

Bangs John Kendrick

Bikey the Skicycle and Other Tales of Jimmieboy



John Bangs

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John Kendrick Bangs

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BIKEY THE SKICYCLE

I

HOW IT ALL CAME ABOUT

Jimmieboy's father had bought him a bicycle, and inasmuch as it was provided with a bag of tools and a nickel plated bell the small youth was very much pleased with the gift.

"It's got rheumatic tires, too," he said, when describing it to one of his little friends.

"What's that?" asked the boy.

"Big pieces of hose pipe," said Jimmieboy. "They run all around the outside of the wheel and when you fill 'em up with wind and screw 'em up tight so's the wind can't get out, papa says, you can go over anything easy as a bird."

"I s'pose," said the little friend, "it's sort of like sailing, maybe. The wind keeps blowing inside o' those pipes and that makes the wheels go round."

"I guess that's it," returned Jimmieboy.

"But I don't see why they call 'em rheumatic," said the other boy.

"Nor I don't, either," said Jimmieboy, "unless it's because they move a little stiff at first."

It was not long, however, before Jimmieboy discovered that his father had made a mistake when he said that the pneumatic tire would enable a bicycle to ride over anything, for about a week later Jimmieboy tried to ride over the shaft of a lawn mower with his wheel, with disastrous results. The boy took a header, and while he himself was not hurt beyond a scratch or two and a slight shaking up, which took away his appetite, the wonderful rubber tire was badly battered. What was worse, the experience made Jimmieboy a little afraid of his new possession, and for some time it lay neglected.

A few nights ago, however, Jimmieboy's interest in his wheel was aroused once more, and to-day it is greater than ever, and it all came about in this way. His father and mother had gone out to make some calls and the youngster was spending a few minutes of solitude over a very fine fairy book that had recently been sent to him. While he was gazing at a magnificent picture of Jack slaying two giants with his left hand and throttling a dragon with his right, there came a sudden tinkling of a bell.

"Somebody's at the telephone," thought Jimmieboy, and started to go to it, when the ringing sound came again, but from a part of the house entirely away from the neighborhood of the telephone.

"Humph," said Jimmieboy. "That's queer. It isn't the telephone and it can't be the front door bell – I guess it's the –"

"It's me – Bikey," came a merry voice from behind the door.

"Who?" cried Jimmieboy.

"Bikey," replied the voice. "Don't you remember Bikey, who threw you over the lawn mower?"

Jimmieboy turned about, and sure enough there stood his neglected wheel.

"I hope you weren't hurt by your tumble," said the little bicycle standing up on its hind wheel and putting its treadles softly on Jimmieboy's shoulders, as if it were caressing him.

"No," said Jimmieboy. "The only thing was that it took away my appetite, and it was on apple pie day. It isn't pleasant to feel as if you couldn't eat a thing with a fine apple pie staring you in the face. That was all I felt badly about."

"I'm sorry about the pie," returned the little bicycle, "but glad you didn't flatten your nose or put your teeth out of joint, as you might easily have done. I knew a boy once who took a header just as you did, and after he got up he found that he'd broken the brim of his hat and turned a beautiful Roman nose into a stub nose."

"You mean snub nose, don't you?" asked Jimmieboy.

"No, I mean stub. Stub means more than snub. Snub means just a plain turn up nose, but stub means that it's not only turned up, but has very little of itself left. It's just a stub – that's all," explained the bicycle. "Another boy I knew fell so hard that he pushed his whole face right through to the back of his head, and you don't know how queer it looks to see him walking backward on his way to school."

"I guess I was in great luck," said Jimmieboy. "I might have had a much harder time than I did."

"I should say so," said the bicycle. "A scratch and loss of appetite, when you might just as easily have had your whole personal appearance changed, is getting off very cheap. But, I say, why didn't you turn aside instead of trying to ride over that lawn mower? Didn't you know you'd get yourself into trouble?"

"Of course I didn't," said Jimmieboy. "You don't suppose I wanted to commit soozlecide, do you? I heard papa talking to mamma about the rheumatic tires on his bicycle, and he said they were great inventions because they made the wheel boy – boy – well, boy something, I don't remember what."

"Boyant?" asked the little bicycle, scratching its cyclometer with its pedal.

"Yes – that was it," said Jimmieboy. "He said the rheumatic tires made the thing boyant, and I asked him what that meant. He said boyant was a word meaning light and airy – like a boy, you know, and that boyancy in a bicycle meant that it could jump over almost anything."

"That is so," said Bikey. "That's what they have those tires for, but they can't jump over a lawn mower – unless" – Here Bikey paused and glanced anxiously around. It was evident that he had some great secret in his mind.

"Unless what?" asked Jimmieboy, his curiosity at once aroused.

"Unless a patent idea of mine, which you and I could try if you wanted to, is good."

Bikey's voice sank into a whisper.

"There's millions in my idea if it'll work," he continued. "Do you see this?" he asked, holding up his front wheel. "This tire I have on is filled with air, and it makes me seem light as air – but it's only seeming. I'm heavy, as you found out when you tried to get me to jump over the lawn mower, but if I could only do a thing I want to you could go sailing over a church steeple as easily as you can ride me over a lawn."

"You mean to say you'd fly?" asked Jimmieboy, delighted at the idea.

"No – not exactly," returned Bikey. "I never could fly and never wanted to. Birds do that, and you can buy a bird for two dollars; but a bicycle costs you anywhere from fifty to a hundred, which shows how much more valuable bicycles are than birds. No, I don't want to fly, but I would like to float."

"On water?" asked Jimmieboy.

"No, no, no; in the air," said the little bicycle impatiently – "like a balloon. Wouldn't that be fine? Anybody can float on the water, even an old cork; but when it comes to floating in the air, that's not only fun but it means being talented. A bicycle that could float in the air would be the finest thing in the world."

