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Author of "Redfern Minor," etc., etc.



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Arthur Redfern’s Vow;

Or, THE DOWNFALL OF THE PLOTTER.

A Grand, Powerful Tale of School Life at St. Dolly’s.

By CHARLES HAMILTON.

Author of “REDFERN MINOR,” “KING CRICKET,” etc., etc.

CHAPTER 1.

The Smart Set of St. Dolly’s.

THERE was a blue haze of cigarette smoke in the room, and a hum of voices. It was a large, comfortable room—Ransome’s room at St. Dolly’s—and very well furnished for a Sixth-Form study. Ransome, indeed, always seemed to have plenty of money, which was a puzzle to some of the fellows at St. Dolly’s, as his people were known to be poor. But that was not the only thing about Ransome which the school did not quite understand.

Ransome was sitting in the window-seat, with a cigarette between his thin lips. From where he sat he had a view of the old quadrangle of St. Dorothy’s, and the wide, green playing-fields. The fine old elms were leafless now, and did not obstruct the view. He could have seen, if he had liked, the football-ground, where a big match was to be played that afternoon—a senior match between the Classical and the Modern sides at St. Dolly’s. But he did not even glance in that direction. Football had no interest for Ransome of the Sixth, unless he could make a bet on it, and then, indeed, his interest in a match could be keen enough.

There were half a dozen fellows in the study as well as its master. They did not all belong to the Sixth, either. It was not customary for a Sixth-Former to entertain Lower-Form fellows; but Ransome had his own ways.

There were Fellowes and Vane of the Sixth, and Allen and Mills of the Fifth, and they were all smoking cigarettes. Two fags of the Fourth—Gunter and Wake—were sitting on the extreme edges of their chairs, feeling and looking uneasy, but in a state of great pride and importance at being admitted to the meeting of the Smart Set of St. Dolly’s. Nobody took much notice of the fags; still, they were permitted to be there, and to watch their elders smoking cigarettes, in defiance of all the rules of the school; and that was quite exhilarating to the two fags. They felt that this was “life.”

At the same time, the fags were feeling an inward quake at the thought that some perfect might happen along, and catch the Smart Set in the act. The Fifth fellows, as a matter of fact, were not without their terrors, though they concealed their feelings well, and seemed to be greatly enjoying their smoke.

Ransome blew out a little blue cloud, and through it looked over the faces of the fellows in the study.

“Well, what do you say?” he asked suddenly.

There had been silence in the study for some minutes. Ransome’s question broke it suddenly.

“I don’t know,” said Fellowes.

“Better make up your minds. I am going down to Burford this afternoon—”

“Aren’t you going to see the match, Ransome?”

Ransome smiled contemptuously.

“Not likely, Vane. I’ve something more important to think about than football. Blessed if I know how the fellows can waste their time over it.”

“Oh, hang!” said Fellowes. “It’s a jolly good game, I suppose?”

Ransome shrugged his shoulders.

“Well, you can go and watch it,” he said, with a yawn. “I’ve got something better to do. I expect to pull in a tidy little sum at Burford. You can do the same if you like. Keen Billy is certain to win. I’ve had a deadsure snip, straight from the horse’s mouth almost. But you can do as you like, of course.”

“Well, as your chum Redfern major is playing—”

Ransome’s brow darkened.

“Redfern major is no chum of mine. We used to chum up, but it’s never been the same since his young brother came to St. Dolly’s, the interfering young puppy! We hardly speak now. Never mind Redfern major.”

“You’ll vote for him in the captain’s election, I suppose?”

“I shall do nothing of the sort,” said Ransome coolly. “I shall not vote at all, unless it is worth my while. But never mind the election now, or the football, either. The question is about Keen Billy for the Burford Stakes. Are you fellows going to put anything on—and are you coming with me?”

There was another silence in the study.

Under Ransome’s influence, the more reckless spirits had broken many of the minor rules of the school; but the most reckless of them balked at this. It was no light matter to go to the races—it was pretty certain expulsion if it were found out, for one thing, and the sack was a serious matter. Ransome, certainly, had a knack of getting out

of the most serious scrapes; but other fellows might not be so lucky.

"If you don't want to come, I can work the oracle for you," said Ransome, as he proceeded to light another cigarette at the stump of the old one. "Hand me what cash you want to put on the gee-gee, and I'll manage it for you with the bookies."

"And if it's lost?" piped out little Gunter, of the Fourth.

Ransome stared at him in a very disconcerting way, which made the fag wish he had not spoken, and wish devoutly, too, that the floor would open and swallow him up.

"If it's lost, it's lost," said Ransome. "If you win, you win. It doesn't need any extraordinary intelligence to work that out!"

"I—I meant——"

"Keen Billy is a cert., as near as can be told, that's all," said Ransome. "But if any fellow is afraid to bet, let him keep his cash in his trousers-pocket. I want only sportsmen to risk their tin, if I have anything to do with it!"

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Ransome!" stammered the fag, covered with confusion.

"I—I——"

Ransome took no further notice of him.

"I'll come with you, Ransome," said Vane. "It will be fun, anyway. What about you, Fellowes?"

Fellowes hesitated.

"I—I think I'd like to see the match," he remarked. "You see, they're saying that the captain's election depends a great deal on the result of the match, and I want to know how it goes, you know!"

"I don't see that it matters to us whether Knowles or Redfern major gets in," said Vane. "But do as you like. I'm coming with you, Ransome."

"Right-ho!" said the cad of the Sixth. "Now, if you fellows want to lay any tin, hurry up, as we shall have to be off!"

"You think Keen Billy's a sure thing?" said Allen, of the Fifth, hesitatingly.

"I've said so."

"Ye-es, but——"

"Racing's full of uncertainties, of course," said Ransome. "I'll lay the bets, and you'll take your chance. But I don't want to persuade you."

"I'll have five bob on, anyway," said Mills.

"Same for me!" said Allen at once.

"I'll make it a sovereign!" said Fellowes, who was one of the wealthiest fellows in the Sixth. "It's worth a flutter, anyway."

"And I——"

Gunter, of the Fourth, was just beginning, when the door of the study opened suddenly and without warning.

A tall, handsome Sixth-Former stood in the doorway and looked in, and then strode into the room.

It was Redfern major—Arthur Redfern, of the Sixth. A junior, curiously like him in features, but of a more sturdy cast, followed him into the room. That was Redfern minor. There was a dead silence in the study for a full minute.

Arthur Redfern looked at the Smart Set, his eyes gleaming with anger. The smokers went on smoking mechanically, and Gunter

and Wake thanked their lucky stars that they had no cigarettes in their mouths. Fellowes, Mills, and Allen had laid their money on the table, and it was glimmering there in full view, a pretty plain indication of what had been going on.

It was Ransome who broke the silence. It was very seldom that Ransome lost his coolness, and after the first start of surprise, he recovered it now. Since his break with Redfern major he had felt that the time must come when he would have to measure strength with his former dupe.

He deliberately struck a match and lighted a fresh cigarette, an act of defiance that moved the unbounded admiration of the fags.

"Hallo!" he said coolly, looking at Redfern major through the haze. "Come to join our little gathering? You're welcome, though you might have knocked. Sit down!"

"I did not come here to sit down!" said Arthur curtly.

"Oh, if you prefer standing, there's no objection; everyone to his taste!" said Ransome smoothly. "Will you have a smoke?"

Gunter tittered. Then he caught Redfern minor's eyes, and the titter died away with remarkable suddenness.

"No," said Arthur quietly. "Put that cigarette down, Ransome!"

Ransome's lips set hard. The cigarette remained between them. A green glint came into his eyes.

"What business have you to give orders in my study?" he said savagely, but still keeping perfectly calm. "You are not a prefect now."

"The Head has restored my prefectship to-day," said Arthur quietly. "I am a prefect again, Ransome; but even if I were not I should interfere here. You shall not lead any fellows into scrapes, if I can help it, as you led me. I have never reproached you with what you did—and I have never betrayed you. But I tell you plainly—there's got to be a change!"

"Indeed!" drawled Ransome.

"Yes, indeed! You have been making bets here even now, I believe. Dare you deny it?"

Ransome shrugged his shoulders.

"You are leading these fellows into your own ways—these and others—and I tell you, Ransome, there is to be an end of it. If I get in as captain of St. Dolly's I shall make a clean sweep, I promise you."

"You are not captain yet," said Ransome, in a silky, dangerous voice.

"No. But I am a prefect, and that's enough; though, as I said, in any case, I should interfere. Throw those cigarettes away!"

Arthur's voice rang with authority. Fellowes and Vane, Mills and Allen coloured, and threw their smokes into the grate. Ransome went on steadily smoking, though his face was paler now. He had never seen Arthur like this before. Where had the prefect gained this courage and determination? Surely it was bluff! Ransome's eyes glittered through the haze of the cigarette, which he did not remove from his lips. Arthur Red-

fern gazed at him steadily, and there was a breathless silence in the study.

"You heard me, Ransome?"

"Yes."

"Are you going to obey me?"

"No."

Short and sharp was the answer; Ransome had flung down the gauntlet. Arthur drew a deep breath. Redfern minor's brow darkened, but he did not speak. It was his major's business; but he prayed in his heart that Arthur would be equal to the test. For weakness now would be the ruin of the resolve Arthur had made; a defeat at the beginning meant the end of it all.

But there was no weakness in Arthur Redfern's breast at that moment. He took out his watch with a steady hand.

"I give you one minute, Ransome, to think it over."

"And what then?" said Ransome, with a sneer. "You will go sneaking to the Head with a tale that your old chum is keeping up your own old habits!"

Arthur turned crimson.

"No," he said, "I shall not go to the Head, the matter is not serious enough for a prefect's report. I shall deal with it myself. If you do not stop smoking——"

"Well?"

"I shall make you!"

Ransome's teeth bit almost through the cigarette. He could not yield now without making himself ridiculous in the eyes of the Smart Set, who were watching him breathlessly. What a fool he had been to light that cigarette out of bravado! But it was too late to think of that now.

Arthur Redfern put the watch back into his pocket.

"Time's up, Ransome!"

"I'm nearly finished, thank you!"

"You will finish now."

Ransome gave a shrug. Arthur Redfern made a stride forward, and his hands fell upon the cad of the Sixth. Ransome was no weakling, but in that strong grip he was whirled from his seat as if he had been a child. He gasped, and then yelled, as the remnant of the cigarette slipped from his mouth. He spat it out furiously, and, clenching his hand, struck Arthur Redfern full in the face!

Redfern's eyes blazed.

He whirled Ransome off his feet, and flung him away; and the cad of the Sixth crashed on the floor, and lay there, panting, white with rage. Arthur stood over him, his fists clenched hard.

"Is that enough, Ransome?"

Ransome made no reply; he was panting for breath. The Smart Set quietly slipped out of the study, excepting Gunter and Wake, who seemed rooted to their chairs with terror.

Ransome staggered to his feet at last.

"Yes," he said quietly; "I shall remember this, Redfern—and I will make you remember it!"

Arthur smiled scornfully.

"I want you to remember it," he said; "and the others, too. There will be no gambling, smoking, or blackguardism of any

sort in the Sixth while I can stop it. I've failed in my duty as a prefect before; I shall not fail again. That's all!"

He turned to the door.

"Come on, Sidney!"

"What-ho!" said Redfern minor cheerily. "I'll help these two young beggars out. They belong to my Form, and I'm going to keep a parental eye on them!"

And Redfern minor took a grip with either hand upon the collars of Gunter and Wake, and jerked them off their chairs. Arthur smiled and quitted the study. Redfern minor swung the two fags towards the door, feebly resisting.

"Come on, my infants," said Redfern minor cheerily. "I'm going to look after you. March!"

"I say, Reddy—— Ow!"

"Yow!"

Redfern minor was applying his boot, not at all gently, in the rear. Under this forcible persuasion the junior members of the Smart Set bolted out of the study and down the passage, Redfern keeping close behind with active boot, as if he were taking a footer down the field. Gunter and Wake were yelling, and considerably hurt, by the time they dodged into a study and escaped.

Ransome remained alone—shaken, furious, white with rage and spite. Redfern major had been his friend once, or, rather, his dupe and victim; there had been little friendship on Ransome's part. But now in St. Dolly's, or in the wide world, Arthur Redfern had no bitterer enemy than Ransome.

"That's the beginning of the end, Sid," said Arthur Redfern to his minor a few moments later. "You see, old man, I'm going to keep my vow."

And the brothers clasped hands.

CHAPTER 2.

A Most Important Occasion.

"SUCH a lot," said Redfern minor thoughtfully—"such a blessed lot depends on the result of the football match to-day."

And Skelton and Brown solemnly echoed:

"Such a blessed lot!"

"But, whatever happens, you chaps, you understand one thing—my major's got to get in as captain of St. Dolly's!"

Redfern minor was sitting on the corner of the table in Study 1, in the Fourth-Form passage at St. Dorothy's. With upraised forefinger he was laying down the law.

Skelton sat astride of a chair, with his face to the back thereof, leaning on his elbows, his chin in his hands. Brown was standing beside the fireplace, with one eye on Redfern and the other on some roasting chestnuts. He was dividing his attention equally between Redfern minor and the chestnuts.

Redfern minor was in deadly earnest.

For there was a crisis in the history of St. Dolly's, and the Fourth Form felt that it behoved them to rise to the occasion.

ARTHUR REDFERN'S VOW.

Lunsford, of the Sixth, the captain of the school, had left. The captaincy was vacant. Now, every fellow at St. Dolly's, from the head prefect in the Sixth down to the smallest fag, had a voice in the election of the captain of the school. On such occasions Jack was as good as his master, so to speak; the most diminutive, inky-fingered fag had as much to say as a prefect, at whose frown he trembled.

And the Fourth Form, being more numerous than the Fifth or Sixth, was of more importance on these occasions than others—a peculiar state of affairs, but one which the Fourth-Formers felt to be quite in accordance with the fitness of things.

Any school election at St. Dolly's was certain to be disputed, for the school was divided into two sides—Classical and Modern—and each side was certain to put up a candidate. And so it was now, for when Lunsford left Redfern major and Knowles, of the Sixth, put in their names as candidates for the vacant post. Redfern major was a Classical; Knowles belonged to the Modern side—a side that had not been long in existence at St. Dolly's, but was very numerous. The Moderns received a "sound commercial education," instead of the old Classical training, much to the disgust of the Classical youths, who wanted to know what the public schools of this country were coming to; while the Moderns, on their side, made unpleasant remarks about old fogies and pedants and stick-in-the-mud duffers, and so forth.

Redfern minor naturally took the matter very much to heart.

Not only was he a Classical scholar, but it was his elder brother who was standing as the Classical candidate, and so, if St. Dolly's was not to go to the dogs at express speed, it was absolutely imperative for Redfern major to get in as captain.

"I think we can depend upon most of our side to vote Classical," said Redfern, tapping on his knee with his finger. "That's the best of the Classical side—the old brigade—they're loyal. They'll back up my major."

"Yes, rather!" said Skelton.

"But about the Modern worms," went on Redfern, with a thoughtful frown. "They're as thick as thieves, you know. It's no good arguing with them; it's perfectly disgusting the way they stick to one another, and won't listen to reason."

A curious sound came from Brown. He bent down hurriedly and looked at his roasting chestnuts as Redfern turned a wrathful eye upon him.

"What's the matter, Brown?"

"Nothing," said Brown hastily.

"Then what were you guggling about?"

"I—I wasn't aware that I was guggling."

"Well, it sounded to me as if you were guggling. If you can't do anything but guggle at a time like this, Brown Tertius, why—"

"I say, these chestnuts are ready."

"Chestnuts! Talk about fiddling while Rome's burning!" exclaimed Redfern minor indignantly. "If you're looking for a thick ear, Brown III.—"

"Oh, keep your wool on!" said Brown.

"The election's not till seven to-night, and we've only just had dinner. No harm in baking chestnuts, I suppose?"

"B-r-r-r! There's more important matters than chestnuts to think of. How is that blessed election going! That's the point."

"Well, I suppose most of the Classics will back up the Classical candidate," said Skelton, "and most of the Moderns will back up Knowles. Only a blessed lot depends on the footer match. If we win, it will mean a heap of votes for your major."

"And if the Mods win—"

"Then I'm afraid Knowles will get in."

"And then St. Dolly's may as well shut up shop, and have done with it," said Redfern, with exaggerated gloom. "There never has been a Modern captain of St. Dolly's yet. I don't know what will happen if Knowles gets in."

"It will be rotten."

"Of course, I've nothing against Knowles," said Redfern. "Knowles is all right, in a way. I don't take to him, but I wouldn't condemn a chap just because I don't take to him."

Redfern said this in the most magnanimous way, and Skelton nodded a full assent to his magnanimity.

"But he's a Modern—a chap who takes German instead of Greek, and chemistry instead of Latin—one of those beasts who can do awful mathematical problems in their heads—a fellow I can't stand," said Redfern minor. "I don't deny that he plays a good game of footer, but he's not up to my major in that line."

"Not half!" said Skelton.

"We may as well get down to the ground, anyway," said Redfern. "Those Modern cads will be bagging all the best places if we let them. There's certain to be a crowd. What's the time?"

"Two o'clock," said Skelton, looking at his big silver watch.

"My hat! Why, the kick-off is half-past!" exclaimed Redfern indignantly. "Fancy you chaps sitting here and jawing and eating chestnuts while the Moderns are bagging all the places on the football-ground!"

"Why, it was you jawing—"

"Oh, don't begin to argue now! Get a move on."

"But you—"

"Oh, come on!"

Redfern jerked at the door. To his surprise, it did not move. He jerked again, and the door opened about half an inch, and then remained fast.

"What's the matter with this door?" he roared. "Who's been playing the giddy goat with this blessed door?"

"It's fastened," said Brown, in surprise—"fastened on the outside."

"Go hon!" said Redfern sarcastically. "How long did it take your mighty brain to guess that?"

He shook the door furiously. There was a chuckle in the passage outside. Redfern kicked at the door.

"You modern cads—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Unfasten this door!"

"Sorry; no time to stop!" said a sweet voice outside. "We're off to the footer match. We hope you will get a good place—when you arrive!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Taffy, you beast——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Taffy and Co., leaders of the Modern side in the Fourth Form at St. Dolly's, went on their way, chuckling gleefully. Redfern wrenched at the door. But a cord was stretched taut across the passage, from the handle to the handle of the door opposite, and the cord was too strong to break.

"My only hat!" said Skelton. "This is a go!"

"Oh, lend a hand here!" grunted Redfern.

"What's the good of jawing? Lend a hand!"

"There ain't room for more'n one to catch hold of the blessed handle."

"Ass! I never said there was."

"Look here, Reddy——"

"Oh, don't jaw! I'll take the handle in both hands, and get a good grip, you put your arms round me and pull, and Brown can put his arms round you and pull, and we'll have it open, if we bust something."

"Oh, all right!"

"Catch hold!"

And they caught hold. Redfern's strong hands closed on the door-handle with a grip like a vice, and Skelton dragged on him, and Brown dragged on Skelton.

"Now, put your backs into it!" said Redfern. "Pull!"

And they pulled.

"Go it!" gasped Redfern. "I—I can feel something coming! I—— Oh!"

Something came; it was the handle of the door, which wasn't built to stand a strain like that. It came off in Redfern's hands, and the three juniors shot backwards.

Brown bumped down heavily, and Skelton bumped on Brown, and Redfern bumped on Skelton.

Three distinct and formidable roars rang through the study.

"Oh!"

"Ow!"

"Yow!"

"You—you asses!" gasped Redfern, as he staggered up.

"Why, it was your fault!" shrieked Skelton. "Who pulled the blessed handle off the door?"

"Oh," moaned Brown, "I'm squashed!"

"It was Reddy's fault——"

"You can argue it out if you like," said Redfern severely; "I'm going down to the footer."

"Oh! Ow!"

The inside handle having come off, the outside portion fell away, the cord with it. Redfern minor opened the door, and passed out into the corridor.

"Oh," gasped Skelton. "I got somebody's blessed knee in my back!"

"Some idiot bumped his silly back on my knee," grunted Brown.

"Oh!"

"Ow!"

"Oh, rats! Let's get down to the footer." And they followed Redfern minor.

CHAPTER 3.

Classicals and Moderns.

HERE was already a crowd round the senior football-ground of St. Dolly's. The crowd was large, and it was increasing. It still wanted a quarter of an hour to the kick-off, but there was a great deal of keenness shown in getting good places. Fellows of all Forms were there, all interested, all eager. The influence the result of that match might have on the captain's election was known to all; but without that consideration, the match itself was likely to be a keenly contested one. It was a senior match between the Classical and the Modern sides.

They were very proud of their football at St. Dolly's. They prided themselves upon their cricket, upon their hockey, and upon their sprinting and their swimming, and upon a few other things; in fact, they had altogether a very good opinion of themselves. But among all things they prided themselves upon, there was no doubt that footer was an easy first.

They played football, as they told their friends, with the accent on the "played." To get one's cap for the first eleven at St. Dolly's was not to obtain a sinecure. A fellow who worked his way into the first eleven had to work to keep his place there. It was a place worth having. And most of the fellows in the Fifth and Sixth, Classical and Modern, would have given a little finger for the much-coveted cap.

And this made the election of the school captain an anxious question to both sides, for the school captain at St. Dolly's was the football captain, and each side felt that it had most to expect from a captain of its own selection. But it was also a fact that many of the seniors, keen footballers, cared more for the game than for the distinction of Classical and Modern, or for anything else, and they were inclined to vote for the fellow they considered most likely to uphold the honour of St. Dolly's in the footer-field.

The Classicals prided themselves upon keeping up the traditions of St. Dolly's in connection with the sports, but the Moderns had been coming very much to the front of late. Their head prefect, Knowles, was certainly a fine footballer—a little given, perhaps, to carping and fault-finding, and sometimes of uncertain temper—but played a splendid game. The Moderns proudly asked where a better skipper could be found than old Knowles—a question to which the Classicals replied by the statement that Arthur Redfern was the man.

The match had fallen due on the same day that the election was to take place. That the support given to the two candidates was pretty equal was a well-known fact, and it was quite probable that the result of the football match would turn the scale.

Hence the unusual keenness displayed by the school. All other matches were off that day. Classicals and Moderns gathered round the field to watch the great game.

Taffy, Vernon, and Rake, of the Modern side—better known as Taffy and Co.—were

jammed in against the ropes by a crowd of fags, mostly of their own party. Taffy and Co. were in high good humour. They had secured excellent places for themselves, and they had left their rivals of the Fourth fastened up in their study—two causes for congratulation. Taffy glanced up at the big school clock, visible from the football-ground.

"Quarter past," he said. "I wonder whether those Classical duffers will get out in time for the match?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah! Modern worms!"

Taffy turned his head quickly. Three indignant youths were marching up to the ground, and they bestowed wrathful glances upon the Modern chums. Taffy and Co. chuckled.

"Hallo! You've got out?"

"Yes. Come over here, and I'll give you a thick ear!"

"Haven't time to lick you now," said Taffy loftily. "I'll dot you on the nose after the match, if you like."

"Yah!"

"Boo!"

And with that exchange of compliments, the Modern juniors turned their attention to the field again. It was a cold, keen winter's day, and the level green, with its white lines, looked very inviting. Redfern, Skelton, and Brown pushed among the fags with powerful shoulders to gain a front place. All St. Dolly's seemed to be crammed round the ropes, as well as a great many of their acquaintances from outside the school, and all good places had long been taken up.

"We're late," said Redfern minor. "This is what comes of gorging chestnuts in a study instead of attending to business."

"Why, you—"

"Of course, you can waste time talking if you like, but I think it would be better to get a good place before the game begins. Shove!"

