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THE END OF THE TRAIL!

After a thrilling chase Kit Wildrake and his chums run the bank-robber to earth!

(Read: "THE DOLLAR TRAIL!" inside.)

THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S ON THEIR METTLE! Kit Wildrake and his chums on the Boot Leg Ranch are some lads, for when a bank robber gets away with 8,000 dollars they get on his trail in double-quick time! And in spite of perils and hardships galore they never drop out until they have got the goods! ...

THE DOLLAR TRAIL!



A New Long Complete
Story of Tom Merry &
Co., telling of their
Thrilling Adventures on
Canadian Soil.

By
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD.**

CHAPTER 1.

A Meeting on the Prairie!

"**S**AY, bo!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat up and took notice.

The swell of St. Jim's was ambling at a leisurely pace along the well-trodden trail that led from Lone Pine to the Boot Leg Ranch.

A gunny-sack hanging on his saddle was stuffed with letters. In that rather remote section of British Columbia, where Tom Merry & Co. were spending their summer holidays with Wildrake of the Fourth, letters came only once a day—on the hack from Rainbow to Lone Pine.

At Lone Pine they had to be collected at the lumber hotel, which was also a store and a post office. On the present occasion Arthur Augustus had volunteered to ride to Lone Pine for the letters for the ranch.

Having collected the letters and lunched at the lumber hotel, D'Arcy was riding back to Boot Leg in the sunny afternoon.

It was a rather lonely trail, and for ten miles Arthur Augustus had not passed a soul. Now suddenly, as he was trotting past a clump of cedars near the trail, a horseman pushed out from the trees and hailed him.

Arthur Augustus pulled in his horse at once and his hand dropped on the revolver in his pocket. Hold-ups were rare in the Rainbow section, but Gussy knew that they had happened, and he was on his guard. He had seen nothing of the horseman until the man suddenly pushed out of the cedars, and so he knew that the stranger had been intentionally keeping out of sight until he came up.

If the stranger had designs on the gunny-sack containing the letters for the ranch, Arthur Augustus was quite prepared to defend his charge. Letters for the St. Jim's juniors staying at the ranch were of no value to anyone but the owners, but those for Mr. Wildrake were quite likely to contain cash.

So Arthur Augustus, who had carefully packed a "gun" before starting for Lone Pine, sat his horse in the trail with his hand on the gun in his pocket, waiting for the stranger to come up and watching him very keenly.

"Say, bo," repeated the horseman, as he came out into the trail, "you don't want that gun. I guess I'm not holding you up."

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He grinned a little as he spoke.

Gussy's gun was not in sight, but the stranger had evidently understood his action.

"I twust not," said Arthur Augustus cheerfully. "But a fellow can't be too careful. What do you want?"

"I guess I'm off my trail, and I want to be put wise. You belong to this section?"

"Not pwecisely," said Arthur Augustus. "I am stayin' at the Boot Leg Wanch with my fwinds for a holiday. But I have learned most of the twails in this neighbourhood, and I can pwobably diwect you."

He looked curiously at the stranger.

There was something unusual, if not exactly suspicious, about the horseman. He had obviously been keeping out of sight, and now that he was in the open his eyes wandered in a rather furtive way on all sides, as if in fear of seeing an enemy.

"Say, where are you from?" he asked suddenly.

"Lone Pine."

"Passed anybody on the trail?"

"No."

"Sure of that?"

"Quite!" said Arthur Augustus, more and more surprised.

He realised that there was no danger to be looked for from the horseman. It was the lone rider himself who was in fear of danger.

"I guess the fire-bug is somewhere about," muttered the horseman. "Sure you ain't seen a breed? Man on a black horse!"

"I've seen nobody," Arthur Augustus assured him.

"He was after me a few miles out of Rainbow. I guess I've been riding like heck, and I've dropped him, but—"

The man stared up and down the trail again uneasily.

The wide prairie looked utterly deserted; but any clump of bushes, any rugged fold of the plain, might have hidden an enemy. And D'Arcy, as he watched the man, could see that he was in fear. He noticed, too, that there was a crimson scratch across the man's cheek, as if a bullet had grazed him.

"That fire-bug, Injun Dick, is looking for me—I know that," went on the horseman. "He held me up a few miles out of Rainbow. He knew I had the dollars with me. I guess he was watching me in the town. You're sure you ain't seen him?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I guess I may get through, then—only, riding away from that bulldozer, I've lost the trail," said the stranger. "I guess I'm a good few miles from Lone Pine now."

"About ten," said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, search me!" ejaculated the horseman in dismay.

"You have to follow this twail, the way I have come," explained Arthur Augustus. "You can't miss it."

The man breathed hard.

"I reckoned this trail led to somewhere," he said. "When I hit it an hour ago I took cover yonder and hoped that some guy would pass that could put me wise. I was mighty glad when I saw you coming. You don't look as if you was in tow with that fire-bug."

"Bai Jove, I twust not!" said Arthur Augustus, with a smile. "I am a schoolboy from the Old Country."

The horseman grinned again, anxious as he evidently was. Probably he did not need telling that Gussy was from the Old Country.

"Well, I reckon I'll hit this trail for Lone Pine and chance it," he said. "Thank you, kid! So-long!"

"Good-aftahnoon!" said Arthur Augustus politely.

The man started along the trail eastward, spurring his tired horse. Arthur Augustus watched him go, and then resumed his leisurely trot towards the distant ranch.

Crack!

The sudden report of a firearm made the swell of St. Jim's jump. He spun round in his saddle.

The horseman was already at a good distance, but he was still in sight. But he was not alone now.

From some hollow of the prairie a dark-skinned man, mounted on a powerful black horse, had appeared. He was ahead of the stranger and had cut him off from the direction of Lone Pine.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

It was the dark-skinned half-breed who had pulled trigger. The man who had spoken to D'Arcy had whirled his horse away from the trail and was riding hard into the prairie. Hard on his track rode the man on the black horse, firing as he pursued.

Arthur Augustus gazed at the distant scene, spellbound.

The two riders were in sight only for a minute, then a fold of the prairie swallowed them up from view. They vanished like figures in a mirage, and the thunder of hoof-beats died away into silence.

CHAPTER 2.

The Good Samaritan!

"B AI Jove!"

Arthur Augustus sat in his saddle, alone on the silent, sunny prairie, in astonishment and perplexity.

What he had seen was evidently an attempted hold-up. The half-breed Injun Dick, as the man had called him, was pursuing the hapless fugitive to rob him. That was clear to Arthur Augustus. And it was clear, too, that the breed was ready and willing to add murder to robbery if it was necessary for his purpose.

Arthur Augustus sat undecided for a few moments. The two horsemen had disappeared, both of them riding hard. The rolling plains had swallowed them up from sight. But Arthur Augustus swiftly decided on his course of action. He could not ride on to the ranch and leave the matter where it was.

He whirled round his horse and rode back along the trail to the point where the two riders had quitted it.

There was no sign of them to be seen, but their trail was visible enough in the trampled grass.

Arthur Augustus followed it at a gallop. His gun was in his hand now, and there was a glint of excitement in his eyes.

Before him lay roll on roll of rugged prairie, like great billows of grass. Suddenly his horse shied

and swerved, and D'Arcy drew rein. Something lay in the grass before him—something bulky that lay very still. It was the carcass of a horse, and as the junior stared down at it he recognised the animal the stranger had ridden.

"Bai Jove!"

Evidently the fugitive was dismounted now—the pursuer had shot down his horse. But where was the rider?

A deep groan from the grass answered the unspoken question.

D'Arcy jumped down from the saddle.

In the thick grass, a dozen yards from the fallen horse, he found the man who had spoken to him on the trail. Of the breed there was no sign.

The man lay on his back, and there was a splash of crimson on his face. He looked up at D'Arcy with haggard eyes.

"You!" he muttered faintly.

"You are wounded?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

The man groaned.

"I guess he got me!" he said faintly. "He's got the dollars—eight thousand dollars in my wallet!"

"Where is he?"

"Gone, I reckon. He won't be seen in this section again," groaned the wounded man. "I pulled trigger on him, but his hoss got the bullet. And then he got me. And he's got the dollars—eight thousand dollars that I was taking from the Rainbow bank to Lone Pine."

"Nevah mind the dollars now," said Arthur Augustus gently. "Let me look at your wound."

"I guess I've got mine."

Arthur Augustus knelt in the grass beside the wounded bank messenger.

The man was twice wounded. A bullet had cut across his scalp, and another was deep in his shoulder.

The man groaned faintly as Arthur Augustus proceeded to bind up his wounds as well as he was able. The junior could do no more than stop the flow of blood.

"I shall have to get you on my horse and get you to the wanch," said Arthur Augustus. "Long Jim will be able to do somethin' for your wounds. Can you get up?"

"I guess I'll try."

With D'Arcy's aid the wounded man gained his feet. D'Arcy called to his horse.

The effort of getting the wounded man into the saddle was almost too much for Arthur Augustus, but he succeeded at last.

"Now hold on, and I'll lead the horse," said Arthur Augustus.

The man nodded.

Arthur Augustus took the bridle and led the horse away. It was a good many long miles to the Boot Leg Ranch, and the swell of St. Jim's had a long and weary tramp before him. But it was the only thing to be done, and he made up his mind to do it.

"He's got the dollars!" the bank messenger muttered again and again. "Eight thousand dollars! He's got the dollars!"

"The Mounted Police will get aftah him, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "P'robably he will not get away with them."

"I guess he's hittin' it for the hills now," muttered the wounded man. "He will light out of this section and strike for the north. They won't get the dollars back."

And he groaned again.

Under the sinking sun Arthur Augustus led the horse on, his legs aching with fatigue. The trail to the ranch seemed endless now that he was on foot. The wounded man fell into a half-conscious silence, clinging mechanically to the saddle.

There was a clatter of hoofs on the plain and a deep voice hailed Arthur Augustus at last.

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"Say, kid, what's this game?"

It was Long Jim, the foreman of the Boot Leg Ranch. Arthur Augustus uttered an exclamation of relief. Never had he been so glad to see the long-limbed cattleman.

Long Jim rode up, staring at the swell of St. Jim's and the wounded bank messenger in astonishment.

"Bai Jove, I'm jollay glad to see you, Mr. Long Jim!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps you will help me with this chap."

"But what's happened?" asked the Boot Leg foreman. Arthur Augustus explained.

Long Jim uttered an exclamation at the name of Injun Dick. Evidently that name was not strange to him.

"That fire-bug! I guess you was lucky that you didn't get to close quarters with him, kid!"

"You know the wottah?" asked D'Arcy.

"I guess most in this section know about that bulldozer," said Long Jim. "The hardest case between the Rockies and the Pacific. The Mounted have been after him a long while, but he's always given them the slip. I reckon he won't be seen near Rainbow again if he's roped in eight thousand dollars from this galoot. Give me the guy. I guess I'll carry him."

And Long Jim took the wounded man in his powerful arms, carrying him almost as if he had been an infant.

"Thank goodness!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

And very gladly the swell of St. Jim's mounted his horse again and rode on to the ranch.

CHAPTER 3.

Tom Merry & Co. Take the Trail!

"**T**IME Gussy was back!" remarked Tom Merry. "More than time!" grunted Jack Blake. "Two to one in flapjacks that he's missed the trail!"

"I guess a galoot couldn't miss the trail here from Lone Pine," remarked Kit Wildrake. "But he's late."

Tom Merry & Co. had been riding that afternoon, and now they were loafing on the ranch veranda, waiting for Gussy to come in with the letters.

The juniors were all keen on letters from home. They were at a distance of six thousand miles from the Old Country, a continent and an ocean lying between them and home. So letters were more welcome than usual on a vacation.

D'Arcy was late—there was no doubt about that. He had had ample time to get in from Lone Pine long ago. The sun was sinking in the west, and Gussy had been due at the ranch long before sundown.

Kit Wildrake turned his keen eyes on the long trail that led from the ranch across the plains to the cattle camp.

A moving figure in the distance had caught his eye.

"Gussy, I guess," he said.

"Better late than never!" yawned Manners.

"He's not alone," said Wildrake. "That's Long Jim

with him, I opine, and he's carrying something. I wonder what's happened."

"Something's bound to happen where Gussy is concerned," said Monty Lowther.

The juniors all rose to their feet and stared along the trail across the sunlit prairie. They soon discerned that it was a man that the Boot Leg foreman was carrying in his arms. Arthur Augustus waved his hand to his comrades and came on at a gallop, ahead of the foreman. They ran down from the veranda to greet him.

"Something up?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus breathlessly.

"There's been a hold-up—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"A wuffianly wascal called Injun Dick—"

"That galoot!" exclaimed Wildrake.

"Yaas, wathah! He spotted that poor chap that Long Jim is cawwyin' in, and wobbled him of eight thousand dollars."

"Some haul!" said Wildrake. "What the thump was the man carrying such a sum about on the plains for?"

"I gathah that he is a bank messenger fwom Wainbow, deah boy, and was takin' the money to Lone Pine," said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, that accounts," said Wildrake. "I guess it was for pay-day on some of the ranches, then. Did Injun Dick get away with it?"

"Yaas, the wottah!"

Arthur Augustus slid from his horse.

"I'll tell you about it ovah suppah, deah boy. I am fwtighfully tired and hungwy."

Long Jim rode up to the ranch-house, and Billy Pink and Nosey Rogers came out of the bunk-house and helped the wounded man down. The bank messenger was quite unconscious now, his face as colourless as chalk. The juniors looked at him compassionately as he was taken into the house. The rancher was absent; but Mrs. Wildrake took charge of the wounded man, and he was taken into a room at once. Long Jim remained with him to attend to his hurts.

When the Boot Leg foreman came out, Arthur Augustus called to him rather anxiously:

"How is he, Mr. Long Jim?"

"Bad!" said the foreman laconically.

"But not—not—" faltered Arthur Augustus.

"I guess he'll pull through with care. I've got the bullet out of his shoulder," said Long Jim. "The missus has got him in charge, and I guess he will pull through. But he won't get off his back for some weeks, I reckon. He's hard hit."

And the Boot Leg foreman strode on.

"Hard lines on the poor chap," said Tom Merry. "Come in and tell us all about it, Gussy."

"Yaas, deah boy."

Arthur Augustus sat down to early supper with his comrades, and over the meal related his strange adventure on the prairie.

The juniors listened with interest, Kit Wildrake with a very thoughtful brow.

"I suppose the Canadian Mounted Police will get aftah that villain," said Arthur Augustus.

"Sure!" said Wildrake. "But the nearest post is at Rainbow, and they can't get after him soon. I reckon Long Jim will telephone the news through to Rainbow and let the bank people know, and they'll put the Mounted on to the trail. But—"

He wrinkled his brows in thought.

"Popper's away on the ranges," he said. "He's getting ready for a big cattle drive to the railroad next week. We're busy at the ranch now. A lot of the boys would be keen enough to get after that firebug, but I reckon Long Jim can't spare a man. But—"

Wildrake paused and looked at his comrades. They read his unspoken thought, and Tom Merry gave a nod.

"What about us?" he said.

"Bai Jove, I'm weady!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"You say the man told you that he had drilled the firebug's horse, Gussy?" asked Wildrake.

"Yaas. He said he had fired at Injun Dick and hit his horse."

"He can't make good speed on an injured horse," said Wildrake. "He's got no end of a start, but if his hoss fails him he's landed, and we've got a chance of



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"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jumped down from the saddle of his horse. In the thick grass he found the man who had spoken to him on the trail a short time before. Of the breed there was no sign. The man looked up at D'Arcy with haggard eyes. "He got me," he said, "and the eight thousand dollars in my wallet!" (See Chapter 2.)

overhauling him. From what Gussy says, he's hit the trail for the north, and he won't find it easy to get a new mount there. Might trade one from some gang of breeds of Injuns. Still, as matters stand we've got a chance of coming up with him. You fellows game?"

"What-ho!" said Blake emphatically. "I'd like to take a hand in putting such a scoundrel behind the bars."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"If the popper was at home, I'd ask him," said Wildrake. "But I guess he would be willing to let me trail down that villain if he knew. Shooting a man down for his dollars isn't good enough for Canada. But about you fellers, I don't know. There will be danger if we get within shooting distance of Injun Dick. What he's done to the bank messenger is a sample of his style."

"I fancy that the six of us ought to be able to handle any gunman in the West," said Manners.

"And a little over," said Blake.

"You're going after him, anyhow. I can see that, Wildrake," said Monty Lowther.

The Canadian junior nodded.

"I guess it's up to me," he said. "I'm bound to do what I can. But it's not up to you fellows, and I guess I feel rather doubtful about dragging you into it."

Tom Merry laughed.

"We shouldn't be likely to let you go on such a trail alone and stay behind," he said.

"Wathah not!"

"We're all on," said Blake. "And if we're going, the sooner we start the better."

"It's a cinch, then," said Wildrake. "I'm bound to warn you that it's a dangerous trail, that bulldozer, Injun Dick will shoot at sight."

"So shall we, then," said Blake. "Let's get off."

"I'll leave a message for popper, then, that we're going off for a long ride," said Wildrake. "No need to say more than that. We'll take the fixings for a few days' trail."

"Come on, then," said Tom.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy forgot that he was fatigued as he joined his comrades to get the horses from the corral and pack the bedrolls and examine the firearms.

All the juniors were keen to take the trail of the ruthless outlaw who had shot down the bank messenger and to recover, if they could, the large sum that Injun Dick was taking with him in his flight to the trackless North-West. But they realised that they were going on a perilous trail, and they were in a thoughtful and careful mood.

Bunchy, the cook, stared at them inquiringly when they came into the cookhouse for the necessary provisions.

"Going up into the foothills again?" asked Bunchy. "I re-ken you'll want me to come and look arter you, same as afore."