"That's very likely true," said Jimmieboy, "but how are you going to do it? You can't soar."

"Not with my tires filled with air," replied Bikey, "but if you'll take the hose from the gas stove and fasten one end to the supply valve of my tires, the other to the gas fixture, fill the tires up with gas and get aboard I'll bet you we can have a ride that'll turn out to be a regular sky-scraper."

It sounded like an attractive proposition, but Jimmieboy wanted to know something more about it before consenting to trifle with the gas pipe.

"What good'll the gas do?" he asked.

"Why, don't you know that gas makes balloons go up?" said Bikey. "They just cram the balloon as full of gas as they can get it and up she sails. That's my idea. Fill my rubber tires with gas and up we'll go. What do you say?"

"I'll do it," cried Jimmieboy with enthusiasm. "I'd love more than anything else to go biking through the clouds, for to tell the truth clouds look a great deal softer than grocery carts and lawn mowers, and I wouldn't mind running into one of them so much. Skybicycling" —

"Pooh! What a term," retorted Bikey. "Skybicycling! Why don't you use your mind a little and call it skycycling?"

Jimmieboy laughed.

"Perhaps skycling would be better than that," he suggested.

"Or skiking," smiled the little bicycle. "If it works you know I'll be simply grand. I'll be a sort of Christopher Columbus among bicycles, and perhaps I'll be called a skicycle instead of bicycle. Oh, it would be too beautiful!" he added, dancing joyously on his hind wheel.

"It will indeed," said Jimmieboy, "but let's hurry. Seems to me as if I could hardly wait."

"Me too," chuckled Bikey. "You go up and get the rubber tube, fasten it to the gas pipe, and inside of ten minutes we'll be off — if it works."

So Jimmieboy rushed off to the attic, seized a piece of rubber tubing that had been used to carry the supply of gas to his little nursery stove in the winter, and running back to where Bikey was waiting fastened it to the fixture in the hall.

"Now," said Bikey, unscrewing the cap of his pneumatic tire, "hold the other end there and we'll see how it goes."

Jimmieboy hastened to obey, and for five minutes watched his strange little friend anxiously.

"Feel any lighter?" he said.

"Yes," whispered Bikey, almost shivering with delight. "My front wheel is off the floor already. I think twenty feet more will be enough there, and when you've filled up the hind tire — ta — ta — ti — tum — ti — too — ha — ha! Then we'll go skiking."

The plan was followed out, and when both tires had taken in as much gas as they could hold Bikey called hoarsely to Jimmieboy: —

"Quick! Quick! Jump aboard or I'll be off without you. Is the door open?"

"No," said Jimmieboy, clambering into the saddle, after turning off the gas and screwing the caps firmly on both tires, "b — but the par — par — parlor window is."

"Good," cried Bikey. "We'll sail through that! Give the right pedal a good turn; now — one — two — three — we're off!"

And they were off. Out of the hall they flew, through the parlor without touching the floor, and then sailed through the window out into the moonlight night.

"Isn't it great," cried Bikey, trembling with delight.

"Greatest that ever was," said Jimmieboy. "But, hi! Take care, turn to the left, quick."

A great spike of some sort had loomed up before them.

"Excuse me," said Bikey, giving a quick turn. "I was so happy I wasn't looking where we were going. If you hadn't spoken we'd have got stuck on that church steeple sure enough."

II

WHEELING ON THE BIG RING OF SATURN

"Hadn't we better go a little higher?" asked Jimmieboy. "There's a lot of these tall steeples about here, and it wouldn't be any fun if we pricked a hole in one of these tires on a weather vane."

"We are going higher all the time," said Bikey. "There isn't a steeple in the world can touch us now. What we want to keep away from now are eagles and snow clad Alps."

"Ho! snow clad Alps," laughed Jimmieboy. "There aren't any Alps in America, they're all in Europe."

"Well, where are you? You don't suppose we've been standing still all this time, do you? If you'd studied your geography lessons as well as you ought to you'd be able to tell one country from another. You are wheeling directly over France now. In ten minutes we'll be over Germany, and in fifteen, if you turned to the south, you'd simply graze the top of Mont Blanc."

"Let's," said Jimmieboy. "I want to see a glazier."

"A what?" asked Bikey.

"A glazier," answered Jimmieboy. "It's a big slide."

"Oh, you mean a glacier," said Bikey, shaking all over with laughter. "I thought you meant a man to put in a pane of glass, and it struck me that Mont Blanc was a curious place to go looking for one. Shall we turn south?"

"If you don't mind," said Jimmieboy. "Seems to me we might coast down Mont Blanc, and have a pretty good time of it."

"Oh, if that's what you're after, I won't do it," said Bikey. "Coasting isn't a good thing for beginners like you, particularly on the Alps. Take a hill of your own size. Furthermore, we haven't come out to explore the earth. I was going to take you off to the finest bicycle track you ever saw. I never saw it either, but I've seen pictures of it. It's a great level gold road running about another world called Saturn. We call it Saturn's ring down home, but I've ideas as to what it is."

"Seems to me I've heard papa speak of Saturn. It's got eight moons, I think he said. One for every day of the week, and two for Sunday," said Jimmieboy.

"That's the place," said Bikey. "You don't need a lamp on your wheel when you go out at night there. They've got moonlight to burn. If you'll pedal ahead now as hard as you can we can get there in time for one turn and then come back; and I tell you, my boy, that coming back will be glorious. It will be down grade all the way."

"How far off is Saturn?" asked Jimmieboy.

"I don't know," returned Bikey, "but it's a long walk from your house. The ring is 18,350 miles from Saturn itself. That's why I think it's a good place for bicycling. Nobody'd take an ice cart or a furniture truck that far just to get in the way of a wheelman, and then as it doesn't go anywhere but just round and round and round, they're not likely to have trolley cars on it. It doesn't pay to run a trolley car nowheres."