"Here, who are you shoving?" angrily demanded a Modern youth, turning his head and glaring at the Classical trio.

"I'm shoving you, Norton, old chap," said Redfern affably.

"You—you Classical cad! What are you shoving me for?"

"To shift you, of course. I want to get in front."

The reply to Norton's question was a perfectly reasonable one, but it did not seem to have the effect of pacifying him. He turned the colour of a beetroot.

"Line up, Mods!" he shouted. "Here's Classical cads shoving."

"'Rah! Down with the Classical cads!"

"Keep 'em out!"

And a crowd of Modern fags wedged themselves round Norton, and presented a sort of Macedonian phalanx to the attack of the Classical chums. They greeted the Classics with yells and hoots, and warm invitations to "come on." It was an invitation Redfern and Co. were never slow to accept.

"Come on!" said Redfern. "Elbows and knees, and down with the Mods!"

"What ho!"

There was a scramble and a scuffle imme-

diately. Redfern and Co., backed up by other Classics, wedged their way on. The Moderns resisted desperately, and Taffy and Co. came squeezing to the rescue. There was a trampling and a squeezing and a hooting and a hubbub that was heard all over the field.

A tall, somewhat thin-featured senior came out of the pavilion, and cast an angry glance towards the struggling juniors.

"Stop that row!" he exclaimed, in a sharp voice. "Do you hear? What do you mean by making a row on the ground?"

"All right, Knowles; it's the Classical cads shoving."

"It's all right, Knowles; it's the Modern worms sticking in the way."

Knowles frowned.

"I'll be there among you in a minute, if you don't stop it!" he exclaimed.

As that would have meant a general flight of the juniors, and a free scramble for places afterwards, it was not likely to make the Classics stop shoving. The scramble, in fact, became worse than ever. But another senior had followed Knowles out—a big, handsome Sixth-Former, who was very like Redfern in looks, being, in fact, his elder brother. He smiled as he looked at the swaying crowd of juniors—a good-humoured smile.

"Here, stop that, kids!" he said good-naturedly. "Don't make a row now, you know. You chaps are shoving. Chuck it, and be quiet, there's good fellows."

"Oh, rats!" growled Skelton, under his breath. "I suppose we must chuck it, if he puts it that way. That blessed major of yours is too jolly persuasive by half, Reddy."

Redfern minor grinned.

"Never mind; we'll find a place. What price that tree?"

"Jolly good!"

The tree was a short distance from the football-ground, and its wide branches afforded ample hold, and gave a splendid view of every corner of the ground. Under the tree, some fellows had put benches to stand on, to get a view over the heads of the crowd. Redfern and Co. ran towards the tree, and the scramble ceased, the Moderns victoriously keeping their places. It did not take the Classical juniors long to swarm up the gnarled trunk, and to crawl out on a stout branch extending towards the playing-fields.

"Yell as much as you like!" said Redfern warningly. "Don't let go to clap, or you'll tumble."

He was standing on the thick branch himself, holding on to an upper one, and his feet were a good eight or nine feet from the ground. It was not a position in which the keenest footballer would be wise to allow himself to grow too enthusiastic.

"I wonder if they're ever going to kick-off?" grumbled Skelton.

"Close on time now. There's the referee!"

Mr. Staines, the master of the Fifth Form in Norfolk jacket and his whistle, had appeared in sight. Mr. Staines was a keen follower of the great game, and he frequently acted as referee in senior matches. Some of the juniors, eager to begin cheering, gave

the referee a cheer, whereat the Fifth-Form master smiled.

"By Jove, what a crowd!" said Redfern minor. "I've never seen so many on the ground before. Most of the masters here, too. There's Ford of ours, and Crane of the Third."

"Hallo, here are the players at last! They're going to begin."

And every eye was turned upon the football-field, where the players were streaming out.

CHAPTER 4.

The Football Match.

ARTHUR REDFERN, the captain of the Classical team, was looking very fit. Redfern minor looked at him with justifiable pride. He had reason to be proud of his elder brother. There was not a finer footballer or a finer fellow at St. Dorothy's. And that fatal weakness of character, which had threatened to wreck Arthur's career, seemed to be quite gone, too, of late months. Arthur seemed a new man since the time when Redfern minor had risked so much to save him from his own folly. It was no wonder that Sidney Redfern was proud of his brother, and the Classics of their captain.

Knowles, too, cut a very fine figure. And both teams were in good form and eager for the fray. It was evident that it would be a hard-contested match, and worth watching. And more than one fellow openly said that there wasn't a pin to choose between Arthur Redfern and Knowles for school-captain, and that his vote would be given to the winning skipper of that day's match.

There was little wind, and the winner of the toss made little difference. Knowles won it, as a matter of fact, and gave Arthur Redfern the kick-off. Every eye was on the two teams as they lined up, the Classics in red shirts, the Moderns in blue.

Arthur set the ball rolling, and amid a breathless hush of interest, the game commenced, the game which was to have a considerable effect on the history of St. Dolly's for some time to come.

"Go it, ye cripples!" exclaimed Redfern minor, as the Classical forwards followed the ball. "Give 'em socks!"

"Buck up, Mods!" sang out Taffy, with a defiant glance across his comrades' heads at the juniors in the tree. "Play up!"

"On the ball!"

The Classics were on the ball with a vengeance. The forwards were in fine fettle, and their passing was superb. Arthur Redfern, who was in the centre, sent the ball out to his left wing. Price, inside, sent it on to Courtney at outside-left, who transferred as he was tackled, letting Arthur have it again. It was quick work, and it fogged the Moderns a little. Arthur went on at top speed, dribbling the ball, and he was through the halves before they knew what was happening.

The backs rushed in, and the ball was taken away from Arthur, only to be recap-

tured by his right wingers, and rushed on towards the Modern goal.

"Bravo!" roared Redfern minor. "Kick, you beggars, kick!"

"Hurrah!"

The leather came whizzing in, and Carne, the Modern goalkeeper, fisted it out again. He fisted it out twice, and again it came in, the backs having no chance of clearing. Out it went again with a mighty swipe from his foot, only to drop at the feet of Arthur Redfern, and to come again with a sudden whiz that gave the goalie no earthly chance.

Plop!

There was a roar!

The leather was in the net!

"Goal!"

"Goal! Hurrah! 'Rah! 'Rah! 'Rah!"

The ball was in the net within ten minutes of the start, and the Moderns had not had a look-in at all yet. Carne tossed it out with a rueful face. Knowles gave him an unpleasant look; and those who were near enough could see that the Modern skipper was in a boiling temper, though he kept it under.

"Hang it!" murmured Taffy, who had a good view of the proceedings. "It wasn't Carne's fault. Lots of league goalies would never have stopped that ball."

"Just what I was going to say," remarked Rake.

Vernon nodded his head sagely.

Our esteemed captain hasn't the sweetest temper in the world, chappies," he remarked. "He wants to win badly, too. He did look savage. Beastly bad form on a footer-field."

"How those Classical cads are yelling, too! One would think a goal had never been taken on a footer-ground before."

"Goal! Goal! Goal!"

"Oh, ring off!"

"Yah! Goal! Goal! Hurrah!"

"I say, chappies—"

"Goal! Goal! Bravo, Reddy!"

The fags ventured to call Redfern major Reddy in the excitement of the moment. They shouted themselves hoarse over that first goal.

"It's ripping!" said Redfern minor, when he was fatigued with yelling. "Simply ripping! You see, it's the beginning of the blessed end."

"What-ho!" said Skelton and Brown.

"Your major is all right, Reddy."

"I should say he is," said Redfern indignantly. "Let me hear anybody say he isn't, that's all!"

"Hallo! There they go again! Bravo, Reddy! Buck up, Classics!"

The Classical forwards were sweeping down the field again in line. They passed the ball like clockwork, and again the Modern defence was beaten, the ball escaping them all the time. There was a brilliant attack on goal, but Carne was found equal to it this time. With a powerful kick he cleared to mid-field, over the heads of the Classics, and then Knowles saw his opportunity.

The way he seized it showed that he was a first-class player. He was on the ball in a twinkling, and away with it like a flash.

The Classical halves were nowhere, the backs far afield. Knowles went for the goal like a streak of lightning, with only the goalie to fear, though the Classical defenders were straining on his track like hounds after a deer.

The goalie was all eyes and hands, ready for anything. But the Modern skipper was too much for him. Changing his feet at the last moment, he sent a shot into the far corner of the net, which gave the guardian no chance at all. The leather was in the net in the twinkling of an eye, and the goalie's despairing clutch swept only empty space.

Then there was a roar!

The Classics had shown what they could do in the way of yelling, and now it was the turn of the Moderns. And they showed that their lungs were made of the right British materials.

"Goal! Goal! Hurrah!"

Skelton sniffed.

"Lot of trouble they make about an old goal!" he remarked. "I can't understand those fellows. It will make no difference in the long run."

Knowles walked back to the centre of the field with a flushed face and a glitter in his eyes. It had been a splendid goal, taken practically unaided, and he deserved the cheers he received. And the cheers were music to his ears. Classics were cheering as well as Moderns, and that might mean votes.

"Jolly good, Knowles, old man!" exclaimed Arthur Redfern, as they came back to the line.

Knowles nodded, with a somewhat sarcastic grin.

He was too keenly anxious about the result of the game to have any time for sportsmanlike feelings about it, and in his heart he characterised Arthur's remark as "humbug." Knowles had a suspicious nature.

The Moderns had not been long in equalising, and the faces of their supporters brightened again, and their hopes rose high.

It really seemed as if there was little to choose between the two teams. The game was likely to be a gruelling one, with plenty of hard work and good play on both sides, the kind of game a football-lover likes to watch.

Arthur Redfern kicked off again.

There was a long spell of play in mid-field, with plenty of sharp work that resulted in nothing, the defence on both sides being good and steady. Then the Classics worked the ball along the touchline, the leather frequently going into touch, but the Classics advancing all the time, till the Moderns were forced to concede a corner.

Then there was a breathless hush.

The corner-kick was taken by North, and every eye was on the alert as the leather dropped, and Arthur Redfern made a gallant attempt; but the kick did not materialise. The wind deflected it the merest trifle, and it bounced from a goalpost back into the field of play, and was instantly cleared.

Redfern minor grunted.

"Hard cheese!" he said. "Beastly hard cheese! Yah!"

The Moderns were attacking in force.

The Classics had fallen back for the defence of their goal; but the Moderns were wedging their way on splendidly, with a fine exhibition of passing that brought ringing cheers from their supporters.

Faster and harder was the play, and the ball popped out of the press like a pip from an orange, only to be fisted out by the goalie again and again, and Kelly cleared each time, amid loud Classical cheers.

"My hat!" muttered Redfern minor anxiously. "They're pressing home! Why don't the beggars clear?"

"Kick, kick!" yelled Taffy and Co., in huge delight.

A charge rolled Arthur Redfern over, and North rolled over him. Knowles added himself to the heap, and muttered savagely as he dragged himself up. Price, the Classical left back, cleared at last, kicking the ball over him with a whiz. It was a tremendous kick, carrying the ball past the half-way line, and it went slanting into touch.

Redfern minor released one hand to take out his watch and look at it. He gave a low whistle.

"Close on half-time?" asked Brown III.

"Yes. Five minutes more to play."

"And the score equal," grunted Skelton. "I really think the Classics might give us one more goal before the whistle blows—I do really!"

"Well, they're trying!" grinned Brown.

They certainly were trying hard. Arthur Redfern and his red-shirted followers were attacking hotly; but the Moderns defended gamely, and the Classics did not seem to be able to get through.

"Play up, chaps!" muttered Arthur.

"We must have that other goal!"

All the Classics made a steady, combined effort. Very few minutes remained; but they were gaining.

The excitement was breathless.

"Go it!" gasped Redfern minor. "Shove 'em on! Go it! Give 'em beans! Now, then, all together, and you've done 'em!"

There was a roar. The leather had been sent in; but it bounced back from the goalpost.

A Modern back was upon it, and he kicked it clear; but—

A Classical head was in the way, and in the twinkling of an eye the ball was headed into the net!

There was a gasp and a roar.

"Goal!"

"Bravo, Redfern major!"

The whistle blew. The first half of that historic match was over. The Classics were one up.

Knowles's face was dark and clouded as he walked off the field.

CHAPTER 5.

The Second Half.

THE second half of the match commenced, Knowles kicking off for the Modern side. Knowles's face was not good-tempered now, and his lips were set tight and hard, and there was a glitter

in his eyes. The most casual observer could see that the Modern skipper took matters very much to heart, and that the Classical score was worrying him.

Arthur Redfern was quiet and cheerful, but evidently in a determined humour, and out for goals.

The St. Dolly's crowd eagerly watched the restart of the game.

The first half had had plenty of hard fighting, and the strain had left its mark upon the players on both sides.

Arthur, who was in splendid form, seemed to be still as fresh as paint, and Knowles was splendidly fit, though not amiable. The Classics, on the whole, stood the strain well. But the signs of lag were plain among the Modern men.

As a matter of fact, the wear and tear of a hard-contested match was showing up the quality of the players, and before the second half had been ten minutes in progress, it was pretty clear that the Classical side was the stronger of the two.

The Moderns fought well, and Carne in goal was especially good; but the Classical attack was sweeping, and for a long time the struggle was almost wholly in the Modern half.

Which, of course, was extremely gratifying to Redfern and Co.

"We're licking them!" said Skelton, with conviction, as he stared hard at the field, dodging for a view among the crowded heads. "The Mods can't hold a candle to us!"

"Us," were the Classical senior team, of course.

Redfern minor nodded.

"It looks like it, Skelty. But Knowles is a good man."

"Yes, if he had a better temper. It's not a sportsmanlike thing to scowl when the game is going against you."

Skelton was right; Knowles certainly was scowling every now and then—whenever he did not remember to control his features, as a matter of fact.

He was beginning to realise clearly that, in spite of all they declared to the contrary, the Modern side were not quite up to the Classics in matters of sport; and that discovery was extremely galling to him, especially as the captain's election probably depended upon the result of the match.

Knowles put all his "beef" into the game, and, in fact, he was playing the game of his life, but football is not a "one-man" game. Knowles could not be everywhere, and do everything; and as the second half wore on, and the Classics pressed hotter and hotter, the tide of fortune ran more strongly against the Moderns, and Knowles could not arrest it.

"By Jove!" said Redfern minor. "Kelly will catch cold if he doesn't get more exercise!"

Kelly, the Classical goalkeeper, was walking about in his goal, clapping his hands and waving his arms to keep warm, and exchanging remarks with the fellows round the ropes. He had had very little to do since the whistle went.

"Hallo, look there!" exclaimed Skelton. The Modern forwards had suddenly broken away.

They came in line down the field, passing the ball splendidly, and getting through the Classical defence in fine style.

The backs were beaten hollow, by the sudden surprise of the attack, which had changed the aspect of the game completely in a second or two. There was a buzz of renewed interest in the crowd, and loud cheers.

"Go it, Mods!"

"On the ball, Knowles!"

"Hurrah!"

Kelly sprang to attention at once. He met the ball as it came in from Knowles's foot, and fisted it out. A Classical back rushed in and cleared—or, rather, did not clear, for he kicked the ball fairly at Knowles, who headed it in in the twinkling of an eye.

Before Kelly knew it was coming it was in the net, and the Modern crowd were yelling with joy and relief.

"Goal, goal! Hurray!"

"Bravo, Knowles!"

The score was level.

The Modern skipper fully deserved the cheers he had won. He had snatched that goal from adverse fortune, so to speak; but the effort could not be repeated. The Classics were too careful for it to happen a second time.

They rallied after that glimpse of success for their rivals, and hemmed in the Moderns in their own half, and pressed for goal. Harder and harder the tussle grew, the Classics getting the better all the time, till at last the leather went in once more, and the Classics were one goal ahead again.

There was now only ten minutes to play to the finish, and the Moderns were fagged and disheartened as they lined up for it.

They had little chance of even equalising, and they knew it. But they were resolved to fight to a finish.

Redfern was rubbing his hands gleefully as they kicked off.

"It's ripping!" he said. "What do you think of my major, now, kids?"

"Oh, amazing!" said Skelton. "There never was, never will be, and never could be anybody like him."

Redfern minor grinned.

"No rot!" he said. "But he's easily the best footballer at St. Dolly's, and chance it. And he's going to be captain of the school—what?"

"Oh, rather!" said Skelton and Brown heartily.

They were quite at one with Redfern minor there.

"Make room, there!"

It was an unpleasant voice behind the juniors. Ransome, of the Sixth, was pushing his way forward, and he pushed Redfern minor very roughly. Ransome had his hat and coat on, and had evidently just come in. Redfern stared at him, his eyes gleaming. He did not like the bullying manner of the cad of the Sixth; and he was surprised, too,

at Ransome taking any interest in the football-match.

Redfern had not seen him since the scene in his study, when the Smart Set of St. Dolly's had been so discomfited by Arthur's visit.

"Who are you pushing?" demanded Skelton belligerently.

Ransome scowled.

"Get out of the way, you brat!"

The juniors reluctantly made way. Ransome reached the front, and looked at the field. The juniors heard him ask a Sixth-Former near him how the score stood.

Harris, of the Sixth, stared at him.

"Haven't you seen the game?"

"I've been out."

"Oh! Classicals are three to two."

Ransome snapped his teeth. He could not refrain that expression of annoyance and chagrin; but it made Harris stare in greater surprise.

"Well, you're a queer chap!" he exclaimed. "You look as if you'd rather the Moderns won."

"Oh, rats!" said Ransome.

"But he would rather the Mods won, though he's a Classical himself," said Redfern, in a low tone. "I never heard of such a cad! Hallo! Hark!"

It was a roar from the crowd.

"Goal!"

It was useless to ask who had scored it. Arthur Redfern had put the ball in the net. The Classicals were four to two now. And, with five minutes more to play, they pressed the Moderns again, harder and harder, and the Classical score stood at five.

Five goals to two.

And that was only the limit, because the whistle went. The score might have gone to almost any figure with another quarter of an hour to play. The Moderns were on their last legs, and it was all they could do to pack their goal, and keep the score unaltered till the blast of the whistle relieved them of the strain.

Phip!

The game ceased. The Classicals round the field were yelling exuberantly.

"Goal! Five to two. Hurrah! Good old Redfern!"

Arthur Redfern's face was bright. Knowles's lips were set like iron as he walked away towards the pavilion. Redfern major tapped him on the shoulder.

"Hard cheese, old man!" he said. "You put up a splendid game!"

Knowles stopped, and looked at him savagely. His bitter chagrin at having lost the match welled up in voice and look; he could not restrain it.

"I don't want any of your sympathy," he said abruptly. "You've won, and that's enough. My men did not back me up."

Redfern major stepped back.

"Oh, very well!" he said quietly.

Knowles gritted his teeth.

"Keep your condolences till they're asked for."

And he strode on.

But grim looks of disapproval followed him from all sides, and more than one mur-

mur; and it was probable that those hasty and bitter words would cost Knowles dear when the hour of the election came. For, Modern or Classical, the fellows of St. Dolly's wanted a sportsman for their captain, and a fellow who could take a defeat with a stiff upper lip, and Knowles evidently was not a fellow of that kind.

CHAPTER 6.

Canvassing for Votes.

REDFERN MINOR was busy. He sat in the study shared by the three chums, with a paper before him on the table, a pencil in his hand, and a deep frown upon his brow.

Redfern minor was not deep in a mathematical problem, nor was he composing Latin hexameters for the critical eyes of a Form-master. He was simply calculating the number of votes that could be depended upon for Arthur Redfern in the coming election for captain of the school.

Skelton glanced at the German clock on the mantelpiece.

"Getting near time," he remarked.

"Oh, that beast's a quarter of an hour fast," said Redfern, without looking up. "I say, Skelton, what price Ransome?"

"About twopence, I should think," said Skelton; "only I wouldn't like to give that for him."

"Same here," said Brown.

"Oh, don't rot, now!" said Redfern. "I mean, what about his vote? I suppose even a cad like Ransome can be depended upon to vote Classical at an election for school skipper?"

"I should think so. He could hardly be such a rotten outsider as to vote against his own side!" said Skelton warmly.

"And that blessed Smart Set," said Redfern. "There's Gunter and Wake, and several more, who are in the gang, and they're in our Form. You know, I rather think that they will vote which way Ransome tells them, whichever it is."

"Oh, he's bound to go Classical!"

"Well, I'm not quite so sure. If he does, and the rest of the Classicals stick together, it's a pretty sure thing for Arthur, for I know we can depend on at least twenty Modern votes. A lot of the Modern chaps who go in for sport are making a sporting matter of it, and plumping for Arthur, because he won the footer match."

"Good for them! Even the Mods aren't all duffers," said Skelton heartily.

"But I'm not sure about Ransome." Redfern rose from the table. "Let's go and do some canvassing."

"Some which?"

"Canvassing for votes," said Redfern minor.

"But Ransome will kick us out—"

"Well, we've been kicked out before, and we're none the worse for it," grinned Redfern. "I must know how the Smart Set vote is going."

Although Skelton was captain of the

Fourth Form, and Redfern his follower, Redfern did most of the leading, as a matter of fact. Skelton and Brown followed him from the study, and they made their way to the Sixth-Form passage, and Redfern tapped at Ransome's door. There was no reply, and he opened it and looked in. The room was empty.

Redfern grunted.

"I should think he was at the races, only we saw him on the footer-ground," he remarked. "Let's draw the other studies."

"Hallo, you youngsters!" said Arthur Redfern cheerily, as he met the juniors in the passage. "What are you doing here? It's nearly time for the election."

"Oh, looking round!" said Redfern minor. "Have you seen Ransome?"

"Yes, I saw him go into Knowles's study. What do you want with him?"

"Only to speak to him; it's rather important."

And Redfern minor hurried on before his brother could question him further. He tapped at Knowles's door, and the Modern prefect's voice bade him enter. Redfern opened the door.

Ransome was there. He was sitting on the edge of the table, talking to the Modern senior, who was standing on the hearthrug, with his hands in his pockets. Both of them glanced irritably at the three juniors.

"What do you want?" asked Knowles brusquely.

"Only a word with Ransome," said Sidney Redfern. "I say, Ransome, would you mind telling me how you're going to vote?"

"Mind your own business!" snapped Ransome.

"It is my business, you see," explained Redfern minor, with the coolness for which he was famous at St. Dolly's. "We're canvassing for votes."

Knowles burst into a laugh, but Ransome scowled.

"Get out!" he said.

"All right. Are you voting Classical?"

"Get out!" roared Ransome.

"I suppose you'll stick to your own side—eh?"

Ransome did not reply, but he came towards Redfern minor with his fist clenched and raised. His face was white with anger. The juniors crowded out of the door. Ransome stopped in the doorway, his eyes glittering.

"I suppose I may take it that you're voting Modern, then," said Sidney Redfern. "That's what you're chow-owing over with Knowles. Well, we'll win the election without you!"

"You young cad!"

Ransome caught up a cane from the prefect's table, and ran into the passage. The three juniors scuttled away; it was useless to stay and argue with the senior at that moment. But Ransome dashed after them, and the cane whistled in the air. Before it could descend, Ransome's arm was arrested, and he glared into the face of Arthur Redfern.

"Let me go!"

Arthur did not reply. He glanced at the juniors.

"Cut!" he said briefly.

"What-ho!" said Skelton, with equal brevity.

And the Classical chums "cut."

Ransome looked furiously at the Classical prefect. Arthur released his arm, and he lowered the cane. For the moment their eyes met—full—and then Ransome turned away. Not a word had been exchanged. But in that glance Ransome expressed all he felt of hatred and malice, and Arthur Redfern fully realised that in his old companion he had the bitterest enemy he had ever made.