"We're going after Injun Dick," said Wildrake quietly.

"Oh, shucks!" exclaimed Bunchy, in astonishment. "I reckon you want to keep wide of that firebug, young Kit. He's dangerous."

"I guess we know that. We want grub-stakes for three or four days, old man. Pack up!"

"Sure!" said Bunchy. "I'll fix you. But—"

"You'll tell popper we've gone on a trip," said Wildrake. "Keep the rest dark, Bunchy. When popper comes in from the ranges to-morrow you can tell him where we've gone."

"Sure!" assented Bunchy.

The preparations for the ride were soon completed. Tom Merry & Co. mounted their horses. At the gate Long Jim met them. He eyed them inquiringly, perhaps with a suspicion of their purpose.

"I've phoned Rainbow," he said. "The Mounted will be after that firebug to-morrow."

"I guess we shall be after him to-night," said Wildrake.

Long Jim looked at him thoughtfully and nodded.

"You're the kid to pick up a trail if there's any to pick up," he said. "I guess I'd come along if I could leave the ranch. Keep your eyes peeled if you get near Injun Dick. He's a dead shot, and he will burn powder on sight. It's the rope for him if he's nailed, and so he's got nothing to lose. Good luck to you!"

And the St. Jim's juniors rode out of the gate.

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CHAPTER 4.

The Trail of Injun Dick

"THAT'S the place," said Arthur Augustus.

The sun was low over the Porcupine Hills, but it was still light. Arthur Augustus had led the way along the Lone Pine trail to the spot where the bank messenger had left it in his wild flight from the outlaw. From that spot the juniors struck across the open plain to the north, and D'Arcy pointed out in the distance the place where he had picked up the wounded man. There was no mistaking the spot, for as the juniors rode up there was a whirring and croaking in the grass, and several startled buzzards rose on the wing from the carcass of the dead horse. A dozen coyotes, with startled yelps, scuttled away in the grass.

The juniors dismounted where the bank messenger had lain when D'Arcy found him. There was blood on the ground, marking the spot. Close by was the track of a horse—evidently the horse of the half-breed outlaw. Wildrake examined that track with the greatest care. He needed to remember it, for it was the only guide to the man who had fled with eight thousand dollars.

"I guess I'll know that print again anywhere," said the Canadian junior at last as he rose to his feet.

"The man's got a long start," remarked Blake.

"Four or five hours, I reckon. If he had a good horse under him it wouldn't be much use following. But if his horse is wounded, as the bank galoot told Gussy, that makes all the difference."

"Yes, rather!"

"I suppose Injun Dick is bwute enough to dwive on a wounded horse," said Arthur Augustus.

Wildrake looked at him.

"He sure is, and worse," he answered.

"Let's get aftah the wottah."

The juniors remounted. It puzzled Tom Merry & Co. how Wildrake could follow the trail on horseback. They were good Scouts enough to pick it up on foot, watching the ground and scanning every inch as they went. But Wildrake evidently saw enough from the saddle to guide him.

He led the way at a trot, the juniors following him.

Lower and lower the sun sank in the west, and the dusk deepened on the rolling prairie.

Four or five miles had been covered when Wildrake suddenly leaped from his horse's back and scanned the ground eagerly. Tom Merry & Co. drew rein and watched him.

"Good luck!" exclaimed the Canadian junior.

"What—" began Tom.

"His horse fell down here, or else lay down to rest. You can see where the grass is crushed, and bloodstains on the ground. I guess the critter was hard hit."

"Poor beast!" muttered Blake.

"Yes; but it gives us a chance at that bulldozer. He lost time here—like enough a good deal of time. But he made the hoss get on again. Come on."

Wildrake went on foot now, with his bridle over his arm. His eyes were keenly on the ground.

Again and again he picked up traces of blood, and again he came on a spot where the sign showed unmistakably that the horse had either fallen or lain down. Obviously the black horse ridden by the outlaw had been hard hit.

"I reckon he was going slow," said Wildrake. "Look here—prints of boots! He was walking beside the hoss here. I guess the critter couldn't carry him farther. I reckon that from here we shall find that he never got into the saddle again."

"Good!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

The juniors followed on eagerly. They were keeping their eyes keenly open now in the thickening dusk. If the fugitive half-breed was dismounted it was possible that they might overtake him at any time, good start as he had had. And they were well aware that if they came on the desperate man the first signal of his presence would be a bullet.

The print of the boots beside the horse's track disappeared suddenly, showing that the breed had remounted. But a dozen yards farther on they

reappeared. And a snarling, savage sound from the grass told the juniors that coyotes were close at hand.

"The hoss, I reckon," said Wildrake.

The Canadian junior was right.

A few minutes later the juniors came on the body of the big black horse that the outlaw had ridden. It had already been torn by the coyotes, who scattered unwillingly, with savage snarls and howls, as the juniors came up.

"Then the scoundrel is on foot now!" said Tom Merry, with a deep breath.

"Yep; and I guess he won't find it easy to get another mount. He won't dare to get near any of the ranches."

"You can pick up his track?"

"Easy as falling off a log, till the light goes."

The light was failing fast now. Wildrake led the way, bent almost double to watch the breed's trail in the thickening gloom. Clear enough in the grass so long as the light remained, he read the prints of the thick, heavy riding-boots worn by Injun Dick.

The outlaw's horse had failed him, but he was keeping on his way, tramping on foot over the boundless plains of the unsettled North-West, heading for the distant hills. Doubtless he hoped to pick up another mount from some wandering Indian or cowboy. At all events, he dared not turn back; he knew that the Mounted Police would be already riding out of Rainbow to hunt for him. It was certain, too, that a large reward would be offered by the Rainbow bank for the man who had robbed their messenger of such a sum as eight thousand dollars. The hunt for the outlaw would be keen and tireless and widespread. Desperate and reckless villain as he was, Injun Dick was in hot haste to get out of the Rainbow section. Mounted or unmounted, he had no choice but to keep on his way to the hills.

But for the coming of night the Boot Leg party would undoubtedly have overhauled the dismounted outlaw. But the night came, the last ray of the sun vanished, and blackness lay on the prairie.

Wildrake halted.

"I guess this lets us out!" he said.

"Wotten!" grunted Arthur Augustus.

"I figure it out that he's not many miles ahead," said the Canadian junior confidently. "He travelled slow on a wounded horse—and now he's on foot. An hour more of light and we'd have had him dead to rights. But I guess we can't tell the sun to stop still, like old Joshua. We've got to stop—"

"Till morning?" asked Tom Merry. "I fancy that villain won't stop, Wildrake. He's sure to keep on!"

"Sure! But we ain't stopping till morning—the moon will be up in an hour—nearly a full moon. We can do with an hour's rest—let's make the most of it."

And Wildrake stretched himself in the grass to rest, and Tom Merry & Co. followed his example.

CHAPTER 5.

D'Arcy Does It!

HIGH over the prairie and the distant hills the full, round moon rode in the sky. Kit Wildrake shook off his blanket and rose to his feet.

The dark blue sky, spangled with stars, showed hardly a cloud. The light of the moon streamed down and made the plains almost as light as by day.

"You 'uns ready?" asked Wildrake.

"You bet!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

The St. Jim's juniors rolled their blankets and strapped the bed-rolls on their horses again. Wildrake glanced at the faces of his companions. All of them were keen, but the Canadian junior seemed dubious. He knew better than his comrades the peril of the trail they were following, and which was leading them away from the settlements.

"I guess you want to keep your eyes peeled every minute when we start again," said Wildrake. "It's quite likely that the bulldozer spotted us before the light went, and if he knows we're after him—"

"Bai Jove! He will be losin' no time, then," said Arthur Augustus.

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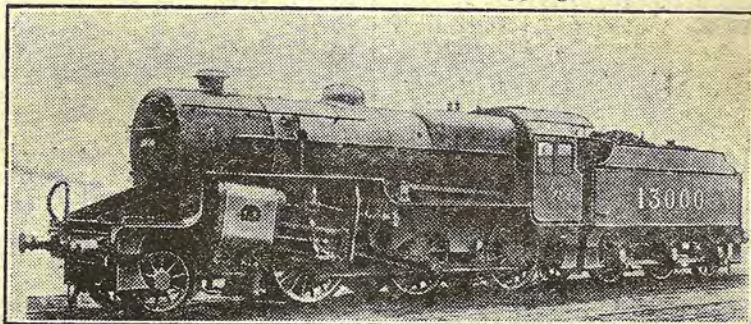
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Wildrake smiled faintly.

"I guess he won't take a scare if he's seen us," he answered. "We think we can handle him, and I reckon we can; but a fire-bug like Injun Dick wouldn't expect to make more than a mouthful of a bunch of school-boys. If he's seen us, I reckon he's not gone on—he's more likely to hang around and look for a chance to get a hoss from us."

"All the better if he does," said Blake. "We shall come up with him then."

"When we come on him, Blake, there will be shooting, and I reckon I've been to blame to let you come on this trail," said Wildrake gravely.

"Rats!"

"Fathead!"

"Cut all that out, old bean," said Tom Merry, with a smile. "We shouldn't have let you come alone."

"I should have refused to entertain the idea for a moment, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, shaking his head. "We are not afraid of that wascal, Wildwake."

"I know that, but—" Wildrake paused. "Well, we're for it now, but you 'uns keep your eyes peeled, and shoot at a shadow if you see one move. If we come up with Injun Dick, I guess we shall hear his six-gun before we see him. If he knows we're after him, he's not running now—he's watching for a chance at us to get a mount; and I reckon it will seem easy as pie to him."

"He won't find it so jolly easy," said Blake rather warmly. "Six to one is long odds."

"I shouldn't have the slightest hesitation in tacklin' the scoundwel entirely on my own!" declared Arthur Augustus loftily.

Wildrake smiled faintly.

"Well, we're hitting the trail," he said. "Keep your guns in your paws and keep your eyes open."

"What-ho!"

Leading their horses by the bridles, the juniors followed Wildrake as he picked up the trail again in the bright moonlight.

They were more watchful than ever now.

Their first thought had been only to cover the ground as rapidly as possible and come up with the fleeing outlaw. It was rather a thrilling idea that the desperate man might be lying in wait for them in the shadows ahead—as eager for them to arrive as they could be. The man who was fleeing for his life, in fear of pursuit from the North-West Mounted Police, was not likely to let slip a chance of getting a horse, and, as Wildrake had said, and the juniors realised, he would probably think little of an encounter with a party of schoolboys. But the idea that the breed fancied himself a match for the six of them was not a thought to deter Tom Merry & Co. It had the effect of putting their backs up and making them more eager to come to conclusions with the desperado.

The ground was rising before them now in a long, sweeping ridge. The outlaw must have passed over that ridge, and it was likely that from the summit of it he had looked back and seen the pursuers in the far distance before the sun had gone.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus suddenly.

All the juniors started. Their nerves were strung at a tense pitch now. Wildrake looked back quickly.

"What is it?" he breathed.

"I've drowped my eyeglass."

"Wha-a-at?"

"My eyeglass, deah boy."

"You pesky guy!" exclaimed Wildrake.

"Weally, Wildwake—"

"You burbling ass!" hissed Blake. "Have you made us all jump because you've dropped an idiotic eyeglass, you potty jabberwock?"

"Weally, Blake, I did not intend to make you jump. Is anythin' the mattah with your nerves, deah boy?" asked the swell of St. Jim's innocently.

Blake breathed hard.

"Never mind your eyeglass, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "Come on!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Let's sit down and rest if Gussy is going to do one of his funny turns," said Monty Lowther resignedly.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"What did we bring that burbling bandersnatch along with us for?" Manners wanted to know.

"Weally, Mannahs——"

Arthur Augustus' comrades looked at him as if they could eat him. The loss of his celebrated monocle did not seem to them so serious a matter as it seemed to the noble Gussy himself. Indeed, it was difficult to imagine that even Gussy could bother about an eyeglass when at any moment the trailers might start their desperate quarry in the shadowy grass. But evidently Gussy was bothering about it.

"You see, deah boys," he explained patiently, "it would be vewy difficult to weplace that eyeglass if I lost it. Owlin' to the way Blake looked aftah the baggage when we were leavin' England, my spare monocle was left behind."

"You bliithering idiot!" hissed Blake. "Come on, you footling fathead, and blow your silly eyeglass!"

"I wufuse to be called a footling fathead, Blake."

"Oh, kill him, somebody!" said Manners.

"You fellows keep on," said Gussy. "I will look for the eyeglass, and follow on when I've found it. It's all wight."

"And you'll miss the trail," growled Blake, "and find yourself in the Pacific Ocean or at the North Pole!"

"Wats!"

"Follow on," said Wildrake quietly. "Even Gussy couldn't miss the trail of five horses and five pairs of boots."

"Puttin' it like that is wathah dispawagin', Wildrake, if you do not mind my mentionin' it," said Arthur Augustus stiffly.

Wildrake did not answer; he was going on again, watchful and wary in the long, shadowy grass, which at any step might have parted to reveal a desperate enemy.

The juniors followed, leading their horses, and D'Arcy handed his bridle to Tom Merry.

"Take my gee, old chap, while I find my eyeglass."

"All right, fathead!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Br-r-r-r!"

The juniors passed on, leaving Arthur Augustus frowning a little. To the swell of St. Jim's the missing monocle was a matter of importance, if not to his comrades. The cord that secured that famous monocle had caught on something and snapped, and somewhere in the grass along the trail the eyeglass lay unseen. Arthur Augustus turned back and proceeded to search for it sedulously. For the moment the outlaw and the trail of eight thousand dollars had to be dismissed from his mind.

Treading carefully and softly, lest he should tread on the invaluable monocle and destroy it for ever, Arthur Augustus stepped back along the trail, scanning the ground.

It was ten minutes before a glimmer in the grass-roots caught his eye and revealed the fallen monocle. Arthur Augustus grabbed it up in great relief, overjoyed to find that it was undamaged.

"Bai Jove, what luck!" he murmured.

He slipped the monocle into his pocket, to remain there in safety until the cord had been repaired. Then he turned to follow on the track of his comrades, who had disappeared from view in the tall, waving, shadowy grass.

The trail of so many feet and hoofs was plain enough, and Arthur Augustus followed it at a rapid walk. On the grassy ground his footsteps made no sound.

A shadowy figure ahead of him dawked on his vision. Arthur Augustus was about to call out, thinking that it was one of his comrades lagging behind the others, but he did not utter that call—for he saw that the

figure, dim and shadowy as it was, was much bigger than any in the Boot Leg party. It was a man who was following the trail, stooping and crouching to keep out of sight in the tall grass as he went.

Arthur Augustus halted, staring blankly at the bent back of the man before him.

He could only see the man's back, and that was shadowy. But he knew, of course, who it was, even if he had not recognised the buckskins worn by the breed whom he had seen in chase of the bank messenger that afternoon. It was Injun Dick!

D'Arcy caught his breath.

For some moments he was utterly astounded and nonplussed by the sight of the outlaw behind the juniors who were following his trail up the grassy ridge.

But it did not take him long to think it out.

Obviously the outlaw knew that he was being pursued, and, as Wildrake had surmised, he had turned on his pursuers. He had doubled back along his own trail, letting the pursuers pass him, with the intention of taking them off their guard in the rear. Had the juniors sought for it, there was a return trail of the outlaw at some little distance to one side, parallel to the trail they were following.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

He forgot his eyeglass now. His gun was in his hand as he trod silently and swiftly after the outlaw.

Obviously Injun Dick did not know that one of the Boot Leg party had dropped behind.

He had struck into the trail from the grass after D'Arcy had left his companions, and was following it up the ridge without a glance behind.

His movements were silent, swift, and eager. D'Arcy did not need telling that as soon as the breed came close behind the juniors he would open fire on them from behind. That was clearly the ruffian's intention. His revolver was gripped in his dusky hand as he crept swiftly onward. Cunning as the breed was, it did not occur to him once to glance over his shoulder.

Arthur Augustus raised his gun, but he hesitated. The man before him was a thief and an assassin; but it went too much against the grain to shoot even an assassin in the back. Yet it was certain that the desperate man would not put up his hands and surrender if the schoolboy called on him to do so. The instant he became aware of D'Arcy's presence behind him he would whirl round and shoot, taking his chance. The swell of St. Jim's was fully aware of that. And, great as was Gussy's confidence in himself, he did not suppose for one moment that he was the equal at gun-play, at close quarters, of a desperate gunman.

Yet he could not shoot the man down.

But it did not take him long to decide. Every second was precious now, for he knew that Tom Merry & Co. could not be far ahead of the wretch who was stalking them like a beast of prey.

He stopped again and took careful aim at the man's right arm. The distance was short and the moonlight clear, and Arthur Augustus was a good shot. He dwelt carefully on his aim and pulled the trigger.

Crack!

CHAPTER 6. The Capture!

CRAC-C-CK!

The sharp report of the revolver rolled over the moonlit plain with a thousand reverberating echoes.

