to think that such a treasure had been wilfully left behind by these boys.

He would have known what to do with it had such luck come his way.

But of recent years, despite his scheming and plotting, his luck had been dead out.

Once again the airship drifted through the night with almost silenced engines. Once again the party awakened to find the day ushered in with glorious sunshine. Below them and everywhere around stretched the vast, unbroken forest. Only on occasion did they sight a clearing or a watercourse and see the wild beasts feeding or drinking there.

The airship was kept to a set course, heading straight for Baruda.

"We shall reach the outpost somewhere before midday, I believe," announced the skipper of the Mirawala. "And I shan't be sorry. It is an easy journey from there to the haunts of civilisation, and the natives are friendly everywhere. I shall be glad of a rest. We need to take in more supplies, fresh water, to overhaul the airship, and make sure that she is everywhere sound. Thank Heaven we have not struck a storm, for I should have doubted whether we could live through it."

Del Rivo was this day a quiver of nerves. He would hardly look at food. He raved because he was not permitted to smoke. He raved because they would not give him drink. Finally he sank into a morbid silence—and even when, with a loud shout, they told him that the settlement lay ahead of them, that they had almost reached Baruda, he would not even condescend to rise and take a look at it.

The others did.

"Look, Adam, my son," laughed the professor, as he swept his crown of leather from his head and waved it joyfully, "they are flying the Union Jack down there, even as we flew it at Barcoomba. I am proud to think that we practically nailed our flag to the mast, and that when the winds and the rain tear it to ribbons, even the ribbons will still flutter to show that Barcoomba is a British possession. Walter

Beavan, always one of the most loyal, loves the Grand Old Flag, the emblem of freedom. Look! Look!"

The clearing appeared to their view in the distance below them. They could easily make out the discoloured Union Jack fluttering at the masthead. They could pick out the buildings, the thatch-roofed huts. They could see a man who stood in the open raise a rifle to his shoulder and the spurt of smoke that issued from it.

That man must be Walter Beavan, Adam decided. And he had fired his rifle in salute and welcome.

The airship dipped. She nosed down lower and lower, moving at half-speed.

The passengers gathered in their separate cabins.

In the engine-room and steering-room Captain Skinner uttered innumerable commands. There Sandy McTavish and Jimmy Brown lent a hand.

"Time we did land, Jimmy, my laddie," smiled the hard-bitten Scotsman. "There's a young lassie aboard who will ha' had more than enough o' this, and I'd gi'e something to stretch my legs a wee myself, to ha'e a bath and attend to ma creature comforts. We ha'e had a bonnie journey through the air, but takin' it all in I prefer to walk over the land."

As if by magic, the party could see the great clearing among the trees where Adam and Harry had landed with their aeroplanes upon their arrival in Baruda fill with people who swarmed from everywhere.

Magnificently handled, the Mirawala swept at half-speed in a graceful circle above the trees, and moved towards the middle of the clearing.

Ropes were thrown downward. The bearded man in a soft big felt hat who had fired the rifle, issued orders to his natives, and bade them help a crowd of white men to seize and hold the ropes.

Evidently the settlement had grown during the brief period of time that had elapsed since Adam had first seen Baruda.

He could make out freshly built dwelling-houses.

Keenly interested, the professor spoke about it.

"In these days, Adam, my son," he said, "a city can grow in the night, if one may use the familiar expression. Man can move from place to place so swiftly that it remains a marvel to me that none knew of the Silver Glacier, the Mountain of the Hidden Crest, and the City of Barcoomba until I was borne a prisoner to the land of the Hokahulas. It was near this outpost of Baruda, at a place called Pocatella, that my native bearers were slain, and Rosa and I fled into the forest for safety. Then it was but a one-man settlement. Now it is a village. To-morrow it will be a town. Progress! Progress!"

"And this man Beavan? You like him, father?"

The professor's lined face softened.

"I love him," he answered. "Walter Beavan is one of the finest—I would even say one of the greatest men I have ever met. When I first saw him he was young, handsome, full of ambition. He and a friend of his, an old college chum named Holden, had come out to this far distant place to hunt big game and amuse themselves by penetrating into wild regions where no white man had ever trod before. I have never seen a more handsome young man than was George Holden. He and Walter Beavan were like brothers.

"In those days Baruda did not exist. I was exploring, gathering together a collection of wonderful trophies—and we were together when we came into touch with a train of native bearers in the service of Julian Del Rivo, then trading between the wild, unknown heart of Africa and the coast. I was alone—and I was in such need of company that I spent two months with Beavan and Holden and Del Rivo before striking a new trail. I shall never forget our parting. The weather was hot. I have never known insects be such a pest as they were then. I managed to escape their bites, but the others were tortured by them. Del Rivo was stricken with malaria, while George Holden became sick. Walter Beavan himself, who was as strong as an elephant, seemed to lose a great deal of his natural vivacity and driving force. As it happened, they had with them some barrels of rum. Beavan drank the spirit like water to stave off sickness. George Holden also took far more than was good for him. I remained with them until they seemed to have quite recovered—then bade them adieu. Growing tired of my wanderings, I made for the haunts of men, and returned homeward to reap the reward of a great success in the manner that you know of. Some of the finest of my trophies are to be seen to-day at home in the main hall of Studley Grange. I afterwards heard that Beavan very nearly died, the drink only saving him, that Del Rivo was nursed back from the very brink of the grave by his devoted natives, but that poor George Holden, what with malaria

and drink, died a raving madman in the very heart of the forest—where they buried him.”