The cad of the Sixth walked back to Knowles's study, and threw the cane on the table. He closed the door. The Modern prefect watched him curiously.

"What did you get your rag out like that for?" he said. "The youngsters were cheeky, but the fags are always that."

"I hate them!" said Ransome between his teeth. "Both the Redferns! And I'll make them sorry yet that they made an enemy of me!"

"Then I can depend upon your vote?"

"Yes; and upon all the votes I can muster! Look here, Knowles, I may as well put it plain," said Ransome abruptly. "I should naturally vote Classical, but I think you'll be a better skipper in many ways for St. Dolly's."

"Thanks!"

"Redfern major has set himself up to start a puritanical crusade," said Ransome savagely. "There's to be no smoking in the Sixth; a chap is never to have a game of billiards or back a horse! We're all to kow-tow to Redfern major and his confounded minor, and I, for one, am not going to stand it!"

"I should say not! I wouldn't!"

"If you get in as captain, you'll have more sense than to meddle; you'll know when to keep one eye closed, and not bother your head about another chap's affairs," said Ransome.

The Modern prefect met his eyes and then dropped his glance.

There was quite a long pause.

"What do you say, Knowles?"

"Yes," said the prefect at last; "I never was a meddler."

"Good!" said Ransome, with evident relief in his face. "Then I back you up through thick and thin, and there are a dozen fellows who'll vote as I tell them, too!"

"Good! I don't know if even that will balance Redfern major's party," said Knowles, with a gloomy look.

"Redfern major's party may not all be there."

The prefect started.

"Why not? They're bound to turn up in force."

"That's all right! Leave it to me!" said Ransome.

And he left the study. Knowles ran to the door.

"Ransome! Look here, no tricks, you know!"

But Ransome was gone. Knowles hesitated a moment, undecided whether to follow him or not; then he stepped back into the study, and closed the door.

CHAPTER 7.

No Intimidation.

SIDNEY REDFERN and his comrades lost no time in getting out of the Sixth-Form passage. Canvassing for votes was all very well, but that was not a healthy quarter for them just then. They turned into the Fifth-Form quarters, and recommenced operations there.

Most of the Fifth were as keen about the election as the juniors were. But the Fifth were a dignified Form—not quite so senior as the Sixth, but senior enough to stand very much upon their senior dignity. They did not appreciate being canvassed for votes by the fags of the Fourth, and so the Classical chums soon discovered.

Vane's study was the first they entered. Fellowes and Milward were there, and the Fifth fellows were discussing the election. They fixed a very unpleasant stare upon the juniors when the latter presented themselves.

"What do you want?" demanded Vane, who had not forgotten the scene in Ransome's study, in which Redfern minor had borne a part.

"We're canvassing for votes."

"Oh!" said Fellowes. "And you've come to canvass the Fifth?"

"Exactly!"

"You cheeky rats——" began Milward.

"No cheek about it. We're making up a list of the voters. I suppose we can rely upon you chaps to do the decent thing, and back up your own side?" said Redfern minor.

Vane grinned.

"Oh, come in, and talk it over!" he said.

"Right you are! We haven't much time to spare."

"We won't keep you long."

Vane was quite veracious there, for as soon as the three juniors were in the study, he made a sign to his companions and the youngsters were seized. They struggled, but in vain, in the muscular grip of the Fifth-Form fellows.

"Here, let go!" exclaimed Redfern minor indignantly. "What are you up to?"

"Kick them out!" grinned Vane.

"Hold on! We—— Oh, oh!"

"Yah! Oh! Ow!"

"Yaroo!"

One after another the three juniors were yanked to the door and sent flying into the passage with powerful kicks, which would have been useful on the football-field, but which seemed to the juniors quite out of place now.

Redfern, Skelton, and Brown went reeling along the passage, to sprawl in a heap half a dozen paces from Vane's door.

They sat up rather dazedly. Three grinning faces looked at them from the doorway of Vane's study.

"M-m-my hat!" gasped Skelton.

"Going to do any more canvassing for votes?" asked Vane.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Fellowes and Milward.

"N-n-no; I think not!" gasped Redfern.

Vane slammed the door, and the three juniors picked themselves up. Skelton and Brown glared accusingly at Redfern.

"Well, I must say your blessed idea of canvassing for votes is turning out a howling success!" said Skelton.

"Oh, rather—I don't think!" remarked Brown, with emphasis, as he dusted his trousers.

"Oh, rats!" said Redfern. "Perhaps we'd better confine the canvassing to our own Form, that's all."

"Yes, perhaps we had."

There wasn't much doubt that it would be wiser to do so. The three juniors turned their steps towards the Fourth-Form passage. At the corner of it a group in earnest conversation caught their eyes.

"Hallo!" said Redfern. "Ransome jawing to Taffy and Co.! What does that mean?"

"It means that he's voting Modern."

"Yes; I'm pretty certain of that."

Ransome was speaking very earnestly to the three Modern juniors. Taffy and Co. were chuckling, and they seemed so interested in what Ransome was saying that they did not even notice the Classical chums passing them.

"Let's go down to the common-room," said Redfern. "Gunter and Wake are there."

"What do you want with them?"

"A little jaw. You see, it's important to see that there's no intimidation in this election," explained Redfern minor. "Gunter and Wake are both Classicals, and they both belong to that precious Smart Set, with Ransome at the head of it. If Ransome votes Modern, he'll try to make them vote Modern, too."

"And they'll do it."

"They jolly well won't! That would be intimidation, if they voted as Ransome told them, because they were afraid to refuse."

"Well, we can't help it."

"Yes, we can! I'm going to see them, and explain that they needn't be afraid of Ransome, and that we sha'n't allow any intimidation under any circumstances."

"I don't see——"

"Never mind! You never do see anything, you know! Come on!"

"Look here, young Redfern——"

"Oh, come on; there's no time to jaw!"

"Rats! You always say that when you've said your own say!"

"What a chap you are to argue! Come on!"

They descended to the common-room. As it happened, Gunter and Wake were the only fellows there. Most of the Fourth Form had already crowded into the hall, where the election was to be held. The two junior

members of the Smart Set were eating tarts from a bag, and Redfern minor guessed where those tarts had come from. They were a bribe for the votes of the two juniors.

"Hallo!" said Redfern minor, halting in front of the two Fourth-Formers. "Aren't you going to vote this evening?"

"That's all right!" said Gunter. "There's plenty of time—half an hour yet."

"We're canvassing for votes," explained Redfern, taking out his notebook. "I suppose we can rely upon you two to vote Classical?"

Gunter and Wake exchanged glances.

"Well, you see—" began Gunter.

"You see—" started Wake.

"You are Classics!" said Redfern severely. "You are not going to be bullied and intimidated into voting against your own side, I suppose?"

"Well, Ransome said—"

"Never mind, Ransome; he's a worm! Are you going to vote Classical?"

"No!" said Gunter, with a touch of defiance.

Redfern frowned darkly.

"Then you're going to back up a Modern candidate against your own side!"

"Rotten traitors!" growled Skelton.

"Worms!" said Brown.

"I suppose we can vote as we like!" said Gunter defiantly. "We think Knowles will make a better captain! He won't meddle like Redfern major! So there!"

"Rotters!" said Skelton. "You're going to vote Modern for the sake of a bag of tarts. Blessed Esaus—selling your birth-right for a mess of pottage!"

"They're jolly good tarts," said Wake.

"Look here, you're going to vote Classical!" said Redfern decidedly. "Ransome has no right to try to influence you in any way. It's intimidation, to say nothing of bribery and corruption by means of tarts. You're going to defy the bully—"

"He hasn't bullied us."

"Yes, he has, but you're too busy guzzling tarts to notice when you're losing your dignity and independence," said Redfern minor witheringly. "As heads of the Fourth Form, we can't possibly allow any intimidation in the matter of the election."

"But we haven't been intimidated," bawled Gunter. "We—"

"Your mistake; you have."

"I tell you—"

"My dear ass, if you don't vote Classical, it will be pretty clear that you've been intimidated by a Sixth-Form bully."

"We haven't! We—"

"Are you voting Classical?"

"No!" yelled Gunter.

"Then we shall have to put down this rotten intimidation with a stern hand," said Redfern resolutely. "Collar them!"

Gunter and Wake sprang up in alarm, and were immediately seized by Skelton and Brown. The two weedy, pasty-complexioned members of the cigarette brigade had no chance against the sturdy athletes of the Fourth. They were helpless in the grasp of Skelton and Brown.

"Leggo!" exclaimed Gunter. "I—"

"Hold them!"

"What-ho!"

"Now then, we're going to rescue you from this loathsome tyranny," explained Redfern. "We're not going to allow intimidation of the Fourth in matters of voting. You two are going to give your solemn word, honest injun, to vote Classical—"

"Rats!"

"Or else get the licking of your lives!"

Redfern minor took the shovel from the grate. Gunter and Wake eyed it very nervously.

"Lay Guntie across the table, Skelton, and hold him there!"

"Right you are!"

Gunter struggled in vain. He was laid face downwards across the table, and Skelton kept him there with a grip of iron.

"Now then, Gunter, honest injun—"

"No!" yelled Gunter.

Thwack!

"Oh! Ow! Yow! Yaroo!"

Thwack, thwack, thwack!

The flat of the shovel made the dust rise in clouds from Gunter's garments. The junior wriggled and yelled.

"Sorry," said Redfern firmly, "but we can't allow intimidation in the matters of voting. Are you going to vote Classical?"

"No—yes."

"Classical—honour bright?"

"Yes," gasped Gunter.

"Good! Let him go. Wake, are you going to follow Gunter's noble example, and resist intimidation like a hero and vote Classical, or shall I lay on with the shovel?"

"I—I'll vote Classical," said Wake nervously eyeing the shovel.

"Honest injun?"

"Yes."

Redfern threw the shovel into the grate with a clang.

"Jolly good!" he exclaimed. "You'll be glad some day, when you look back to this time, that I was here to help you resist tyranny and intimidation, and to preserve your independence to vote as you please."

"What-ho!" said Skelton and Brown heartily.

"Come on!" said Redfern. "There may be some more intimidation going on, and we haven't much time to look into it before the election comes off. We shall have to turn up in hall pretty soon."

And the Classical chums left the common-room. Redfern looked about him outside in surprise. The gas had been turned out by someone in the passage, and it was quite dark.

"Some silly ass up to larks!" growled Redfern. "Don't shove your napper against the wall, or you'll know it. I— Oh! What—how—help!"

Hands, invisible in the darkness, suddenly grasped the three juniors. There seemed to be numberless hands grasping them all over, and they did not have the slightest chance to resist. Struggling ineffectually, they were lifted off their feet, and rushed along in darkness. Save for panting breath and trampling feet, there was no sound. But Redfern

knew that it was an ambush—an ambush of the Moderns—and that they were in the hands of Taffy and Co.

"Leggo!" he gasped. "Leggo, you rotters! Yah! Leggo!"

There was only a faint chuckle in response. A door was opened, the juniors were bumped in upon the floor, the door closed, and a key clicked. The next moment Redfern minor was upon his feet in the darkness, hurling himself furiously at the door; but it was fast. He reeled back, stumbled upon somebody, and fell, and there was a yell from Skelton.

"Prisoners!" gasped Redfern.

There was no doubt about it. Taffy and Co. were evidently "canvassing," too! Redfern, Skelton, and Brown were prisoners, locked in, and the election almost due!

CHAPTER 8. Just in Time.

"O H!"

"Yaroo!"
"What's the matter?"
"Ow! You're stamping on my beastly legs!"

"Keep your beastly legs out of the beastly way, then!"

"Look here, Reddy——"

"How is anybody to look anywhere in this blessed dark?" demanded Redfern minor. "It's like the inside of a hat!"

He groped for the door. It was quite secure, and did not budge a tenth part of an inch as he shoved at it.

The Classical chums of the Fourth were prisoners. The Moderns had trapped them, and locked them in, and they were helpless.

Skelton and Brown scrambled to their feet, bumping their heads in the darkness as they did so. There was a fresh chorus of gasps.

"Nice pair of asses you two are, to be caught in a trap like this!" growled Redfern, in disgust.

"What price you!" demanded Skelton wrathfully.

"Well, I was thinking about something else. I've got all the blessed trouble of the election on my shoulders!" said Redfern. "How could I know that Taffy and Co. had turned out the gas in the passage, and were lying for us there?"

"Well, how could we know either?"

"Oh, don't argue! Blessed if I ever knew a chap like you for arguing, Skelton! We're in a fix now, and any amount of jaw won't get us out!"

"It's you that's doing all the jawing, you frabjous ass!" howled Skelton.

"Better think, instead of talking," said Redfern. "We're shut up here. This is the lumber-cupboard under the stairs outside the common-room. The fellows are all in Hall for the election, and there's nobody to come if we ye!"

"There's Wake and Gunter in the common-room," said Brown III. hopefully.

"They're not likely to help us, after the way we—we encouraged them," said Redfern. "Besides, Taffy and Co. will be on

the watch right up to the moment of the election."

"Well, we're not going to stick here, I suppose, till we grow grey beards?"

"I'm going to yell," said Skelton. "Somebody may hear. I'm jolly well going to yell, and you chaps can do as you like!"

And Skelton yelled. He yelled: "Help! Fire!" at the top of his voice.

The sound was muffled in the lumber-cupboard, deafening the juniors as it echoed round.

There was the sound of a chuckle outside; and Skelton ceased his efforts for a moment.

Redfern rapped on the inside of the door.

"Hallo, out there!"

"Hallo!"

"Who is it?"

"It's me!" said Gunter's voice. "Me and Wake! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is he laughing at us, or at his own grammar?" said Skelton. "I'll jolly well give him a thick ear, and chance it, when I get out!"

"Open the door, Gunter, old chap!" said Redfern softly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The election's coming off, you know——"

"Ha, ha! There's no key!"

"Get something, and prise it open."

"No time! I'm going to the election. It's due in ten minutes."

"Look here, Gunter——"

"Ha, ha! Good-bye!"

"I say, Wake——"

"Ha, ha, ha! Taffy's watching from the end of the passage, and he'd jolly soon stop us if we started prising open the door."

"Yes, but——"

"Good-bye!"

And the footsteps of Gunter and Wake died away down the passage.

Redfern kicked furiously at the door.

"Better yell again!" suggested Skelton.

"It may bring somebody else."

"Rats!"

"Well, what are we going to do?"

"Don't ask me!" said Redfern crossly.

"I've no time for conundrums. The election in ten minutes, and us bottled up here! It was Ransome suggested this to Taffy and Co., you can bet your new boots on that! The beasts! How the fellows will snigger when they find out we've spent the election-time in a cupboard under the stairs!"

"They'll have a right to snigger, too!" said Brown III. "Hang it! We shall deserve to be sniggered at if we can't get out!"

Redfern snorted. He was quite conscious of the truth of that remark. They were locked in. Even if friends came to the rescue, there was no key. It would take time to break in the door. It might only lead to others besides themselves missing the chance of voting for the Classical candidate. For the Moderns, seeing that some of the Classicals were absent, would be certain to rush the election through as quickly as possible.

"And if we're away from the election, some of the fellows are certain to go out and look for us, and miss the voting, too," said Brown. "And then there's the slackers

—the fellows you have to drive in to vote— if they're not looked after, they won't turn up—and they won't be looked after unless we're there."

"Redfern major is done for!" remarked Skelton.

"Not yet!" said Sidney Redfern. "We're going to get out. Look here, there's a lot of lumber kept in this cupboard—I've barked my shins on some of it. There may be something we can smash the door with."

"Smash the door? Phew!"

"There'll be a row about that!"

"I don't care if there are fifty rows! We're not going to miss the election, and see a Modern rotter captain of St. Dolly's!" said Redfern resolutely. "Anybody got a match?"

Skelton struck a match.

As the light flickered out, Redfern glanced round him anxiously.

There was certainly a variety of lumber stacked in the long, deep cupboard under the staircase—ancient chairs, lame tables, old boxes, and a broken form. It was upon the latter that Redfern's eye lighted with a gleam of satisfaction.

He seized it, and dragged it out, sending a dozen other "rocky" articles of furniture crashing down amid clouds of dust.

"The very thing!" he exclaimed.

"Mind my toes!"

"Blow your toes! Strike another match, Skelton, and keep showing a light, while I bang this thing on the lock."

"Good! If there's a row, we can stick it."

"Stand clear!"

The form had been a heavy one of oak. There was a whole end of it and part of the seat.

Redfern raised it in the air, and Skelton and Brown crowded back among the lumber. Skelton struck matches and kept them alight.

Crash!

Redfern minor brought the heavy mass of oak against the door with a terrific concussion.

The door creaked and groaned.

There was a sharp exclamation out in the passage Redfern did not heed it.

Crash! Crash!

The door groaned as if in pain. Skelton struck continual matches and chuckled.

The door wasn't built to stand an attack like that, and it was only a question of moments now.

Crash!

The lock flew off, and the door shot open. There was a yell from outside.

Taffy and Co. had waited in the passage, with the gas half-turned up, in case rescue should come, intending to scuttle into the hall at the last moment. At the crashing on the door they had come closer, in alarm, lest the Classics should break out, and Taffy received the opening door full upon the chest, and went flying.

As he bumped down upon the linoleum the three Classics, dusty and excited, sprang out of the cupboard.

To collar Rake and Vernon, and hurl them across the sprawling Taffy, was the work of a moment. Then the chums of the Classic side raced away in the direction of the hall.

"Quick!" panted Redfern. "Into the hall, and keep the door shut! What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The dusty Classics dashed into the great, crowded room, and there was a yell of welcome from the Classical juniors there. The clock was indicating the half-hour, and the proceedings were about to begin.

Redfern slammed the great oaken door shut, and the three juniors put their feet against it.

A minute later there was a terrific hammering outside.

Arthur Redfern looked across the crowd at the door.

"What's the row there?" he demanded.

"It's all right!" said Skelton. "It's only some kids who are too late for the election."

Redfern major smiled.

"Let them come in," he said.

"But——"

"Open the door at once."

And the three chums, exchanging rueful glances, obeyed. Taffy and Co., red and wrathful, entered the hall. It looked as though they would go for the Classical chums on the spot; but a master's voice was heard calling for silence, and the settling of the score was deferred till a more favourable opportunity.

CHAPTER 9.

The Election.

THE great hall of St. Dorothy's was well filled.

All, or nearly all, the school had turned up for the election.

For it was an important matter to all St. Dolly's—a matter upon which the great men of the Sixth, and the fags of the lowest Forms, met as on common ground.

Whether a Classical or a Modern should be captain of St. Dolly's was a question that agitated almost every breath in the school. And there were other questions mixed with that. The footballing enthusiasts, whether Classical or Modern, were likely to plump for Arthur Redfern. Ransome and the rest of the slackers were equally likely to give their votes to the Modern candidate. He was the one who would best serve their peculiar interests, for although a keen footballer himself, he was more likely than Arthur Redfern to "go easy" with the slackers and the Smart Set.

And so the sides were mingled, to some extent, in the Upper Forms, while in the Lower there was more patriotism, as Redfern minor called it. Irrespective of other matters, regardless of other considerations, most of the juniors were certain to vote Modern or Classical, according to the side they belonged to.

But the voting was so uncertain that no one had the least idea which candidate had the better chance of the two.

Neither Redfern major nor Knowles could feel anything like certain of the result; they both hoped for the best, but in different ways. Redfern major was quiet, and showed

little concern about the matter, while Knowles was openly anxious.

Redfern minor looked over the big crowd with a keen eye.

He had arrived with his chums only just in time for the proceedings, which were now opening, and he wondered whether any of the Classical voters had failed to turn up. There were, of course, a good many who did not take the matter so much to heart as Redfern minor did, and Reddy had been prepared to drive them all up to the poll in time. Owing to the little trick of the Modern youths, however, he had barely succeeded in getting there in time himself.

"Are we all here, Benson?" he asked a Classical Fourth-Former, as he looked round over the crowd.

"Where have you been?" asked Benson.

"Never mind that now," said Redfern sharply. "Are all the fellows here?—that's the question. Ford's beginning to jaw now, and they'll soon get on to the voting."

Mr. Ford, the Fourth-Form master, was speaking at the upper end of the hall. In his slow and distinct voice he was telling the fellows what they knew already—that the post of captain of St. Dolly's was vacant, and that they had met there to elect a new captain in Lunsford's place. He added that there were two candidates for the post—Redfern major, and Knowles, of the Sixth, and that information, which was hardly needed, was greeted with loud cheers for both candidates.

"I haven't seen Spratt," said Benson, under cover of what Redfern minor disrespectfully termed the "jaw" at the upper end of the hall. "He's not here, I think."

"I saw him last in the tuckshop," remarked Miller. "He said he would be here in time for the election."

Redfern minor knitted his brows.

"The greedy young brute! He's stuffing again, I suppose, and he doesn't care if Rome is burning all the time."

"Rome isn't burning, is it?" said Benson, who did not follow the classical allusion. "I haven't seen it in the paper."

"Oh, rats! Anybody else missing besides Spratt?"

"I think not."

"Count the chaps, then; Ford will keep that up for some minutes yet."

"Good!"

There were twenty-one Classical youths in the Fourth Form of St. Dolly's, and twenty Modern. Of the twenty-one Classicals, twenty were present. Only Fatty Spratt was missing. He was doubtless eating tarts in the school shop, oblivious of the crisis in the history of St. Dolly's, or regarding the crisis as being of less importance than a good feed. Redfern looked worried.

"The brute may turn up yet," said Skelton. "Risky going to look for him, you know. May get shut out of the voting oneself."

"Yes, there's the rub."

"What about Gunter and Wake?" said Brown III. "There's Ransome speaking to them."

Redfern's brow darkened.

"I'll jolly soon settle that. Come on!"

A crowd of Classical youths followed Redfern minor over to where the cad of the Sixth was speaking in a whisper to Gunter and Wake of the Fourth. These two youths were looking very uneasy. They had been honoured by admission into the Smart Set, of which Ransome was the head. But they had promised Redfern minor "honest injun," that they would vote Classical. True, the promise had been given under a certain amount of compulsion. But then, Redfern had a right to expect them to vote Classical. And if they broke their pledge, they anticipated warm times in the Form-room. It was all very well for Ransome to let them smoke cigarettes in his study; but he could not save them from the wrath of indignant Classicals if they betrayed their side. And so they looked very dubious as Ransome whispered to them.

It was then that Redfern minor came up with his friends.

"Gunter!" he exclaimed. "Wake! Stick to me, you know. We've got to rally up to get our man in."

"Let them alone," said Ransome, with a scowl. "Mind your own business, Redfern minor. Every fellow can vote as he likes."

"It is my biznay," said Redfern coolly. "I'm not going to have my voters bribed and corrupted. They've promised to do the decent thing, and they're going to do it, or I'll know the reason why."

"You see, Reddy—"

"I see that Ransome's trying to persuade you to break your promise, and go back on your own man," said Redfern sternly.

"But—but—"

"All these rotten Moderns are sticking together," said Redfern. "I should think the Classicals in the Fourth would make common cause to get the Classical candidate in."

"Rats!" exclaimed Taffy, coming up as he heard the dispute. "If Gunter and Wake want to vote for our side, that's their business."

"They don't want to—they're being intimidated by one of the Sixth."

"Nothing of the sort!" exclaimed Ransome angrily. "I am advising them."

"Advising them to play the traitor!" exclaimed Redfern minor scornfully. "They don't want any of your precious advice, Ransome!"

"You cheeky cub—"

"Come with me, Gunter. Come on, Wake!"

"Stay where you are!" exclaimed Taffy, only too eager to secure these new recruits for his side. "We'll stand by you! You sha'n't be bullied."

"Come on, kids. We're going to protect you."