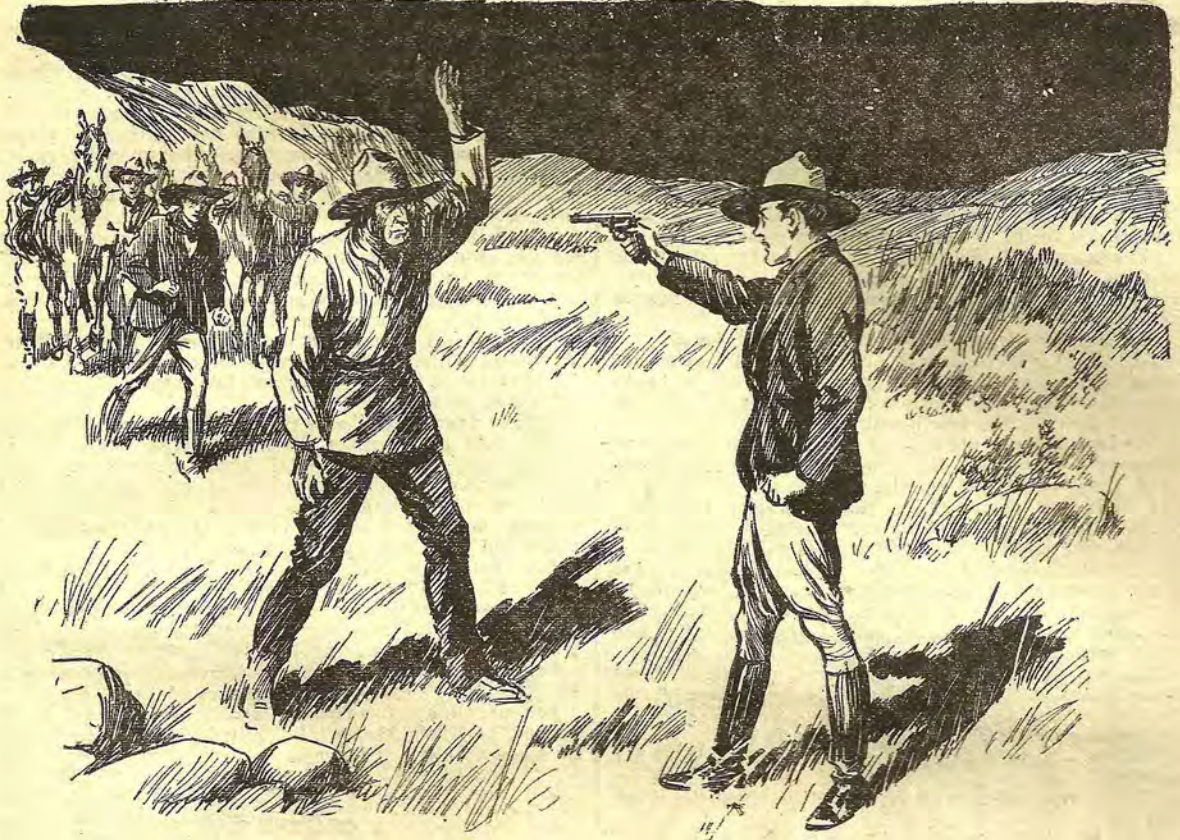
It was followed by a wild yell from the breed.

He spun round in the trail and his pistol-arm came up, his savage eyes glaring at Arthur Augustus, who was not a dozen paces away.

For one sickening instant D'Arcy supposed that his shot had missed, and in that fearful instant death was before his eyes, and he seemed to be treading the valley of the shadow.

But the breed's arm did not reach the level. It sank down again helplessly, and his bullet, as he pressed the trigger, crashed into the ground at his feet. D'Arcy's bullet had reached the mark, and blood was running down the breed's arm and drenching his fingers and his revolver.

Arthur Augustus bounded forward.



"Hands up, you wottah!" said D'Arcy, his levelled revolver never faltering. "Keep your paw like that, you scoundwel!" "A thousand curses!" hissed the half-breed. There was a clatter of hoofs and running feet as Tom Merry & Co. came racing back. "All sewene, deah boys!" called out Arthur Augustus. "I've got the wottah!" (See Chapter 6.)

The desperate man was seeking to change his weapon to his left hand, when D'Arcy's revolver was jammed almost into his savage, dusky face.

"Dwop that gun!"

The junior rapped out the words like pistol-shots. His eyes gleamed over his levelled revolver.

"Dwop that gun, you scoundwel, or I will blow your bwains out!"

The breed glared at him murderously. But he read death in the levelled pistol, death in the gleaming eyes behind it. Arthur Augustus did not look then much like the glass of fashion and the mould of form of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's. His face was hard and tense, his eyes glinting, his teeth set. Had the ruffian grabbed his revolver in his left hand, the swell of St. Jim's would have pulled trigger instantly to save his own life, and the outlaw knew it. The blood-stained revolver dropped into the grass, and Injun Dick spat out curses.

"Hands up, you wottah!"

The cursing breed raised his uninjured arm over his head. The other he could not lift.

"Keep your paw like that, you scoundwel," said D'Arcy, his levelled gun never faltering. "I will shoot you like a mad dog if you dwive me to it!"

"A thousand curses!" hissed the half-breed.

"Silence, you scoundwel!"

There was a clatter of hoofs and running feet. The shots behind them had alarmed Tom Merry & Co.

"That's Gussy in trouble!" panted Blake.

And the juniors came racing back.

"All sewene, deah boys!" called out Arthur Augustus. "I've got the wottah!"

"What—"

"How—"

"Great Scott!"

"Gussy!" gasped Wildrake. "Oh, Jerusalem crickets! Gussy's got him! Well, carry me home to die!"

The astounded juniors surrounded Arthur Augustus

and his prisoner. Tom Merry & Co. stared as if spell-bound. But Wildrake at once grabbed the second revolver from the breed's belt and drew away his knife, losing no time in disarming the ruffian.

Injun Dick glared round at the juniors with the glare of a cornered wild beast, baring his yellow teeth in a savage snarl.

"Gussy's got him!" said Blake dazedly. "Gussy! Oh crumbs!"

"What duffer said that the age of miracles was past?" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"But how the thump did the rotter get here?" exclaimed Manners, in amazement. "The trail led right on. We were following it. We thought the brute was ahead of us!"

"He doubled back, of course," said Wildrake. "I guess it was some luck for us that Gussy dropped behind."

"Yaas, wathah! I found my eyeglass, you know," said Arthur Augustus innocently.

"Bother your eyeglass!" said Tom Merry. "You found this scoundrel, which is rather more to the point."

The half-breed stood in the midst of the juniors, savage, ferocious, black with rage, but entirely powerless. He was disabled and disarmed, and there was no escape for him. Wildrake had a gun in his hand now, looking at the ruffian, and the Canadian junior would not have hesitated to drop Injun Dick in his tracks had he given trouble.

"You dog-goned rascal!" said Wildrake. "You saw us from the top of the ridge yonder before the sun went, I guess?"

The breed did not answer.

"You saw us following your trail, and after dark you doubled back to get behind us when we went on up the ridge. I might have looked for a trick like that in a cunning breed. You were after our horses, I guess."

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You wanted a lift to the north-west. I guess the lift you'll get will be back to Rainbow and the calaboose."

The breed's eyes snapped savagely.

"And now where's the dollars?"

"The wascal took a wallet fwm the bank messengah, with the eight thousand dollars in it," said Arthur Augustus. "It must be about the villain somewhah."

"Hand it out, Injun Dick!"

The breed grinned savagely and mockingly.

"You have me; you will not have the dollars," he said between his teeth. "Find them if you want them."

"I guess we'll find them." Wildrake raised his revolver. "You 'uns go through his rags, and I'll blow his brains out if he so much as raises a finger to stop you!"

Tom Merry & Co. quickly searched the half-breed.

But the bank messenger's leather wallet was not found on him, neither was there any trace of the bank-notes the wallet had contained. Evidently Injun Dick was not keeping his loot about him.

It was a disappointment for the trailers. They had taken it for granted that when they ran the breed down they would recover the plunder. But the thief had been too cunning for them. Injun Dick had doubled back on his pursuers, to attack them from behind and made a desperate attempt to capture a horse from them. Probably the gunman had had little doubt of success in dealing with a party of schoolboys. But he had left his loot in a safe hiding-place, lest luck should go against him, as it had gone. That was clear now.

Prisoner as he was, wounded and powerless, there was a bitter, savage triumph in the dusky face of the breed.

"Nothing on him," said Tom Merry at last.

"Where's the dollars, Injun Dick?" asked Wildrake quietly.

"Where you will never find them," answered the breed sourly.

"You hid them somewhere before you turned back?"

"Sure!" the breed sneered. "I did not expect much trouble with you, but I take no risks. If I am shot, the money never goes back to Rainbow. If I am a prisoner, you take me, but you do not take the dollars." He made a mocking gesture towards the grassy ridge, shadowy in the moonlight. "Search for the bag of dollars among the grass and the bush. Search for days and weeks and months, and you will find nothing. Take me to Rainbow if you choose. I shall escape, and the dollars will yet be mine. I say no more."

And the breed fell into sullen silence.

The juniors gave him grim looks.

"Anyhow, we've got this cuss," said Wildrake. "We shall land him in gaol at Rainbow and put a stop to his hold-ups."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But we'll hunt for the dollars before we hit the trail back," said Tom Merry.

"Sure. And I reckon we'll find a way to make this guy tell us where he's hidden them," said Wildrake, with a threatening look at the breed.

"No can!" said Injun Dick.

"We'll see about that in the morning. I guess we're camping here for the night, fellers," said Wildrake. "We can't hunt for the dollars till sun-up. Camp's the word!"

Wildrake knotted a length of trail-rope to the breed's left wrist, and fastened it down to the back of his belt. He was taking no risks with so slippery a customer.

"What about his wound, deah boy?" said Arthur Augustus gently.

Wildrake gave a grunt.

"What did he care about the man he left shot down, when he robbed him, Gussy? Let him take the same as he gave."

"That is vewy twue, deah boy; but we are bound to act wathah bettah than a wascally wobbah," said the swell of St. Jim's. "It is up to us, you know."

"Just as you like."

Arthur Augustus approached the breed, who eyed him curiously. Evidently Injun Dick had not expected the slightest consideration, and the hardened ruffian was prepared to endure what he was ready to inflict. Never-

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theless, he was glad enough to have his wounded arm attended to. D'Arcy rolled back the ragged buckskin sleeve and bound up the wound with his own handkerchief. The bullet had gone clean through his arm, luckily for the breed without breaking a bone, and the wound, though intensely painful and causing a great loss of blood, was not dangerous. The breed stood in grim silence, enduring the pain with the iron stoicism of his Redskin race, as D'Arcy bound up the wound and stopped the effusion of blood.

Round the clean bandage Arthur Augustus wound the breed's own dirty neckscarf. Then, with a length of trail-rope, he made a rough sling for the disabled arm.

The relief to the wounded breed was great, but his hard, dark face expressed nothing.

"That is the best I can do, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus politely. "If there is anythin' more——"

"Give me a drink," muttered the breed.

"Yaas, wathah."

Arthur Augustus filled a tin pannikin from his water-bottle, and placed it to the breed's lips. Injun Dick emptied it. Then the ruffian threw himself into the grass to rest, accepting the fact of his captivity with the same stoical philosophy.

Wildrake knotted a rope to his ankle, and knotted the other end to a peg in the ground.

"Is that weally necessawy, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"I guess we're taking no chances with that fire-bug," answered the Canadian junior. "We're not letting him crawl away while we're asleep."

Injun Dick's eyes gleamed for a moment, and then his hard face was sullenly expressionless again.

It was close on midnight now. The horses were pegged, and Tom Merry & Co. rolled themselves in their blankets to sleep till dawn.

CHAPTER 7.

The Trail of the Bootlegger!

KIT WILDRAKE opened his eyes.

The moon was lower in the sky, but a clear, silvery light still streamed down on the grassy plains.

Some slight sound or movement had awakened the Canadian junior.

He sat up and glanced round him.

"You 'uns asleep?"

There was no reply from the St. Jim's juniors. All of them were deep in slumber.

Wildrake fixed his eyes on the prisoner.

Injun Dick still lay where he had thrown himself down, and seemed to be asleep.

"You awake, breed?"

The outlaw made no response. But Wildrake, listening, could hear his deep, steady breathing.

"I guess it was some coyote nosing around," muttered Wildrake.

All was silent now; but he was sure that some movement or slight sound had been the cause of his awakening.

He rose from his blankets and stepped across to the breed. There was no movement from Injun Dick, and his eyes were closed, his breathing regular. Wildrake did not heed that. He stooped and examined the rope that fastened the outlaw's ankle to the peg. It was quite secure. Then he bent over the breed. It seemed extremely unlikely that the wounded outlaw could be entertaining a hope of escape. But Wildrake was not the fellow to take chances.

Injun Dick was lying partly on his back, and his left hand, bound to the back of his belt, was under him. Wildrake grasped his shoulder, and the breed's black eyes opened.

"I guess I want to see if you're safe," said Wildrake.

The breed did not speak.

Wildrake shifted him a little so that he could see the bound hand. It was still secured as he had left it.

"All O.K.," said the Canadian.

The breed scowled and settled down to sleep. Wildrake stood for some minutes looking round in the moonlight over the shimmering grass, and then returned to his blankets. He felt that he had been, perhaps, over-cautious, and he was soon fast asleep again.

But he had not been over-cautious. For a quarter of an hour there was no movement or sound in the camp. Then the head of the outlaw was lifted, and his black eyes glinted suspiciously at the sleeping juniors. His attention was concentrated upon Wildrake; but he was soon satisfied that the Canadian junior was asleep.

Cautiously—more cautiously than before, when some slight rustle had caused Wildrake to awaken—the breed stirred. Many times in the course of his wild and lawless life Injun Dick had been a prisoner—in the hands of the Mounted Police, in the hands of ranchers who had caught him lifting cattle, in the hands of savage Redskins. It was no new thing for the desperate outcast to be in a tight corner. He was now in as tight a corner as he had ever been in; but he had not given up hope; his stoical submission to his fate was wholly affected. Ever since the juniors had lain down to sleep he had been wrenching at the rope that bound his hand, to loosen it, and it was already a little loosened.

Now he resumed his efforts, straining every nerve to work his bound hand free.

anguish. But Wildrake only stirred and was still again. Softly, stealthily, the breed crept on tiptoe towards the tethered horses.

To release one of them from the tether, to throw himself on its bare back and flee, that was his intention.

But fortune, which had favoured the outlaw so far, failed him now. The horses were sleeping in the grass close by their masters. The breed bent by the nearest animal and grasped the trail rope to cast him loose. The horse stirred uneasily and whinnied.

Before the brief sound had died, Kit Wildrake was on his feet. It had been more than sufficient to awaken him.

"What—"

Wildrake gave one glance at the spot where the breed had lain. It was dark now—not a glimmer came from the sky—but he could see that the place was vacant. The breed was no longer there. He swung round towards the horses, gun in hand.

Crack!

He fired instantly at the dark figure bending by the horse and holding the trail-rope.

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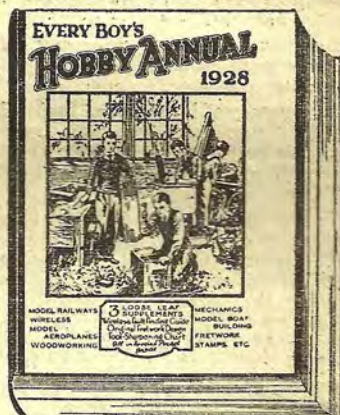


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His right hand, completely disabled by his wound, and swathed in bandages, was useless to him. His left hand was securely tied, but no bonds could be quite secure enough for the lithe, wiry half-Indian. As he strained to release it, the skin was rubbed raw by the rough rope, and the pain must have been intense, but the breed endured it in grim silence. Long minutes passed into hours, and he knew that dawn was at hand; but with unflinching patience and determination he worked, until at long last he was able to slip his hand through the rope.

The moon was gone now, and deep shadow lay on the prairie.

Injun Dick, silent, sinuous as a snake, stretched out his free hand to the rope that was knotted to his ankle. In a few minutes he had unpicked the knot.

He was free now, and he rose to his feet, his eyes fixed on Wildrake. He did not fear that the others would awaken.

The Canadian junior stirred in his blankets.

Injun Dick's movements were almost as silent as those of a creeping snake, yet some sense of alarm seemed to have communicated itself to the wary Canadian.

The breed breathed hard and deep.

For a moment or two he stood quite motionless, his eyes on Wildrake in a deep anxiety that amounted to

There was a yell.

While the shot was still ringing the breed bounded away into the darkness.

Crack! Crack!

Twice the Canadian junior fired after him, guided by the trampling and rustling. But he had to fire almost at random.

A yell came back, but it was a yell of defiance. The hurried, trampling feet of the breed were heard for a few moments, and then the footsteps died into silence.

"Bai Jove! What—"

"What the thump—"

The firing had effectually awakened Tom Merry & Co. All the juniors were on their feet, grasping their guns.

"Wildrake, what—" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Wildrake gritted his teeth.

"The breed!" he snapped.

"But what—"

"He's gone!"

"Gone! My hat!"

Wildrake loosed off a couple more shots into the darkness, but there was no sound in reply; the outlaw was gone.

"But how the thump did he get loose?" exclaimed Blake in wonder.

"I guess he's as slippery as a rattler!" growled Wildrake. "I woke and looked at him once, and he seemed safe. But"—he gritted his teeth again—"I guess we ought to have pegged him out hand and foot. That's the only safe way with that kind of galoot."

"Bai Jove! We weally could not have twented a wounded man like that," said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, shucks!"

"Weally, Wildrake—"

"I guess I'd have pegged him out like a cow for branding if I hadn't figured it out that I'd fixed him safe," growled Wildrake. "Not much good chewing the rag now—he's gone."

"On foot?" said Blake.

"Sure! I was just in time to stop him getting a horse. I guess he was hit, too—dog-gone him!"

"It's all wight, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus soothingly. "We shall wun him down at dawn. He's on foot, and wounded, and unarmed. We shall handle him all wight."

"If we find him—yes," growled Wildrake. "He won't let the bunch grass grow under his feet."

"It's close on dawn now," said Tom Merry.

Already a pale flush was showing in the eastern sky. Until the light came it was useless to think of trailing the half-breed. Wildrake waited impatiently for the dawn.