It all seemed beautifully reasonable, and Jimmieboy's curiosity grew greater and greater as he pedalled along. Up and on they went, passing through huge fleecy masses of clouds, now and again turning to one side to avoid running into strange little bits of stars, so small that they seemed to be nothing but islands in the ocean of the sky, and far too small to be seen on the earth.

"We can stop and rest on one of those if you want to, Jimmieboy," said Bikey; "are you tired?"

"Not at all," Jimmieboy answered. "Seems to me I could go on this way forever. It's easy as lying down and going to sleep."

Bikey chuckled.

"What are you laughing at?" said Jimmieboy.

"Nothing," said Bikey. "When you said it was easy as sleeping I thought of something – that was all."

"Dear me," said Jimmieboy, ruefully. "I am awake, ain't I? This isn't like all the other experiences, is it?"

"Not at all," laughed Bikey. "Your other adventures have been quite different. But, I say, we're getting there. I can see five moons ahead already."

"I can see six," cried Jimmieboy, quite elated. "Yes, six – and – one more."

"You've got nearly the whole set, as the boy said when he came to the other boy's Nicaragua page in the stamp album. There are only eight altogether – only I think your seventh is Saturn itself."

"It must be," said Jimmieboy. "It's got a hello around it."

"What's that?" asked Bikey.

"I forgot," said Jimmieboy. "You never went to Sunday school, and so of course you don't know what a hello is. It's a thing like a gold hoople that angels wear on their heads."

"I'll have to get one," said Bikey. "I heard somebody say I was an angel of a bicycle. I don't know what she meant, though. What is an angel?"

"It's a – a – good thing with wings," said Jimmieboy.

"Humph!" said Bikey, "I'm afraid I'm not one of those. Don't they ever have wheels? I'm a good thing, but I haven't any wings."

"I never heard of an angel with wheels," said Jimmieboy. "But I suppose they come. Angels have everything that's worth having."

Bikey was silent. The idea of anything having everything that was worth having was too much for him to imagine, for bicycles have very little imagination.

"I wish I could be one," he said wistfully, after a moment's silence. "It must be awfully nice to have everything you want."

Jimmieboy thought so, too, but he was too much interested in getting to Saturn to say anything, so he, too, kept silent and pedalled away as hard as he could. Together and happily they went on until Jimmieboy said: —

"Bikey, what's that ahead? Looks like the side of a great gold cheese."

"That," Bikey answered, "is exactly what you think it is. It's the ring of Saturn, and, as the saying goes, for biking Saturn is quite the cheese. In two minutes we'll be there."

And in two minutes they were there. In less, in fact, for hardly eight seconds had passed before a great, blinding light caused Jimmieboy to close his eyes, and when he had opened them again he and Bikey were speeding along a most beautiful road, paved with gold.

"I thought so," said Bikey, "we're on the ring. And isn't it smooth?"

"It's like riding on glass," said Jimmieboy. And then they stopped short.

A peculiar looking creature had stopped them. It was a creature with a face not unlike that of a man, and a body like a man's, but instead of legs it had wheels like a bicycle. If you can imagine a Centaur with a body like a bicycle instead of a horse you will have a perfect mental picture of this strange creature.

"Excuse me," said the stranger, "but we have to be very particular here. Where do you come from?"

"Earth," said Bikey.

"All right," said the stranger. "Move on, I'm a Saturn policeman and so many wheelmen from the Sun and the Moon and Jupiter have caused disturbances of late that we have had to forbid them coming. You are the only Earth people who have been here, and of course are not included in our rules, but I will have to go along with you to see that you do not break any of them."

"We're very glad to meet you," said Bikey, "and if you'll tell us your rules we will be very glad to obey them."

"Well," said the creature with wheels instead of legs, "the first rule is that nobody shall ride a wheel standing on his head. There was a person over here from Mars last week who actually put his head in the saddle and wheeled his pedals with his hands."

"How utterly absurd!" said Jimmieboy.

"Wasn't it?" said the Saturnian; "and my! how mad he got when I interfered – asked whether this was a free country and if anybody had rights, and all sorts of stuff like that. Now there's another rule we have, and that is that coasting backward cannot be permitted. We used to allow that until a man from Jupiter ran slap bang into another man who lived at the extreme end of the handle of the Great Dipper, who was coasting backward from the other direction. They came together so hard that we couldn't get 'em apart, and we have had to keep 'em here ever since. They can't be separated, and the Dipper man won't go to Jupiter, and the Jupiter man won't go to Dipperville – consequently they stay here. They're a fearful nuisance, and it all came from coasting backward."

"It's a very good rule," said Jimmieboy, "but in our world I don't think we'd need a rule like that, because, while our bicycle riders do lots of queer things, I don't think they'd do that."

"I hope not," said the Saturnian, "because there isn't any use in it, any more than in that other trick our visiting bicyclists try to play here. They take those bicycles built for two, you know, and have what they call tugs of war with 'em. One fellow takes the hind wheel and the other the front wheel, and each begins to work for all he is worth to pull the other along. We had to stop that, too, because the last time they did it the men were so strong that the bar was pulled apart and both tuggers went flying off on one wheel so fast that they have never managed to get back – not that we want them back, but that we don't want people to set bicycling down as a dangerous sport. It means so much to us. We get all our money from our big ring here; bicyclists come from all parts of the universe to ride around it, and as they pay for the privilege why we get millions of dollars a year, which is divided up among the people. Consequence is, nobody has to do any work and we are all happy. You can see for yourself that it would be very bad for us if people gave it up as dangerous."

"Very true," said Bikey, "and now we know the rules I suppose we can go ahead."

"Yes," said the policeman, "only you must go to the Captain's office and get a permit. It'll cost you \$2,000 for one season."

"Two thousand dollars?" echoed Jimmieboy, aghast.