"Stay here—we'll protect you," said Taffy.

"Just what I was going to say," said Rake.

"You'd better clear off, chappies," said Vernon. "We're looking after these kids. You can't make a row in Hall."

"We don't want to make a row," said Redfern minor warmly. "But we're jolly

well not going to have our voters stolen under our very eyes."

"They're not your voters."

Mr. Ford broke off in what he was saying, and glanced towards the group of juniors. Their raised voices were interrupting him.

"This will not do," said Mr. Ford. "Boys, you must be quiet in Hall. What is the dispute there among you juniors?"

"Sixth Form interfering with the Fourth, sir," said Redfern minor promptly, before Ransome could speak.

"It's nothing of the sort, sir!" exclaimed Ransome angrily. "I was just speaking to Gunter and Wake——"

"Ahem!" said Mr. Ford. "It is better for the Sixth not to speak to the juniors on an occasion like this. It may lead to misconception. It would be unpleasant if there was any charge of intimidation after the election."

Ransome gritted his teeth; but he could not disobey Mr. Ford, and he moved away from the spot, leaving Gunter and Wake to be disputed over by Taffy and Co. and the Classical chums. But Taffy and Co. were quite ready to take charge of the proceedings. They meant to keep Gunter and Wake in their possession, or know the reason why. Redfern minor was equally determined that the two renegades should vote Classical.

"This way, Gunter," whispered Redfern. "Don't make a fuss and interrupt Fordy again."

"Stick here," whispered Taffy. "Reddy can't make you vote for his rotten major. Stick here, and do the right thing."

"Look here, Morgan——"

"You let my voters alone."

"They're not your voters."

"They're Classical, I suppose," said Redfern minor, his voice rising excitedly. "You're jolly well not going to collar a single vote from our side, let alone two."

"Stick to us, kids."

"They sha'n't!"

"They shall!"

And Taffy slipped an arm through Gunter's, and Vernon slipped his through Wake's. Gunter and Wake seemed too confused by the dispute over them to know what they wanted to do; and, as a matter of fact, they were not consulted by either party.

"Let them alone, you Modern worms!" exclaimed Redfern.

"Rats!"

"Let go, or I'll jolly well punch your head!" almost shouted Redfern.

"More rats!" said Taffy.

Biff! Redfern minor's knuckles clumped upon Taffy's nose, and that was quite enough for the youth from gallant little Wales. He let go Gunter, and went for Redfern on the spot. Redfern minor, nothing loth, met him with ready fists, and in a twinkling they were going at it hammer and tongs.

There was a shout of indignation from the other parts of the hall. For the juniors to begin fighting there was unheard-of, outrageous. Several prefects came struggling through the crowd towards the scene, with canes in their hands.

Redfern and Taffy had closed, and were struggling furiously. Skelton and Brown had tried to drag Wake away from Vernon, and Vernon resisted fiercely, and a second fight was quickly in progress.

The hall was in an uproar.

Mr. Ford's speech was interrupted, and his voice died away. The Form-master was pink with indignation. He jingled the bell.

"Silence! Order, there! Prefects, restore order!"

The prefects willingly carried out that instruction. Three or four big seniors threw themselves upon the combatants, and dragged them apart. Redfern, with his hair like a mop, and his nose hammered to the hue of a beetroot, was clutched in Kelly's powerful hands, while Taffy was grasped by Courtney, of the Sixth. The other combatants were seized by prefects, and shaken till they hardly knew whether they were on their heads or their heels.

Mr. Ford glared at the culprits wrathfully.

"It is absolutely outrageous," he exclaimed, "that this absurd dispute between the Classical and the Modern sides at this school should be carried to such an excess; that the respective sides cannot meet in Halls without resorting to fisticuffs. If there is any further disturbance, all boys participating in it shall be turned out of the hall, so I warn you to take care."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Taffy.

"Prefects, please separate the two parties," went on Mr. Ford—"the Classical boys to the right of the hall, and the Moderns on the left, and some of you remain between them."

"Yes, sir."

Redfern minor chuckled softly. The arrangement suited him admirably, for Gunter and Wake were Classics, and they had to go with him and his friends. Taffy and Co. were speechless with wrath. Their last chance of securing the two renegades was gone. Crowded up among the other Classics, Gunter and Wake were quite certain to vote Classical.

"Goo! Ad Fordy!" whispered Redfern, as he crowded back with the others, his arms affectionately linked in those of Gunter and Wake. "He doesn't know what a good turn he's done us."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

With a wide space of the hall, and a group of prefects between them, the rival juniors could dispute no more. Gunter and Wake looked very disquieted. From all sides now came Classical urgings to "vote straight," mingled with pleasant descriptions of what came Classical urgings to "vote straight,"

"Oh, it's all right!" mumbled Gunter. "Of course, I meant to vote Classical all the time."

"So did I," said Wake.

Which was not strictly true, but quite satisfactory to the Classics. In case of any falling off at the last moment, however, Redfern assigned to Skelton and Brown the task of keeping their arms linked in those of Gunter and Wake. Those two smart youths were not to be allowed to run loose until the voting was over.

CHAPTER 10.

The New Captain.

RANSOME was on his feet on the dais now. Classical as he was, Ransome had thrown in his lot openly with the Modern candidate. He rose to propose his friend Knowles as captain of St. Dolly's, and made a short, neat speech in his favour. He pointed out that Knowles fulfilled every possible requirement from a sportsman's point of view, and was at the same time a jolly good fellow, and not at all given to meddling in other fellows' business. This was a direct hit at Arthur Redfern, and Arthur turned pink, but did not glance at the speaker, or take any open notice of the remark. Knowles's friends cheered Ransome, and Carne seconded the nomination.

Then Courtney proposed Arthur Redfern, and was seconded, and a show of hands was called for.

"Hands up for Knowles," said Mr. Ford, who was to act the part of a teller, in order to make assurance doubly sure that the counting was correct.

A forest of hands went up for Knowles.

The Modern candidate glanced round, and his eyes glistened. Certainly there was a goodly show for him.

Half, or very nearly half, the fellows in the hall were voting for Knowles. It would be a close election at the best.

Redfern minor noted with an anxious eye that there were some Classical hands in the air; how many he did not know. Enough, however, to make the result very doubtful for the Classical candidate. But Gunter and Wake had their hands down. That, at least, the juniors were able to make sure of.

"It'll be a close thing," said Skelton anxiously. "I shouldn't be surprised if Knowles pulls it off."

"We need every vote," said Redfern savagely. "That fat rotter Spratt hasn't turned up yet."

"He may come in time; the Classical count is taken second," said Brown hopefully. "Besides, they'll count twice, you know; they always do, in case of errors."

The Classical chums waited anxiously. Mr. Ford, and the Fifth-form master, Mr. Stainer, were counting the upraised hands slowly and methodically. There was a buzz as the counting proceeded. Knowles was a little pale, but Arthur Redfern was talking to Courtney, and seemed quite undisturbed.

There was a deep breath among the fellows as the two masters ceased to count. They were seen to compare notes, and they nodded over them, as if they agreed. The boys were simply bursting with curiosity to know the number. They made wild guesses, anywhere from sixty to a hundred and twenty. There was a hush as Mr. Ford announced the number.

"Votes for Knowles, one hundred and four!"

Knowles's partisans gave a tremendous cheer.

It was a bumping number. Everybody knew the total number of boys at St. Dolly's—two hundred and nine. Knowles had scored

practically half the votes of the school. If not a single fellow missed the election, Arthur Redfern could only have a majority of one, and it was more likely that three or four were missing it. It was seldom that a school election brought up every fellow to the poll. This, true, was a more than usually important contest, and the canvassing for votes had been brisk.

Redfern minor's face was a study for a moment as he heard the announcement.

"You hear that, Skelty?"

"A hundred and four."

"We're done in," said Benson gloomily.

"We know at least one Classical is away—that's Fatty Spratt. We can only tie at the best."

"Then there'll be another election," said Brown.

"And Ransome will jolly well make sure of Gunter and Wake next time," said Benson grimly. "It's all up. The Classical side is done for at St. Dolly's."

Redfern set his teeth.

"Not quite."

"What can we do?"

"I'm going to fetch Spratt."

"Don't you go out!" exclaimed Benson, in alarm. "We tie as it is, and there's a chance yet. If you're out, and don't vote, Knowles will have the majority, and become captain of St. Dolly's to-night."

Redfern hesitated one moment.

It was truly a crisis. Should he remain where he was, and assure at least that his major was not defeated, or should he risk everything to bring up the last voter? Was there time before the counting finished? Every second lost made his chance worse.

"I'll go," he said between his teeth. "I'll bring Spratt in time, or—or burst something! The fat brute, he ought to be here! Look here, you fellows, delay the voting, if you can. Lose as much time as possible; misunderstand things, you know—anything to gain time while I fetch Fatty."

"But—"

"No time for 'buts.' I'm going."

And Redfern minor slipped quietly and quickly out of the hall. His heart was beating hard. He had taken a great responsibility upon himself; in ten minutes he might be blaming himself as the cause of Arthur's defeat. He left his chums excited, too. The Fourth-Form master had already called for a show of hands for the Classical candidate, and the Classical hands were going up.

How long would Redfern be?

If the counting finished before he re-entered the hall he would not be allowed to vote, and all was lost!

And Skelton, mindful of Reddy's warning to delay the counting as long as he could, suddenly shoved Brown violently, and the surprised Brown promptly shoved him back, and there was an uproar. The counting ceased, and there was a chorus of angry voices directed against the juniors. It was some minutes before order was restored, and it transpired that a friendly shove was the cause of it, and there was really no dispute at all.

Meanwhile, Redfern minor had dashed out of the house, and was sprinting towards the

school shop on the other side of the quadrangle.

He had little doubt that he would find Fatty Spratt there; and he was right. As he entered the tuckshop he caught sight of the fat junior, sitting on one of the high chairs at the counter, slowly travelling through the last of a plate of tarts. There was a smear of jam on Spratt's fat face, and a smile of contentment.

He looked round as Redfern dashed breathlessly in. His face expressed mild surprise. Fatty himself never moved in a hurry.

"Hallo, Reddy!" he said. "Try these tarts. They're spiffing!"

"Come on, you ass!"

"Eh?"

"The election—quick!"

"Election! By George, you know, I'd forgotten all about it!" said Spratt. "I'll come as soon as I've finished this tart!"

"You'll come now!" roared Redfern minor, seizing the fat junior by the collar, and jerking him off the chair.

"Oh!" roared Spratt, as he bumped on the floor, and the tart jammed on his face.

"Ow! Leggo! Beast! Yaroo!"

"Come on!"

"I c-c-c-an't c-come for a minute!"

"Then I'll jolly well help you!"

And the excited junior dragged Spratt to his feet, took an iron grip on his collar, and ran him headlong out of the tuckshop.

Propelled from behind by Redfern minor, Spratt ran blindly along through the darkness of the quad., hardly knowing where he was going or what was moving him.

His breath came in short, quick gasps, and he soon began to struggle.

"Lemme go!" he panted. "I—I—I c-c-c-can't run. I—I—I've been eating jam-tarts, and I—I'm winded! Ow! Leggo!"

"Come on!"

"I—I—I c-c-c-can't run!"

"You've jolly well got to!" said Redfern minor.

And Spratt did. Afterwards he described it as like a horrible dream. Breathless, with the fragment of tart still sticking to his face, gasping and unhappy, and almost sick, the fat Fourth-former was raced across the quadrangle.

It was not easy work for Redfern minor, either, for at every step Spratt tried to drop on the ground, and Redfern had to jerk him up and make him keep on.

But Redfern minor had put his "beef" into it. He rushed Spratt across the quad., staggering and stumbling, and rushed him into the School House, and rushed him to the hall.

The big oaken doors were ajar, and two or three juniors were looking anxiously out.

"Oh!" gasped Spratt. "Leggo! I—I'm dying!"

"In you get!"

"Ow! Oh! Yow!"

With a final effort Redfern minor rushed him into the hall. The dispute raised by Skelton and Brown had ceased, and the counting was proceeding. Mr. Ford was within a dozen paces of the door, taking the last hands, when Redfern minor rushed

Spratt upon the scene. Holding Spratt with one hand, he elevated the other in the air.

"Put up your hand, Spratt, you dummy!" he whispered.

Spratt spluttered helplessly.

"Put up your hand, or it'll be too late," whispered Redfern, in agony. "Quick! I'll lick you if you don't!"

"Gr-r-r-rooo!"

"Quick—hands up! I'll stand you a bag of tarts after the election!"

Spratt recovered wonderfully at that. His hand went up. Mr. Ford was almost close to them now; another half-minute and he was counting Redfern and Spratt. He looked very curiously at both at them, but made no remark. They were in time for the counting, and there was nothing to be said.

Skelton gave a gasp of relief.

"It's all serene, Reddy, I think.

"Good!"

Mr. Ford ceased counting, and Mr. Stainer went over the upraised hands. Then they compared numbers, and nodded. Mr. Stainer made the announcement, waited for in breathless silence.

"One hundred and five votes have been cast for Redfern major. Redfern major becomes captain of St. Dorothy's by a majority of one vote."

"Hurrah!" roared Redfern minor.

And there was a roar of cheering from the Classicals. Arthur Redfern rose to say a few words, but what he said no one knew; his voice was drowned by the cheering. The very closeness of the election made his backers more jubilant, especially the junior portion. They had pulled him through; they had made him captain. They shouted and cheered and stamped till the old hall rang again.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

Knowles, with a pale, set face, hurried from the hall to hide his chagrin and disappointment from other eyes. Ransome sat biting his lips. But no one noticed Ransome; few noticed Knowles. Cheer on cheer rolled through the great hall for Arthur Redfern—Redfern major, the new captain of St. Dolly's!

CHAPTER 11.

Election Night.

"HURRAH!"

"Bravo!"

"Hurray—'ray—'ray!"

So shouted and yelled the Classicals as they poured out into the dusky quadrangle after the election. Redfern minor, Skelton, and Brown marched along arm-in-arm, hurrahing at the top of their voices, and the enthusiastic cheering drowned the groans of the Modern juniors. Taffy and Co. were glum and dumb. Their candidate had been defeated, and a Classical was captain of St. Dolly's, and they did not feel like cheering.

"'Ray—'ray—'ray!" roared Skelton.

"What price the Moderns now?"

And there was a groan for the Moderns.

"Jolly narrow escape for St. Dolly's," said Brown, with a shake of the head.

"Majority of one! If a Modern had got in

as captain, I don't know what would have become of the old school."

Redfern minor grinned. He was not so alarmed as Brown for the future of St. Dolly's; but he was exuberantly glad that his major had got in as captain.

"Where's Redfern major?" exclaimed Benson. "We ought to chair him round the quad. We did Lunsford when he was elected captain two years ago."

"Jolly good wheeze!" exclaimed Redfern minor immediately. "Where is he?"

The idea came on at once. Fifth and Sixth Formers joined in the rush to find Redfern major to chair him round the quad, in triumph.

Arthur Redfern was caught as he was leaving the hall, and he was surrounded and seized before he knew what was happening.

He struggled in the grasp of his captors.

"Here, hold on!" he exclaimed. "What on earth's the matter? What's the little game?"

"A giddy triumph!" exclaimed Courtney, of the Sixth. "You're going round shoulder-high."

"Oh, rot!"

"Rot or not, you're going."

"But, I say——"

"'Nuff said. Up with him!"

And Arthur was hoisted up on the shoulders of two sturdy Sixth-Form seniors, whether he liked it or not, and rushed out into the quad.

Round him marched a hurraing crowd, waving caps, yelling, stamping, clapping hands, and some of the younger members executing war-dances and cake-walks.

Arthur laughed as he was marched on. It was a real triumph, and it pleased him. He was glad, too, to see a good many of the Moderns in the cheering crowd. Many of them had voted for the Modern candidate from a sense of loyalty to their own side, but showed very plainly now that they were not dissatisfied with the result of the election.

Round the quad, went the procession, with a hubbub that rang and echoed in every corner of St. Dolly's. It brought Dr. Cranston to his window, and he looked out and saw the excited crowd in the light of the stars, and smiled. The Head, too, was pleased by the result of the election. For, weak as Arthur Redfern's character had been in the past, the Head knew that at the present moment there was no fellow at St. Dolly's more fit to be captain of the school.

Right round the quad, and back to the School House door, the triumphant Classics bore their hero, and there, at last, yielding to his entreaties, they set him down. He alighted on the steps, considerably ruffled and rumped and out of breath.

"Speech—speech!" roared the juniors.

Arthur Redfern laughed.

"Very well," he said. "I'll say a few words."

"Order!" yelled Redfern minor.

"Rats!" yelled back Taffy.

There was a roar at once.

"Order!"

"Throw that Modern waster out!"

"Yah! Rats!"

"Chuck him out!"

Order was restored at last. The fellows stood in a great crowd round the steps of the School House, with Arthur standing on the steps and facing them.

"I haven't much to say, you fellows——"

"Hear, hear!"

"I'm jolly glad I've been elected captain of St. Dolly's——"

"Hurrah!"

"And I intend to be as decent a captain as I can. I'm a Classical." Frenzied cheers from the Classics greeted this. "But I'm going to hold the balance level between the two sides. A fair field, and no favour, for all." A considerable modification of Classical enthusiasm, and cheers from the Moderns. "In the matter of sports especially, a man will be chosen for his form, and without regard to the side he happens to belong to. I hope this term to see St. Dolly's go ahead in football."

"Hurrah!"

"We're all going to pull together for that purpose, Modern and Classical."

"Hear, hear!"

"And there's one other matter," said Arthur, after a barely perceptible pause. "I allude to some practices that go on, especially in the Upper Forms which won't bring credit on any school. There's nothing manly or clever in smoking cigarettes in the studies, or making bets with blackguards in public-houses. I'm not going into particulars, but I want it understood that while I'm captain of St. Dolly's I set my face against everything of that sort."

Loud cheers.

"That's all, except that I thank the school for electing me."

And Arthur walked into the house, leaving the crowd cheering loudly. After that most of the seniors went in; but the enthusiasm of the juniors was not so easily dissipated. They wanted some more excitement. Skelton sprang upon the steps.

"Gentlemen——"

"Hear, hear!"

"We're all glad to see old Redfern elected captain of St. Dolly's. The Fourth Form have had a jolly big hand in it. I may say that I've had a big hand in it——"

"Yes, you've got rather a paw," said a voice from the crowd, and there was a laugh.

Skelton turned red.

"If the Modern worm who spoke will kindly step out, I'll make mincemeat of him before I go on," he remarked.

The Modern worm did not accept the invitation, and Skelton continued victoriously:

"I've had a big hand in it, but Redfern minor takes the biscuit. He brought up Fatty Spratt at the last moment to turn the scale. Reddy minor did the trick; and now they've shouldered Reddy major: let's shoulder Reddy minor."

"Bravo!"

"Oh, chuck it!" exclaimed Sidney, as his jubilant Form-fellows closed round him and grasped him. "Nuff's as good as a feast. Chuck it!"

"Rats! Up with you!"

"Lemme alone!"

"Bosh!"

"Up with him!"

And Redfern minor, willy-nilly, was hoisted upon the shoulders of Skelton and Brown and Benson, and, with a crowd of cheering juniors, was marched round the quad.

"My only hat!" exclaimed Taffy. "This is a little too thick! There's been enough of Classical processioning for one evening."

"Just what I was going to say," remarked Rake.

"Let's muck it up, chappies," suggested Vernon.

"Call the fellows together."

"Just what I was going to——"

"Come on!" shouted Taffy, waving his cap. "Down with the Classics! Sock it to them!"

"Look out!" shrieked Benson.

"Keep off, you wasters!"

"Hurrah! Sock it to them!"

The procession was burst up in a twinkling. Redfern minor reeled and swayed in the air as his supporters went swaying and staggering. He came down with a lump finally, on his hands and knees, and yelled expressively.

Two or three Classics rolled over him, and squashed him to the ground, and Moderns rolled on them, and in a few minutes there was quite a heap of them struggling and fighting.

"Go for 'em!" yelled Taffy.

Redfern minor struggled out of the heap.

"Yah! Down with the Classics!"

"Line up!" roared Redfern.

"Sock it to them!"

"Stop that row!" roared a prefect from the doorway of the School House, brandishing a cane wrathfully at the swaying crowd in the starlight. "Do you want me to come out to you?"

But the juniors were far too excited to hear or heed. Classics and Moderns were fairly at it now. The combat continued amid wild excitement, till two or three prefects sallied out of the house with canes in their hands, and began to lay about them with liberal impartiality.

Then there was a hurried retreat, Classics and Moderns scattering into all sorts of corners, and the fight died away; and the prefects, breathing hard after their exertions, went indoors grinning. Redfern, Skelton, and Brown foregathered in their study, breathless and dusty and dishevelled, but in a contented mood.

"Well, it was fun!" said Redfern minor, caressing a swollen nose. "And my major is captain of St. Dolly's! Hurray!"

"Hurray!" echoed Skelton and Brown; and the whole length of the Fourth-Form passage echoed it, too.

CHAPTER 12.

Exercising His Authority.

"BEATEN!"

Knowles, of the Sixth, was pacing to and fro in his study. His face was dark with passion, his eyes glinted under his contracted brows.

"Beaten!"

He muttered the word over and over again, savagely, spitefully. All the evil in his nature seemed to have been aroused by his defeat in the captain's election.

He had gone straight to his study after his defeat. Two or three friends had looked in to condole with him; but Knowles's look had not encouraged them to enter. He had been left alone in his anger and chagrin.

It was a bitter blow to the Modern senior. He had fully expected to become captain of St. Dolly's; the assistance of Ransome and the renegade Classics seemed to make it a sure thing for him. And the defeat was so narrow, too—a majority of only one for his rival.

Knowles gritted his teeth as he thought of it.

There came another tap at the door of his study, and he turned angrily round. The door opened, and Ransome looked in.

"Can I come in?"

"I suppose so, if you like!" said Knowles ungraciously.

Ransome entered and closed the door.

There was an indefinable expression upon his narrow, shrewd face; but it was easy to see that he was as annoyed by Arthur Redfern's victory as Knowles was.

"Well, it's all over," he said.

"Have you come here to tell me that?"

"No," said Ransome quietly, taking no notice of Knowles's evident bad temper. "It was an unlucky business; a majority of one."

"My friends ought to have looked after it better."

"I don't see how; every fellow at St. Dolly's voted, and that's an almost unheard-of thing, too," said Ransome. "It wasn't possible to bring up another voter, was it?"

"The Classics managed it."

"Yes; Redfern minor—always Redfern minor!" said Ransome, between his teeth. "But for him, you would have had a majority of two or three."

"Hang him!"

"With pleasure, if I could. But what I have come to ask you is, are you going to take this quietly?"

Knowles stared at him.

"I suppose so. What else can I do?"

"Well, you could protest against the election, and demand a new one, on the ground of intimidation. There were at least two Classics in the Fourth who would have voted for you if they had had the chance."

Knowles shook his head.

"It's no good. Besides, I've heard that some of the Classics were shut up in a cupboard, or somewhere, and were only got out just in time for the voting. It was six of one and half a dozen of the other, and the Head wouldn't take any notice."

Ransome nodded.

"Perhaps you're right."

"But Arthur Redfern sha'n't have the easiest job in the world as captain of St. Dolly!" said Knowles savagely, too angry and exasperated to be careful of what he said. "He will find that the Moderns will have to be reckoned with, although he has

got in as captain. He will not ride roughshod over us, I can promise him!"

"It's not easy to buck up against the skipper."

"I shall manage to do it. You will see."

Ransome looked at him, his eyes narrowing to mere slits, a way he had when he was watching anyone intently.

"You mean that?" he said.