To Tom Merry & Co. it seemed a simple matter enough to trail down the fugitive as soon as it was day, and recapture him.

But the Canadian junior evidently did not think so. He was more accustomed to the wily ways of the breeds than his comrades.

"I guess we'll get him," said Wildrake between his teeth. "But don't you guys run away with the idea that it's easy—it isn't! But we'll never let up on this trail till we've got him, and the dollars, too!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

In the glimmering half-light before the dawn Tom Merry & Co. saddled up and prepared to take the trail.

The minute the light was strong enough for reading sign Wildrake led the way, the juniors following him, leading the horses.

The way lay up the ridge, and the trailers could guess that Injun Dick had headed for the spot where he had hidden the bank messenger's wallet to recover his plunder from the hiding-place before he fled on his way to the wild North-West.

On the summit of the ridge Wildrake halted. The sun was well up over the eastern horizon now.

"I guess he stopped here. This is where he had the wallet hidden, I guess."

It looked like it. The breed's trail led to a little clump of thorny bushes and stopped. On a close examination, broken twigs and other traces showed where something had been thrust under the bush. Undoubtedly that was the spot where the wallet of bank-notes had been hidden when the desperate man doubled back on his pursuers the evening before.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass on the surrounding grass with a puzzled expression.

"Bai Jove! The wottah isn't theah now, deah boys, but the twail seems to end," he remarked. "The foot-pwints come wight up to this bush—and stop heah!"

"He blinded his trail after this, I guess."

"But how—"

"I guess he learned that trick from his Indian connections," growled Wildrake. "He would tread lightly and stir up the grass behind him with a stick. I reckon we shall have to use our eyes if we're going to pick up his trail again."

Wildrake hunted for sign while Tom Merry & Co. scanned the surrounding country in the hope of picking up a glimpse of the fugitive. For about a half-mile the farther slope of the ridge fell away to the north-west, covered with thick grass. Beyond was a wood which closed the view in that direction.

"Come on," said Wildrake suddenly.

"You've found a sign?"

Wildrake hesitated.

"He's a good man at this game," he said. "He's blinded his trail like a Redskin on the warpath. I think I've got it, but I can't be sure. But I reckon he

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was likely to make for the wood yonder, as it was the nearest cover. We'll try that."

The juniors followed him in silence. If the cunning of the half-breed had rendered Wildrake uncertain, it was not much use for the other fellows to try their skill. They could only follow the Canadian junior and hope for the best.

Wildrake went at a slow walk, scanning the ground on all sides, without speaking, but the changing expressions on his sunburnt face told his comrades that he alternated between hope and doubt.

Suddenly he stopped, with a sharp exclamation, and a look almost of stupefaction on his face.

"Great gophers!"

"What is it?" exclaimed Tom Merry, hurrying forward. "A trail?"

"Yep—but not Injun Dick's."

"My hat! Then there's somebody—" The juniors stared round over the plain, deserted, lifeless, but for themselves.

"Somebody on wheels," said Wildrake, staring at the sign.

"What?"

"Look for yourselves. Somebody drove a buckboard this way not later than last evening—and not much earlier, I guess."

"Great pip!"

The trail was plain enough to read—the track of a wheeled vehicle, with the hoof-marks of a horse between the tracks of the wheels. It came up from the south, bordered the wood, and disappeared towards the north.

Wildrake was evidently astonished.

In that lonely waste he would not have been surprised to find a horse's tracks, belonging to some cowboy or wandering Indian. But the tracks of wheels were astonishing.

"But who—" said Blake. "Who and what—"

"I guess it's got me beat for the minute. There ain't any ranches hereabouts. This is all Government land, unsettled yet. Whoever drove that buckboard across this prairie had a rough journey, and I guess it was because he had to carry something he couldn't carry on a hoss." The Canadian junior wrinkled his brows in thought. "Sometimes a herd may be driven up to this country, but a buckboard— Oh, I guess I've got it. A dog-goned bootlegger."

"Bai Jove! Do you mean somebody ffrom the Boot Leg Wanch, deah boy?"

Wildrake laughed.

"Nope. A bootlegger is a galoot who sells fire-water to the Indians—against the law, of course. I guess it's likely that that shebang had a load of whisky on board. Anyhow, we shall see."

He mounted his horse and turned into the track of the wheels.

"But we are aftah that bweed," said Arthur Augustus.

"I know that, Gussy. But that breed saw this trail before we did, I reckon, if he came this way, and he sure did. And what Injun Dick is in need of just now, more'n anything else in the world, is a hoss. It's a bag of dollars to a Mexican centavo that he followed on this trail to look for a horse, old bean—the horse that pulled the buckboard. Isn't it what he would do?"

"But the ownah would not be likely to part with it, I pwesume?"

Wildrake chuckled.

"I guess Injun Dick wouldn't ask him. Come on!"

Wildrake rode at a gallop on the trail, and the juniors rode with him.

CHAPTER 8.

Injun Dick's Last Blow!

SILAS J. HONK, citizen of the United States, yawned and sat up in his blankets, and yawned again. The sun streamed down upon the green grass in which Silas was camped, on the border of a thick wood. In a sort of embayment of the wood a patch of prairie was almost surrounded by trees, and that was the spot Silas had chosen for his camp the night before. Solitary as the prairie was, far from the settlements, Silas had his own reasons for "lying doggo" as much as possible, and the circling trees

screened his buckboard from sight. Near the vehicle a horse was tethered, idly cropping the grass as he lay. Silas Julius Honk threw off his blankets, yawned again, and rose to his feet. He was a long, lean-faced man with a stubbly beard, and sharp, shifty grey eyes set very close together, and a skin like parchment. His features were as sharp and shifty as his eyes. Anyone looking at Silas Julius Honk for the first time would have seen immediately that he was a gentleman very difficult to overreach in a bargain, and a gentleman not over-scrupulous in his methods of annexing dollars.

Silas had had experience of every kind of "graft" known in the great United States in his time. His present "graft" was boot-legging among the Indians. In his buckboard he had a choice assortment of the vilest whisky to be procured for love or money. The laws of the Dominion of Canada are very strict on the subject of selling fire-water to the Redskins. Before the time of those salutary laws the fire-water of the white men had done more harm to the Redskins than their rifles or anything else they had brought into the boundless West. What is a slow poison to the white man himself is much more rapid and deadly in its effects on the hapless savages who learn the vices of their conquerors.

But the taste once implanted was not to be eradicated by law. Any bootlegger who could escape the vigilance of the Mounted Police was sure of a huge profit in trading his poisonous liquor to the Redskins. And for that worthy purpose Silas J. Honk was now in his present camp on the border of the solitary wood.

Some time during that day his cargo was to be taken off his hands by the Indians with whom he traded, Silas receiving in return valuable furs and pelts worth at least a hundred times as much as the whisky had cost him. Perhaps Silas salved his conscience—if he had one—by reflecting that he had to be paid for his risk. Certainly, a long term in the "pen" would have been his reward had the North-West Police caught him in his nefarious traffic.

Silas probably was not worrying about his conscience. If he was thinking of anything as he turned out of his frowsy blankets in the sunny dawn, it was of his breakfast and of the profits he was to make on the transactions of the day.

That the Redskins who obtained the liquor from him would return to their teepees to hold a "jamboree," that the drunken orgy would develop into a wild riot and murderous quarrelling, that blood would be shed, that lives would be sacrificed, Silas knew well enough. But he gave no thought to such trifles. That was not his "funeral." His funeral was to rake in as many dollars as he could. And Silas held the view—not uncommon in the United States—that the almighty dollar covers a multitude of sins.

Silas rubbed his drowsy eyes and stared round him and looked out over the prairie from the opening of the trees. Not that he expected to see any living soul until the time came for the Indians to arrive for the liquor. But his mode of life made Silas incessantly wary and watchful.

"Jehosophat!" ejaculated Silas. He saw as he stared round what he had not expected to see. In the rosy light of dawn a man was in sight, coming along the trail the buckboard had left on the border of the wood. He was not an Indian nor a white man, but something between the two. Silas knew a breed when he saw one.

The bootlegger's first movement was to the "gun" in his belt. The revolver was in his hand as he took a second glance at the stranger.

The man did not look dangerous. His right arm was bandaged and

in a sling, and his hard, dusky face was pallid and drawn with fatigue and pain. He did not seem to be armed. But Silas was taking no chances with a stranger. He noticed, without particular interest, that the man had a leather wallet buckled to a strap over his shoulder. Silas J. Honk little dreamed at the moment what that wallet contained.

The man was coming on at a steady tramp, and he was still a good distance away when Silas spotted him. He saw Silas looking at him, and seemed to pause and hesitate for a moment or two, and then he came on again.

Silas kept his gun ready.

"Some breed who's dropped on my trail, I reckon," he muttered. "He's on foot, and that means he's lost his horse in this country. I calculate he never started from anywhere on his own hoofs. I reckon if he had found me asleep hyer I shouldn't ever have savvied what had become of my critter. I reckon I shouldn't have woke up, neither, if he's got a knife in his rags."

Silas half raised his gun, but lowered it again. The breed was coming on, and every step made the shot an easier one if Silas decided to burn powder on him. He waited and watched, ready to pull trigger on the instant if the breed showed a sign of touching a weapon. In such matters Silas J. Honk was well aware of the value of the first shot.

But the breed showed no sign of hostility. He came on with his weary, lagging tramp nearer and nearer to the lean American, and entered the bay of grassland in the half-circle of trees.

Silas made a motion with the gun.

"Halt right thar!" he said.

The breed obediently halted, a dozen paces from the bootlegger.

Silas eyed him curiously and suspiciously.

"Put 'em up to begin with!" he rapped out.

The breed raised his left hand.

"Wounded fin?" asked Honk.

"Shot," said the breed briefly.

"I guess I'm wide to any trickery," said Honk. "If you try any gum game you won't know what hit you. What do you want here?"

"Food and rest," said Injun Dick submissively. "You will help a stranger who has been attacked and robbed by rustlers."

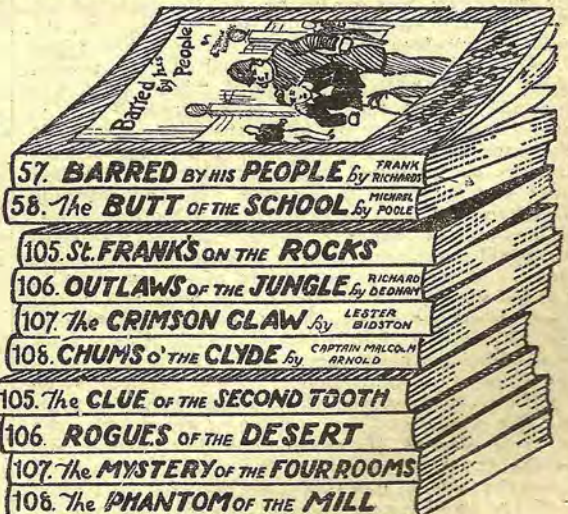
"Wash it out!" said Silas J. Honk derisively. "I guess I know a rustler when I see one, and if you ain't (Continued on next page.)"

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in that line I'll sure get glasses when I go back to Chicago. You can't put a story like that over. Spill it, feller. You've been rustling yourself and slipped up on it—what?"

The breed's eyes glinted for a moment.

He had followed the wheeled trail without knowing to what it might lead him, thinking only of the chance of obtaining a horse, the most desperate need of any man dismounted in the prairie country. No doubt he was disappointed to find that the trail had led him to so wary a customer as the American bootlegger. But his need was too desperate for hesitation. He was ready to risk his life a dozen times over for a horse.

Had he been armed, the bootlegger's ready revolver stopped him from making a desperate attack. But he had no weapon, and he could only rely on cunning and treachery now that he had found that the owner of the buckboard was on his guard.

"Spill it!" repeated Silas J. Honk. "You're a breed, and you've struck trouble and got winged. You foller my trail to steal my horse. That's a cinch, I guess. I'm sure death on hoss-thieves."

"Buy horse," said the breed.

Honk laughed.

"Yep, I guess you look like buying a hoss, if I was selling, which I ain't," he jeered. "I reckon a five-dollar greenback would buy you and all you've got in your rags, and leave four dollars fifty cents over for change."

"I give two hundred dollars."

"Got 'em in your rags?" grinned Honk.

"Sure."

"Waal, I reckon I ain't selling. That there hoss has got to pull me back home, and I reckon I ain't walking seventy miles for two hundred dollars, even if you mean business."

"Five hundred dollars."

Honk opened his eyes wide.

"Say, have you been robbing a bank, bo?" he exclaimed.

"Sure!" said the half-breed again.

"Waal, search me!" ejaculated Honk, staring at him.

His interest in the breed was keen now. He fastened his shifty eyes on the leathern wallet. The name of the Rainbow Bank was stamped on the leather, and for the first time it caught the bootlegger's eyes and he began to understand.

He came closer to the half-breed, his shifty eyes gleaming.

"That's a bank's grip, I reckon?" he said.

The breed nodded.

"What did you get away with?" breathed Silas.

"Eight thousand dollars."

"Jehosophat!"

His shifty eyes blazed with greed. He stretched out his left hand to the wallet and jerked it away from the breed. The revolver was ready in his right hand but Injun Dick offered resistance. But the breed stood impassive.

"Look in the wallet," he said. "Take what you choose, and give me the horse. Is it a trade?"

Silas did not reply. He was tearing open the little leather sack with eager hands. The breed watched him, motionless, his uninjured arm still held in the air—only a blaze was gathering in his eyes. He had read the bootlegger's character as easily as the bootlegger had read his, and he was well aware that the lean-faced rogue would never allow him to depart with any of his plunder, and was very unlikely to allow him even to live to tell what had become of it. The breed was taking a desperate chance, but it was all that was left to him. He stood impassive, but he was as watchful as a wild-cat—watching for his chance.

And it came. The bootlegger gave a gasping cry as the wads of banknotes in the leather "grip" met his eyes. His whole face was a blaze of greed. For the moment he was off his guard, and that moment was what the breed was watching for. As Silas J. Honk grabbed the wads of notes from the wallet his attention was off the breed for the moment, and in that moment Injun Dick leaped at him like a tiger, and struck.

Crack!

The bootlegger fired as he staggered back under the half-breed's desperate blow, but the hurried shot

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missed. The next moment he was on the ground, and Injun Dick had seized the revolver by the barrel and was wrenching at it savagely. Had he possessed the use of his right arm the bootlegger's fate would have been sealed. But his right arm was bandaged and useless. Even as he wrenched the revolver from the bootlegger's grip Silas snatched his knife from his belt with his left hand and struck.

Injun Dick swayed over his adversary and fell upon him heavily. The bootlegger thrust him aside and leaped to his feet. But the breed did not stir. The dollar trail was over for the half-breed outlaw.



Silas J. Honk drew rein under the leafy branches, panting through the air, and a loop settled over his shoulders. Before a weapon, the tautening rope plucked him from the saddle.

CHAPTER 9.

Silas K. Honk Hits the Trail!

FOR some minutes the bootlegger stood panting. A glance had shown him that he had nothing more to fear from the breed. He gave the still form in the grass no more attention. He stood panting, shaken and unmoved by the desperate struggle.

"Search me!" he gasped at last.

Silas J. Honk was soon himself again. He picked up the wads of notes, which had fallen to the ground, and counted them eagerly. Then he thrust them into the wallet again and strapped it over his own shoulder. The man who had robbed the bank messenger from Rainbow had lost the dollars and lost his life—and his plunder was a windfall for the dealer in forbidden liquor. Silas J. Honk was not particular as to the

source of his gains. Like the Roman emperor of old, he believed that the smell of all money was sweet.

"I guess this is a cinch for me!" he muttered. "Eight thousand dollars—well, I'll tell a man! But was there anybody after that galoot? I guess no sheriff would raise a dust about wiping out that fire-bug; but the dollars are a different matter. Gee-whiz! If they're after him they'll light on me lyer and the fire-water in the buckboard! If there's a sheriff posse on his trail, I guess I'm a gone coon if I don't hit the trail instanter."

His lean face was dark with anxiety.



relief. Suddenly there came a whizzing sound, a rope flew and made a movement to save himself, before he could touch the ground with stunning force upon the earth! (See Chapter 9.)

Eight thousand dollars was at least eight times the value of his consignment of fire-water. But he was unwilling to lose the profit on his illicit traffic if he could help it. But if pursuit was close on the heels of the bank-robber there was no chance of saving the cargo—a horseman could easily have overtaken the buckboard once he had sighted it. If pursuers were at hand, Silas Honk's only chance was to saddle his horse and ride, leaving the buckboard where it was.

He reflected for a few anxious minutes, and then clambered up the tallest of the trees and scanned the plains beyond the wood, in the direction whence the half-breed had come.

He did not have to watch long.

Six Stetson hats, bobbing with the motion of the riders, came into his view. Less than a quarter of a

mile away six riders were galloping on the trail of the buckboard, coming up hand over fist.

"Jehosophat!" ejaculated Silas.

He slithered hurriedly down the tree to the ground. He knew that not a moment was to be lost.

That the half-dozen riders he had seen were in pursuit of the half-breed was obvious enough. In a very short time they would come sweeping into view. Had there been only one or two of the riders Silas would have been tempted to take cover and fire on them from the trees as they rode up. But he had little chance of dealing successfully with half a dozen. It went against the bootlegger's grain to abandon his cargo of illicit liquor and fail in his appointment with the Indians, who were to arrive that day with a collection of valuable skins to be handed over in return for his poison. But there was no help for it if he was to save the dollars.

He loosened his horse, took saddle and bridle from the buckboard, and saddled up. Swift as he was the minutes were passing, and he could now hear the hoof-beats of the horsemen who were approaching, as yet hidden by the wood. With muttered curses the bootlegger packed his bed-roll and his food, the hoof-strokes sounding louder, clearer, nearer, as he did so. The pursuers of the half-breed were close at hand now.