"That's what I said," said the policeman.

"But," said Jimmieboy, ruefully, "I haven't got more than five cents with me."

"Then," said the policeman, "you can get a permit for five cents' worth – that's one-forty thousandth part of a season."

"And how long is a season?" asked Jimmieboy.

"Forty thousand years," said the policeman. "You can ride a year for five cents."

Bikey laughed.

"That'll be long enough," he said. "And where can I find the Captain?"

"I'm him," said the Saturnian. "Give me the five cents and it will be all right."

So Jimmieboy handed over his nickel, and in a moment he and Bikey were speeding along over a beautiful golden road so wide that he could not see the other side of it, and stretching on and on to the fore for thousands of miles.

III

A SUDDEN STOP AT THE TYRED INN

"This is a great place," said Bikey as they sped along. "I've coasted on pretty much every kind of coasting thing there is, and I think I never struck anything like this before. It beats the North Pole all hollow."

"You never coasted on the North Pole, did you?" queried Jimmieboy.

"Oh, didn't I just!" laughed Bikey. "It's made of ice, that North Pole is, and it's so slippery that you can even slide up it – that's awful slippery, when you come to think of it – and as for coming down, well, you'd almost think you were falling off a roof."

"But, wasn't it dangerous?" asked Jimmieboy.

"Not at all," laughed Bikey. "Sliding up you run into the air, and that isn't very hard, and coming down you land in a great snow bank – but this place here is much pleasanter, because it's warmer, and you don't have to exert yourself. That's the great thing about this track. We aren't going at all, though we seem to be – it's the track that makes my wheels go round. It's just a-whizzing, this track is, but we are standing perfectly still. If you should step off on to the road you'd whizz back out of sight in two seconds."

"Well, I won't step off, then," said Jimmieboy a little fearfully; "I don't want to be left up here all by myself."

Silently they went on for at least five minutes, when what should they see before them but a great stone wall, built solidly across the road.

"Hi!" cried Bikey. "Put on the brake – hurry up."

"There isn't one," shrieked Jimmieboy. "I – b – bub – busted it on the lawn mower the day of the accident."

"Back pedal then – back pedal," roared Bikey.

"C – can't gug – get my feet on 'em, they're going so fast," cried Jimmieboy.

"Then p – pup – punk – puncture my tire – take a nail or a pin or anything – or we'll be dashed to pieces."

"Huh! haven't gug – got a nail or a pup – pin or anything," wept Jimmieboy.

"Then we are lost," said Bikey; but just then his tires punctured themselves and they came to a full stop two feet from the stone wall and directly in front of a little hotel, from the front door of which swung a bright red sign on which was the following inscription: —

THE TYRED INN

FOR

THE TIRED OUT

"My!" ejaculated Bikey as he and Jimmieboy tumbled in a heap before the inn. "That was the narrowest escape I ever had. If we hadn't stopped we'd have been smashed all to bits – leastways I would have – you might have cleared the wall all right."

"Good morning, Bickleman," said a fat, pudgy little old fellow, appearing in the doorway of the inn and bowing profoundly.

"What's that you say?" asked Bikey looking up. "I didn't catch that last word."

"Biklemen," repeated the fat little fellow. "It's a word I invented myself to save time and it signifies gentlemen who ride bicycles. Instead of saying 'good morning, gentlemen who ride bicycles,' I say 'good morning, biklemen, is there anything I can do for you?'"

"Well, I should say there was," retorted Bikey. "Just look at my tires, will you? There are twenty-six punctures in the front one and eighteen in the hind one. I should think you'd have better sense than to sprinkle the road with tacks in this way."

"Why, what an ungrateful creature you are," cried the landlord of the Tyred Inn, for that was who the pudgy little old fellow was. "If it hadn't been for those tacks I'd like to know where you'd be at this moment. You'd have smashed into that stone wall and busted yourself and your rider all to pieces."

"That's so, Bikey," said Jimmieboy. "Those tacks saved our lives."

"Of course they did," said the landlord. "And even if you had a right to growl about 'em, you haven't any right to growl at me because the government compels me to keep that part of the road sprinkled with 'em."

"Really?" asked Bikey. "Queer law that, isn't it?"

"I don't see why you think that," replied the landlord. "Is it a queer law which results in the saving of people's lives?"

"No; but the way to save people's lives would be to remove that stone wall," said Bikey. "And that's the thing that makes this place dangerous."

"I don't like to be impolite to biklemen," said the landlord, "but I must say that you don't know what you are talking about. Do you suppose I am in business for fun?"

"I don't see what that has to do with it," said Bikey, ruefully regarding his tires, which looked for all the world like porous plasters would look if they were sold by the yard.

"Well, I'll show you in ten seconds," said the landlord. "Do you see this inn? I presume you do, though there seems to be so little that you see that I have my doubts. Well, this inn is run, not because I think it's a game I'm playing, but because I'm after money. Now, this inn wouldn't earn a cent of money if biklemen didn't stop here. See that?"

"Yes," said Bikey. "That's plain enough, but that doesn't account for the tacks or the stone wall."

"Yes, it does, too," retorted the landlord. "I ran this inn two years before that stone wall was built, and I paid the government \$500 a week for being allowed to do it, but nobody ever stopped. Every bikleman in the universe went coasting by here and never a one stopped in, so I never got a cent and was paying \$26,000 a year to the government into the bargain. Of course I complained to the Secretary of the Interior, and he just laughed me off; said it wasn't his fault; that I ought to do something myself to make 'em stop, and that is how I came to build the stone wall. They've got to stop now. See that?"

"Yes," said Bikey, "I see. And did you begin to make money?"