"Of course I do!"

"Then I'm with you. I suppose you didn't hear Redfern's speech on the school steps? He is going to begin a crusade—abolition of everything except Sunday-school stories!" said Ransome, with a bitter sneer. "Any fellow found smoking to be hauled before the beaks, and so forth. I'm up against it all the time. I've got some friends who are up against it, too. I suppose we can rely on you?"

Knowles nodded without speaking.

"Good!" said Ransome, with great satisfaction. "You see, you had such a big minority, that Redfern will never have the authority old Lunsford had. Lunsford was elected by three-quarters of the voters. Redfern has just scraped in. Besides, he's not like Lunsford. I know him; he was my chum for years, till he turned against me. He's as weak as water; he has lately put on the heavy business, but it's all gas. If there's enough pressure brought to bear on him, he'll give in. I know him, I tell you. And if he's to be put in his place, the idea is to make his captaincy no end of trouble to him; and when he finds it too steep, he'll resign. Then——"

Knowles's eyes flashed.

"You think he'll resign?"

"Yes; or he may be made to. Then comes your chance, and you'll make a far and away better captain for the school than he does. You've got a cleaner record, if everything were known. The idea is, to buck up against him at every opportunity, and make him sick of the job. As for Redfern minor, you can leave him to me——"

There was a knock at the door, and it opened. Arthur Redfern looked in. His brow darkened a little as he saw Ransome in the study, and he paused.

"I looked in to speak to you, Knowles," he said.

"Speak, then," said Knowles.

Arthur looked at Ransome, who declined to take the hint. He put his hands into his pockets and sat on the corner of the table, evidently determined not to leave Redfern and Knowles alone. Arthur compressed his lips.

"Well, it's about the election," he said. "I've just scraped in. There has been a lot of excitement about it, but what I want to say is, that the result needn't make any difference to us. I want to pull with you for the good of the school, and especially in football matters. We've got a good fight ahead of us this season, if we're to keep our place, and any trouble between Modern and Classical would muck up the game. I want to assure you that there will be fair play all round, and I shall consult you on all points in making up the teams, and I hope there will be satisfaction all round."

Arthur spoke cordially, and in spite of shod over us, I can promise him!"

"Well, I suppose I think as much of the good of the school as you do," he said. "I don't want any trouble; and there won't be any, so long as the Moderns get fair play in the sports."

"They will get that."

"Very good."

Knowles said no more, and Arthur stood silent for a moment. He had come there to have a frank and friendly chat with his defeated rival. Knowles was a good enough fellow at bottom, though vain and jealous, and a chat between the two leaders might have cleared the air very much. But Ransome's presence prevented that.

While Arthur stood hesitating, Ransome drew a cigarette-case out of his pocket and selected a smoke. Arthur did not notice his action for the moment, but, as Ransome struck a match, his eyes turned upon him. Ransome lighted a cigarette.

Arthur's eyes blazed.

It was a piece of the most palpable insolence, for a strict rule at St. Dolly's was that there should be no sneaking in the studies, and Arthur, as captain of the school, was bound to see that it was observed.

"Stop that, Ransome!" he said sharply.

"Feeling your feet already?" said Ransome, with a sneer. "You have been captain about a quarter of an hour, I suppose."

"Never mind how long I have been captain. This is the second time I've tackled you on the same subject. You remember the first, I suppose?"

Ransome coloured with anger. He remembered well enough how helpless he had been in the grasp of Arthur Redfern.

"Mind your own business," he said. "This is Knowles's study. Knowles is a prefect. If he asks me to stop, I will. Are you setting up to teach the prefects their business?"

Arthur reddened with annoyance. Ransome's object was to further widen the breach between him and the Modern prefect, and he saw it clearly. Knowles, too, was already looking angry.

"Hang it all, Redfern," he burst out, "I think you might wait till your authority is a little older before you swagger it about in my study!"

"I didn't mean to do anything of the sort, but Ransome——"

"Let him alone!"

"You don't mean to say that you uphold him in this, Knowles?"

"Why shouldn't I?"

"You are a prefect. You——"

"You never winked at breaking rules when you were a prefect?" asked Ransome, with a sneer. "It seems to me that I remember certain little convivial parties at the Green Man, where there was a St. Dolly's prefect named Redfern."

Arthur turned crimson.

"You know how much you had to do with that, if it is true, Ransome," he said. "And it is not to the purpose now. I am captain of St. Dolly's, and I'm going to do my duty."

"You are not going to interfere with a friend of mine in my quarters," said Knowles, taking a step forward.

Ransome stepped back, leaving the two facing one another.

"I don't want a row with you, Knowles," said Arthur slowly.

"Get out of my study, then," said Knowles. "You came here to hector and interfere. You won't find me standing anything of that sort."

"You are mistaken. I didn't—"

"Well, don't interfere, then. Ransome is here as my friend; let him alone."

Ransome blew out a little cloud of smoke. Arthur's hands were eager to be upon the cad of the Sixth, and he could hardly restrain himself. But Knowles stood between them; and Knowles was evidently prepared to interfere by force.

Arthur hesitated—it was the old hesitation that was a part of his character, and always made his difficulties more difficult.

"Look here, Knowles, you know you're taking up a rotten position in acting like this!" he said. "It's not fair to me, or to yourself."

Knowles shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't want to air my new authority in a hurry either," said Arthur, biting his lip. "I—I will pass over the matter for this once—on your account, not on Ransome's. I hope you will think better of it, Knowles."

And he quitted the study abruptly.

Knowles stood with a very dubious expression upon his face, not wholly satisfied with himself.

Ransome chuckled softly.

CHAPTER 13.

Open Foes.

"SOMETHING'S on!" said Redfern minor.

He made that statement in a positive tone, and Skelton and Brown did not dispute it. In fact, they nodded assent at once.

"Taffy and Co. are jolly busy," said Redfern. "They're fagging for Ransome. Ransome's giving some sort of a celebration in his study. Now, what on earth is he celebrating for, when his man has just lost the election?"

Skelton and Brown shook their heads.

"Better look into it," said Redfern minor cheerfully. "If Ransome is up to some game, or it's some Modern dodge for scoring off us, we want to see to it. Here comes Taffy and Co. Let's bump them, as a start."

"Jolly good idea!"

The three juniors were standing at the door of their study, whence they could see over the staircase into the end of the Sixth-Form passage. Taffy Morgan, Rake, and Vernon were coming along in sight, each of them carrying a basket.

They had just come into the house, and the Classics knew that they had been to the tuckshop, and were bringing in supplies for a feed.

To scuttle down the stairs and dodge into the Sixth-Form passage occupied the Classical juniors only a few seconds.

Taffy and Co., coming on towards Ransome's study, found three sturdy youths in rank across the passage, blocking the way.

The Modern chums halted. They had no choice in the matter.

"Chuck it!" said Taffy. "We're busy. Get out!"

"What's the little game?" said Redfern severely. "What do you mean by going in for feeds and things without asking your uncle?"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Taffy. "We're fagging for Ransome. He's standing a feed to some of the Sixth and the Fifth. It's going to be a good show, too. He's celebrating—"

"Oh, rats! Our candidate nearly got in!"

"A miss is as good as a mile!" said Redfern minor severely.

"We should have had it if you hadn't rolled up Fatty Spratt at the last moment!" said Taffy wrathfully.

"Just what I was going to say!" remarked Rake.

"But we did roll him up!" grinned Redfern. "And he saved the situation. We've saved St. Dolly's from the undying disgrace of having a Modern captain!"

"Oh, go and eat coke! And let us pass!"

"Rats!"

"Look here," roared Taffy, "if I have to put down this basket, I'll give you the licking of your life, young Redfern!"

"Good! It will be an experience!"

Taffy's eyes gleamed with the light of battle. The defeat of the Modern candidate still rankled, and he was not sorry to come to battle with Redfern and Co.

He set the basket down in the passage, and Rake and Vernon did the same.

"Now, wipe them up!" said Taffy.

And the three Moderns rushed forward.

Now, it was easy to arrange to wipe the floor with the Classical chums, but it was not so easy to actually do it. So the Moderns found. The two parties closed with one another in deadly strife, and reeled to and fro, struggling and panting. But instead of the Classics being swept away, they stopped the rush easily, and came on in their turn.

Redfern minor went backwards in Taffy's powerful grip; but Skelton and Brown shoved Rake and Vernon back, on the other hand—and back and back till they stumbled over the baskets they had left on the floor and forgotten in the heat of the conflict.

"Ow!" gasped Rake, as he sat down, with Skelton's weight upon him, on one of the baskets.

There was a terrific squeal.

The top of the basket squashed in, and Rake sat amid eggs and tarts and cake.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Skelton. "That's rough on the feed!"

"Oh! Ow!" gurgled Vernon, sitting down on another basket, and then rolling over, with Brown III. clinging to him.

There was a sharp exclamation in the passage. Ransome came out of his study, and his face was black as he saw the damage done to his property.

He came quickly along, with his light, quiet tread, and a cricket-stump in his hand. His eyes were gleaming with rage.

Clump! Clump!

Redfern minor roared as the cricket-stump came across his back, and he let go Taffy suddenly.

Slash! Slash!

"Oh, oh, oh! Scoot, you kids!"

"Oh, rather!" gasped Skelton.

Leaving the Modern juniors and the scattered and squashed provisions, the three juniors "scouted" down the passage.

Ransome stared at the wrecked baskets.

"You young fools!" he exclaimed, glaring at Taffy & Co. "What do you mean by rowing here, and mucking up the things like this?"

"It wasn't our fault!" said Taffy ruefully, rubbing his nose, which had come into violent contact with Redfern's elbow. "You see——"

"You confounded young rascals!"

Taffy's eyes flashed.

"I tell you we couldn't help it, Ransome! We——"

"Take that!" exclaimed Ransome furiously. And he brought down the stump across Taffy's shoulders. "Now get the things in! Where are you going?"

Taffy was marching off down the passage, with a very red face. Rake and Vernon, who always followed their leader, marched after him.

"Come back!" roared Ransome.

"Sha'n't!"

"What?"

"If you can't be decent you can fag for yourself!" said Taffy defiantly. "You're not going to lam me with a stump! I won't touch the things!"

"What-ho, chappy!" said Vernon.

"Come here! I——"

"I won't!"

Ransome dashed after the juniors. They dodged round the corner of the passage and fled at once.

The cad of the Sixth stopped. It was useless to pursue the elusive juniors at that moment, whatever he might do later. He promised Taffy & Co. all sorts of unpleasant things in the future, and returned to the place where the baskets had been wrecked. With a savage brow he set about gathering up the things himself.

From a distance Redfern minor and his chums saw him, and they chuckled. It was amusing to see the bully fagging for himself.

Ransome crammed the articles upset on the floor into the baskets again, leaving, however, a considerable quantity of jam-tarts and butter and eggs adhering to the linoleum.

Ransome carried the things into his study, and slammed them down.

Ransome's study was assuming quite a festive aspect. There was a bright fire burning in the grate, and the table was laid with a white cloth, and nicely set. There were seven chairs in the study, four of them borrowed from along the passage. This showed that Ransome expected six guests—a considerable number for a Sixth Form tea-party. A red and perspiring fag was making toast at the fire. It was Gunter, of the Fourth, who had the honour of being ad-

mitted as a hanger-on to the Smart Set of St. Dolly's.

Ransome glanced at the clock.

"Time the fellows were here!" he growled.

Ransome was not in the habit of entertaining in his study. As a rule, he contrived to get a great deal of entertainment from others, but did not shine as a host himself. But on the present occasion he was doing the thing in style. He had his reasons; and that feed in Ransome's study was destined to have its results.

"Hallo! What's that?"

It was the sound of a heavy fall, and an angry exclamation in the passage.

Ransome looked out of the doorway.

Vane and Fellowes were coming along, and Vane's foot had slipped in the spilt eggs on the linoleum. Vane had skated along about three yards, and then sat down with a bump. Vane was looking now as if he would have liked to massacre somebody.

"My hat!" said Fellowes. "There's something on the floor!"

"Ow, I'm hurt!"

"By Jove, I'm sorry!" said Ransome, grinning in spite of himself. "My beastly fag spilt some eggs there!"

"Ow! I'll squash your fag!"

"You're welcome! Gunter, go and clear up that muck in the passage!"

And Gunter went. Vane came limping into the study, with a far from amiable expression. But his face cleared a little as he saw the preparations for the feed.

"Well this is all right," he remarked. "But I don't know what the idea is, Ranny, old son. You're not celebrating our defeat, I suppose?"

"No," said Ransome; "our future victory."

"Oh, I don't see——"

"Knowles is coming."

"Yes, but——"

"You'll see, my boy. Hallo, here's Milward and Allen and Mills."

The fellows came in, and Ransome told Gunter to make the tea. The array on the table was really very attractive, and the piles of buttered toast, keeping warm on the fender, gave forth an appetising smell. The fellows drew their chairs up round the table, but the guest of the evening had not yet arrived. It was some minutes later when Knowles entered the study, and nodded to the fellows there. The Modern prefect did not look very cheerful. He was not feeling cheerful, either.

"Here you are, Knowles, old man!" said Ransome. "Glad you've come! Buck up with that tea, Gunter! Sit down, Knowles!"

Under the influence of general sympathy and admiration, Knowles melted into a better humour. Ransome could be very agreeable when he liked, and he was very tactful now. To fan Knowles's resentment against Arthur Redfern was easy. To hint that Arthur was assuming masterful airs, on the strength of a majority of one at the election, was enough to make the jealous and passionate fellow ready to take exception to any and every action of Redfern's.

The tea passed off with growing cheeriness

on Knowles's part, and then Ransome bade Gunter clear the table and get out. Gunter obeyed, carrying off a quantity of tarts and toast, to be devoured in his own den. Then the seniors assumed more easy attitudes, stretching their legs, taking their ease, and chatting freely. And then Ransome opened a drawer in the table, and took out a packet of cigars and cigarettes. He passed them round, and every fellow except Knowles accepted one.

Knowles looked dubious. As a prefect, he knew very well that he ought to prevent anything of this sort; but it was difficult to start upon his friends, and then there was his desire to take a contrary part to Arthur Redfern's.

"Come, you'll smoke, just for once," said Ransome. "Redfern major isn't likely to look into my study, you know."

Knowles's face flushed at the suggestion that he was afraid of being seen by Redfern major. He reached out, and took a cigarette.

The study was soon cloudy with smoke, and Ransome opened the door wide. Knowles finished his cigarette, and lighted another.

"What the deuce——"

It was Arthur Redfern's voice. As he passed to go to his own study, Arthur could not help seeing what was going on. He stopped, looking in with an expression of unbounded surprise upon his face. Ransome looked at him coolly.

"Do you want anything?"

"What do you mean, Ransome?" exclaimed Arthur angrily. "Hanged if you're not growing worse every minute. You know this won't do! Suppose a master came along and saw you, what would the Head say to me?"

"I really don't know."

"Knowles, you ought to know better than this!" said Arthur. "Look here, stop it at once! I'm surprised to see a prefect taking part in a thing of this sort. Stop it!"

"Mind your own business!"

Arthur came into the study. His face was growing hard, his eyes glinting. He had been very patient with Knowles, but his patience was reaching its limits.

"Look here, I've had enough of this," he said. "It's got to stop. I suppose Ransome is at the bottom of it all!"

"You can let Ransome alone," said Knowles. "You're dealing with me now. The best thing you can do is to get out, and mind your own affairs!"

Arthur's eyes flamed.

"I've yielded a point once, Knowles; it was for the first and last time. This sort of thing is going to stop. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Knowles rose to his feet, trembling with anger and excitement.

"Leave the study!" he ground out.

"Don't be a fool, Knowles!"

"Get out!" said Knowles, in a low, concentrated voice. "I give you half a minute, then——"

"Well, then what?"

"Then I'll throw you out!"

"Knowles, you must be out of your senses, I think. I——"

"Are you going?"

"Certainly not! I——"

Knowles strode forward. Arthur pushed him back, and then the last vestige of Knowles's self-restraint gave way. His hand went up like lightning, and a blow from the open palm upon Arthur Redfern's face rang like a pistol-shot. The captain of St. Dolly's uttered a sharp cry, and reeled back towards the door.

CHAPTER 14.

A Bad Beginning.

ARTHUR REDFERN staggered towards the door of the study, with the strong grasp of the Modern prefect upon him. The new captain of St. Dolly's was more amazed than anything else. The flushed, angry face of Knowles was looking into his; the prefect seemed to have lost control of himself completely for the moment. It looked as if Knowles's threat would be carried out, and Arthur Redfern would be hurled from the study into the passage.

Ransome and his friends were on their feet now, looking on in tense interest and alarm. There was alarm in every face but Ransome's. A struggle between the two head prefects was an unheard-of occurrence; at the most hostile moments the hostility of the Classics and Moderns had never gone as far as that. And Arthur was captain of the school! There was only one fellow in the study who did not wish himself out of it. That one was Ransome.

His eyes were gleaming with satisfaction. All was going well—for him! For nothing now could heal the breach between the two seniors, and the first step had been taken for rendering Redfern's captaincy a farce in the school.

Back to the door Arthur Redfern staggered; but there he collected himself. Then he made an effort, threw himself forward, and Knowles reeled back in his turn. The fellows in the study scattered to make room for them.

Arthur Redfern wrenched himself loose, and with a great effort hurled Knowles back. The Modern prefect staggered against Ransome, who caught him and supported him.

"You fool!" cried Arthur. "You insane fool! What are you thinking of? Stand back!"

The sound of the struggle had already attracted attention. There was already a pattering of feet in the corridor.

When it became known that the captain of St. Dolly's was fighting with the head Modern prefect, all the school would be there.

Knowles faced the captain, flushed and panting.

"Get out, then!" he said.

"I will go," said Arthur, controlling his temper with a mighty effort. "I will go, to save a disgraceful scene before all St. Dolly's!"

Knowles clicked his teeth.

"Go, then. That's all I ask!"

"But this is not the end of it, Knowles. I shall expect an apology from you," said the captain of St. Dolly's sternly.

Knowles gave a bitter laugh.

"You will not get one!"

"I hope I shall, when you are cool. At present I'll leave you to think it over."

And Arthur Redfern stepped out of the study and closed the door. Three or four fellows were already on the spot, and they looked curiously at the flushed face of the captain.

"What's happened, Redfern?" exclaimed Plimsoll, of the Fifth.

Arthur passed on without replying. Plimsoll opened the study door, and looked in.

"Hallo, you chaps! What's happened? Been a row?"

"Yes," said Ransome.

"Oh, mind your own business!" said Knowles irritably. "Get out!"

"Keep your wool on!" said Plimsoll, in surprise. "I was only asking a civil question!"

"Well, don't bother!"

Plimsoll withdrew his inquiring head. Knowles kicked the door shut after him. The prefect's face was troubled. He was already ashamed of the outbreak.

"Look here, you chaps," he said roughly, "don't say anything about this outside ourselves. It's not a thing to jaw all over St. Dolly's!"

Vane nodded emphatically.

"You're right, Knowles!"

"Are you going to apologise to Redfern?" asked Ransome, with a sneer.

"No!" said the prefect hotly. "But if he doesn't wish it to go any further, I don't. I'm sorry I lost my temper, and that's a fact; though I wouldn't tell Redfern so!"

"But it must go farther unless you apologise," said Fellowes. "Redfern can't take a handling like that quietly."

"Not likely!" said Ransome. "But why not have it out? You could stand up to Redfern, and a real tussle would clear the air."

"Good heavens!" muttered Knowles. "What would the Head say if he heard? A fight between a head prefect and the captain of the school!"

"He would never hear."

"Besides, Redfern has forced it upon you," said Ransome. "You are only standing up for your rights, and the rights of your friends. Sit down and have a smoke!"

But Knowles shook his head and quitted the study. One by one Ransome's friends dropped away after him. They felt that there was trouble ahead, black trouble, and though they disliked interference from Arthur Redfern keenly enough, none of them could look to the future with the same cynical coolness displayed by Ransome.

Left alone, Ransome shrugged his shoulders and settled down to read a highly coloured sporting paper, lighting a fresh cigarette to assist him in the task.

Meanwhile, Arthur Redfern had gone to his study. He had been on his way there

when he had been drawn into the trap Ransome had laid for him. His minor was waiting for him in his study, to discuss some question dealing with junior football. Sidney looked at Arthur as he came in, and noted at once the expression upon his face.

"Anything wrong, Arthur, old chap?"

The quick, affectionate question was very different from the way Redfern minor would have spoken not so very long ago. There had been distrust on Arthur's part, loyalty on the minor's, till at last, when Sidney had saved Arthur from the results of his own reckless folly, the clouds between them had cleared away. Now there were not two firmer friends at St. Dorothy's than the major and the minor, in spite of the differences in their age and their position in the school.

Arthur Redfern closed the door. His face was dejected.

"Yes, Sid," he said quietly.

"I thought I heard some row up the passage," said Redfern minor anxiously. "What has happened?"

"Oh, it's Ransome, of course! You know, Sid, the vow I made when I got clear of those rotters who were doing their best to ruin me—ass that I was. I vowed I'd stamp out anything of the kind at St. Dolly's if I became captain; that I'd see that no other fellow was led into the same trouble that fell upon me?"

"Yes, Arthur; and I said I'd help you."

"I thought Ransome would have sense enough to turn over a new leaf, the same as I did. He was far deeper in that rotten business than I was, and he ran a much greater risk of being expelled if it came out. Instead of getting him to do the same as I've done, I've only made an enemy of him."

"He was always your enemy, Arthur."

"I suppose he was, in a sense; at all events, he's an open enemy now. He's got Knowles under his thumb, just as he used to have me, and he is determined to make as much trouble as he can, unless I let him and his precious Smart Set alone."

"Which you won't do?"

Arthur's eyes gleamed.

"Never!"

"Good for you!"

"Only there's been a row," said Arthur. "Knowles has struck me!"

"Struck you?" exclaimed Redfern minor, in astonishment. "The hound!"

"That's the beginning," said Arthur bitterly. "Of course, there's only one thing for me to do. I can't bring the matter before the Head—I suppose that's my strict duty, as captain of the school—but it would make the fellows all look on me as a sneak and a coward. I must fight Knowles."

Redfern minor drew a deep breath.

"Fight him?"

"Yes. Of course, that is Ransome's game. I am to open my term as captain with a fight with the head prefect of the Modern side. If it gets to the doctor's ears——"

"Phew!"

"But it can't be helped. Unless Knowles

apologises—which he won't do—I shall have to meet him."

Redfern minor looked dismayed.

"Well, it can't be helped!" said Arthur, more briskly. "What was it you wanted to see me about, Sid?"

"Oh, only about our junior football club!" said Redfern minor. "It doesn't matter, I won't bother you about it now."

"All right. Will you look for Courtney and tell him I want to speak to him?"

"Yes, Arthur, old man. Don't worry."

And Redfern minor quitted the study with a very troubled look on his face. He had worked hard to secure his brother's election as captain of St. Dolly's; but it was evident that the captaincy was not to be a bed of roses for Redfern major.

CHAPTER 15.

Captain Against Prefect.

COURTNEY, of the Sixth, tapped at Knowles's study door and entered. Courtney's handsome face was very serious, and it was easy to see that he had a weighty matter upon his mind. Knowles was busy at his table, with a Greek paper before him. At all events, he appeared to be busy. But it occurred to Courtney that he had only just taken up the pen as he heard the tap at the door.

"Hallo!" said Knowles, not very cordially.

He did not need telling that Courtney had come from Redfern major in connection with the scene in Ransome's study.

"I've got a message for you," said Courtney awkwardly. "This is a beastly bad business, Knowles."

"What business?"

"Your quarrel with Redfern."