The bootlegger jumped into the saddle.

He could not ride out on the plain without exposing himself to the full view of the bunch of riders coming at a gallop along the border of the wood. That was the last thing he desired to do. He rode away into the trees, which were mostly firs growing at a good distance apart. Beyond the wood, to the south, he would hit the open plains again.

As he went he heard the thunder of hoof-strokes and a shout. He rode on; but deeper in the wood he drew rein to listen, his head bent, his breath coming fast.

Silence now—the hoof-beats had ceased. That meant that the pursuers had arrived at his camp and halted.

"I guess that'll stop 'em a bit," the bootlegger muttered. "They've got the man they want, anyhow, dog-gone them!"

And he rode on again as fast as the trees allowed. For three or four miles the timber extended, and then the trees fell away into the open plain again.

With great relief Silas J. Honk left the timber behind him and spurred on his horse, riding at a desperate gallop across the rolling prairie to the south.

Far in the distance to the south, across many a long mile of waving grass, rose a bunch of tall cedars, a "timber island" in the sea of grass.

Silas knew the spot; he had camped the buckboard there a day before on his northward way.

He headed for the cedar clump at full gallop, and a mile after mile of glimmering grass fled beneath the spurning hoofs.

Many times, as he rode, he glanced back over his shoulders, but the plain behind him showed no sign of a pursuer. But the folds and ridges of the rolling prairie might have hidden them from view, only half a mile away.

Silas lost no time.

With lashing whip he drove on his panting, straining steed, and the timber island ahead drew nearer and nearer.

The bootlegger's plans were cut and dried. He intended to take refuge in the timber island, whence he could watch the plain for miles, from a high branch, and pick up his pursuers, if he was pursued. If they appeared he would have his choice of firing on them from cover, or riding on past the cedars in further flight. And in some hollow tree, the bag of dollars would be safely hidden, so that if luck went against him he could disclaim all knowledge of it, and return for it at some later date, when the coast was clear.

It was what Silas called, to himself, a "cinch"; he preferred, if he could, to keep clear of the party that had been following the half-breed; but, in any case, the eight thousand dollars were safe. Silas J. Honk was quite satisfied about that.

Under the burning sun of the Canadian summer his lean face was crimson with heat and exertion, thick with sweat. His straining horse sweated and panted.

Flies buzzed about his damp face, and drew curses from him. But he did not check his speed for a moment. For the eight thousand dollars in the wallet strapped on his shoulder Silas J. Honk was prepared to ride like a cowpuncher in a stampede, till his horse dropped.

But he was glad when he rode at last into the welcome shade of the cedars, out of the burning blaze that made the prairie ache with heat.

He drew rein under the leafy branches, panting with relief.

But that relief lasted only a few seconds. The sudden change from the blaze of the burning sun to the shade of the foliage in the timber island dazzled him and rendered him almost blind to his surroundings. He was vaguely aware of some movement under the trees, and then came a sudden whizzing sound.

Silas J. Honk well knew the whizz of a whirling lasso. But he did not even see the rope that flew through the air, or the loop that settled over his shoulders. Before he could make a movement to save himself, before he could touch a weapon, the clutch of the tautening rope plucked him from the saddle, and he crashed with stunning force upon the earth.

CHAPTER 10. The New Trail!

KIT WILDRAKE raised his hand to point as he rode ahead of the juniors on the trail of the buckboard.

"I guess that's the shebang."

Tom Merry & Co., sweeping at a gallop round the border of the fir-wood, came in sight of the bootlegger's buckboard. It stood there in the patch of grass almost enclosed by trees, just as the bootlegger had left it. Wildrake noticed at once that there was no horse to be seen, neither was there any sign of the owner of the buckboard.

The juniors slackened speed and rode up to the camp so recently deserted by the bootlegger.

They rode up, gun in hand, hardly knowing what to expect there; but ready for trouble. But there was no living thing to be seen.

Wildrake jumped down from his horse.

"I guess the galoot, whoever he is, isn't at home," he remarked. "But Injun Dick got here, that's a cinch."

"Suah of that, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Yep!"

Wildrake pointed to the tracks of the half-breed. For some distance, in his flight, Injun Dick had "blinded" his trail; but moments had been precious to the hunted breed, and after striking the track of the buckboard he had ceased to obliterate his trail. Again and again Wildrake had picked up his footprints close by the wheel-marks, and knew that he was on the right track beyond a doubt. And now, at the bootlegger's camp, the print of the breed's heavy boots was plain for all eyes to see.

Wildrake looked round him, puzzled.

"Injun Dick got here," he repeated. "I guess there was somebody here along with that buckboard, but—"

He was perplexed for some moments. Then a startled exclamation broke from him as he discerned something that lay almost hidden by thick grass.

"Great gophers!"

He ran to the still form in the grass.

"Bai Jove—what—" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, startled.

"Injun Dick!"

The juniors gathered round the fallen breed with pale faces and startled looks. The man was an outlaw and a thief, his hands were red with many crimes, but it was a terrible shock to find him thus.

"I guess he's got his!" said Wildrake quietly. "He came here after the horse belonging to that buckboard, and he slipped up on it. If he'd had a gun I guess he would have got the hoss. As it was—"

"But who—" faltered Blake.

"The bootlegger, I guess. You can see there's been a struggle here. I guess Injun Dick took his chance and came near pulling it off. But the man had a knife handy."

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The juniors shuddered.

"I guess we needn't waste any sympathy on that bulldozer," said Wildrake. "It was his life or the other galoot's, I guess; he would have killed the man for his hoss, or a dozen men, if you come to that."

"I suppose so," said Tom. "But the other man—where is he?"

"Lit out, that's clear. Lit out and left his buckboard; but he's taken the hoss, which means that he vamoosed in a big hurry."

"We don't want to bothah about him," said Arthur Augustus. "We were aftah Injun Dick and the bag of dollars. Now we've found him—"

"We've found him, but we haven't found the dollars," said Wildrake. "I guess we've got to ride for them yet."

"You think the bootlegger bagged the plunder from him and cleared off with it?" asked Tom Merry.

"Sure!"

Wildrake quickly ascertained that the wallet was not on the breed. He scanned the trampled ground, and soon picked up the trail of a horse leading away southward through the fir-wood.

Meanwhile the juniors examined the buckboard.

The interior of the vehicle was stacked with cases, and one of them, being opened, revealed rows of bottles packed in straw. There was no doubt now of the occupation of the unknown owner of the vehicle. That cargo of liquor could only have been brought to that lonely spot in the prairie for bootlegging to the Indians.

Wildrake rejoined his comrades after a minute investigation. He seemed to be satisfied now of what had happened at the bootlegger's camp.

"I guess I've got it clear," he said. "The bootlegger had camped here, and I guess he had just turned out when Injun Dick moseyed along. There's no sign of the man having any meal this morning. Either he knew what the breed had got about him, or he found it after he had killed him. Anyhow, he got the dollars."

"And you think he cleared off for good, leaving his property behind him?" asked Lowther.

"That's a cinch. You see, a breed trailing in, wounded, with eight thousand dollars in his rags, didn't leave the man guessing—he knew that Injun Dick had stolen the dollars, of course. His next idea would be, was the breed being trailed by a sheriff or by the Mounted or anybody else. I guess he shinned up a tree to look, and, of course, he would see us coming on from the top of a tree. I guess he wouldn't be able to make us out clear, but he wouldn't need telling that we were riding after the breed and the dollars, whoever we were."

"I suppose so," assented Tom.

"That's the tree he climbed, as a matter of fact," said Wildrake, pointing.

"Bai Jove! How do you know, deah boy?"

The Canadian junior smiled.

"After seeing us way back on the trail he knew he hadn't any time to lose, and he came down the tree in a mighty hurry."

"That is vewy pwobable; but I don't see how you figure it out, you know."

"Lots of things you don't see, even with your eyeglass, old bean," remarked Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"I think I can pick up that sign, Wildrake," said Tom Merry. "There are two deep prints in the grass under that tree—much deeper than any others here. The boots have been fairly driven into the ground. That means that a man dropped from a branch there."

"That's it," said Wildrake. "I guess he wasn't jumping about there just for exercise in the morning. He dropped from the tree, climbing down—dropped from a branch to save time. I guess he was up that tree to look for a bunch following Injun Dick, not birds' nesting."

"Yaas, wathah! I quite see now, old bean."

"Then what would he do?" went on Wildrake, following in his own mind the bootlegger's train of thought. "He had given the breed his ticket for soup and got the dollars. He saw a bunch coming on fast after the breed. He would figure it out that it was a sheriff's party or the Mounted Police; but, whoever it

was, it was a party after the dollars. The dollars were worth more than his truck here, and besides that, he wouldn't dare to be found with a cargo of illicit whisky. That means arrest and a long term in the pen. He couldn't drive away the buckboard at a speed to get away from horsemen—that's impossible. So he left the buckboard and took the horse, and lit out with the bank's wallet."

"Looks like it," agreed Tom.

"It's a sure thing," said Wildrake. "If he hadn't got the dollars he would have taken a chance of staying on. He had time to get the whisky out of the buckboard and cache it somewhere among the trees, and he could have spun a yarn about being an honest trader for furs and pelts. I guess he would have played that game and taken his chance—but for having eight thousand dollars of the Rainbow bank's money in his paws. He's got the dollars."

"Bai Jove! Then we've got to get aftah him now that we have wun down Injun Dick," said Arthur Augustus.

"That's so. Whoever he is, he's got the dollars, and it's the dollars we're after. His trail goes south through the trees, and I could pick it up with my eyes shut. But we'll waste a few minutes in getting rid of this filth he's brought up here to trade to the Reds."

"Yaas, wathah! That's a wippin' ideah."

"Tumble out those cases, you 'uns!"

"Good egg!"

There was an axe in the buckboard, and Wildrake picked it out. He swung it with both hands, and, as the juniors tumbled the cases out, he smashed them open one after another.

Crash! Crash! Crash!

Poisonous liquor from smashed bottles flowed round the smashed cases. Whisky and gin mingled together

and soaked away into the soil. Every case was smashed in turn, and then Wildrake looked for any bottle that might have escaped destruction, and cracked it with a blow of the axe. In a very short time the boot-legger's consignment of poison had soaked away, leaving only a smell behind it.

"Now for the trail," said Wildrake.

"What about bwekkah, deah boy? As a mattah of fact, I am fwithfully hungwy," confessed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Same here," murmured Manners.

"I guess we're not burning daylight for feeding. Chew on a corn cake while you ride," said Wildrake.

"Oh cwumbs!"

"I reckon you expected to rough it on a trail like this, Gussy," said the rancher's son, with a smile.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus immediately. "I twust I can wuff it with anybody. Come on!"

"Boot and saddle," grinned Lowther.

The St. Jim's juniors remounted their horses, Arthur Augustus casting an uneasy glance in the direction of the breed.

"No time to waste," said Wildrake, reading his thoughts. "Follow on."

And the Canadian junior led the way among the firs.

The trail of the fleeing rider was not difficult to follow. It led through the firs to the plain beyond, and Tom Merry & Co. rode out of the trees into the sunshine again.

"I guess he lit out as if he was sent for," said Wildrake, with a look at the trampled trail in the thick grass. "A blind man could follow this."

"He's got a good start," remarked Manners.

"Yep—and he's got a fresh horse, and ours have covered a good bit of ground," said Wildrake. "But the critter he would have to pull a buckboard isn't

(Continued on next page.)



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It is an exact model of the famous L.M.S. Express Engine "Mogul" Class—a handsome souvenir of Britain's progress in railway construction, and a fine addition to the set of these models you have started to collect. No reader of the GEM should miss this coloured metal model, which prompts me to make use of those familiar words, "Get your copy to-day." It would be a rare pity to let such a wonderful opportunity go by. Thousands of boys and girls throughout the kingdom will be asking at their newsagents for a copy of this week's "Magnet," and it is quite on the cards that some of them—the casual ones—will be disappointed, for there is a limit to everything, and some time or another this week the newsagents will be sold out of their copies of the "Magnet." Now it is up to you fellows to jump in right away. If you don't, you will stand the chance of missing the finest Free Gift of the year. And while we are on this subject let me remind you, too, that on Saturday of this week

THE FOURTH FREE GIFT ISSUE

of our grand companion paper will be obtainable at all newsagents. That number will contain another dandy metal model of a famous express engine—to be precise, the

Great Western Railway's crack flyer, the "Caerphilly Castle." With the two models mentioned above, in addition to the two you have already received, you fellows will possess a unique collection that will be the envy of all who behold it. It's up to you to make certain of completing your set. Make certain now! See your newsagent right away. Got the idea?

"LOOK WHERE YOU'RE GOING!"

A reader in Liverpool has a little grouse—I don't mean of the edible variety, but he complains that his mother, when they are out walking, continually says to him, "Look where you're going!" Nothing much in that, is there? But my correspondent says that his friends chip him about it. Tut-tut! We all get chipped about something or other, and we must learn to take it in good part. But to return to this time-worn phrase. It is pretty certain that my correspondent doesn't look where he's going, or his mother wouldn't constantly remind him; and he must remember, too, that his mother is only thinking of him all the time. Dash it all, one can only walk under a steamroller once, and I don't recommend barging into a motor-car as a healthy pastime exactly. Lots of us have a habit of walking about with our eyes shut, so to speak, and it is distinctly dangerous. Cheer up, my Liverpool chum, and pay heed to your parent's advice. You can bet your sweet life that the moment you do commence to look where you are going that irritating phrase will fade away.

NEXT WEDNESDAY'S PROGRAMME:

"THE SCHOOLBOY COWPUNCHERS!"

By Martin Clifford.

This is another exhilarating story of your old favourites, Tom Merry & Co., out West. Judging by the numerous letters I have received, this Western series is extremely popular. Well, next week's story is well up to that high quality of work which we always associate with the name of Martin Clifford. Don't miss this treat, chums.

"THE ROOKWOOD DICTATOR!"

By Owen Conquest.

There will be another ripping instalment of this school serial, boys, and it's full of pep. Mind you read it.

Your Editor.

likely to shape well in a race with a cowpuncher's critter. I guess we've got lots of chance to run him down. Anyhow, we're trailing him till we get him, if we have to follow all the way to Mexico. We're not going to be beaten by a dirty bootlegger."

"No fear!"

The juniors rode on hard. They were tired, but the excitement of the chase was keen in their breasts. Wildrake led the way at a gallop, never pausing once to pick up the trail. The sign was plain enough for any member of the bunch to read from the saddle.

The rolling prairie stretched far and wide before them, blazing in the sun. Up the long, sweeping rises, down in the succeeding hollows the juniors rode without a pause. All the time they kept a keen look-out for the fleeing rider ahead of them, but if he was within the range of vision the inequalities of the rugged prairie hid him from their sight.

Wildrake pointed with his whip towards the tall cedars that showed up against the southern horizon.

"I guess he was making for that motte," he said.

"Bai Jove! What is a motte, deah boy?"

"Timber island. The trail runs right on towards it ever since we left the first. I guess that was what he was making for, and he's got it by this time. If he's camped there—"

"If he's camped there we shall get him," said Blake.

"Unless he gets us," said Wildrake coolly. "I guess he would put up a fight for eight thousand dollars, feller. We want to keep our eyes peeled when we get near those trees, or the first thing will be a bullet and a man down."

"Bai Jove!"

Under the blaze of the sun, past the zenith now, the juniors rode on, hot and perspiring, but heedless of heat and dust and flies. The cedars in the distance grew clearer and clearer to the view. The riders were very wary now. Whether the bootlegger had fled on past the timber island, whether he had camped there believing himself beyond pursuit, or whether he had taken cover and was watching for them with a rifle sighted to shoot them down as they came on, there was no telling.

Wildrake rapped out orders as they drew nearer the timber island.

The juniors scattered wide to give less of a target to any possible marksman hidden in the timber.

Wildrake jumped from his horse at last, and his comrades followed his example.

"Lead your critters, and keep your heads low," said Wildrake. "We've got to take a chance, but we don't want to ask for it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

But no sound or movement came from the timber. The trail of the bootlegger led right up to the cedars, and it was evident that the man had entered the timber island. In a few minutes now the juniors would know whether he had turned to bay there.

"Halt!"

Wildrake rapped out the word.

"You 'uns hang on here and keep low while I put in some scouting," said the Canadian junior.

He dropped on his hands and knees and vanished from the sight of his comrades in the grass.

Tom Merry & Co. waited.

"Bai Jove, you know, I weally don't like the ideah of Wildwake goin' alone," said Arthur Augustus uneasily. "But I suppose he is weally the best scout in the bunch."

"Go hon!" murmured Lowther.

"Wildrake's leader," said Tom Merry. "He knows all there is to know about keeping in cover. He's all right."

"Pewwaps I had bettah get on and see if he is all wight, Tom Mewwy."

"Perhaps you'd better stay just where you are, fat-head," grunted Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Hallo, that's Wildrake yelling!" exclaimed Manners. The Canadian junior's voice was heard shouting from the timber island.

"All O.K. He's here! Come on, you 'uns!"

The juniors jumped on their horses and dashed on. They rode in a bunch under the spreading branches, where Wildrake waved his hand to them.

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"He's here! I guess he hit trouble in the timber. Look!"

And Tom Merry & Co., in utter amazement, stared at a lean-faced, foxy-eyed man, bound to a tree in the timber island, spitting out angry curses with a strong nasal accent.

CHAPTER 11.

When Rogue Meets Rogue!

