

WHEN
THINGS
WENT
WILD

A stylized illustration of a bird, possibly a hawk or eagle, in flight. The bird is shown from a side profile, with its wings spread wide, flying towards the left. It is positioned below the word "WILD" in the title.

Books by Tom Mitchell

HOW TO ROB A BANK
THAT TIME I GOT KIDNAPPED
ESCAPE FROM CAMP BORING
WHEN THINGS WENT WILD

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TOM MITCHELL



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To Nicky, my wife

*He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.*

Mum*

.....

* after Alfred Lord Tennyson

CHAPTER

1

Spring and the sun have sprung. Friends play football; families meet in parks; everybody's happy. But not here. The sky's thick with charcoal-drawn clouds. Drizzle catches against your cheeks.

Welcome to Grantown, Scotland, the exact middle of nowhere. The nearest cinema's hours away. Nobody in their right mind would choose to live in a place like this. Nobody but my parents.

And don't think I'm hating on Scotland. I'm not. I *like* Scotland. It's this house – my house, a house so old it has a weird name: Aonar. An inherited house that belonged to Mum's great-grandmother or someone. A house in the middle of green-and-brown nothingness . . .

On the day my brother Jack found the device, I was

waiting for Wikipedia to load. That's how it started: a slow website.

We'd only been here for a week, but already I understood that the days of instantaneous internet were over. Online gaming? Forget about it. Checking Insta? Only if you've a few hours free. It was like falling back in time, but without any of the fun you see in the time-travel movies. Dad said we'd end up getting proper fast internet from a satellite someday. But Dad says a lot of things – mostly about policing.

The Wikipedia page I waited for was 'Glossary of Scottish slang and jargon'. I was starting at a new school on Monday and didn't want to be caught out by not knowing key terms.

'Just be yourself,' the parents said.

But they were so old they'd forgotten that you're only successful in school by doing the exact *opposite* of this. *And* I was English. *And* I was joining two terms in. It wasn't fair. You couldn't get a more perfect situation for encouraging bullying.

All that effort I'd put into making friends back in Nottingham: wasted. It's not easy. You've got to pretend to be interested in other people. It takes work. It takes time. And I'd been popular. Not captain-of-a-sports-

team popular, but people-saying-hi-to-me-in-corridors popular.

What made things worse was that Jack wasn't even starting school until the following September. Dad, when he wasn't off pretending to be a police officer (sorry – a volunteer community support officer), would be home-schooling him. And anyone who's ever done any remote learning knows exactly what that means: messing around and doing no work. And I *love* messing around and doing no work. They're my twin passions. Well, them and violent sci-fi films.

A knock on my bedroom door.

I put on my glasses to see who dared interrupt my 'me' time. Mum. Wearing a yellow waterproof jacket and smiling.

'Good news,' she said. 'We thought we'd go for a walk!'

'No,' I replied. 'No way. I refuse. We're *always* going for walks. My legs still ache from yesterday. You go. I'm fine. I'm preparing for school. I'm doing research. Really.'

'I'm not asking,' said Mum. 'I'm telling.'

And I opened my mouth to say that I couldn't think of anything worse than going for a walk in the Highlands,

WITH JACK, *again*. But no words emerged because she gave me the look, the look that shrivelled my very soul.

‘Get your boots on,’ she said. ‘Now.’

Rolling off the bed in full grump, little did I know that the walk would CHANGE OUR LIVES.

Dramatic music