"That was yesterday," said Knowles, with a yawn. "I fancied it was all over by this time."

"I really don't see how you could have fancied that, Knowles. It is impossible for Redfern to pass over a thing like that. He has been giving you time."

"Time for what?" asked the prefect disagreeably.

"To think it over. You ought to apologise."

"I don't think so."

"You know that Redfern was only doing his duty as captain of the school in interfering in what was going on in Ransome's study. You know jolly well that as a prefect you ought to have interfered, without waiting for Redfern."

"I don't want lessons from you, Courtney!"

"Well, the long and short of it is that Redfern hasn't heard from you, and so he has sent me," said Courtney abruptly.

"What do you intend to do?"

"Nothing."

"Something will have to be done. The matter can't remain where it is. Already the school is whispering that you have struck the captain, and that he has taken no step in

the matter. It is impossible for Arthur to let it go at that."

"He can do as he likes."

"If you refuse to apologise there is only one thing to be done."

"I suppose you mean a fight. Well, I am ready, if Redfern major is."

"I suppose you know what a rotten affair a fight between the captain of the school and a prefect will be," said Courtney. "If it came to the doctor's ears it would be enough to lose Redfern the captaincy. Do you want that?"

Knowles flushed crimson.

"If you think so, Courtney——"

"I don't think so, but you must think of it. If Redfern loses his position through this affair, I know what all the fellows will say about you."

Knowles shifted uneasily in his chair.

"Well, I can't help it," he said at last. "I won't apologise, that's flat. As for the Head getting to hear of it, why should he? I shall not say a word, and I suppose Redfern won't, and our seconds will keep the secret."

"These things have a way of getting out."

"Well, I don't see what's to be done."

"Very well; it's to be a fight, then. Who's your second?"

"Ransome."

"What time and place will suit you?"

"Any. Settle it with Ransome."

"Very well."

Courtney quitted the study. Ten minutes later Ransome entered it. There was a subdued glitter of triumph in the eyes of the cad of the Sixth. Matters were working out exactly as he had anticipated, and exactly as he wished.

"It's settled," he said. "I'm glad you've taken this line, Knowles. It will show Redfern and his set that you're not to be bullied. After all, practically half the school voted for you at the election, and it's absurd Redfern putting on all these flourishes over a majority of one, and that one a kid who was routed out of the tuckshop at the last moment."

Knowles nodded.

"What have you arranged, Ransome?"

"In an hour's time behind the chapel," said Ransome. "That's all right?"

"Yes. Mind, Ransome, this must be kept awfully dark," said Knowles uneasily. "If it gets to the Head, he will be down on Redfern major. Of course, I don't care for Redfern. But Courtney has pointed out that if it caused Redfern to be sacked from the captaincy, the fellows would look on it as a put-up job by me for that purpose."

"I don't see how the Head can hear of it," said Ransome, with a peculiar look in his eyes. "It's among us four, unless Redfern lets his minor know. He seems to tell his minor everything. He chums with him more than with anybody in the Sixth, I think."

"The boy might chatter."

"Possibly. That's Redfern's look-out. As a matter of fact, Knowles, if there is any interference from the masters, it will be because the Redfern party have talked. I

don't believe Arthur Redfern has a chance against you. Some of them might like the fight to be stopped before it ends in his getting a licking!"

"I don't know about that," said Knowles, with a short laugh. "I shall try my best, of course; but I don't feel very certain about the result."

"I think you'll win."

The two seniors remained in talk till the time for the meeting, and then they left the house together. Ransome had packed a few requisites for the fight in a bag. The early night had long set in, and the moon was sailing over the chapel, a cold, white light streaming down upon the buildings and the wide quadrangle. Behind the chapel was a lonely spot either by day or night, and now there was little chance of an intruder turning up there. The moonlight made it almost as bright as by day.

Arthur Redfern and Courtney were already on the ground when Knowles and his second arrived. Arthur's brow contracted a little at the sight of Ransome. He would rather any other fellow had been Knowles's second. But, of course, it was not for him to raise any objection on that score.

Courtney came forward to meet the late comers.

"I suppose you haven't changed your decision?" he asked, in a last faint hope that the contest might be avoided.

Knowles shook his head without speaking.

"Certainly not," said Ransome.

"Very well."

In silence the two principals stripped off their jackets. Ransome opened his bag, and produced sponge and towel, and a can, which he filled at a tap in the garden. Then all was ready for the conflict.

"Three minute rounds and minute rests," said Courtney, taking out his watch. "Is that agreeable?"

"Yes."

"Time!"

The two seniors stepped up. They shook hands in a mechanical way, and immediately the sparring commenced.

Both of them were half-hearted at the start. The weight of his responsibility as captain of the school was hanging upon Arthur. It was his duty to put down fighting in the school, and here he was fighting, and with a prefect! Yet what other course had been open to him? Knowles was worried, too. He was not a bad fellow in the main by any means, though obstinate and passionate. As a prefect he was in an unpleasant position himself, and he felt, too, that he had placed Arthur at an unfair disadvantage. But the only alternative—an apology—was out of the question, from his point of view.

But as the round proceeded both of them warmed up to the work. Arthur's right came home on Knowles's chin, and Knowles put in a counter that rang on the captain's chest. Then both faces flushed a little, and the fighting grew more earnest.

"Time!" said Courtney.

They parted, both panting a little, both

with sparkling eyes. Ransome clapped his principal on the back.

"Good!" he whispered. "Get as close to him as you can. You're stronger than he is, but not so light on your feet, you see; get close in and hammer him. That's your cue."

"Right-ho!"

The second round commenced. Knowles pressed the fighting now, and Arthur Redfern gave ground a little.

But his guard was perfect, and hardly one of Knowles's slogging blows got home, and even while giving ground he dealt tap after tap upon his adversary's face and chest.

Knowles's face grew more and more crimson with exertion and anger as he strove in vain to get through Arthur's defence.

But it seemed to be impossible.

Finally, towards the close of the round, Knowles made a desperate assault, fairly hurling himself upon the captain of St. Dolly's.

Arthur Redfern gave ground again, guarding skilfully; but Knowles received, without heeding, two smart taps on the jaw, and came on, slogging furiously. He broke through Redfern's guard, and dealt him a heavy right-hander, which Arthur partially guarded. The blow missed his face, but grazed his ear, and spun him half round. As he spun, Knowles drove in his left, catching him on the side of the jaw.

Arthur dropped like a log.

"Time!"

It was the end of the second round.

Courtney helped up his dazed chum, and sponged his face, giving him a seat upon his knee. His face was serious and quiet.

Arthur did not speak a word. His head was ringing, his jaw aching; but his brows were knitted with determination.

"Time!"

They stepped up to the line again. Again Knowles tried his rushing tactics, which had proved so successful once. But this time they were not so successful.

Arthur Redfern was more on his mettle than ever, and he was putting all he knew into that round. Knowles came on like a bull, but reeled back panting from a defence he could not penetrate, and, as he receded, Redfern major came on.

His fists seemed to move like lightning. His right came through Knowles's guard, and caught him under the chin, and Knowles staggered.

Like a flash, Redfern's left was on his chin in a jarring blow, and in a twinkling the ready right had followed it up, and Knowles went to the earth like a sack of wheat.

He bumped on the ground with a shock that shook out what little breath he had left, and lay there dazed and gasping.

Redfern dropped his hands, and waited. Courtney, watch in hand, counted. The fight was according to rule. If Knowles did not rise at "ten," he was beaten.

"One—two—three—four—five—"

The Modern prefect sprang to his feet. Arthur Redfern could have struck him down as he did so, but he did not. He allowed

his opponent to rise, and contented himself with defence as the prefect came on again furiously. Knowles's senses were swimming, but he attacked fiercely, and for some seconds Redfern had all his work cut out to guard the driving blows.

Then he came in again, hitting hard, and Knowles staggered, and crashed on the grass once more. Courtney was looking at his watch.

"Time!"

It was fortunate for Knowles, for he would never have risen again in ten seconds. Ransome lifted him, and made a knee for him. There was a slightly anxious look upon Ransome's face; but it was not caused by the events of the fight.

He had hardly been looking on at the last round. More than once his eyes had swept round as if in expectation of something, or somebody; but the clear moonlight shining down, showed only the level stretch of grass by the chapel railings, and the dim buildings shutting off the view towards the school.

Knowles gasped painfully as he rested on Ransome's knee.

"That was bad!" said Ransome, in a low voice. "But keep it up. Hang it out as long as you can, and don't get to close quarters for a bit."

"Time!"

Redfern stepped up briskly; Knowles as willingly, but more slowly. The round was hard and fast from the start. Blows were given and taken almost unheeded, and the two combatants advanced and receded, swayed and hammered, as if unconscious of pain. Their eyes were gleaming now. They had forgotten everything but the fight. Each saw only the hostile face before him, and had forgotten all else.

Courtney looked on with keen anxiety. This was probably the last round; it could not go on at this pace. But Ransome was not looking on. His glance swept the shadows round the chapel again.

From the mass of shadow a moving form detached itself, apparently coming from the direction of the school. Ransome's eyes glittered, and he turned to the scene of the fight once more, watching keenly.

The fight was hard and furious. The faces of both seniors showed terrible signs of the conflict. Knowles's left eye was closed, and his nose was swollen, his lip cut, his cheek bruised.

Arthur Redfern's nose was streaming red, but he never even noticed it. There were cuts on his face, a lump on his chin. But he was careless of all as he pressed his enemy harder and harder.

Knowles was weakening. Twice—thrice Arthur's blows came heavily in, and he could not stop them. He reeled and reeled, still fighting. Arthur gathered all his energy for a final effort.

Knowles's guard was swept helplessly away, and Arthur Redfern's right crashed on his chin. As he staggered back, Arthur put in with his left fairly on the "mark."

Knowles gave a single gasp, with a sound

like air escaping from a punctured tyre, and dropped. Courtney counted.

"One—two—three—four—five—"

Knowles did not even move. The moonlight shone on his white, bruised face; only his eyes were wide open, glittering with rage and helpless chagrin. But he was done.

"Six—seven—eight—"

"Boys! Redfern! Knowles! What does this mean?"

It was a deep, stern voice. Courtney stopped counting, the words frozen on his lips. The Sixth-Formers swung round towards the newcomer in utter dismay. It was the Head!

CHAPTER 16.

An Anonymous Letter.

"THE Head!"

Arthur Redfern stood dumb-founded, his starting eyes fixed upon the grave, severe figure of the Head of St. Dorothy's.

Knowles, still dazed and dizzy, blinked up from the ground, still making no attempt to rise. Courtney seemed thunderstruck. If anyone kept his coolness, it was Ransome. Ransome was so cool that one might have suspected that the sudden appearance of the Head was not wholly unexpected by him.

There was a grim silence for some moments.

Dr. Cranston's severe glance took in the whole scene—the two seniors in their shirt-sleeves, the sponge and the basin, the bruised faces—and Knowles stretched on the sward. He did not need telling what had been passing there.

"Redfern!" he said at last. "Redfern! You!"

Arthur hung his head.

There was more of reproach than severity in the doctor's voice. And what could the captain of St. Dolly's say to him—the captain, appointed to keep the rules of the school respected, and now caught in the act of flagrantly breaking them?

"Redfern, I can hardly believe my eyes! You are captain of the school; Knowles is a prefect. I was told that I should find a disgraceful scene proceeding here, but I never expected to find this!"

Arthur Redfern started.

"You were told, sir?"

"Yes. I received an anonymous letter," said the Head. "Anonymous letters I usually should regard with contempt, but the writer of this one apparently had the cause of order in the school at heart, and wished to prevent a disgraceful encounter. At all events, as the warning was plainly given, I considered it my duty to heed it; and I am glad now that I did so. I have learned in what hands I am reposing trust; I have discovered what the captain of St. Dorothy's and a prefect of the school are capable of."

Knowles staggered to his feet. Ransome gave him a helping hand, and the Modern prefect stood unsteadily leaning upon his friend.

"May I see the letter, sir?" asked Arthur.

"There is no need for you to see it," said the Head. "The writer especially asks me to keep his identity a secret, as he fears punishment from one of you—he does not specify exactly whom. I have no suspicion as to who the writer is, but the letter might betray him to you. I shall keep his secret. I do not, as I have said, approve of this method of communicating intelligence, but this boy, whomsoever he might be, has done his duty."

Knowles's lips curled in a sneer.

"His duty!" he murmured. "Who was it, Ransome? Who has sneaked?"

Ransome shrugged his shoulders, and did not reply.

"Have you anything to say, Knowles and Redfern?" asked the Head. "I have discovered you in the act of fighting like two quarrelsome fags. What have you to say?"

The two seniors were silent.

"You place me in an exceedingly difficult position," said Dr. Cranston. "Can I allow a boy to continue to hold the position of prefect after discovering him thus? Can I allow you, Redfern, to remain captain of the school?"

Redfern major started again. Ransome's eyes gleamed for a moment.

"I shall take time to come to a decision," said Dr. Cranston, after a pause. "If you have any explanation to make, in the meantime, you can make it to me. Now both of you go in at once. If this affair proceeds any further, I shall resort to the severest measures."

"It will not proceed further, sir," said Arthur.

Knowles was silent.

The doctor strode away with rustling gown.

The four seniors looked at one another, and three of them at least looked exceedingly sheepish.

"This is rotten," said Courtney, the first to speak.

"I can't understand it," muttered Arthur. "How could an anonymous letter have been sent? No one but ourselves knew of the matter."

"It's pretty clear to me," said Ransome quietly.

The other three looked at him.

"What do you make of it, then?" asked Courtney.

"What the Head says about the chap writing that letter from a sense of duty is all piffle. A chap doesn't sneak from a sense of duty."

"That's right enough."

"The writer has done it for one reason—and one reason only—to favour either you or Redfern," said Ransome, speaking to Knowles. "I imagine it is some friend of one of you, who—"

"It was hardly a friendly act, I should think," said Arthur.

"You don't follow me. Suppose some friend of yours, for instance, thought that you were certain to be licked by Knowles. I only say suppose. He might write this letter to the Head to get the fight stopped, to save the captain of St. Dolly's from having to acknowledge a licking."

Arthur flushed red.

"You have no right to suppose anything of the sort!" he exclaimed hotly.

"Well, how else do you account for it?"

"I don't account for it. Besides, your remark would only fit Courtney, as he is the only friend of mine who knows anything about it."

"Exactly!" said Courtney, with a nod.

"It might have been a friend of Knowles's, anxious for him, as I said," replied Ransome, with a shrug of the shoulders. "I'm pretty certain that's correct, and I think the rotter ought to be found out."

"I don't see how he's to be found out, if the Head won't let us see the letter."

"We might get to see it, all the same. Besides, if you carefully go over in your mind all the fellows who knew anything about this—"

"I told nobody," said Knowles.

"And you, Redfern?"

"No one."

"Not even your minor?" asked Ransome.

Arthur started.

He had not told Sidney Redfern, but there was no doubt that he had said enough to his minor to give the junior a pretty clear idea as to how matters stood. Sidney might have kept his eyes and ears open sufficiently to be informed about that meeting behind the chapel. Ransome watched the captain's face with a sneering smile.

"Well?" he said.

"You have no right to mention my minor's name!" exclaimed Arthur hotly. "There is not the slightest reason to suppose anything of the sort."

"I shouldn't be surprised at it," said Knowles spitefully.

"Rot!" exclaimed Courtney, in his direct way. "Why should young Redfern have any fears for his major? You were licked when the Head came up, Knowles. I don't suppose Reddy doubted for an instant that you would be licked, if he knew anything about this at all."

Knowles gritted his teeth.

"I think it ought to be gone into," said Ransome.

"Well, look into it, and don't begin mentioning names till you've got something more than bare suspicion to go upon!" exclaimed Courtney. "Come on, Arthur."

Redfern major and his second left the spot.

Knowles slowly donned his waistcoat and jacket, with Ransome's assistance. He did not speak until they were leaving the spot. Then he looked suddenly at Ransome, as the cad of the Sixth walked at his side.

"Do you think Redfern minor wrote that anonymous letter, Ransome?" he asked.

Ransome nodded.

"You do?"

"Yes."

"But Arthur Redfern had the better of me."

"You were unlucky; anybody would have said you had the better chance. Young Redfern is wrapped up in his brother. He would do that, or anything else, to assist

him. And, of course, he never counted upon Redfern major getting into a row with the Head. A kid like that wouldn't think of everything."

Knowles nodded, and no more was said on the subject then.

But the faces of the two seniors were a sufficient indication to all the fellows at St. Dolly's that there had been trouble; and somehow or other it was soon whispered about that Redfern major and Knowles had had a desperate encounter, which had been interrupted by the Head; the Head having been directed to the spot by an anonymous letter suspected to have been written by Redfern minor. That was what the seniors were saying among themselves, and naturally enough the intelligence soon reached the junior Forms.

CHAPTER 17.

Guilty!

"IT seems to be pretty clear that Redfern's minor wrote it."

Arthur Redfern stopped as he heard the words.

It was the day after the fight behind the chapel. The captain of St. Dolly's had not seen the Head since, excepting in class in the Sixth Form-room. What Dr. Cranston's decision was he did not know. Knowles, too, who had fully expected to have his name struck off the list of prefects, was waiting for the blow to fall; but it had not yet fallen.

Meanwhile, the story of the anonymous letter was all over the school. The Fourth Form knew it from beginning to end, though no one had mentioned it to Redfern minor so far. There was a certain delicacy about mentioning it to Redfern minor. Suspicion had fastened upon him; no one quite knew how or why, though, doubtless, Ransome could have explained.

Arthur Redfern knew it; but he had not seen his minor yet, and he did not know whether to mention it to him. He did not believe for a single instant that Sidney had written the letter, yet he was puzzled to know who could have written it.

The words he now heard came suddenly upon his ears as he came down the steps of the School House after morning lessons. In spite of all he had done to remove them, the signs of the late conflict were very plain upon his face. Arthur glanced round quickly, and saw Vane and Fellowes standing together near the steps. It was Vane who had spoken.

Arthur fixed his eyes upon Vane, who looked a little uneasy.

"I heard what you said, Vane," said Arthur quietly.

Vane shrugged his shoulders with an air of defiance.

"Well, what then?"

"You were speaking of the anonymous letter written to the Head to cause him to stop the fight yesterday."

"Yes."

"You said my minor wrote it."

"I said it seems pretty clear."

"And why?" asked Arthur, suppressing his anger. "How does it seem clear?"

"Well, it seems that your minor knows most of your business, from all accounts," said Vane. "And certainly no one else knew anything about the matter, except the principals concerned. Knowles never said a word, he says, and I know Courtney wouldn't. Ransome didn't mention it—he'd have told me, as I'm his chum, if he'd told anybody—and I never had the faintest idea anything was going on, till I saw you and Knowles come in with your faces bashed. You must have let something fall to your minor, I think."

"I might have—but he never wrote that letter."

"Well, if you want the fellows to believe that, you'd better find out who did write it," said Fellowes, with a yawn. "It looks to most of us as if your minor did it; and some of the chaps say—"

He paused.

"Well," said Arthur, with a scornful glance at the ornament of the St. Dolly's Smart Set. "What do the chaps say?"

"Well," said Fellowes, stung by his look. "It has been whispered that your minor did it with your knowledge, because you didn't care to face Knowles to a finish."

Arthur laughed contemptuously.

"So they say that, do they—you among the others, I suppose?"

"Oh, no," said Fellowes, retreating a pace or two. "I don't say anything. I've an open mind on the subject."

"I should advise you to stop gossiping about it," said Arthur scornfully. "It's easy to say that another chap has said something; but you may get the punishment of a slanderer if you repeat the slander."

And Arthur walked away, leaving Fellowes scowling angrily. Vane broke into a sneering laugh.

"By Jove, it looks as if there were something in it!" he said.

"That Redfern made his minor write the letter?"

"Yes."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Fellowes spitefully. "A ripping captain for a school like St. Dolly's. I don't think."

"He mayn't be captain long," said Vane. "He hasn't made a good beginning. I should be surprised if Redfern major didn't resign before long."

Arthur Redfern's brow was contracted as he walked away. He was quite certain that his minor was innocent of the act he was suspected of, but exactly how to make that clear to others was a problem. If the Head had allowed him to see the anonymous letter, something might have been done. But that letter was safe in Dr. Cranston's keeping, if indeed it had not been destroyed.

He passed Ransome in the quadrangle, walking with Knowles. They were speaking together in low voices, and Arthur thought he knew the subject of their talk. He hesitated for a few moments, and then turned back to speak to them. They stopped. A

slight sneering smile was lurking on Ransome's face.

"I want to speak to you fellows," said Arthur abruptly. "Someone has been setting a yarn afoot that my minor wrote the anonymous letter to the doctor."

"Well, these things will get out," said Ransome.

"You mean to say that you believe it?"

"I don't know about that; but it looks very probable. Redfern minor was the only one beside ourselves who knew that you were going to fight Knowles. It looks to me as if only he could have written the letter. Anyway, the fellow who did it ought to be found out and cut by the whole school; and I think the matter ought to be investigated. Knowles was just saying so, too."

"Well, you were saying so, but I agree with you," said Knowles. "It's due to all of us to have the thing sifted out. Some of the fellows will begin saying that we ourselves, or some of us, wrote that rotten letter. It's a jolly unpleasant business, but it ought to be cleared up, I think."

"How can it be cleared up? I know my minor never wrote the letter."

"Suppose we got the letter from the Head?" suggested Ransome. "It stands to reason that there must be some clue in it—the handwriting—"

"I suppose that would be disguised," said Knowles.

"Yes. But there would be a trace or two. Besides, the paper, the ink—lots of things might give the writer away without his foreseeing it."

"The Head has the letter," said Arthur quietly. "He refused to show it to us."

"Well, we ought to get it somehow. If you tell him that your minor is suspected by everybody, he will give you the letter, to help you clear him. You can promise that the name of the writer shall be kept a secret if you discover who wrote the letter, for our own satisfaction."

Arthur Redfern nodded.

"I will speak to the Head."

He walked away without another word. He had seen the Head go into his study, and he followed him there. Dr. Cranston's deep voice bade him enter, and Arthur stepped into the study. The Head's clear eyes met his.

"Redfern!"

"Yes, sir." Arthur coloured awkwardly before the steady gaze of the Head. "I—I haven't come here to speak about myself, sir. Though, if you think fit, I am quite ready to resign the captaincy of the school."

Dr. Cranston shook his head.

"I have not asked you to do that, Redfern. But what is it you wish to speak to me about?"

"About the anonymous letter, sir."

"What of that?"

"The fellows are saying that my minor wrote it. I know it is not true. Will you allow some of the Sixth to see the letter, sir, so that they can prove whether my minor wrote it?"

"The letter was written with good intentions."

"The fellows don't look at it like that, sir. They look on it as sneaking. If my minor isn't cleared, he will be sent to Coventry."

The Head frowned.

"But in that case, if you discover the real writer, I take it that he will be sent to Coventry, Redfern."

"We would keep it a secret, sir, if you think fit. I only wish to be able to clear Sidney. I know he did not write the letter. If he did, he ought to take the consequences. At present he is under the imputation, without a chance to defend himself."

"I am sorry for this. You will see, Redfern, how one wrong action leads to another. But for your quarrel with Knowles this could not have happened."

Arthur was silent. The Head rose, and unlocked a drawer of his desk, and took out a sheet of scribbled paper. He handed it to Redfern major.

"That is the letter, Redfern. You can use it for purposes of investigation; but return it to me as soon as possible. At the same time, I charge you not to make known the name of the writer when you find him, if you do."

"I only want to clear Sidney, sir."