SILAS J. HONK glared at the St. Jim's juniors, with nasal imprecations still falling from his thin lips. Silas J. Honk was in an extremely vile temper. Tom Merry & Co. gathered round him. They could guess that this was the bootlegger they had been trailing, but they were utterly amazed to find him like this. They had considered all the possible chances—that he might have ridden on through the timber island without stopping; that he might have camped there; that he might be waiting and watching for them in cover, rifle in hand. But they had never dreamed of finding him a helpless prisoner, bound fast to a tree, delivered powerless into their hands.

Evidently there had been others in the timber island before them—something had occurred there of which they had no knowledge and at which they did not even guess.

"Say, you guys!" hooted Silas, breaking off his string of swearing to call to the juniors. "Can't you let a galoot loose?"

"Yaas, wathah!" answered Arthur Augustus politely. Wildrake pushed him back.

"Let up, Gussy. We want to know first. This is the guy we've been following, but somebody else seems to have given him his."

"I suppose that's the bootlegger," said Tom Merry.

"Sure!"

"Nary a bootlegger!" said Silas hastily. "I guess I'm a trader—a trader in furs."

"I guess you are," assented Wildrake, "and you hand over poison in exchange for the furs—about one per cent of their value. I know your sort, you low-down rascal!"

"Say, bo, you're sure mistaken," said Silas.

"Cut that out!" snapped Wildrake. "I picked up the track of your boots at the camp yonder by the buckboard, and here's the same track where you're standing. You're our mutton."

Silas swore again.

"Cut that out, too!" snapped Wildrake. "Look here, we want to know where are the dollars?"

Silas gritted his discoloured teeth.

"I guess I'll make it a trade," he said. "You let me loose and leave me free, and I'll tell you all I know. I guess I'd like you to man-handle them ginks what robbed me. I guess I'd give a hundred dollars to see anybody let daylight through them. Is it a trade?"

"We're after the dollars that belong to the Rainbow Bank, and we don't want you," said Wildrake. "You're not fit for a decent Canadian to touch, anyhow. We know you killed the breed back yonder and lit out with a bag of eight thousand dollars. I guess it was taken off you by the guys who rigged you up like this. Put us as wise as you can to get on their trail, and we'll let you run."

"That's a cinch," said Silas.

He paused a few moments to curse. Then he went on:

"I guess you've got it straight—though I reckon I'd never have lit out and left my buckboard if I'd knowed it was a mob of kids on the trail. I guessed it was a sheriff's posse arter that breed. Gee-whiz! I might have stayed on and whopped you easy."

"Not so easy as you guess," said Wildrake. "I don't think you'd have given us much trouble. But keep to business. You got as far as this timber island with the bag of dollars."

"Yep!" groaned Silas.

"And what then?"

"What then, by gum! Why, I was roped in jest as I rode under the trees," said Silas savagely. "Afore I could say 'No sugar in mine!'—there I was on the yearth, knocked half silly, with a rope round me. By

hokey, if I got a chance at them ginks with a gun in my hand—

"Never mind that! Who were they?"

"I calculate they never handed me their visiting-cards!" snorted Silas. "There was two of them, one a galoot with a broken nose—you'll know him if you see him—the other a little fellow with red hair. Two of the toughest specimens I ever struck. They'd watched me coming up, and laid for me, and the little feller roped me in as soon as I got under the trees. They went through my rags so quick it would make your head swim, and I guess they cavorted some when they found a bag with eight thousand dollars in it."

Silas spat out a curse.

The loss of the dollars evidently was a sore memory to the bootlegger.

"But that wasn't all," mumbled Silas. "They cleaned me out—all my own money and my knife and my shooter and my hoss—even my pipe and baccy! Oh, you can bet your boots they was old hands at that game. Jest figger it out, me getting off with a bag of dollars and running right into that pair of cow-thieves! Two hard cases that I guess are wanted bad by the Mounted, skulking hyer out of sight—and I run right into them! Ain't such luck enough to make a man cuss?"

Tom Merry & Co. smiled.

There was no doubt that Silas J. Honk had cause to get his "mad" up, as he would have expressed it. He had found the way of the transgressor hard.

"Were they mounted?" asked Wildrake.

"They had their hosses," answered Silas. "They've got mine now, too. I guess that's their trade—hoss-stealing."

"Yep. The little feller—his pard called him Slim Jim—wanted to make it last sickness for me; he said it would be safer. But the other galoot said I'd be safe enough roped up. You see, I didn't let on that there was any bunch arter me." Silas grinned cunningly. "They reckoned I was on my own with the stuff. You bet I kept it dark that I was expecting you galoots on my trail—you bet your boots, sir! I reckoned I'd put you wise when you came and give you a chance of roping them fire-bugs in. I guess I want them to be nailed, just a few."

"So they tied you up and left you?" said Tom Merry. Silas J. Honk nodded and swore.

"Jest that—tied me to this here tree—and the big feller—name of Poke Bill, according to what the other guy called him—told me I'd be able to wriggle loose in about twenty-four hours and get going agin. I guess that was so, too—dog-gone his hide! A pair of hoss-thieves and cow-stealers. I reckon they hadn't the grit to kill a man. Durn 'em both!"

Obviously Silas J. Honk was not troubled by any considerations of gratitude to the thieves who had spared his worthless life.

"They might have treated you as you treated Injun Dick," said Tom Merry sternly.

"I guess that breed asked for it," said Silas. "He was on to me like a panther, and it was him or me. I never gave these galoots any back-chat—I hadn't an earthly. I was tied up afore I knew what was happening. Goldarn them! I guess I'd stand for a hundred dollars to see them lynched!"

"I guess I can pick up their trail," said Wildrake. "But if you know where they were heading it might save time."

Honk shook his head.

"I jest know that they rode away out of the timber island, and then I lost them," he answered. "They figger it out that I'm safe till to-morrow. Nobody's likely to come along here—except you galoots, because you was after that breed, and they never knowed that. I guess I've been waiting and hoping you'd come on my trail. You bet your boots! I guess I didn't want a hull day in this durned rope, wriggling to get loose. Now you let me out of it, you guys."

"They went together?" asked Wildrake.

"Yep!" Silas grinned. "They sorted out the dollar bills into two lots, and the big man put his lot into his belt, and the little man kept the grip. But I reckon them hoboos ain't the kind to let one another get away with thousands of dollars. I guess they was watching

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one another like cats when they started. They'll separate, sure enough."

"Then the sooner we get after them the better," said Blake.

"Sure!" assented Wildrake.

"Let a galoot loose first!" exclaimed Silas. "You ain't leaving me tied up after I've put you wise?"

"We're not your sort!" snapped Wildrake.

He drew his knife and cut through the bootlegger's bonds. Silas J. Honk gasped with relief to find himself free again. He rubbed his cramped limbs.

"You're goin' arter that bunch?" he asked.

"Correct."

"Lend me a gun, and I guess I'll help—"

"Can it!"

"Look hyer. You ain't leaving a galoot without a gun on this hyer perarer, a hundred miles from everywhere," urged Silas. "I've got to hoof it ten miles and more back to my buckboard, and then I reckon I don't want to trade with Injuns without a gun in my trousers. It ain't safe."

"You won't trade with any Injuns," answered Wildrake coolly. "You'll find your buckboard, but you'll find all your whisky gone."

"What?" roared Silas.

"I guess it's gone for keeps, unless you can get it back from the prairie it's soaked into."

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The bootlegger stared at Wildrake for a moment, and then, his lean face crimson with fury, burst into a torrent of curses. Wildrake shoved the muzzle of a revolver into his infuriated face.

"That's enough! Stop chewing the rag and get!"

"I—I guess I——" spluttered Silas.

"I guess I'll kick you for a starter if you don't yamoose!" rapped out Wildrake. "Clear off, you scoundrel!"

And the bootlegger, shaking a bony fist in the air, swung round and started. He stopped at a distance to shake his bony fist again and yell out an imprecation, and then tramped away across the sunny prairie and vanished.

"I guess we're well rid of that gink," said Wildrake.

"Yaas, wathah! The howwid wottah weally leaves a nastay taste in a fellow's mouth."

"Now for the trail," said Tom Merry.

The trail of two ridden horses and one led horse was easily picked up under the cedars. The juniors remounted, and with Wildrake in the lead resumed their way. The trail of the bootlegger had ended, as the trail of the half-breed had ended; but the task of Tom Merry & Co. was not yet at an end. From the timber island they rode out on the prairie again, still on the dollar trail.

CHAPTER 12.

Run Down at Last!

CRACK!

The pistol-shot rang and echoed in the scrub.

"I guess we're close," said Wildrake.

For two long hours the Boot Leg party had ridden across the sun-scorched plain. The open prairie was behind them now, and they had ridden into a region of scrub and live oaks, where it was difficult to see twenty yards ahead of their horses' noses.

Their horses were weary, and the riders were weary, too. Tom Merry & Co. were sturdy and fit, and the rough open life on the Boot Leg Ranch had hardened them. But they were feeling the strain of the long trail, though not one of them thought of giving in. The sun was sinking towards the distant Pacific now, though there still remained hours of light and summer heat. The juniors had eaten corncake and cold meat in the saddle as they rode, and drunk from their water-bottles. Wildrake, who seemed made of iron, never thought of a halt, and Tom Merry & Co. were not to be outdone. And their hopes of success were high now.

The stolen dollars were in the hands of Poker Bill and Slim Jim, two thieving outcasts of the prairie whom they had never seen, but whom they expected soon to see. According to what the bootlegger had told them, the two ruffians did not know that there was any pursuit, and it was not likely, therefore, that they were making any great speed in the heat of the day. It was likely enough that they would bed down when night came, with no thought of danger.

Indeed, Wildrake could read in the trail that the horsemen ahead were not hurrying. There was a great deal of difference between the hoofprints of a trotting horse and those of a galloping animal. The two "hoboes" who had taken the dollars from Silas J. Honk were not galloping. They seemed to be proceeding at an ordinary rate of travel, doubtless with some destination in view, probably some spot which they had fixed upon for a camp at sundown.

But for the scrub that blinded the view, the juniors would have expected to sight them ahead before this.

As they rode through the scrub, baking with heat, thick with flies and mosquitoes, the sudden ringing of a pistol-shot came to their ears down the wind.

Wildrake reined in his horse.

"That's one of the hoboes," he said. "We're near. I guess they don't know we're after them, or they wouldn't be burning powder now."

The shot had not been fired at the juniors; it had rung and echoed from a distance across the scrub. Why one of the rustlers had fired his revolver was a mystery to Tom Merry & Co.

"Watch out now!" said Wildrake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors rode on slowly, gun in hand, watchful for a sign of the men they sought. The trail led them directly towards the spot where the pistol had been fired.

"Halt!" rapped out Wildrake suddenly.

He leaped to the ground.

Half hidden by the herbage and a prickly scrub, a roughly-clad body lay there. Wildrake's finger was on his trigger, but his gun was not needed. The man did not move.

"He's got his!" said the Canadian junior grimly.

With awed faces, the St. Jim's juniors looked down at the dead man.

He was a powerfully built fellow, with a rugged face and a broken nose. They remembered the description given by the bootlegger. This was one of the men who had bound him to the tree in the timber island.

There was no sign of the other rustler.

The trail of three horses—two of them led with empty saddles, as the lighter impression of the hoofs showed—ran on through the scrub. The surviving rustler had gone on alone, taking his comrade's horse as well as the bootlegger's.

"But—but what—why——" stammered Blake, his face white as he looked down at the unmoving form of the prairie tramp.

Wildrake shrugged his shoulders.

"That guy back in the timber island was right," he said. "Both the galoots wanted the dollars, I reckon."

"You think they quarrelled over the plunder?" asked Tom Merry.

"I reckon Slim Jim got in his shot before there was time to quarrel over it," answered Wildrake. "I guess he dropped behind a bit. You can see that this guy got the bullet from behind. It hit him behind the cheekbone. I guess it was so sudden that he never knew what had hit him."

"Good heavens!" muttered Tom.

Wildrake pointed to the dead man's belt, which had been dragged off him. It was a belt with pouches, and the latter were open and empty.

"You remember that bootlegger told us the feller put his half of the dollars in his belt," said Wildrake. "They're back in the wallet now, I guess. The other man's got the whole caboodle."

"What an awful wascal!" breathed Arthur Augustus, with a shudder. "This is weally too howwid, Wild-wake!"

The Canadian junior gave another shrug.

"I guess this kind of guy ain't particular," he said. "But that little man with the red hair is sure the limit. I guess I shall be mighty pleased to get a bead on him and give him what's coming to him."

"Bai Jove! He ought to be stwung up, the feahful beast!" said the swell of St. Jim's.

"We shall get him," said Wildrake briefly. "I guess he wouldn't have done this thing if he'd known that anybody was close on his trail. But keep your eyes peeled. That kind of gink will fight like a wildcat if he gets the ghost of a chance. We know what he looks like from what the bootlegger told us. Shoot on sight."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors' faces were grim as they pushed on their way through the scrub.

It was not easy to get the terrible sight they had witnessed out of their minds; and even the kind-hearted Arthur Augustus had no thought of mercy towards the desperate wretch who had shot down his partner in crime for his share of the stolen dollars.

They rode gun in hand, ready to pull trigger at the first glimpse of the man they were tracking.

The weary horses plodded on at little more than a

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Wildrake waved his hand to the juniors as they rode in a bunch under the spreading branches. "He's here! I guess he hit trouble in the timber. Look!" Tom Merry and Co. stared, in utter amazement, at a lean-faced, foxy-eyed man bound to a tree in the timber island, spitting out angry curses with a strong nasal accent. (See Chapter 10.)

walk. But speed was not needed now. The Boot Leg party were sure of their quarry.

Lower sank the sun in the golden west, and the shadows lengthened and deepened in the scrub.

Wildrake halted at last.

"I guess we peg the critters here," he said in a low voice. "We can't be far behind the skunk now, and we don't want to give him the alarm. I reckon he's sure to halt and camp for the night, and it will be dark soon. You galoots are tired, I guess?"

"Just a twifle," murmured Arthur Augustus. "Nothin' to speak of."

"I guess you may as well camp here with the hosses, and—"

"Guess again!" said Tom Merry. "We're coming on to the finish. There will be shooting as soon as that villain is roused out, and you're not taking it on alone."

"Wathah not!"

"Forget it, kid," said Monty Lowther.

Wildrake smiled.

"Follow on, then. But don't speak or make a sound. If he's camped already, we're close on him, and if his hosses hear us they may give the alarm. We don't want to have to hunt that guy through the scrub."

"Wight-ho!"

In deepening dusk among the tangled scrub the juniors pressed on on foot, their hearts beating fast now.

As the shadows deepened it was a wonder to Tom Merry & Co. how Wildrake followed the trail. But the Canadian junior never paused for a moment. The tracks of three horses were as plain an indication to him as he could wish so long as there was a glimpse of light to read them by. Suddenly he stopped and held up his hand as a sign of caution. From the gloomy

scrub ahead came a faint sound—the subdued whinny of a horse.

"Watch out now," whispered the Canadian junior. "Not a sound, but keep your guns ready."

He moved on, silent as a shadow. With cautious tread, the juniors followed him, stepping lightly, careful not to let even a twig crackle as they advanced. A glimmer of light and a smell of wood-smoke came to them. In the deepening shadows the reflections of the flames danced with strange effects. Evidently utterly unaware of pursuit, the prairie thief had camped and lighted a camp-fire in a little clearing of the scrub.

From the surrounding gloom, in the glimmer of the camp-fire, the juniors saw him suddenly. A little, wiry, muscular ruffian, with a tanned face hardened by a life of desperate crime, rendered more savage and threatening by the play of the firelight on his hard, grim features; he sat on a log, with an open wallet on his knees, his stubby fingers running through wads of banknotes, his eyes glistening over them as he counted them, like the eyes of a beast of prey—as, indeed, he was.

It was the end of the dollar trail at last.

CHAPTER 13.

The End of the Dollar Trail!

SLIM JIM did not stir, save for the movements of his dirty, tobacco-stained fingers as he rustled the banknotes. His greedy eyes were fastened on his plunder, and it filled all his thoughts, and his eyes twinkled and glittered with greed. Near at hand three horses were picketed, and one of the animals raised its head and whinnied, scenting the approach of strangers.

Slim Jim did not heed the sound. He was muttering to himself as he rustled the stolen notes, and finally packed them back again into the wallet.

"Eight thousand dollars! I guess that's some jamboree for me when I hit Cactus Creek to-morrow." He rose from the log, with a grin. Then he stared at the horse, which had whinnied again. "Durn the critter, what's the trouble with you? What—"

"Hands up!"

Slim Jim spun round with a yell as the sharp words reached his ears. His hand flew to the gun in his belt. But he did not draw it.

He was looking at a levelled revolver, with Wildrake's clear, steady eyes behind it.

"Put 'em up!" rapped out Wildrake. "If you try to draw that gun, you galoot, you're dead mutton!"

"Search me!" gasped the ruffian.

He stood as if spellbound, his grasp on his gun.

Shadowy in the glimmer of the firelight, Wildrake advanced with levelled revolver, Tom Merry & Co. shadowy behind him.

The Canadian junior's face was set hard, his eyes glinting like steel. He did not expect the prairie thief to surrender and relinquish his prey, but he was giving the wretch a chance.

"Put 'em up!" he rapped out.

For an instant Slim Jim stood glaring at him, and then he tore the gun from his belt and flung it up to shoot.

Crack!

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Slim Jim's finger pressed the trigger, but his shot flew into the air as he staggered back and crumpled on the earth, riddled with bullets.

Tom Merry & Co. rode out of the scrub under the glimmer of the stars. They were fatigued by the long trail of the stolen dollars, but they did not care to camp

near the spot where the last tragedy had taken place. They rode under the stars until they reached the timber island once more, where they bedded down for the night.