The professor, staring downward, sighed.

“It was the loss of his bosom chum that broke Walter Beavan’s heart, soured him, and caused him to bury himself an outcast in this wild and lonely place, Baruda,” he said. “When, after an absence of ten years, or more, I returned to this lonely place I scarcely knew him. He had become a morose and disillusioned man, one who shunned his kind, and preferred to live here alone, surrounded by natives, rather than go back to civilisation. Drink had not a little to do with it—and during the week we stayed here he was hardly ever sober. Yet the old, kindly spirit of the younger man I used to know and admire flashed up here and there, and when we resumed our journey nothing could have exceeded the graciousness of his manner.”

The professor leaned upon the open window, watching the efforts of the natives below, and of Walter Beavan and the white men as, answering the instructions of Captain John Skinner, they helped to haul the silver airship to safe anchorage.

For a time the professor remained lost in thought, then he resumed his story:

“I remember now as clearly as when it happened,” he said. “Beavan, warning me against possible treachery, telling me that he had heard weird and wonderful stories about a warlike and unknown race of people to the north-west of the trail I had marked down for exploration. He begged me not to journey in the direction of the place where George Holden died. He informed me that a big-game hunter named Curtis had been massacred with all his train within fifty miles of unknown Baruda, his assailants killing them and stealing the valuable trophies and goods they had gathered after months of privation and toil. Yet I had no fear for my own safety. I had trusty guides and trusty native helpers. I was well known throughout the country, and I had my daughter with me. I told Beavan that I would be back within two or three months’ time. But, alas, within four days of our departure from Baruda my train was attacked, my men were killed, and Rosa and I fled into the forest. I do not know now how we managed to live. I carried only scanty supplies with me—a rifle and ammunition, a revolver, and a case of medicines. Rosa carried a satchel full of small articles of various kinds, including many tins of meat lozenges. Aided by my experience and cunning we struck a trail that led north-west of Pocatella, where the massacre took place—and eventually, when at the point of death, we were found and carried into captivity, together with the man Symes, by the Hokahulas, who spared us, no doubt because of our white skins. For days we lingered at the point of death, for which reason no doubt I have stored no knowledge of the passing of the Silver Glacier, of which I was told in Barcoomba, or of our journey along the narrow path on the face of the cliff which leads to the Great Waterfall—the gateway to Hokahula land. But the great Mountain of the Hidden Crest I did see—and therefore was able to speak about it in the messages I sent from Barcoomba.”

Slowly but surely the Mirawala dipped to her resting place. Soon she was only house high above the ground. Amid the shouting of hundreds of native women and children the splendid airship was towed to safe harbourage under the shelter of the forest trees.

And, at long last, down from the cars the travellers descended.

Walter Beavan, bearded, sombre, unsmiling, watched critically as he saw them come down—his eyes lighting up only when he saw the girl descend with the nimbleness of an acrobat.

Adam, as he dropped lightly to the ground, turned and looked at him. It struck him then that he had never seen a more wonderful-looking man than Beavan. Standing six feet three inches, and as broad as he was tall, without an ounce of superfluous flesh upon his huge frame, he looked indeed a man, as, with folded arms and feet set slightly apart, he watched the safe homcoming of the captain and crew of the Mirawala.

Down they came, one after the other, Captain Skinner and some members of the crew being the last to descend.

Professor Byrne, leaping forward, extended his hand to the settler.

“Beavan, my dear fellow,” he laughed, “this seems too good to be true. I have seen and done much since I saw you last, having been crowned a king. My daughter Rosa you have met and know, also my son, and his friend Harry Franklin, Jimmy Brown as well, and Sandy McTavish, and I believe you have met the man Symes before.”

As the tattered scarecrow of a man shuffled forward to meet Beavan, the settler started. It seemed to Adam as he watched him that Beavan’s face changed its colour beneath the deep sun tan. His lips twisted nervously. When he spoke there was a note of fear in his voice.

“Why, yes, of course,” he murmured, passing a hand wearily over his forehead and smoothing his hair back. “I know Symes. I had believed him to be dead.”

He ignored the man’s outstretched hand.

“I believe Symes was with you when George Holden died?” said the professor.

“Yes, he was.”

Symes smiled a trifle maliciously and edged away.

The next moment Julian del Rivo and Walter Beavan stood face to face.