"Well, rather," said the landlord. "The first day after that was built a lot of biklemen from the Moon came over here and they ran plumb into that wall. Five out of eight broke their legs, two broke their arms and one of 'em got off with a cracked nose, but every one of 'em had to stay here two months at \$10 a day apiece, and, of course, their families had to visit 'em, and they paid from \$5 to \$8 apiece, and then I charged 'em all for medical services, and altogether things began to look up. I cleared \$7 a week steady. But they were a mean crowd. In spite of all the good treatment they got, as soon as they got well they made a complaint against that wall, said it was an outrage, and the government said it must come down."

"All right," said I to the Secretary. "But if that wall comes down I go out of the hotel business, and you can whistle for your \$500 a week." He didn't like that a bit, the Secretary didn't, because his salary depended on the money I paid. Being Secretary of the Interior he got a commission on hotel taxes, and as mine was the only hotel in Saturn, shutting it up meant that he was ruined."

"You had him there," laughed Bikey.

"I rather guess so," smiled the landlord, "and he knew it. Still I was easy with him. I didn't want to have people making complaints all the time, so I said that while the stone wall had come to stay, I'd pave the street for two hundred yards in front of it with cat teasers."

"What?" cried Jimmieboy.

"Cat teasers," said the landlord. "Didn't you ever hear of cat teasers? They're small square pieces of zinc with pricklers on 'em. City people generally put 'em on top of their back yard fences so that Patti cats" —

"Excuse me," asked Bikey. "What cats?"

"Patti cats and De Reszke cats – the kind that sing, you know," explained the landlord. "They put 'em on their back yard fences so that these operatic felines would not be able to sit down there and sing and keep them awake all night; but the scheme didn't work. I had an idea that the cat teasers would puncture the bicycle wheels in time to stop 'em, and they did, but they interfered with people on foot as well, and after these people got lockjaw from puncturing their feet on my pavement I took it up and suggested sprinkling the roadway twice a day with tacks. This satisfied the Secretary, and a law was passed compelling me to do it, and I do. How it works you have seen for yourselves."

"That's true," said Bikey, ruefully.

"Well, it saved me," said Jimmieboy.

"But how are we ever to get home?" asked Bikey.

"Oh, as for that," returned the landlord, "gather yourselves together and come inside. I think I can fix you out very shortly, and it won't cost you more than \$800."

"Come on, Bikey," said Jimmieboy, "I'd sort of like to see the inside of this house, anyhow."

"I haven't got any \$800," snapped Bikey.

"Oh, never mind about that," laughed the landlord. "I run a banking business here, too. I'll lend you all you want. Come in."

And so they went into the "Tyred Inn for the Tired Out," and a most remarkable place they found it to be.

IV *THE TYRED INN*

The entrance to the Tyred Inn and the parlors and rooms of that extraordinary place were quite like those of any other roadside hotel, but the method of conducting it and the singular things that were to be found in it made Jimmieboy's brief stay there an experience long to be remembered. The bicycle idea was carried out in everything. If you wanted a bell boy you had to ring a bicycle bell. In place of an elevator or staircase they had a spiral pathway running up from the centre of the hall to the roof, upon which guests could either walk or ride, an electric bicycle built for two being provided for those who did not care to walk up, the elevator boy sitting on the front seat and managing the apparatus.

From the parlor there came the most beautiful strains of music, as from a fine brass and string orchestra, all of which was managed by the merest bit of a midget sitting astride of a safety and working the pedals, which in turn worked the great musical instrument that occupied the whole of the lower end of the room. Upon the walls were all sorts of curious pictures, and for a decoration of the ceiling there were automatic frescoes presenting a constantly moving bicycle scene. For instance, instead of a series of groups of rosebuds and cupids, there were about a hundred little plaster wheelmen racing about the edge of the ceiling, and every once in a while one of these would take a header, flying immediately back to his saddle again, however, and continuing on his way until the clockwork by which the frescoes were run forced him to take the header all over again. On and around they raced incessantly, and so varied were the things that they did that it did not seem to Jimmieboy as if he could remember half of them in case he should ever want to tell his father or his brothers about it afterward.

"That's a fine ceiling, isn't it?" asked the landlord, with a grin, as Jimmieboy gazed overhead, his mouth wide open in wonderment.

"I should say so," replied the boy, delightedly. "I wish I could have a ceiling like that in my room."

"Nonsense," said Bikey. "You'd soon get tired of it. It wouldn't take long for a ceiling like that to drive a man crazy."

"That's so," put in the landlord. "But there are lots of things that would drive a man crazy that wouldn't drive a boy crazy – like trumpets and whistles. When it comes to things like that, boys are much stronger than men. I've known a boy of five to stand banging on a drum for seven hours, when his father couldn't stand it for seven minutes. Nobody need go crazy over my bicycle ceiling though," continued the landlord. "I just press a button and it's all over – see?"

As the little man spoke he pressed a button on the side wall, and instantly the fresco bicycles stopped moving, the little plaster wheelmen jumped off and threw themselves down upon the soft grassy borders of the painted roadside and all was still. Then the landlord pressed another button and they jumped up, mounted again and the race began once more.

"That's my own invention," said the landlord, "and it's a very popular feature of my house. It brings children here. When the mothers of this neighborhood want to go off wheeling, and there's nobody to look after the children, they bring them here and leave them with me, and they're as good as pie as long as that ceiling goes. That's another of my ways of making money. I charge fifty cents an hour for letting the youngsters in here, and it's a very poor sort of a day that I don't clear \$40 on my kid account."

"I should think so," said Jimmieboy in a superior sort of way. "I think that if I were a child I should like to spend a day here myself."

The landlord looked at Jimmieboy with an amused expression.

"Say, Mr. Bike," he whispered to Bikey. "What does he think he is, a telegraph pole? He said if he was a child. Isn't he a child?"

"Yes," laughed Bikey, "but he is a little old for his age, you know. Had lots of experience."

"Ha – I see," said the landlord. Then he turned to Jimmieboy again and said: —

"Now, Mr. Man, if you'll accompany me up stairs I'll show you my pantry."