And Arthur left the study with the letter. Knowles and Ransome were waiting for him, and Courtney had joined them. Arthur explained briefly to the three seniors what the doctor had said. Then he showed them the letter.

It was written in pencil on a sheet of common ruled paper, torn from an exercise-book. The torn edge was very ragged. The writing was a large round hand, and looked as if it had been adopted for purposes of disguise, for here and there it grew unconsciously smaller. The letter ran as follows:

"Sir,—A disgraceful scene will take place this evening behind the chapel soon after seven o'clock.—A Friend to Order."

"The rotten cad, whoever he was!" said Knowles, between his teeth.

Ransome scanned the letter.

"I've seen that writing before," he said. "It looks like the scrawl of a Second-Form fag; but that's the disguise. Look here, where the chap goes smaller and smaller every now and then. It's a pity the letter isn't longer. But—"

"I cannot see any clue in it," said Arthur.

"I can, Redfern. Look here! There are two g's in the letter. Have you ever seen g's with curly tails like that?"

Arthur Redfern started. He had. He remembered perfectly well that extra curly tail to the small g, which he had seen in his brother's exercises when he corrected them for him.

"My fag used to do notes for me," said Ransome. "I remember his writing. My fag was Redfern minor, as you know."

The seniors looked at one another.

"It's pretty clear," said Knowles.

"There's more evidence to come," said Ransome. "Better make a thing like this

perfectly clear. This sheet has been torn from an exercise-book. The fags always write their notes that way—they never have any notepaper. You see how the edge is torn?"

"Yes; it's ragged."

"That edge ought to fit into some exercise-book," said Ransome quietly. "You see the point? The chap whose exercise-book it fits wrote the letter."

"Good!" said Courtney.

"Come!" said Arthur Redfern roughly.

He strode away to his minor's study. He looked in, with the others at his heels, and found the three chums there. Redfern minor, Skelton, and Brown were sitting round a Gamage price-list, looking out the prices of roller-skates. They started up in surprise when the four seniors came in.

"Hallo!" said Redfern minor. "Anything up? What on earth are you looking like that for, Arthur?"

"Where is your exercise-book?"

"What!"

"Your exercise-book—quick! I want to see it."

"But—but I don't understand——"

"None of your dodging," exclaimed Ransome. "Get the book, and be quick."

Redfern minor's eyes gleamed.

"Who's dodging! What do you mean, you cad?"

Arthur Redfern pushed Ransome back, and spoke in a quieter voice. His face was harassed.

"Sidney, it's important. Get me your exercise-book at once."

"Oh, all right!" said Sidney, in wonder.

He laid the book on the table. Arthur opened it, and turned the leaves slowly, till he came to a place where one was missing. The others watched him in dead silence. There was a deep breath as the ragged edge, where the missing leaf had been torn off, was seen.

In silence Arthur Redfern laid the scrawled sheet in the book, and fitted the edges together. They fitted perfectly! There was not the slightest doubt that the sheet had been torn from Redfern minor's exercise-book—not the slightest doubt in any mind in the study.

"It fits exactly!" said Ransome.

Arthur's face was haggard.

"Well, what does it all mean?" broke out Redfern minor. "I don't see what it matters. Do you mean to say that that sheet has been torn from my book?"

"Yes," said Arthur.

"And what is that sheet, then?"

"It's the anonymous letter that was sent to the Head."

Redfern minor's face blanched. He saw in a flash what it meant. He would be branded as a sneak!

"So you wrote the letter, you little sneak!" cried Ransome angrily.

Sidney clenched his fists, then out shot his left and caught Ransome a stinger on the point of the jaw.

"Sneak yourself!" he retorted hotly, as Ransome reeled back against the wall.

"You cad, you shall pay for this!" hissed Ransome, his face livid with rage. "You'll be sacked for striking a prefect. Come to the Head, you rotten sneak!"

And he dragged Sidney towards the door.

CHAPTER 18.

Black Against Redfern Minor.

REDFERN MAJOR clutched Ransome's arm.

"Don't be a fool, Ransome!" he said. "You must complain to me, not to the Head. He wouldn't listen to you. Besides, you asked for it, you know. You can't expect a kid to take that sort of thing lying down."

"I suppose not," grumbled Ransome, releasing his hold.

There was a dead silence in the study.

Redfern minor stared, as if fascinated, at the exercise-book, into which the torn sheet fitted so exactly.

It was impossible to doubt that the sheet of paper used for the anonymous letter to the Head had been torn from that book—Redfern minor's book. The slight similarity in the handwriting which Ransome had discovered—slight in itself—was of great weight now. Taken together, the proofs seemed clear enough.

Redfern minor had written the anonymous letter!

It was through Redfern minor that Knowles was in danger of losing his prefectship, that Ransome and Courtney were in disgrace, and that Redfern major might cease to be captain of St. Dolly's.

The junior stood dumbfounded, the accusing glances on all sides seeming to cut him like sharp steel.

"Sidney"—Arthur Redfern spoke at last—

"Sidney, why did you do this?"

Redfern minor did not reply. He only turned a pale and troubled face upon his brother.

Arthur's glance was hard and stern now.

"Answer me, Sidney!"

"What—what do you think I have done?"

"This letter was written to the Head, warning him that Knowles and I were about to fight behind the chapel!" said Arthur Redfern sternly. "No one would have known a syllable about it but for this letter. Ransome suggested that a friend of mine wrote it, thinking to save me from being defeated by Knowles."

"I determined to look into the matter—to clear you. I was so certain that you were innocent that I begged the letter of the doctor, promising that as soon as you were cleared, it should be returned to him, the name of the real culprit being kept a secret. And now——"

"And now the real culprit turns out to be Redfern minor," broke in Ransome, with a sneer. "As a matter of fact, I was quite sure of it all along."

"Have you anything to say, Sidney?" B

"I?" said Redfern minor, with a start.

"Yes. I won't answer that cad—I'll answer you!"

Ransome made a step forward. A look from Arthur was enough to make him step back again. The cad of the Sixth gritted his teeth. The bitter contempt in Redfern minor's voice pierced even his thick skin.

"Go on, Sidney!"

"What's the use?" broke in Knowles brusquely. "We know the young cad wrote the letter! What is the use of listening to a string of lies?"

Redfern minor coloured hotly.

"I shall tell you no lies!" he exclaimed. "If I had written the letter, I should own up to it."

"If!" sneered Knowles.

Arthur looked worried and harassed.

"Do you mean to say that you did not write it, Sidney?"

Sidney Redfern flushed.

"I never expected that question from you, Arthur."

"Answer it, all the same."

"No, I did not write the letter," said Redfern minor steadily. He was recovering his coolness now. "I never saw it before."

"What's the good of listening to him?" said Knowles impatiently. "We've proved his guilt, and that's enough. I'm going!"

"Stay a moment," said Arthur. "If my brother has anything to say, you ought to hear it. Look here, Sidney, you can see that this sheet came out of your exercise-book."

"It looks like it."

"The edges fit exactly; there is no doubt about it."

"Well, no, I suppose there isn't," said Redfern minor, looking at the sheet. "But I didn't write the letter, all the same. And I never saw it before. I suppose the cad who wrote it tore a sheet out of my exercise-book to write it on. If he was keen, he wouldn't use his own paper."

"That's as good as accusing your study-mates!" said Ransome.

Redfern's eyes blazed.

"Nothing of the sort, and you know it! You're a rotten cad to suggest such a thing!"

"You impudent whelp!"

"Hold your tongue, Ransome!" said Arthur savagely.

"Do you think I'm going to be talked to like that by a fag?" demanded Ransome, his voice trembling with rage.

"Let him alone, then."

"Skelton and Brown knew I didn't mean anything of the sort," said Redfern minor, with a glance at his chums.

"What-ho!" said Skelton.

"Of course, you didn't!" said Brown. "It's jolly odd about somebody taking a leaf out of your exercise-book; but anybody could do it, if he liked. The book lies there on the table, and it's never been locked up. Anybody could handle it."

Arthur Redfern glanced at the seniors.

It was certainly possible that anybody could have taken a leaf out of the book, if he had wanted to; but it was equally certain that this was, naturally, the first thing that Redfern minor would say if he were guilty.

There was grim disbelief in each face.

Only Skelton and Brown's firm faith in their chum never wavered for a moment. Their loyalty was plain in their faces.

"I don't know what to think," said Arthur, at last.

"I do," said Ransome. "Redfern minor wrote the letter."

"So I think," said Knowles.

"What do you think, Courtney?"

Courtney hesitated. He was Arthur's chum, and hated to back up Knowles and Ransome against him. But his opinion was visible upon his face.

"Well, I can't help thinking that it looks pretty plain," he said, at last. "I'm sorry to say so, Redfern. But it does seem pretty black. There's the similarity of the hand, too—it was that that brought us here in the first place. Then we found that the sheet fitted into Redfern minor's book."

"It would be simply obstinacy to doubt any further," said Knowles. "You know, as well as we do, Redfern, that your minor wrote the letter."

Arthur was silent.

"I did not write it," said Redfern minor.

"I'm going!" said Knowles. "That young cad betrayed us to the Head. He did it, I suppose, with the idea of benefiting you; but it looks like working out the other way, and serve you both jolly well right! And I tell you plainly that if I lose my prefectship, I'll make the cad wish he never was born!"

And the Modern prefect strode from the study, followed by Ransome. Courtney gave a hesitating look at Arthur, and slowly followed. Arthur did not appear to notice it. He stood quite still, with the anonymous letter tightly grasped in his hand.

Again there was a dead silence. Sidney understood how terribly black everything was against him; but he expected his brother to have faith in him. Arthur's expression, however, showed that his faith was more than wavering.

"You say you did not write the letter, Sidney?" he said, at last.

"I have said so."

"And—and you can suggest nothing except that the writer may have torn the page out of your book?"

"That is all."

"Don't you see how weak it is? You were the only person, besides the seniors, who knew of the fight. Suspicion rested on you, anyway. Now, all the proofs that have been discovered are against you."

Redfern minor bit his lip.

"I understand, Arthur. It looks to me as if an enemy of mine has been at work—as if the paper wasn't taken from my book simply by chance."

Arthur shook his head.

"It's no good starting anything of that kind, Sidney. I am afraid all the fellows will conclude that you wrote the letter."

"And you?" cried Redfern minor, stung to the quick.

"I don't know what to think!" said Arthur.

"You ought to know what to think!" said Sidney hotly. "If you were accused of

a caddish thing like this, do you think I should believe it? I'd investigate it, and never rest till I'd found out the truth. You ought to have faith in me."

Arthur coloured.

"I can't have faith in you in the face of positive evidence," he said. "I'll try to keep an open mind, that's all. I must take this letter back to the Head now."

He left the study. A couple of minutes later he was in the presence of Dr. Cranston. The Head looked at him gravely and quietly.

"Well, have you made any discovery, Redfern?"

"It appears so, sir," said Arthur wretchedly. "The sheet belongs to my minor's exercise-book, and Ransome has found a similarity of handwriting."

The Head started.

"Then Redfern minor——"

"He denies having written the letter, sir."

The Head pursed up his lips.

"As I have said, Redfern, I think the writer of that anonymous letter acted from a sheer sense of duty, though I cannot, of course, approve of anonymous communications. I therefore wished to keep his identity a secret. If it is your minor——"

"I was so certain it wasn't Sidney, sir."

"Indeed, I agree with you," said the Head. "Redfern minor is not at all the kind of junior to have so overstrained a sense of duty as to write an anonymous warning to me because a fight was taking place. He would be more likely, I think, to climb a tree near the place and get a good view of the fight."

Arthur smiled slightly. That would certainly have been much more like his brother.

"I know that, in the eyes of the boys, this letter being written to me must appear in the light of a crime," said the Head.

"If Redfern minor is believed to be guilty of it, he will have a most unpleasant experience. If the matter is not allowed to die I shall, I think, send for a handwriting expert, and have the matter thoroughly sifted. Meanwhile, I shall keep the letter locked up in my desk."

And Arthur Redfern left the Head's study. He was feeling doubtful and miserable. Ransome had failed to prevent him from becoming captain of St. Dolly's. But he had to admit that his captaincy had not been a bed of roses so far.

CHAPTER 19.

Something Like a Row.

"WELL, what sort of a worm do you call yourself?"

Lumsden, of the Fourth, a Modern junior, propounded that question as if it had been a conundrum, as he met Redfern minor in the passage after morning school, the next day. Sidney gave a start, and stared at Lumsden. Modern and Classical seldom met without some exchange of remarks more or less complimentary, generally less. But Lumsden was evidently not merely chipping.

"What sort of a worm do you call yourself?" demanded Lumsden.

"Off your rocker?" asked Redfern. "I don't call myself any sort of a worm; but if you're looking for a thick ear I'm ready to oblige you."

"I wouldn't fight you!" said Lumsden loftily.

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"I wouldn't touch a chap who writes anonymous letters."

Redfern's face was flooded with crimson.

He understood now.

The subject of the anonymous letter had been dropped among the Classical juniors. They could not, and would not, believe that Redfern minor had written it, and if a few had their doubts, loyalty to the side kept them dumb. But the Moderns were under no such restriction. They had no particular reason to believe in Redfern's innocence, and they allowed the weight of evidence to have its natural influence upon them.

Redfern looked at Lumsden, and the Modern looked at Redfern, and wished he had not raised the subject. Redfern's eyes were blazing.

"So you think I wrote that letter?" said Redfern.

"Well, you did, you know."

"You can think what you like, I suppose," said Redfern, without heeding the interruption. "But you jolly well won't say so while I'm within hitting distance of your chivvy. You catch on? Put up your fists!"

"I'm not going to fight with a——"

"You should have thought of that before you spoke. Are you going to put up your hands?"

"You ass! Just outside the class-room? Ford will be on us."

"I don't care!"

"Look here, I won't——"

Smack!

Redfern's open hand rang across Lumsden's face with a crack like that of a whiplash.

"Will you now?"

Lumsden did not need any more. He sprang like a tiger at Redfern and Redfern met him with right and left. Lumsden rolled on the floor, with the red streaming from his nose, and one eye blinking shut. He hardly knew what had happened to him, as he rolled there, gasping.

Mr. Ford came out of the Form-room at that moment.

He looked angrily at the two juniors.

"What!" he exclaimed. "Redfern—Lumsden! You can find no more appropriate place to brawl than just outside the Form-room. Get up, Lumsden!"

Lumsden scrambled to his feet.

"You will take fifty lines each!" said Mr. Ford. "Be off with you!"

"Yes, sir," said Redfern.

He walked away. The fifty lines did not cause the cloud that settled on his brow. He generally had as many lines as that on hand. Neither did he care for Lumsden. But the incident had shown him how he was looked upon in the Fourth Form. His own friends believed him; but all who were not attached to him by personal ties would not believe

him. The anonymous letter was destined to cause trouble. What did Taffy and Co. think of it? He could hardly believe that they considered him guilty. Yet—

"Wherefore that worried brow, Reddy, my son?" said Skelton, clapping him on the shoulder as he turned into the quadrangle.

"The brow of the great chief is clouded," said Brown III. "Wherefore is this thusfulness?"

"Oh, don't rot!" said Redfern. "I'm bothered."

"What's the matter?"

"That beastly anonymous letter. Lumsden has just chucked it at me. I suppose the Modern worms will be making capital out of it. I shall never hear the end of it, unless we find out who wrote it, and there doesn't seem to be much chance of that."

"Taffy and Co. wouldn't believe such a thing of you," said Skelton, after a pause. "They're Modern worms, I know, but they're decent, and they know you. Look here, they're over yonder, and there's Lumsden himself yarning to them. What on earth's the matter with his nose?"

Redfern grinned.

"It came into collision with my knuckles."

"Ha, ha! Come on! Let's talk to Taffy."

Taffy, Vernon, and Rake were standing under the elms, and Lumsden was holding forth to them excitedly. While he talked he gesticulated, and pointed to his nose. His nose really did not need pointing out, for it was swollen and crimson, and spoke for itself.

"Well, I can't help it," said Taffy, as the Classical chums came up. "You shouldn't have ragged him if you didn't want your nose punched. What's the good of complaining. What did you want to bring up the anonymous letter at all for?"

"Well, he wrote it."

"That's not your bizney."

"It's all our business," howled Lumsden.

"I mean, it's the business of all of us. He ought to be sent to Coventry."

"Oh, cheese it!"

"I tell you—"

"Sing on, sweet bird!" said Skelton, as Lumsden suddenly broke off. "Don't mind us. When you've finished I'll close up your other eye for you."

"Oh, rats!" said Taffy. "Lumsden's had enough. Let him alone. The less you Classicals have to say for yourselves at present, the better."

"Does that mean that you believe that I wrote the letter?" demanded Redfern.

Taffy hesitated.

"Oh, speak out!" said Redfern, whose temper was up, and who was not inclined to be conciliatory to anybody just then. "Don't be afraid!"

And at that Taffy's eyes blazed.

"I'm not afraid to speak out," he exclaimed. "I don't know whether you wrote the letter; but it looks jolly black against you, anyway."

"Then you think I'd do a thing like that—a mean, crawling thing like writing an anonymous letter?" said Redfern passionately.

"Well, if you did it, I suppose you did it

for your brother. I remember you'd do anything for him. You used to get into scrapes on his account," said Taffy.

"That's enough. You needn't ever speak to me again if you think I could have done that. As for Lumsden, he only got what he asked for, and any chap who says in my hearing that he thinks I wrote that letter will get the same."

"Oh, will he?" exclaimed Vernon. "I suppose you're not going to lick the whole of the Fourth Form, chappy?"

"Just what I was going to say," remarked Rake.

Redfern's eyes flashed.

"I'll lick any fellow who says I wrote that letter," he exclaimed, "whether he's in the Fourth Form or not. I wouldn't stand that from one of the Sixth."

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"Keep your mouths shut, that's all. You can think what you like, if you're cads enough," said Redfern hotly.

"Hoity-toity!" said Taffy. "You'd better draw it mild, I think. I'm not used to taking so much cheek from a Classical worm."

"Oh, go and hang yourself," said Redfern, turning away savagely. "I don't want to talk to you."

The next moment a grasp on his shoulder swung him back.

"You've jolly well got to, then," said Taffy angrily. "Do you think—"

"Take your paw off my shoulder!"

"Rats!"

Redfern's hands swept up, and Taffy's hand was knocked away. The blow raised all the hot Welsh blood in Taffy's veins. His knuckles rang on Redfern's cheek the next moment. That was enough! In a twinkling they were fighting like wild-cats.

"Go it, Reddy!" exclaimed Skelton.

"Knock his blessed Modern head off! If you're looking for a licking, Vernon, you can't do better than look this way."

"Delighted, chappy!" drawled the Modern dandy; but there was nothing languid in the way he went for Skelton.

Brown and Rake eyed one another for a moment like two mastiffs, and then, without a word, they went for one another.

Three pairs of combatants were fighting at the same time now, and the blows that were exchanged were heavy and savage. It was not one of the usual "rows" between Classicals and Moderns, in which there was as much fun as anything else. There was bitter blood now, and it found vent in hard and heavy blows.

Brown was the first one down, with Rake in his grasp, sprawling over him. There had been rain lately, and Rake and Brown rolled in puddles, with a result to their clothes that may be better imagined than described.

Skelton and Vernon were grasping one another, and staggering to and fro, and they came to the earth at last, still grasping and punching.

A crowd had gathered round by this time, cheering on the combatants, and exchanging defiant howls and catcalls, Modern and Classical. Redfern and Taffy were hammer-

ing away at each other, and both countenances looked very much the worse for wear.

"Go it; Reddy!"

"Smash him, Taffy!"

"Now, then, another on his boko!"

"Give him another!"

"Go it!"

"Hurray!"

The din was terrific. Several of the Moderns and Classicals, carried away by the excitement, began to fight, proceeding from words to blows. In a few minutes there were half a dozen fights going on, and it looked as if the matter would end in a general scrimmage. And it was all in the open quad., in the full view of the doctor's windows—a fact that the juniors had quite forgotten in the excitement of the moment.

"Go it, Reddy!"

"Yah! Down with the Moderns.

"Kick them out!"

"Rats! Yah!"

Taffy went down last, under a terrific right-hander from Redfern minor. A Modern ran forward to pick him up, and a Classical clutched at him to stop him. Another and another of either side interfered, and in the twinkling of an eye, as it seemed, the whole crowd was mixed up, scrambling and struggling and fighting.

Prefects ran up, shouting for order, but were taken no notice of. The juniors had completely lost their heads. It was a scene such as had never been witnessed in all the alarms and excursions of the rival sides at St. Dolly's before.

The uproar was at its height when there was a sudden yell of "Cave!"

Dr. Cranston, with his face pale with anger, was striding towards the scene.

CHAPTER 20.

Redfern Faces the Music.

"CAVE!"
But the warning came far too late. The doctor was upon the scene. He came up with a hurried stride, very unlike his usual stately pace. His gown was rustling; his face was quite pale with anger; his brows darkly contracted.

"Boys, let this cease at once!"

The deep, organ-like voice of the Head had an instant effect.

The fighting ceased. The gasping, dishevelled juniors separated, panting for breath, and looking extremely sheepish under the stern eye of the doctor.

"What does this mean? How dare you quarrel in this ruffianly, disgraceful way, under my very windows?" exclaimed the Head. "I can hardly believe my own eyes. Why was not order at once restored by the prefects? Knowles!"

"Yes, sir," said Knowles, who had just come up.

"Why did you allow this to go on?"

"I've only just got here, sir. I was trying

"It has been going on for at least five

minutes," said the Head. "You should have been here before."

Knowles bit his lips as he stepped back.

"Now, who began this disgraceful scene?" said the Head. "Tell me at once!"

There was a general silence.

Most of the fellows did not know who had begun it, and those who did were not at all inclined to turn sneak, and name him to the doctor.

The Head waited for a few moments, his face dark and stern. No one replied to the question, and the Head's face hardened more and more. He took out his watch.

"If I do not receive the name of the offender in thirty seconds," he said coldly, "I shall cane every boy present, and stop all holidays for the Fourth Form for the rest of the term!"

There was a gasp from nearly all the juniors. When the Head was angry, he could come down very heavy, and to be gated for all holidays—at the beginning of the term, too—was a punishment that the juniors could not contemplate without consternation.

"My only hat!" murmured Skelton. "The Head is coming it strong!"

"Well!" said Dr. Cranston.

Redfern minor stepped forward. He had no desire to make a martyr of himself, but he could not remain silent and let such a punishment fall upon his Form.

"If you please, sir, it was I," he said quietly.

Dr. Cranston returned his watch to his pocket.

"Very good, Redfern," he said. "I am glad that you have had the grace to own up. And why did you begin this outrageous riot?"

Redfern was silent.

"You struck the first blow, Redfern?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, rats!" exclaimed Taffy. "I—I beg your pardon, sir. But I had collared Reddy when he punched me. I was just as much to blame as he was. We both lost our tempers, I—I think."

"You must learn not to lose your tempers, especially when the result is so serious," said the Head grimly. "I accept your confession, Morgan, and I have not the slightest doubt that you were quite as much to blame as Redfern. You two will follow me to my study. You others will be gated for Wednesday afternoon. Instead of taking the usual half-holiday, you will remain in and write out Virgil. Follow me, Redfern and Morgan!"

The two juniors exchanged a grimace, and followed the Head.

Dr. Cranston strode on with stately steps, the two juniors behind him, like two little skiffs in tow behind a stately battleship. He entered his study, and carefully selected a cane. The Head had a way of selecting a cane before he used it which increased the terrors of apprehension in the breast of the unlucky one who was about to feel it.

Dr. Cranston faced the two waiting juniors, with the cane in his hand, and his stern eyes read their downcast faces.