“So, Walter Beavan,” said the Portuguese, with an ugly laugh, “we meet again.”

“Julian del Rivo!” ejaculated Beavan, bending his sombre eyes upon the Portuguese.

“The world is small, isn’t it?” almost snarled Del Rivo. “Even when a man isolates himself in such a God-forsaken and out-of-the-way place as Baruda old friends have a habit of turning up when least expected.”

They glared at each other, the hostility between them being plainly revealed to the onlookers.

“Well, well,” Del Rivo went on, “let us shake hands for the sake of old times.”

But Beavan, ignoring the outstretched hand, turned his back upon the Portuguese and walked away.

After their long flight in the silver airship the adventurers were more than glad to be on land again. They found living quarters prepared for them, and during the days of rest which followed talked and planned many things.

Walter Beavan, Adam discovered, was a man of an even more sulky and morose disposition than his father had stated him to be.

He shunned their society. On two occasions he was so abrupt and rude to the professor that Rosa declared her father should not go to him again.

“And yet, Adam,” the girl confided, “I feel so sorry for him. I shall never forget his kindness to us four years ago when we came to Baruda, and all he did for us then. Isn’t it a shame, a man like that burying himself in this out-of-the-way place?”

“It does seem a pity,” answered Adam, “because Walter Beavan seems such a clever and able man.”

Beavan was so strange these days as to convey the impression that he was out of his mind. He would rise with the dawn, shunning the society of the white men, shoulder a rifle, and plunge into the heart of the forest.

No more would be seen of him until close upon night-fall, when he would return, walking a trifle unsteadily, sometimes laden with game, sometimes empty handed, and always with an empty flask slung over his shoulder, the whisky it had contained having been drained to the last drop.

Then he would enter his bungalow and hide himself.

Twice Adam tried to speak to him; but each time the settler was rude in the extreme, turning his back upon the boy. Once he did speak, but his manner was strange.

“Better mind your own business, my boy. You don’t want to have any dealings with a man like me.” And he plunged into his hut, where Adam could hear him cursing his native servants. Truly a strange and cross-grained man.

“Adam, my dear boy, it is our coming which has upset him,” remarked the professor that night. “It has brought back afresh all the old memories. He is for ever thinking how poor George Holden died.”

The safe landing at Baruda had affected the travellers in various ways. It had aroused in Del Rivo all the old arrogance. The Portuguese swaggered about as if the place belonged to him, boasted of the fortune he would make in the future, and bewailed all the riches they had left behind.

His insolence was almost unbearable.

The man Symes, on the other hand, seemed to regret their arrival at Baruda, and suffered so much from nerves that he begged to be permitted to share one of the native huts with the white men—a plea that awoke in Adam’s breast all his old suspicions and distrust of Del Rivo, for Adam felt convinced that the Portuguese was at the bottom of the matter.

(Look out for next week’s thrilling instalment, chums.)

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(Continued from page 22.)

return," said Arthur Augustus. "The man who got away from the police—I twust they will nab him soon—was named Wube Wedway!"

"What a name!" ejaculated Blake.

"I guess Gussy means Rube Redway!" chuckled Wildrake.

"Yaas, wathah; I said Wube Wedway," said Arthur Augustus innocently, "and from what the wottahs said they're affah some of your patah's land called Pine Twee Patch, and they hoped to get it off him by usin' you somehow when you were in their hands."

"So that's it," said Wildrake, with a nod. "They won't get me into their hands in a hurry, I guess."

"I am goin' to look affah you, deah boy."

"Good man!" grinned Wildrake.

"I mean it, Wildwake," said Arthur Augustus. "If that howwid wottah Wedway goes free he will be affah you again. You are goin' over to Canada for the long vacation?"

"Correct!"

"I have often thought," resumed Arthur Augustus, "that I should like a wun ova to Canada."

"Gee-whiz!"

"And the midsummah holidays are long enough, you know," said the swell of St. Jim's. "In ordinawy cires, deah boy, I am not the fellow to give myself an invitation; but these cires are not ordinawy. I shall come

ovah to Canada with you when the school bweaks up for the summah holidays, to see you safe home. I twust I shall be welcome?"

"Welcome as the flowers in May," said Wildrake, laughing. "I've told you more than once I'd like you to see the Boot Leg Ranch, and I guess the popper will be bucked. And I'll look after you—"

"You do not catch my meanin', deah boy. I am goin' to look affah you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

"I guess we'll look after one another, what?" said Wildrake. "It's a cinch, Gussy—you're coming?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good!"

"I shall write to my patah at once and tell him," said Arthur Augustus.

And the swell of St. Jim's proceeded to Study No. 6 to write that important letter to his pater—a letter which probably surprised his noble pater considerably when he received it. And during the remaining days of the term Arthur Augustus was much less occupied in bothering about exams than in making his preparations for his holiday in the wild and woolly West.

THE END.

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