"Good," said Jimmieboy. "I must say I'm pretty hungry, and a pantry is just the sort of thing I'd like to see."

Mounting the "bikevator," as the printed sign over it called the arrangement that took guests to the upper floors, the party was soon transferred to the landing above. The landlord, after assisting Jimmieboy to dismount, walked to the end of a long corridor and, taking a bunch of keys from his pocket, unlocked and opened a little door.

"Come in," he said, as he disappeared through the door. "I have to keep the pantry locked."

Jimmieboy and Bikey entered as they were bid, and the landlord closed the door after them. The place was dimly lighted, but on the shelves, that rose one above another from floor to ceiling, all sorts of curious looking bottles and cakes and pies and biscuits could be seen, and Jimmieboy's mouth watered at the sight.

"What'll you have?" asked the landlord. "An air cake or a piece of fresh pneumatic mince pie?"

"A little of both," said Jimmieboy.

"Or a bite of my gutta percha gum?" suggested the landlord.

"Well, it's hard to say," said Jimmieboy. "Indeed, I don't know what an air cake or a pneumatic mince pie is, nor did I ever hear of gutta percha gum."

"I know that mighty well," laughed the landlord. "Nobody ever heard of these patent dainties of mine, but they're the best things for the digestion you ever saw, and they last forever. If people could only train themselves to eat my food they'd be able to save money in two ways – bakers' bills and doctors' bills."

"I don't quite understand," said Jimmieboy.

"One of my pneumatic mince pies will show you in a jiffy," returned the landlord. "One pie if properly cared for will last a lifetime" —

"Not with a real live boy in the house it won't," said Jimmieboy, positively.

"That may be all very true," said the landlord, "but if the real live boy ate one of those pies he would cease to be a real live boy. You see this pie is made of rubber, and all you've got to do is to blow it up with an air pump and serve it."

"But you called it mince pie," said Jimmieboy, very much disgusted.

"Well, it's my pie," said the landlord. "I guess I've got a right to call it what I please."

"But you said it saved doctors' bills," put in Bikey, who was no better pleased with this absurd invention than was Jimmieboy.

"And I said right," said the landlord, with a self-satisfied smile. "It's just this way: – If you eat mince pie it gives you indigestion and you have to send for the doctor, and then you get a bill for several dollars. Now, with my pie it's different. You can't eat it, and therefore you can't get indigestion, and you don't have to send for a doctor. Wherefore, as I said, it saves doctors' bills. This is the latest make – I make a new kind every year, just as the bicycle makers make new wheels every year. A 1902 safety pneumatic mince pie costs \$2; a 1901 pie I sell for \$1.50."

"And what is the difference?" asked Jimmieboy, beginning to be amused.

"The air in this year's pie is fresher, that's all," said the landlord.

"I suppose your air biscuits are of the same kind?" asked Bikey.

"Yes," said the landlord, "except that I flavor 'em. If you're fond of vanilla, or strawberry, or any other flavor, I perfume the air that is pumped into them. They're very nice."

"What are those things on the top shelf?" asked Jimmieboy. "They look like sausages."

"They are sausages. I make 'em out of old tires, and they are very good and solid. Then, over there in the icebox, I have rubber steaks and chickens – in fact, all kinds of pneumatic food. You have no idea how well they last, and how good they are for the digestion – if you could only get used to them. That's the greatest trouble I have, getting people used to them."

"Don't you have any real good food here?" asked Bikey.

"Real? Why, my dear fellow," ejaculated the landlord, "what could you ask more real than those rubber viands? You could drop a railway engine on one of those rubber sausages and it would be just as solid as ever."

"But you can't live on air!" protested Jimmieboy.

"No more can you live without it," said the landlord, unlocking the door and opening it, some disappointment manifested in his countenance. "If you will come up to the hospital now, sir," he added, addressing Bikey, "I'll see what can be done to repair your wounds. I am sorry you do not seem to appreciate the good things in my larder."

"We'd appreciate 'em if we could see the good of 'em," said Jimmieboy. "What on earth can you do with a rubber mince pie besides not eat it?"

"Oh! as for that, you might use it for a football," retorted the landlord sadly, as he locked the door behind them and started down the corridor to the hospital room.

"I call it the hospital room," said he, "although I am aware that doesn't describe it. We don't take care of horses there, but as yet nobody has invented a word like bikepital, and so I do not use it. I have applied for a patent on that word, however, and as soon as I get it we'll change the name."

With these words they entered the hospital, and if the pantry was queer the hospital was a marvel.

V *IN THE HOSPITAL AND HOME AGAIN*

"Come right in," said the landlord, stepping into the hospital. "We'll fix Bikey up in a jiffy, and as for young Mr. Jimmieboy, we'll see what can be done to improve his appetite for our gutta percha pies."

Jimmieboy glanced apprehensively at the old gentleman. He did not like the tone in which the remark was made.

"Thank you, Mr. Landlord," he said, after thinking for a moment, "but you needn't bother about me. I can get along very well without liking them. The kind of pies that we have at home are plenty good enough for me, and I don't really care to like yours, thank you." Jimmieboy had tried to be at least polite. The landlord laughed unpleasantly.

"Humph!" he sneered, "that doesn't make any difference to us. Article number seven, paragraph sixty-three, of the hotel laws of Saturn requires that you SHALL like the food we serve at this hotel, whether you want to or not. Therefore, what you want or don't want to like cuts no figure here. You will have to be operated upon, and that portion of your anatomy which does not welcome the best pneumatic pie that ever was made will be removed."

Jimmieboy immediately perceived that he was in trouble, for the landlord spoke with great determination and, what was more, had locked the door behind him, so that the boy was practically a prisoner. Escape seemed impossible, and yet escape he must, for no one could relish the idea of becoming a patient at the Bicycle Hospital. To gain time to think, he observed as civilly as he could: —

"It seems to me, Mr. Landlord, that that is a curious law. Just because a traveller doesn't like the food at your hotel he's got to go to a hospital and stay there until he does like it. Isn't that a trifle queer?"