Wildrake slept that night with the Rainbow bank wallet under his head for a pillow.

The sun was high in the heavens the following day when the St. Jim's juniors turned out of their blankets. They had taken a long rest, which they needed after the long and weary trail.

The juniors breakfasted at ease in the timber island, and then mounted their horses for the ride back to the ranch.

But they did not return the way they had come. Wildrake knew his way about the trackless prairie, and he headed direct for Boot Leg, saving many long miles on the way.

But it was nearly sundown when the party, dusty and weary, rode up to the Boot Leg Ranch at last.

Long Jim rode out to meet them, waving his Stetson.

"I guess I'm glad to see you 'uns again," he said. "Your popper wasn't exactly pleased to hear that you'd gone on the trail of that fire-bug, Injun Dick, young Kit. I'm sure glad to see you safe again. I guess you never found the dollars."

Wildrake laughed.

"Guess again, old scout!" he answered.

The Boot Leg foreman stared.

"Mean to say you roped in the dollars?" he exclaimed.

"Just a few."

"Well, carry me home to die!" ejaculated Long Jim. "I guess this will be good news for that galoot who's lying sick in the ranch-house, Kit. It will sure be pie to that galoot."

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus cheerily. "I twust that he will be bucked to heah that the dollahs

(Continued on page 27.)

LOOK OUT FOR THIS COVER ON THE BOOKSTALLS NEXT WEDNES- DAY, CHUMS!

A thousand head of cattle running amok! Right in the path of the maddened beasts are Tom Merry & Co.—strangers, comparatively speaking, in a strange country and unused to cattle and their ways.

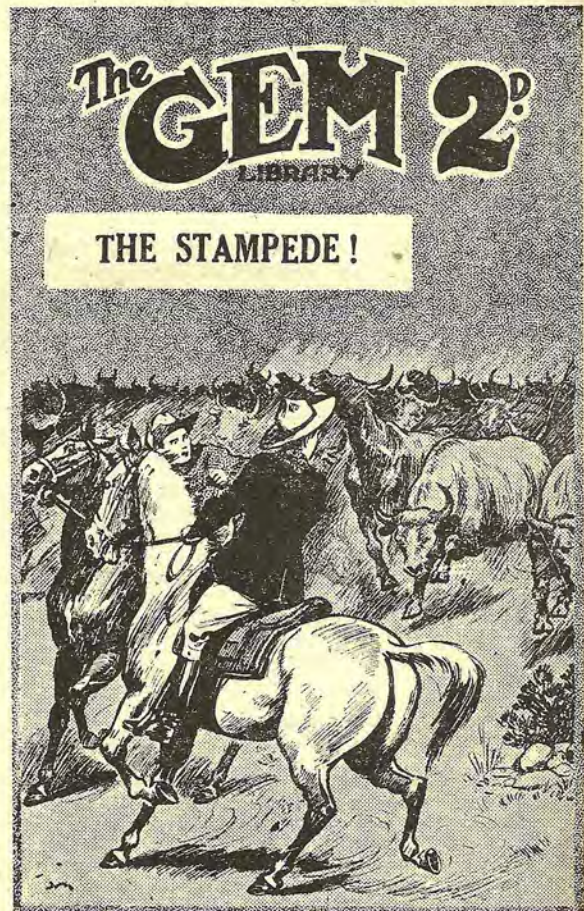
But Kit Wildrake's with them, and Kit was born in British Columbia. He knows as much about stampeding cattle and how to handle 'em as cowboys thrice his age.

Read how he handles the perilous situation shown in the cover picture alongside, in next week's grand story:—

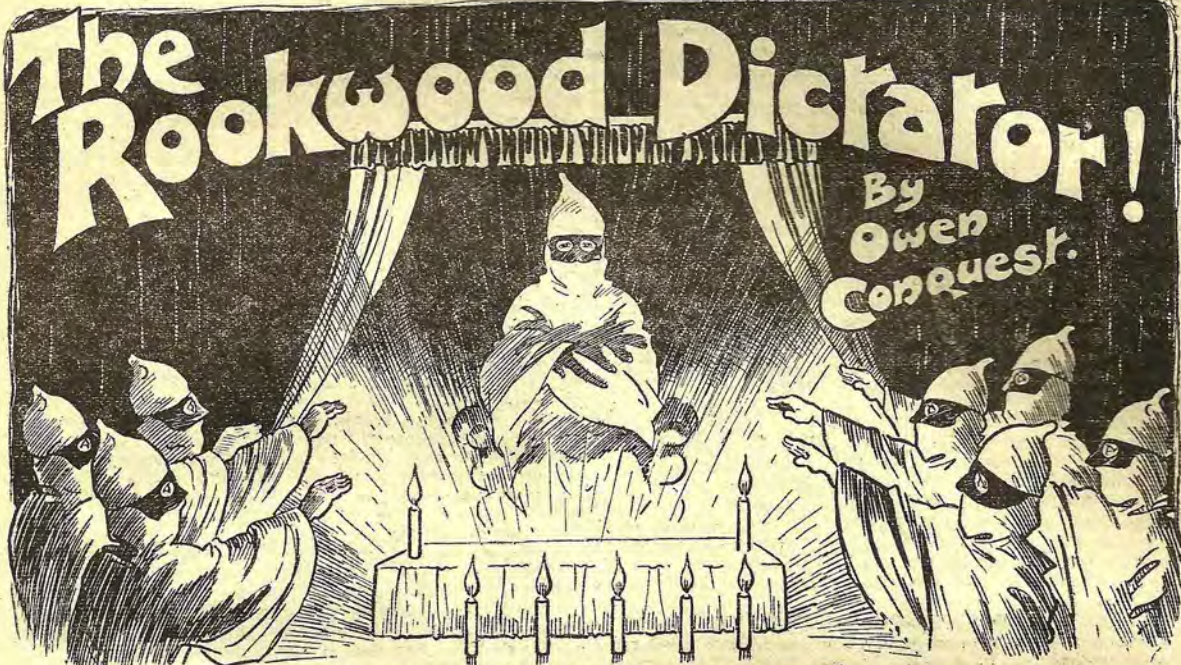
"THE SCHOOLBOY COWPUNCHERS!"

ANOTHER MASTERPIECE BY
FAMOUS MARTIN CLIFFORD.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,019.



ON VENGEANCE BENT! Carthew is hungering for vengeance upon Arthur Edward Lovell of the Fourth Form! And when the chance comes his way, he jumps at it with both feet!



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

(Introduction on page 24.)

Not According to Programme!

CARTHEW'S eyes glinted in at the doorway, and they came to rest on Lovell's smiling visage. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome looked grim. Lovell might be to blame, but they did not intend to stand by and watch Carthew wreak his ugly temper on their chum. The prefect appeared to have difficulty in finding speech at first. When he spoke it was almost a snarl. The least pretty side of Carthew's unpleasant nature was uppermost now.

"Lovell, get off that table!"

"Quite comfy, thanks!" said Lovell calmly.

"Get off that table! You hear me?"

"Get off, you ass!" breathed Jimmy Silver. "He's probably looking for a chance—any excuse is better than none!"

"What did you say, Silver?"

"Ahem!"

"I demand to know what it was, Tell me."

"Hem!"

"Very well. Hold out your hand."

Jimmy Silver hesitated. He could see Carthew's game clearly enough now. The bully of the Sixth could not mention the study ragging, but he could take it out of the Fistical Four in other ways—and this was the start. But he was in the right so far. Jimmy held out his hand grimly.

"Jimmy, you ass——" began Lovell.

Swish, swish!

In spite of himself Uncle James of Rookwood winced.

"The other hand."

Swish, swish!

Jimmy Silver was pale after that infliction. The severity of the strokes was out of all proportion to the offence. Lovell's face was grim and set.

Carthew gave him a look, and it was easy to see that he was in a furious mood. But three juniors at least met his gaze with hostility.

"Lovell, do you know anything about the ragging of my study?"

Lovell raised his eyebrows.

"This morning," said Carthew thickly, "I rose early and took a fairly long stroll. On my return—I was absent an hour—just after rising-bell, I found my study had been wrecked—evidently the work of some reckless young hooligan. It was not done when I went out——"

"Well, my hat!" breathed Lovell. "You—you Ananias!"

"What?"

"It was done last night—while you were playing cards over on the Modern side!" roared Lovell angrily. "And you know it, you rotter!"

"It was done this morning—after I went out for a stroll," said Carthew evenly. "I shall stick to that—and there's nothing to disprove it. You admit your guilt, then?"

Lovell stuttered.

He could find nothing to say.

And his chums' faces were grim.

Carthew, with rare cunning, had evolved his version of the facts—a version he could present to the "beaks" without fear of his forbidden practices coming to light. Brains as Arthur Edward Lovell had been, Carthew had out-pointed him. And the situation was serious—remarkably so.

"Look here," began Lovell indignantly. "I did it—you may as well know that. But report it, and I'll say when I did it, too. You'll have to prove that it happened early this morning."

"You were down early," said Carthew coolly. "I got that from Muffin. You can't deny what I say. I give you your choice—take a record licking from me, or let me report it to the Head. You'll be taught a lesson, either way."

Lovell's lips were set. It seemed that, after all, Carthew had trapped him. But his face brightened suddenly. A chord of memory had stirred.

"Wait a minute!" he ejaculated grimly.

Carthew slipped his ashplant into his hand.

"When I was ragging your study," said Lovell, with enjoyment, "I remember I knocked down your clock—it fell on the rug, and didn't make much sound. But it stopped—I remember that. It ticks rather loudly, if you remember. It wasn't ticking when I left the study. Have you put it on again this morning?"

Carthew bit his lip. His look showed plainly enough that he had not. And the clock would be witness to Lovell's story.

Carthew turned to the door.

He found Newcome and Raby lined in his path. Jimmy Silver and Lovell closed in from behind.

"I—I may have made a mistake!" said Carthew, moistening his dry lips.

"No doubt about it—you have!" grinned Lovell. "And I guess it won't be much good your trying to get that clock to go again—something went inside when it fell!"

"Get out of my way, Raby!" snapped Carthew.

"Not yet," grinned Raby. "You haven't apologised."

"Haven't what?"

"Haven't apologised for licking Jimmy—and making up lies into the bargain," said Raby. "You can say you're sorry, or take a ragging. We're giving you the choice, same as you gave Lovell, you know."

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"You—you—get out of the way!" roared Carthew, losing his temper at last. "Stand there another second and you'll get my ashplant."

As Raby did not move, the prefect did not hesitate.

The ashplant swept up, and there was a loud thwack and a louder yell as it descended with terrific force on Raby's shoulders.

"Yaroooh! You dangerous maniac! Mob him!"

"Grab him!" panted Jimmy Silver.

"Down with Carthew!" roared Arthur Edward Lovell.

Carthew made a dash for the passage.

He entered it with four enraged juniors close behind him, yelling furiously. Their yells awoke to life the whole passage—and in a flash fellows began to pour out of the studies. In the midst of the uproar the breakfast bell sounded, but for once it was given no heed.

"What's up?"

"What's the racket?"

"Oh, my hat! Carthew!"

"After him!"

"He came here to rag the Fourth!" hooted Lovell. "Rag him! Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander!"

"Hurrah!"

"Down with the Sixth!"

A mob of excited juniors swept after Carthew of the Sixth as he broke for the stairs. Carthew was not thinking of his dignity. His one desire was to get away.

He reached the head of the stairs with a rush, but not before Jimmy Silver and Lovell, and Mornington and Conroy and several other fellows. As Carthew ran, a foot was stretched out, and his leg was hooked away from under him. With a crash that shook the staircase Carthew went over.

"Woooooop! You young fiends! Wooooop!"

Carthew went over, and nearly a dozen fellows piled on him immediately. In a trice he was hidden from sight amid a struggling mass of humanity, each trying to get in a punch on Carthew's anatomy.

Then, when he began to feel that every bone in his body was broken, the prefect was lifted bodily and poised in the grasp of many hands over the staircase.

"Oh! Ow! Yow-wooooo! Lemme down, you young ruffians! I'll smash you!"

"One!" called Jimmy Silver. "When I say three, let him go, and a good swing, mind."

"You dare!" panted Carthew desperately.

"Two!"

"You—you—"

"Three!"

And at the word three Carthew was swung far out over the staircase and let go.

Possibly it was a reckless proceeding. Carthew might have crashed on the stairs and done himself some serious injury, but the juniors were too excited to think of that.

Fortunately for Carthew, he did not crash on the stairs. His fall was broken in quite an unexpected manner. For one giddy moment he hovered in space, and then a figure—a figure in cap and gown—appeared at the foot of the stairs. The figure appeared only just in time.

Mr. Dalton was ascending, to see why the Fourth had not come down to breakfast, while Carthew was descending, because he could not help it. They met midway, and there was a gasp and a crash. Before the Fourth's horrified gaze Carthew and their Form master rolled, inextricably mixed, down the stairs. Each bump their Form master suffered in the descent increased the horror of his pupils above.

Mr. Dalton rolled over at the foot of the stairs and gazed for a moment at Carthew. He did not speak. Then he transferred his glance to Jimmy Silver & Co. at the head of the stairs.

His voice, when he spoke, resembled the rumble of distant thunder.

"Silver!"

"Oh dear! Yes, sir?"

Carthew Decides.

"WHAT—what is the meaning of this, Silver?"

Jimmy Silver groaned inwardly.

The rest of the Classical Fourth shuffled their feet uneasily.

There was really nothing to be said. Mr. Dalton knew as much as there was to be known—he had borne the brunt

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of the whole affair, in fact. In those circumstances he could hardly be expected to be in a calm and reasonable mood.

"You—you see, sir—" began Jimmy.

Mr. Dalton's lips were set as he ascended the stairs, with Carthew, bruised and breathless, but grinning triumphantly, just behind him.

"I have just witnessed a lamentable display of hoodliganism!" said Mr. Dalton icily. "I demand to know the meaning of this at once. Silver, you are head boy of the Form. Tell me!"

"Choke it up!" murmured Lovell. "Dicky can't flay us!"

"Lovell!"

"Sir?"

"Did I ask you to speak?"

"Nuntho, sir!"

"Then kindly do not. Silver, am I to address you again?"

"You—you see, sir, Carthew came up into our passage to—to speak to Lovell, and we—we threw him downstairs. We didn't see you in time, sir. We wouldn't have thrown Carthew at you for the world, sir!"

There was a faint chuckle at that and a scowl from Carthew. But Mr. Dalton's frown did not conduce to chuckling.

"So I imagine," said Mr. Dalton coldly. "You say Carthew came here to speak to Lovell. Do you consider that a good and sufficient reason for throwing a prefect down the staircase? Carthew might have been seriously hurt. If that is all you have to say, I am surprised at you, Silver!"

Jimmy Silver gasped.

Put that way, the ejection of Carthew assumed terrific proportions. And it was difficult to make a Form master see the truth of the matter.

"Carthew came up here to bully me," said Lovell bluntly. "Jimmy and my pals weren't standing by and seeing that, so they cleared him out of the passage. That's how it lies, sir."

"Oh! What have you to say to that, Carthew?"

Carthew's eyes glinted evilly.

He was hurt and his dignity had suffered. Now he had the upper hand, and he did not hesitate to use it.

"I came here to ask Lovell for some lines, sir," said Carthew coolly. "Before I could speak the young rascals made a rush at me, and the whole passage was—ahem!—pursuing me. I had no alternative but to run. The rest you know, sir. In my opinion, they want tanning till they can't howl!"

"I did not ask for your opinion, thank you," snapped the Form master. "But there is no denying that my boys have acted in an utterly reckless and disrespectful manner. I am sorry that boys of my Form should have treated you so, Carthew."

Carthew smiled. It was as good as an apology for the misdemeanours of the Fourth, and it was a feather in Carthew's cap. He enjoyed the effort it cost Mr. Dalton to make it.

"Silver!"

"Yes, sir?"

"You have nothing to say in extenuation of your conduct?"

"Only that Carthew was bullying Lovell, sir. We interfered, and called in the rest of the fellows. They aren't really to blame, sir."

"Every boy who had a hand in assaulting Carthew is to blame," retorted Mr. Dalton. "I can see that you need a lesson. The whole Form will be gated on the next half-holiday. You will attend in the Form-room at two o'clock, when Carthew will set you to work till five. That is all!"

"Oh, sir!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Lovell.

The ejaculations of the Fourth did not affect Mr. Dalton. He swept down the stairs, Carthew accompanying him, and the juniors followed more slowly.

"But Dicky surely knows that we're due at Bagshott next half!" ejaculated Raby excitedly. "Oh dear! That rotten cad Carthew! Just like him to muck up a big fixture!"

"Of course, the howling, rotten had it all planned out," growled Lovell angrily. "He knew Dicky would come down like a ton of bricks if we laid hands on him. He was bound to catch us one way or the other."