"Nothing queer about it at all," retorted the landlord savagely. "Nothing queer about it at all. Naturalest law in all the world. I'm not in business for fun, as I've already told you, and if I left any stone unturned to compel people to like my house I should be ruined. My guests have got to like everything, including me — I, myself, see? When I pay a big tax to the government for the privilege of doing business the government has got to do something to help me on in that business, and, fortunately for us, in Saturn we've got a government that is just chock full of justice and common sense.

"When I first started up here nobody liked the food I served, and after coming here once most of them never came again. Ruin was staring me in the face, so I went to the capital and I told the government that they had to do something for me, and they did. They passed an act compelling people to like my food under penalty of \$500 a dislike, or six months in my hospital, where I am authorized to regard them as patients. Now you can take your choice. You don't like the pie, you don't like the sausage, you don't like the rubber chops and the bicycle saddle stew you look upon with disfavor. There are four things you don't like.

"Now you can do any one of three things. Eat all four of these dishes, pay a fine of \$2,000 or stay here in the hospital and undergo a course of treatment. I don't care which. There's one thing certain. I'm not going to let you out of this place until you like everything about it."

Jimmieboy glanced uneasily at Bikey, who was leaning carelessly against the wall as if he were not at all bothered by the situation.

"But I've got to go to school to-morrow, Mr. Landlord," he put in. "Can't you let me off long enough to finish my term at school, and then when vacation comes maybe I'll come back?"

"No siree!" ejaculated the landlord. "I know what you are up to. You're nothing but a boy, and boys don't like schools any better than you like my pneumatic pies. You stay right here."

"Oh, tell him you like 'em, Jimmieboy," put in Bikey. "Tell him they beat mince all holler and pumpkin isn't in it with 'em. Tell him life would be a barren waste and every heart full of winter if it wasn't for 'em. Pile it on and let's get out. I'm getting nervous."

"Well, so they are in a way," said Jimmieboy. "The fact is, they're the finest pies ever made."

The landlord's face brightened up.

"To eat?" he asked eagerly.

"N-n-o," stammered Jimmieboy. "Not to eat – but to play football with or to use for punching bags."

The landlord froze up immediately.

"That settles your case," he snapped. "I'll put you in the violent ward and to-morrow morning we'll begin a course of treatment that will make you wish you'd liked 'em from the beginning. And now for you, sir," the landlord added severely, turning to Bikey. "How about you and my pneumatic pies?"

"Oh," said Bikey, with a joyful fling of his right pedal. "I simply adore those pies. Indeed, if there's anything I love in the world it is gutta percha food. Have you any rubber neck clams?"

The landlord beamed approval. "You are a bikleman of sense," said he. "I will order up a pneumatic rhubarb at once."

Bikey's saddle turned pale.

"Oh, please don't trouble yourself, Mr. Landlord," he said, pulling himself together. "I – ah – I should love to have it, for if there is one thing in the world I love more than rheumatic pneubarb – I mean rheubarbic pneumat pie – I don't know what it is, but my doctor has ordered me not to touch it for a year at least. 'Mr. Bike,' said he the last time I saw him, 'you are killing yourself by eating piebarb roobs – I mean roobarb pies – they are too rich for your tubes, Mr. Bike,' were his precise words. And he added that if I didn't quit eating them my pedals would be full of gout and that even my cyclometer would squeak."

"Under the circumstances," said the landlord, with an approving nod at Bikey, "I shall not take it amiss if you refuse to eat them. But your young friend here must remain and be treated. Meanwhile, I shall have your wounds repaired and let you go. Mr. Jimmieboy will be sent forthwith to the violent ward."

"Serves him good and right," Jimmieboy was appalled to hear Bikey reply. Here he was off in a strange, wild place, in the hands of an enemy, who threatened him with all sorts of dreadful things, and his only friend had gone back on him.

"Bikey!" said he, reproachfully.

"Served you right," roared Bikey. "Not to like the good gentleman's pies. Your father has told you again and again to always like what is put before you. You impolite child, you!"

Jimmieboy's pride alone kept him from bursting into tears, and he sorrowfully permitted himself without further resistance to be led away into the violent ward of the Inn Hospital.

"To think that he should go back on me!" the boy sighed as he entered the prison. "On me who never did him any harm but break his handlebars and bust his tires unintentionally."

But Jimmieboy, in his surprise and chagrin had failed to note the wink in Bikey's cyclometer, which all the time that he had been speaking was violently agitating itself in an effort to attract his attention and to let him know that his treachery was not real, but only seeming.

"Now," said the landlord kindly to Bikey, as Jimmieboy was led away, "let us attend to you. I'll call the doctor. Doctor Pump!" he added, calling the name loudly in a shrill voice.

"Here, sir," replied the head physician, running in from an adjoining room.

"Here's a chap who likes air pies so much that his doctor forbids him to eat them. I wish you'd fix him up at once," said the landlord.

"He must be insane," said Dr. Pump, "I'll send him to the asylum."

"Not I!" cried Bikey. "I'm merely punctured."

"His wheels have gone to his head," said Dr. Pump, feeling the pulse in Bikey's pedals.

"Nonsense," said Bikey. "Impossible. I haven't any head."

"H'm!" returned Dr. Pump, scratching his chin. "Very true. In making my diagnosis I had failed to observe the fact that you are an ordinary brainless wheel. Let me look at your tires."

Bikey held them out.

"Do you prefer homeopathic or allopathic treatment?" asked Dr. Pump. "We are broadminded here and give our patients their choice."

"What difference does it make in the bill?" asked Bikey.