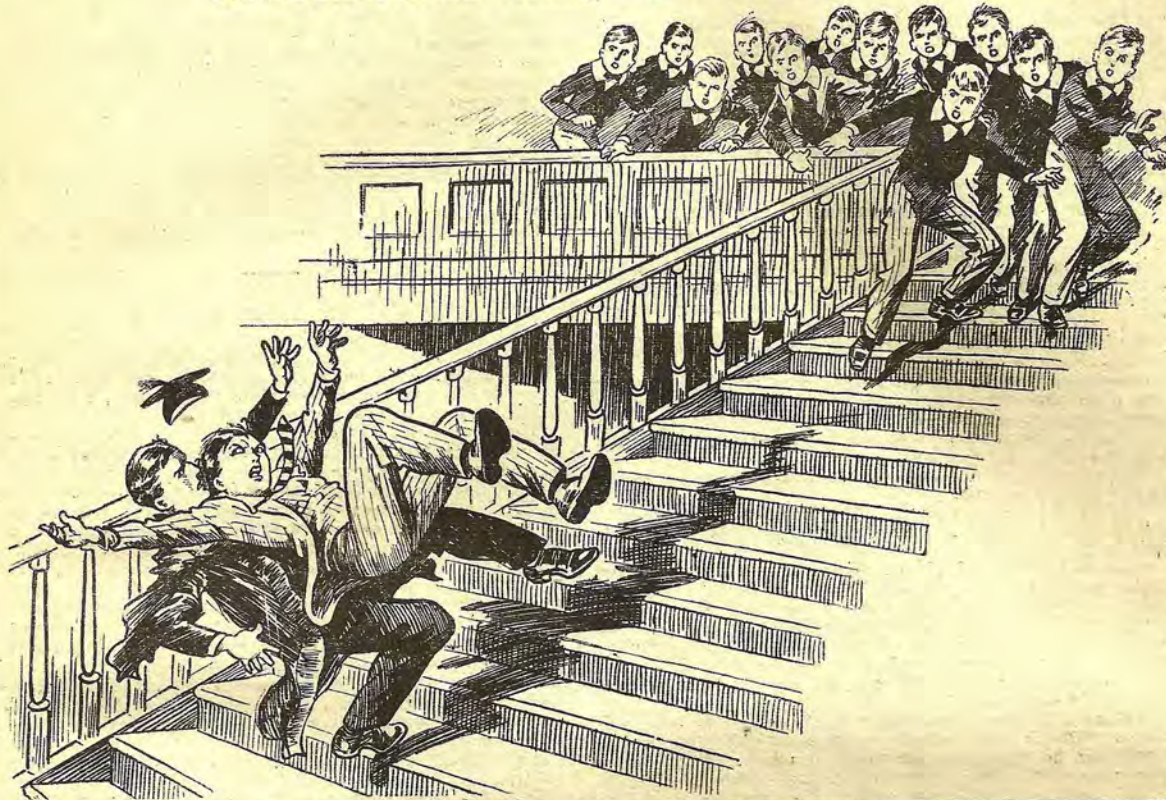
"It's awful!" agreed Jimmy Silver thoughtfully. "Pankley & Co. will crow no end if we have to scratch. Blow Carthew! Bust Carthew! Burst Carthew, in fact!"

"Tell you what," suggested Mornington hopefully, "if

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

In debt to CAPTAIN PUNTER, who has made quite a nice little living out of the "sportsmen" of Rookwood, LOVELL minor, a sag in the Third Form, appeals to his major, ARTHUR EDWARD, for the loan of ten pounds to square the debt. Lovell major bluntly refuses, but in company with his faithful henchmen, JIMMY SILVER, RABY, and NEWCOMBE, commonly known as the Fistical Four, he meets the rascally Punter, whom he roughly handles and forces to give up the incriminating I O U. Shortly after this Lovell falls foul of CARTEW, of the Sixth, another victim of the astute Punter, and is made to "bend over" before all his chums. In retaliation Lovell proceeds to wreck the Sixth-former's study.

(Now read on.)



Mr. Dalton and Carthew met midway on the stairs and there was a gasp and a crash! The Form master and the Sixth-Former rolled, inextricably mixed, down the stairs! Each bump Mr. Dalton suffered in the descent increased the horror of Jimmy Silver & Co. above! (See page 24).

we're as good as gold in Form to-day. Dicky may relent. Jimmy could spin it to him like a Dutch uncle after class, and there might be a chance—what?"

"My hat, yes!"

"It's worth trying," agreed Jimmy Silver, his eyes brightening.

"Good as gold, then," warned Mornington, as the Fourth trooped, late, in to breakfast.

Breakfast was a model meal with the Fourth that morning.

Usually Mr. Dalton had to reprimand several fellows for talking, and to keep an eagle eye on Tubby Muffin's gastronomic performances. But this particular morning the Fourth was on its very best behaviour. Nobody talked and nobody whispered. There was no need even for a sharp word to Muffin. Mornington, who sat next to him, kept the fat junior in order.

When the bell for classes went Mr. Dalton came into the Form-room, with a grim brow. He looked considerably startled to see the whole Fourth in their places, waiting demurely for his arrival. And they were not talking. The usual cheery hum of conversation was absent. A pin could have been heard to drop.

Mr. Dalton stared a little, but made no comment. Perhaps he began to perceive the reason for the startling change. If so, he did not show it.

"You will give your exercises to Silver, boys," said Mr. Dalton calmly. "While I am marking them, go on with your Virgil. I shall expect the next passage to be translated by the time I have finished."

In respectful silence the Fourth settled down to Virgil, Jimmy Silver collecting the exercises set for prep and handing them to the Form master.

Mr. Dalton began to mark, and Lovell whispered to Jimmy:

"It's working. Dicky is beginning to look quite cheery."

"Get on with your Virgil, ass!"

"I say, do you think he will spot my exercise?"

"What's wrong with it?"

"I didn't have time to finish it. And I'm not sure if it's quite right in places. Oh, my hat!"

Mr. Dalton had been engrossed in marking the exercises. Now he glanced up, and his glance—a grim glance—settled on Arthur Edward Lovell.

"What do you mean by submitting this exercise, Lovell? It is incomplete."

"I—I didn't have enough time, sir!" gasped Lovell.

"And it is full of the most absurd mistakes. Do you or

do you not know the definition of an ablative absolute, Lovell?"

"Oh, yes, sir! An—ablative absolute is—is—well, an ablative absolute, sir!"

"Oh dear!" groaned Jimmy Silver.

Latin was not Lovell's strong point. He was much better on the playing-field than in class. And at Latin he was slightly worse than at most other subjects. It was sheer bad luck that Mr. Dalton should have picked on him on this especial morning.

"You are an ignorant boy, Lovell. I really do not know which is the bigger dunce—yourself or Muffin. Come out before the class!"

Lovell groaned, but he stepped out.

Mr. Dalton swished his cane.

Swish, swish! Swish, swish!

"That will do. Next time you will give more attention to your Latin preparation, Lovell."

"Oh, yes, sir!"

Mr. Dalton went on marking exercises, while Lovell nursed his aching palms under cover of his desk. The Form master paused to accost Tubby Muffin, and then he spoke to Peele, and Gower and Lattrey. It was not a happy morning for the Fourth, after all. And when dismissal came at last, Jimmy Silver did not approach his Form master. It was hardly a politic moment.

There was a meeting extraordinary of the football committee in the end study, at which there was some very plain speaking. But plain speaking did not improve the situation; only angelic behaviour could do that.

"Try again after class—if Lovell hasn't trodden on Dicky's corns again," suggested Mornington sagely.

But afternoon classes were not smoothly conducted, and Jimmy Silver postponed his petition till the next day—the day before the Bagshott match. Once again the Fourth trooped into class, and once again they did their best to avoid the vials of Mr. Dalton's wrath. Lovell had done his prep this time, and there was no hitch. Even Tubby Muffin played up.

"Now's the time!" whispered Mornington, as the class was dismissed.

Jimmy Silver nodded, and approached his Form master.

"If you please, sir—"

"What is it, Silver?"

"About the—the Bagshott match, sir. If you—"

Mr. Dalton raised his eyebrows.

"That matter is closed, Silver. You will oblige me by not referring to it again."

"Oh! But—but—"

Mr. Dalton turned to his papers, evidently determined. With a sinking heart Jimmy Silver followed his chums from the Form-room. He was met by eager glances.

"Any luck?"

"Nothing doing," said Jimmy morosely. "Dicky's sticking tight."

"Oh, rotten!"

And that was the general sentiment in the Fourth.

As a rule, they liked and respected their Form master. In their eyes "Dicky" was rather a sportsman. But on this occasion they felt that he had overstepped the mark a little. And it was all Carthew's fault, that was agreed.

"Come up to the study, Morny," said Jimmy Silver. "We may be able to think of something."

Mornington nodded, and he and Erroll accompanied the Fistical Four to the end study.

Something had to be done, that was certain. Pankley and his chums would smile loud and long if their rivals were forced to scratch—not that Jimmy Silver intended to scratch. Form master or no Form master, the match had to be played. But how?

"I've been thinkin'," remarked Mornington, as he settled in the study armchair.

"So have I," said Lovell. "But we're no forrarder."

"Carthew's keepin' it dark about his study bein' ragged, isn't he?"

"That's so," agreed Jimmy Silver. "He wouldn't want that known, now he's cooler. It wouldn't be safe, considering where he was at the time."

"An' Carthew's goin' to be left in charge of us to-morrow afternoon—what?" continued Mornington thoughtfully. "Dicky will probably go out of gates—we know he's fond of trampin' on a half-holiday. So we shall only have Carthew to deal with."

"What difference does that make?" asked Lovell curiously. "He'd report us fast enough if we cut detention."

"Would he?" queried Mornington coolly. "You know who ragged his study, Lovell. If you chose to blab, it would soon be all over the school. The masters would be bound to hear of it. And Carthew, obviously, doesn't want it blabbed."

"That's so."

"Can't you see what I'm drivin' at?" grinned Mornington. "One good turn deserves another—what? Carthew's keen on miffin' up his study raggin'. Why should Lovell help him?"

"No reason at all," admitted Lovell.

"Supposin' we didn't turn up for detention?" asked Mornington. "Supposin' Carthew got a note, puttin' it quite plain? If he chooses to say nothin' about our cuttin', Lovell will keep quiet, too. Otherwise, you never know, do you?"

"My hat!" gasped Lovell.

"By Jove! I believe it could be worked," ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"Easy as fallin' off a form," assented Mornington calmly. "We can slip out of gates without bein' seen, an' nobody will ever be the wiser. If Carthew plays up, Dicky will think we were with him all the afternoon. If he doesn't—but he will. He doesn't want the study raggin' to be broadcast, we know that. It's worth riskin', anyway."

"And even if it comes out, and we're gated on another day, it won't be so bad," grinned Raby enthusiastically. "Another day there won't be a match."

"Put it to the vote," said Jimmy Silver, his eyes gleaming.

The motion was carried unanimously.

"Good egg!" said Lovell. "Then we—"

Rap, rap!

"Come in!" called Jimmy Silver.

Carthew of the Sixth looked into the study. He was met by grim looks.

"You fags are takin' classes with me to-morrow afternoon, Mr. Dalton tells me," said Carthew, eyeing the juniors rather peculiarly.

"Are we?" asked Lovell.

Carthew's eyes glimmered for a moment.

"I just thought I'd warn you," he remarked coolly. "Mind you're there."

And the door closed behind Carthew of the Sixth.

If the Fistical Four could have known Carthew's thoughts just then they might have been surprised.

Carthew was still hungering for vengeance for that study ragging, though outwardly he appeared to have forgotten it. And the offer of the rascally Captain Punter lingered in his mind. By delivering Jimmy Silver & Co. into the

hands of the captain he could liquidate his debt—a debt which he knew he could never pay. Jimmy Silver & Co. were due in the Fourth Form-room on the morrow afternoon. But Carthew had more than a suspicion of the trend of affairs in the Fourth.

He called to a fag in the quad.

"Wegg!"

"Yes, Carthew?"

"Take this note to the Bird-in-Hand. There's no answer."

"Yes, Carthew."

Carthew watched the receding form of the fag, with a smile.

The Ultimatum!

CARTHEW stared.

It was the day of the Bagshott match, and the time wanted but a few minutes to two o'clock.

Carthew was sitting alone in his study, thinking.

His thoughts were not very pleasant.

The spectre of disgrace, consequent on exposure at the hands of Captain Punter, had been floating before his eyes ever since that interview in the lane. The way out was simple, but even Carthew shrank from giving Jimmy Silver & Co. into the power of Punter and his associates, though it could be done easily enough. Carthew's cunning was equal to the task, but his nerve, or his rascality, was not.

He had sent a note to the man Punter—a note which would raise hopes in the captain's breast. Captain Punter and his friends were to wait in the lane for the Rookwood charabanc, with Jimmy Silver & Co. aboard.

To Carthew it was a rather grim kind of jest. If the Fourth-Formers accepted their detention quietly, Punter would wait in vain. Carthew would explain that a mistake had occurred afterwards. But if—as he could not help suspecting—they took the law into their own hands and broke detention, then they would have to take their chance. Looking at it that way, Carthew managed to quiet his conscience a little.

In a few minutes he was due in the Form-room to take detention. He would know then what was to happen.

A faint footstep from the corridor made him look up. His eyes lighted on a card, obviously just pushed under the door.

Carthew stared.

Then he stepped across and threw open the door.

The passage was deserted. Scuttling footsteps sounded in the distance.

Carthew closed the door again and picked up the card.

"Mark Carthew, Sixth Form.—We beg to state that we shall be unable to attend detention in the Form-room this afternoon, as we have a match at Bagshott. We hope that you will not see fit to report our absence to Mr. Dalton, in which case we, in our turn, will see that all details concerning the ragging of your study are suppressed. One good turn deserves another.—THE FOURTH."

Carthew stared and stared again at that remarkable communication. For some moments he could hardly credit that the juniors were in earnest. He had suspected that they might make a break for it, but this was a different matter. And as the prefect re-read that cool ultimatum, he realised that the Fourth had him in a cleft stick.

Assuredly he did not want that study ragging talked up and down the school. Now that he was cool he could see that Lovell could prove his case easily enough. Witnesses would be able to vouch for Lovell's presence in the dormitory, but Carthew had nothing but his own word.

He looked at the card again.

"By gad! So the young rascals are going, and they expect me to keep it from Dalton. And—and Punter—"

Carthew turned to the door.

In another moment he was striding down the corridor, en route for the quad. The footballers would probably not be gone yet. There was a chance of catching them, and, in spite of what depended on it, Carthew could not leave them to Punter's tender mercies. He had to make some effort to stop them. If they refused to obey him, it would be their own fault.

As Carthew appeared in the House doorway, there was a shout from Tubby Muffin at the gates.

"Cave, you fellows! Carthew!"

(Now look out for next week's thrilling instalment and for more startling developments, chums. A word of advice too, Order your GEM early.)

"The Dollar Trail!"

(Continued from page 22.)

are all wight. We have had wathah a wuff time, Mr Long Jim, and I neahly had a feahful accident."

"Injun Dick draw a bead on you?" asked the ranch foreman.

"No. I suppose we have been thlrough some dangalis, but I was not thinkin' of that."

"Then what was it that nearly happened?" asked Long Jim.

"I neahly lost my eyeglass," answered Arthur Augustus innocently.

"Eh?"

"My eyeglass, you know."

"Waal, I swow!" ejaculated Long Jim, staring at the happy Gussy blankly. "If that's the worst that happened to you, I kinder figure it out that you got off cheap."

"It would have been wathah a sewious mattah," explained the swell of St. Jim's. "Owing to the way that ass Blake looked aftah the baggage when we left England my spare monocle was left behind. I was feahfully alarmed when I found I had lost my eyeglass. Howevah, I found it again, so it was all wight—wight as wain!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Long Jim.

"Weally, you know—"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

Long Jim doubled up in his saddle with merriment. Arthur Augustus gave him a stare of surprise, and rode on after his grinning comrades.

The juniors dismounted at the ranch, and Mr. Wildrake met them as they came in.

"You young ginks!" he exclaimed.

"What's biting you, popper?" asked Kit Wildrake cheerily.

"It's all wight, my deah sir," said Arthur Augustus reassuringly. "We felt bound to go aftah that bweed, you know, in the circumstances. It's turned out all wight—"

"And we've got the dollars, popper," said Wildrake.

The rancher stared.

"You've got them?"

"Sure!"

Wildrake handed over the Rainbow bank wallet. The rancher opened it and stared at the wads of notes inside. Then he looked at the St. Jim's juniors again.

"Well, you kids have got me beat," he said, with a smile. "I guess I'll take this stuff to that galoot upstairs, who's worrying more about his dollars than about his wound. This will help him to get well, I reckon. I guess I was rather mad with you for going on that fire-bug's trail, but—well, you've got me beat!"

And the astonished rancher tramped away up the stairs with the wallet, to bring comfort to the wounded bank messenger, still an invalid at the Boot Leg Ranch.

Wildrake smiled at his comrades.

"All serene now," he said. "Who says supper?"

"Supper!" said Tom-Merry & Co., with one voice.

And after supper the St. Jim's juniors were distinguished guests in the bunkhouse, where they had to relate to the Boot Leg punchers the whole thrilling story of the dollar trail.

THE END.

(Be sure you read the next topping yarn in this magnificent series, entitled: "THE SCHOOLBOY COWPUNCHERS!" which will appear in next week's bumper issue of the GEM.)

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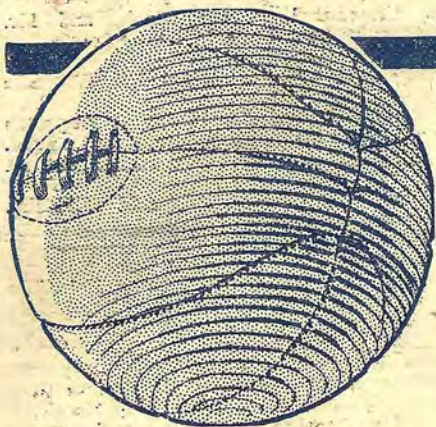
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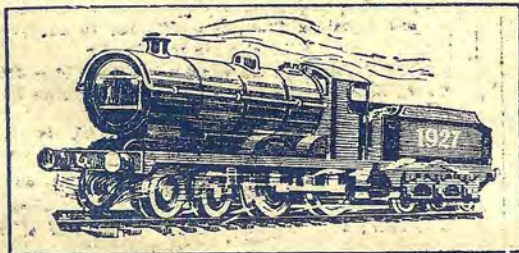
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