"None," said Dr. Pump, grandly. "It is merely a difference in treatment. If you wish homeopathic treatment we will cure your tires, which seem to be punctured, with a porous plaster, since like cures like under that system. If, on the other hand, you are an allopath, we will pump you full of rubber."

"I think I prefer what they call absent treatment," said Bikey, meekly. "Can't you cure me over the telephone? I'm a Christian Scientist."

They had never heard of this at Saturn, so Bikey was compelled to submit to one of the two other courses of treatment, and he wisely chose the porous plaster to cure his puncture, since that required merely an external application, and did not involve his swallowing anything which might later have affected his general health.

Meanwhile poor Jimmieboy was locked up in the violent ward. It was a long low-ceiled room filled with little cots, and the lad found no comfort in the discovery that there were plenty more patients in the room.

"Why, the room's full, isn't it?" he said, as he entered.

"Yes," replied the bicycle attendant, who had shown him in. "In fact, everybody who comes to this house ends up here. Somehow or other, nobody likes the landlord's food, and nobody ever has money enough along to pay the fine. It is curious how little money bicyclists take along with them when they are out for a ride. In all my experience I haven't encountered one with more than a thousand dollars in his pocket."

"How long does one have to stay here?" asked Jimmieboy.

"Until one likes the food," said the attendant. "So far nobody has ever got out, so I can't say how long they stay in years."

Again the boy's heart sank, and he crawled into his cot, wretched in spirit and wholly unhappy.

"I've given you a bed by the window," said the attendant, "because the air is fresher there. The landlord says you are the freshest boy he ever met, and we have arranged the air accordingly. I wouldn't try to escape if I were you, because the window looks out on the very edge of the ring of Saturn, and it's a jump of about 90,000,000 miles to anything solid. The jump is easy, but the solid at the other end is very, very hard."

Jimmieboy looked out of the window, and immediately drew back, appalled, for there was nothing but unfathomable space above, below, or beyond him, and he gave himself up to despair.

But the boy had really reckoned without his friend Bikey, who was as stanch and true as ever, as Jimmieboy was soon to find out.

He had lain in his little bed barely more than an hour, when from outside the window there came a whisper: – "Hi, there, Jimmieboy!"

Jimmieboy got up on his elbow to listen, but just then the door opened and Dr. Pump, accompanied by the landlord, walked in. So he lay back and the words at the window were not repeated.

Dr. Pump walked to the side of Jimmieboy's cot.

"Well, young man," said he, "what do you think of air pies up here, now?"

"They're bully," said Jimmieboy, weakly, and resolved to give in.

"H'm," said Dr. Pump. "Bad case, this. I can't say whether of insanity or compulsion. There's only one course. We'll order a pie. If he's insane he'll eat it. If he is acting under compulsion" —

"I won't eat it," roared Jimmieboy, springing up from his pillow. "I won't; I won't; I won't. I'll take cod liver oil on my strawberries first!"

His was evidently an awful case, for immediately Dr. Pump, the nurse and the landlord and every patient in the place fled from the room, shrieking with terror.

"Good for you! You've scared them silly," whispered the voice at the window. "Now, Jimmieboy, hurry. Jump out. I'll catch you and we'll be off. Be quick, for they'll be back in a moment. Jump!"

"Who are you?" cried Jimmieboy, for he was still the same cautious little traveller.

"Bikey! I only went back on you to help you!" he said. "Jump!"

And then the door opened again, and the landlord and Dr. Pump and the nurses and all the patients and a platoon of policemen crashed into the room.

"Catch him, quick!" cried the landlord. But Jimmieboy had already jumped, landing upon the friendly saddle of Bikey. In an instant he found himself speeding away through space.

"Are we still on Saturn?" he gasped.

"Not we!" cried Bikey. "That place is too hot for us. We're not on anything. I'm simply tumbling through the clouds and whirring my wheels for fun. I like to see the wheels go round. Don't bother. We'll land somewhere."

"But," cried Jimmieboy, "where?"

And then there was a crash. Bikey made no reply, but —

"Here," said a well known and affectionate voice.

"Where's here?" asked Jimmieboy, faintly, opening his eyes and gazing up into a very familiar face.

"You interrupted me, my son," remarked the owner of the familiar face. "I was about to say, 'Here now, Jimmieboy, this business of falling out of bed has got to stop.' This is the fifth time in two weeks that I have had to restore you to your comfortable couch. Where have you been this time?"

"Off with Bikey," murmured Jimmieboy, rubbing his eyes and gazing about his nursery.

"Nonsense," said his daddy, the owner of the familiar voice. "With Bikey? Why Bikey has been in the laundry all night." Which fact Bikey never denied, but nowadays when the incident is mentioned he agitates his cyclometer violently, and shakes all over as if he thought it was a good joke on somebody.

In all of which I am inclined to agree with him.

THE IMP OF THE TELEPHONE

I

JIMMIEBOY MAKES HIS ACQUAINTANCE

The telephone was ringing, of that there was no doubt, and yet no one went to see what was wanted, which was rather strange. The cook had a great way of rushing up from the kitchen to where the 'phone stood in the back hall whenever she heard its sounding bells, because a great many of her friends were in the habit of communicating with her over the wire, and she didn't like to lose the opportunity to hear all that was going on in the neighborhood. And then, too, Jimmieboy's papa was at work in the library not twenty feet away, and surely one would hardly suppose that he would let it ring as often as Jimmieboy had heard it this time – I think there were as many as six distinct rings – without going to ask the person at the other end what on earth he was making all that noise about. So it was altogether queer that after sounding six times the bell should fail to summon any one to see what was wanted. Finally it rang loud and strong for a seventh time, and, although he wasn't exactly sure about it, Jimmieboy thought he heard a whisper repeated over and over again, which said, "Hullo, Jimmieboy! Jimmieboy, Hullo! Come to the telephone a moment, for I want to speak to you."

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