"I wish to know what this disturbance was

about," he said quietly. "I know that there is a keen rivalry in this school between the two sides, Modern and Classical. I do not wholly disapprove of it. I think it spurs many of the boys on to emulation, both in study and in sports. But this riot is something quite out of the usual bounds. A little horseplay may be harmless, but this matter is serious. You both look as if you had been in a prize-fight! What is the meaning of it? What were you quarrelling about?"

The juniors flushed, and were silent.

"Answer me, Morgan, as the elder."

"Well, sir," said Taffy uncomfortably, "it—"

"Well?"

"It was the anonymous letter."

"Ah!"

"Reddy's been chipped about it and it makes him wild. I—I don't really think he wrote it, only—"

"That letter, Morgan, was written by some boy from a sense of duty—a mistaken sense, perhaps—in order to bring a serious infraction of the rules of the school to my notice."

The juniors looked grim.

Redfern ventured to contradict the doctor's assertion.

"You do not think so, Redfern?"

"No, sir. I think the fellow who wrote that letter was a mean, crawling cad, and that he ought to be kicked out of any decent school!" said Redfern hotly.

The Head smiled slightly.

"Morgan, do you think Redfern would speak thus if he had written the letter?"

"N-n-no, I suppose not," stammered Taffy. "I—I never really thought he wrote it, sir. I—I only said it looked black."

"I am quite sure Redfern did not write it," said the Head. "I hope the matter will be allowed to drop. Now, hold out your hand!"

The juniors received six cuts each, in the way that the Head laid it on when he really meant business. They did not utter a word during the infliction, only the twisting of their features indicating how they felt it.

"You may go," said the Head.

They left the study quietly.

"My only hat!" said Taffy, in the passage.

"I believe the Head does exercise with Indian clubs to get his muscle up, you know, before he lays it on. Does your hand feel as if it had been boiled in oil?"

Redfern grinned.

"What-ho!"

"Never mind, it was a glorious rag!" said Taffy, chuckling. "Why, there never was such a row at St. Dolly's before, and never will be again, I expect. Under the Head's own windows, too! That's the richest part of it."

Redfern nodded. He did not reply. He was busily engaged in squeezing his hands under his armpits to relieve the pain.

"I—I say, Reddy," said Taffy abruptly.

"I was an ass, you know! I'm sorry I said what I did in the quad. But you were so blessed high-handed about it; it was really your fault. But I don't believe you wrote that measly letter. I can't believe you'd do anything of the sort."

"Thanks."

"I mean it. I think the fellows will come round. If you'll take a friend's advice, you'll be a little more patient about it. No good jumping down a chap's throat, and irritating him into saying things he doesn't really mean, you know."

"You're very good," said Redfern quietly. "I'm glad you don't believe I did that cad-dish thing. But you don't understand how I feel about it. I'd just as soon be called a thief."

"Yes, but—"

"I don't want to quarrel with anybody on the subject. But I won't have anybody say in my hearing that I wrote an anonymous letter, sneaking to the Head. I tell you I wouldn't stand it even from a chap in the Sixth."

Taffy whistled.

"Well, I'm speaking as a friend, Reddy. Most of the Sixth believe that you wrote the letter, and they won't be backward in saying so. A fag can't start punching the head of a Sixth-Former."

Redfern set his teeth.

"If a Sixth-Former insults me like that, I shall jolly well punch his head," he said.

"You'll get expelled."

"I'd rather be expelled than take a thing like that lying down."

"Well, have your own way, Reddy. I hope you'll think better of it, that's all."

And Taffy walked away to bathe the injuries to his face. Redfern, with a clouded brow, followed his example.

He fully meant what he had said to Taffy. He would take an accusation on that subject from no one.

He was soon to be put to the test.

During afternoon school he could not help noticing that there was a great deal of whispering among the Modern juniors. Taffy had a great deal of influence over his followers, but in this case they declined to follow his opinion. They preferred to keep to their own opinion about Redfern minor.

But to Redfern they said nothing. A struggle with the champion fighting-man of the Fourth was not a light undertaking, and Lumsden's lesson had not been forgotten.

The Moderns, therefore contented themselves with whispering, and nothing was said to Redfern, either in the Form-room, or afterwards. But the junior was looking gloomy as he went out after lessons.

It was bitter and humiliating to be despised, even by an enemy. And those who believed that he had written an anonymous letter could not help despising him.

Knowles was coming out of the Sixth-Form room. His brow darkened as he saw Redfern minor. About the fight behind the chapel the Head had as yet said no word; but what had happened that day was another nail in the coffin of his prefectship, as Knowles regarded it. The reprimand before the crowd of juniors rankled deep in the prefect's breast.

"Well, you young cad!" said the prefect bitterly, stopping as he saw Redfern minor.

"Have you decided to own up yet?"

Redfern turned towards him, his eyes sparkling.

"What did you say, Knowles?"

"Here, come away?" exclaimed Skelton in alarm, seizing Redfern's arm and dragging him forcibly along the passage. "Come on!"

Redfern wrenched himself loose.

"I won't come! Knowles says that I wrote that letter——"

"You did write it!" said Knowles savagely.

"Liar!"

"What!" The prefect started, scarcely believing his ears. "What!"

"It's a lie!" said Redfern recklessly.

"You cheeky young hound!"

Knowles seized the junior savagely. But only for an instant. Redfern's blood was up. His fist, clenched and as hard as iron, crashed into the prefect's face, and the senior went reeling and staggering away, to fall heavily against the opposite wall of the passage.

CHAPTER 21.

The Head's Decision.

"REDFERN!"

"You—you mad young duffer!"

Half a dozen voices shouted out to Redfern minor, but too late to stop the blow. Knowles staggered back, with a glaring red mark on his white cheek. Redfern minor stood facing him, his fists clenched nod, his eyes blazing.

"You—you cub!" gasped the prefect. "I——"

Words failed him. For a prefect of the Sixth to be struck in the face by a junior fag was almost unknown in the history of St. Dolly's. Yet this was the second time Redfern minor had transgressed. Knowles had provoked it, but he had never dreamed that Redfern would dare. He had completely lost his temper, and he sprang towards the junior like a tiger.

A sharp voice rang out:

"Knowles—stop!"

It was Mr. Ford, the master of the Fourth, Redfern minor's Form-master. He had just come into the hall—just in time to see that hasty blow.

The prefect checked himself.

"Did—did you see what he did?" he almost shouted.

"I saw it," said Mr. Ford gravely. "I think you must be mad, Redfern minor! How dare you strike a prefect?"

Redfern set his teeth.

"I would strike him again if he repeated what he said," he replied.

"What do you mean?"

"He accuses me of having written an anonymous letter," said Redfern hotly. "If he thinks so, let him keep his thoughts to himself. He had no right to insult me!"

Mr. Ford looked curiously at the junior.

"That is hardly the way to address your Form-master, Redfern," he said.

"I'm sorry, sir; but——"

"You will come with me to the Head. Whatever provocation you received, you must know that you had no right to strike a prefect."

Redfern minor's brow set darkly. Perhaps the Form-master was right; yet he did not regret that smack in the face to Knowles. He had stood enough of the Modern prefect's sneers.

"Follow me, Redfern minor."

"Yes, sir."

Knowles looked after the junior as he followed the Form-master. The prefect's face was still burning from that sudden smack. His eyes were glittering.

"The cub will be expelled for this!" he muttered. "By George, and if his major could be made to follow him——"

Redfern minor followed Mr. Ford quietly to the Head's study. Dr. Cranston looked very grave when Redfern minor was taken in to him. In a few words Mr. Ford explained the matter. The Head's brow set grimly.

"Redfern minor!"

Sidney's heart beat fast, but he managed to answer calmly:

"Yes, sir."

"You know what is the penalty of such a breach of discipline as you have been guilty of. Have you any excuse to offer?"

Redfern drew a deep breath.

"Yes, sir. I'm being ragged and badgered by everybody because some mean cad wrote that anonymous letter to you. Knowles threw it at my face; he had no right to. I said I would hit out if anybody threw that at me, and I don't care if he is a prefect. I'd rather be expelled from the school than stand it!"

The words came out in a passionate burst. Then Sidney Redfern stood silent, expecting a thunderclap of wrath.

But it did not come.

The Head's face, as a matter of fact, had softened. Perhaps the very passionate recklessness of Redfern's outburst was more convincing than calm explanation would have been in showing that the lad had acted under the impulse of deep indignation.

"You have done wrong, Redfern. But I can understand, and to a certain extent, sympathise with, your feelings. But you must keep them within bounds."

"Yes, sir."

"About that anonymous letter. The matter is most unfortunate. I certainly believe that you did not write it, and it is unfortunate that a contrary impression has gained ground among your schoolfellows." The Head's brow contracted in thought. "I think the time has come for the matter to be sifted to the bottom. I had hoped that it would die away of its own accord; but there seems to be no prospect of that. You may go, Redfern; and I trust you to keep your temper within bounds in future, even under an unjust accusation. You know perfectly well that discipline must be maintained in every school, and that Lower-Form boys cannot be allowed to take the law into their own hands."

Redfern coloured.

"I'm sorry, sir—very sorry. It sha'n't happen again, whatever Knowles likes to say."

"Very well, I accept your assurance. You may go."

"Thank you, sir!"

And Redfern minor left the study. Dr. Cranston turned to Mr. Ford. The Fourth-Form-master was his college friend, and very much in his confidence.

"This matter will have to be looked into," the Head said gravely. "It is most unfortunate. The boy who wrote that anonymous letter did so, I am sure, from a mistaken sense of duty, to warn me of a serious infraction of the rules of the school. The boys seem to have made up their minds that it was Redfern minor. About the last boy in the school to do anything savouring of meanness, I think. Fortunately, I still have the letter, and that will enable me to set the matter at rest."

The Head opened a drawer in his desk, and took out the anonymous letter. He glanced at it, and a troubled look came over his face.

"You do not agree with me in my opinion of the writer of this letter," he suddenly exclaimed.

The Fourth Form-master shook his head.

"Frankly, I do not," he replied. "A boy would have to be very stupid indeed to imagine it a meritorious act to betray a schoolfellow by means of an anonymous letter. That the fight behind the chapel was a serious transgression does not alter the case. The writer of that letter betrayed Knowles and Redfern major—why? He was not a stupid boy, as a matter of fact, for he seems to have been cunning enough to disguise his hand, and to take a leaf of Redfern minor's exercise-book to write his letter upon. It looks to me like the work of some cunning fellow, actuated by a secret spite against both the Redferns."

The Head nodded thoughtfully.

"It is possible. In any case, the matter has caused trouble enough, and it must be settled definitely, one way or the other."

"I do not see how, sir."

"I shall send for a handwriting expert," explained Dr. Cranston. "He shall have this letter and a specimen of the handwriting of every boy in the school. Disguised as the hand is, I have not the slightest doubt that a competent expert will at once detect traces in it to reveal the identity of the writer."

"I have no doubt of it."

"Then I shall publicly announce to the school that the writer is discovered, without announcing his name. My assurance that Redfern minor is innocent will be sufficient, I imagine, to clear him in the minds of his schoolfellows."

"Decidedly."

"You may let it be known, Mr. Ford, that it is my intention to send for an expert, and that the matter will be definitely settled this week. It may save a great deal of friction. I think it is due to Redfern minor, who is a very honest and manly lad, though hasty of temper, I am afraid."

"Certainly, sir."

And before bedtime that night everyone in the school knew that the Head had written to a handwriting expert of national fame in London, asking him to come to St. Dorothy's to investigate the matter. The juniors told

in bated breath of the supposed fee the Head was to pay for the expert's services; Benson, of the Fourth, declaring that it amounted to a thousand guineas, while others fixed it at the more modest figure of five pounds. The Classics were delighted, for they felt that their hero was to be cleared now, and the Moderns were mostly sneering and sceptical. But there was one boy in St. Dolly's who heard the news with a cold chill of terror at his heart.

The reader will perhaps guess who that boy was. He walked to and fro in his study, his face pale, gnawing his thin lips.

"The fool," he muttered again and again—"the old fool!" It was the Head of St. Dorothy's he was alluding to. "To think that he should take such a step on account of a rotten junior fag! The fool! If an expert gets hold of that letter, what may it not lead to? Oh, the fool! But the expert sha'n't see the letter; it must not be in existence when he gets to St. Dolly's. That is the only way!"

CHAPTER 22.

A Night Excursion.

"BLESSED if I can make that chap Redfern out!"

It was Lumsden, of the Modern side of the Fourth, who delivered that opinion to a group of Modern juniors in the quadrangle.

"Go hon!" said Taffy sarcastically. "There must be something awfully deep about Redfern minor if you can't make him out, Lumsden. We all know what a keen fellow you are."

And there was a chuckle. Lumsden turned red.

"Oh, cheese it, Taffy!" he said. "I tell you I can't make him out. You fellows all know perfectly well that he wrote that anonymous letter to the Head."

"I don't know anything of the sort, for one," said Taffy. "And you don't, for another, as a matter of fact."

"Look here, we all know it jolly well. Redfern minor wrote that letter. Now the Head has decided to get an expert to sift the matter out. It will come out that Redfern minor wrote it, so clearly that he won't be able to dodge. What I can't understand is, that the bounder seems to be pleased about it."

"Ass!"

"Well, he is, you know. He's been as cheerful as a cockchafer ever since the Head decided. Now, what does that mean?"

"It means that you're an ass, chappy," said Vernon.

"Just what I was going to say," remarked Rake.

"Oh, rats! It's true! Redfern minor has been as cocky as anything since the Head's decision, and he's good-tempered about that blessed letter, too. Wylie let slip something about it before him this morning, and he never turned a hair. I expected him to slog Wylie on the boko, but he didn't. Now, what does that mean?"

"Possibly it means that he's satisfied now that his innocence will be proved," suggested Taffy, in a tone of patient explanation.

"But he wrote the letter, you know."

"Ass!"

"Just what I was going to say."

"Look here, Taffy—"

"Oh, rats!" said Taffy. "I said all along that Reddy never wrote that caddish letter, and now I'm certain of it. If he had written it, he would be shivering now. I'll bet the real chap is shivering, if we only knew it."

"He may be up to some dodge," said Lumsden. "Anyway, he wrote the letter, of course. I can't quite make him out, but he wrote the letter."

Taffy snorted, and walked away. He was firmly convinced of Redfern minor's innocence, but it was evidently no use arguing with Lumsden. He passed Redfern minor with Skelton and Brown in the quad., and stopped to speak.

"I'm glad about this news, Reddy," he exclaimed. "It will clear the air, you know, though I suppose we shall never be told who really wrote the letter. But I said all along that you didn't, didn't I?"

Redfern grinned.

"Well, I don't remember your saying it all along," he answered. "I think I remember something a little different from that. But it's all right; the whole thing will be cleared up in a few days now."

"And I'm jolly glad."

Redfern minor's face was very bright as he strolled on, and Skelton and Brown were looking particularly cheerful. A couple of days had elapsed since the Head's decision, and it was known in the school that Mr. Craven, the expert, was to arrive the following morning. However long the investigation took him, it could not last more than a few days at the outside, and then the truth would be known—at least, regarding Redfern minor.

And the cheerful confidence that Redfern minor's manner showed was quite convincing of his innocence to most minds. Only a few obstinate fellows like Lumsden still held out, and maintained that Redfern was up to some dodge; but probably the real reason of Lumsden's obstinacy was the swelling that still remained on his nose. Until that swelling had quite subsided, he was not likely to believe in Redfern's innocence.

"Do you remember, Reddy—" began Skelton, with a look of great attraction on his face, later in the day.

Redfern minor looked inquiringly.

"Do you remember," resumed Skelton, "shortly after your fight with that pugilist chap, the Chicken—"

"That's all over. Cut it out," said Redfern shortly.

"Don't get shirty, old son!" said Skelton. "No harm meant, you know. Well, shortly after that—er, that affair—" Skelton uttered the word in a heavy, mysterious

*See "Boys' Friend Library," No. 479, entitled "Redfern Minor."

tone, and even Redfern grinned. "You made a suggestion—an idea—"

The Classical leader broke off thoughtfully.

"Go on!" said Brown encouragingly.

"Yes, I think it could be done!" said Skelton brightly. "In fact, there's no think about it—"

"Or you wouldn't be on it," murmured Brown.

"Eh? It's the roller-skating wheeze, you know," said Skelton, with a good deal of enthusiasm. "Your wheeze, Reddy, but we postponed it. The skates are still waiting for us at the station. Now, what about to-night?"

"Eh?"

"What about to-night?" repeated Skelton.

"To-night?" said Redfern vaguely. "I should say it will be frosty. Not too frosty, you know—"

"Just enough to whiten the roofs," suggested Brown.

"Chumps!" roared Skelton. "I mean, why not fetch the skates from the station to-night? It will mean breaking bounds—"

Redfern whistled.

"But it's the only way," said Skelton firmly. "If we fetched them in the daytime the Moderns would be sure to spot us. Then they'd keep an eye on us, and ten-to-one catch us practising. We want this rinking stunt to come as a complete surprise for the school!"

"Well, I'm game if you are," said Redfern resignedly.

"We three will go, and Benson and Miller can stay up to help us in again," said Skelton. "It will be as easy as falling off a form."

And so it was agreed.

The roller-skating "wheeze" had been taken up most enthusiastically by the Classicals. The whole country was rinking, and why not St. Dolly's too? The idea of being the first to introduce the latest craze into the school, of practising secretly, and suddenly coming out as expert skaters, and dazzling all St. Dolly's, and making the Moderns wild with envy, appealed very much to the Classical juniors.

They were all determined to become possessed of roller-skates, and to join in the wheeze; and almost all of them, by dint of writing to parents and kindly uncles, by saving or borrowing, had raised the necessary "tin." And Redfern, with an eye to business, had bargained by post with a firm in London for supplying twenty pairs of roller-skates at a reduction for the quantity. He had succeeded, too, and the skates had been supplied at a most reasonable price. The consignment was waiting now at the local railway-station, and it only remained to smuggle the skates in undiscovered by Taffy and Co.

When bedtime came, there was some excitement in the Classical dormitory. Arthur Redfern came to see lights out, but he was too preoccupied to notice anything unusual in the manner of the juniors. Arthur had not been in a happy state of mind for the past few days. He had come to feel that

his brother was innocent of the accusation that had been made by Ransome in the first place, and he felt a keen remorse for ever having doubted him.

But there was something in Sidney's manner that discouraged him from speaking upon the subject. Redfern minor had been bitterly hurt, and something like a coldness had grown up between the brothers since.

Arthur glanced at his brother, at the frank and honest face, and wondered how he could ever have suspected the lad of a mean action.

"Good night, kids!" he said.

"Good-night, Redfern major!"

The light was extinguished, and the door closed behind Arthur Redfern. The juniors lay quiet until the sound of the captain's footsteps had died away down the corridor.

Then Redfern minor sat up in bed.

"Good!" he said. "Skelton! Browney! Up you get!"

A few grunted references to the cold were made on the part of Skelton and Brown, but they tumbled into their things.

Meanwhile, Redfern had fastened a rope to the leg of a bed, and was already out of the window.

The rope rustled in the ivy as Redfern minor descended. Skelton looked out after him into the gloom. There was danger in the task, true, but it was mere child's play to the strong and active junior. His feet touched the ground, and he gave the rope a shake to indicate that he had landed. Then Skelton came down the rope.

He joined Redfern minor at the foot of the wall.

"Now, which——" he was beginning.

"Hush!"

Redfern grasped his arm tightly as he whispered the word.

"What is it?" breathed Skelton.

"Look!"

Redfern was pointing towards the glimmering light of the Head's window. The juniors could see that the French windows were open, and they caught the reflection of the red light on the glass.

But what caused Redfern's excitement was the sight of a dark shadow crossing the glimmering square of the window.

Someone had suddenly passed before the window, obscuring it for a moment—someone in the garden!

"The Head's come out of the study!" muttered Skelton.

Redfern shook his head.

"That didn't look like the Head's shadow."

"Well, no. Wasn't it too small?"

"Yes."

"But who else could it be?"

"Blessed if I know. A prefect on the watch perhaps. We shall have to be jolly careful. Quiet, Brown. There's somebody about."

"Right-ho!" murmured Brown.

Redfern minor shook the rope gently. Benson pulled it up to the window, and there was a faint sound as the dormitory window closed.

"I jolly well hope Benson won't go to sleep and forget us," muttered Brown.

"If he does we'll boil him in oil," said Redfern minor. "But don't jaw; there's somebody in the garden—either the Head or a prefect. This way!"

Redfern minor led the way, skirting the school wall, and the light from the Head's window soon vanished among the trees.

To climb over the school wall into the lane was easy. The wall was not high, and it was thick with ivy.

The three juniors dropped into the road, and started for Okeholme. The road was quiet and deserted. At the sound of a pedestrian's footsteps they dodged among the trees. It would not do for St. Dolly's caps to be recognised out of doors at that time of night. They kept up a steady trot to Okeholme, and reached the station in a quarter of an hour. The one porter whom Okeholme boasted was also the man in charge of the luggage department, and the juniors knew him well. He stared at the sight of them, and grinned as Redfern slipped a shilling into his hand.

"Master Redfern, there'd be a mighty row if the doctor knew this!" he said.

Redfern laughed.

"He won't know it, you know. We're in a hurry to get the things in, you see, and we're not telling everybody about it, that's all. Where's the parcel?"

"Here they are, Master Redfern—three of them, directed to you."

"That's right."

The three parcels were each of a good weight. But the juniors shouldered them manfully, and left the station, leaving the ancient porter shaking his head after them in an extremely dubious sort of way.

They stepped out cheerily on the road home.

"By Jove, these weigh something!" Skelton remarked. "I'm glad I haven't to carry mine for a hundred miles. I suppose we'd better hide them in the woodshed, and smuggle them into the school to-morrow."

"That's it; no good trying to get them up to the dorm. window," chuckled Redfern.

"We can get them in to-morrow easily enough."

"Good! Here's St. Dolly's at last, thank goodness."

The school wall, with the line of dark trees beyond it, loomed up in dark shadow before them.

Brown set his burden down with a sigh of relief.

"It's jolly heavy, and no mistake!"

"I'll get on the wall, and you can hand them up," said Redfern.

"Right-ho!"

Redfern minor sat astride of the wall and reached down for the parcels. He dragged them up one after another; and then the other two juniors climbed over, and received them from him on the inner side of the wall.

Then Redfern dropped inside.

"Now for the woodshed!"

There was the growl of a dog as the juniors approached the woodshed. It was the voice of Phipps's mastiff. But Redfern

knew the dog well; and a soothing whisper from him quieted Bob at once.

Redfern struck a match, and it glimmered in the woodshed on the piles of faggots and the other lumber that was kept there by Phipps, the house-porter.

The juniors removed some of the faggots, and carefully stacked the parcels away, covering them up out of sight with the wood.

Then, well satisfied with the results of their excursion, they crept out of the woodshed. The light was still gleaming from the window of the Head's study, and the red glow from the fire within fell upon the glass.

"The Head's at work," grunted Skelton. "Examination papers, I suppose. On the whole, it isn't all lavender to be the headmaster of a public school."

"I'd rather be in the Fourth!" chuckled Redfern. "I wonder whether Benson and Miller are awake? Got a stone?"

"Here you are!"

Redfern threw up a stone with careful aim, and it clinked faintly on the glass of the high dormitory window.

The juniors waited anxiously, watching. There was a glimmer of starlight on the glass of the dormitory window.

They felt a sense of relief as they saw the glass slide back. The window was opened. A dark object was projected from within, which they knew to be a head looking downwards.

Redfern imitated a bird-call, the signal agreed upon. The rope came rustling down through the ivy.

"Cave!"

Faintly through the stillness of the night came the sound of footsteps—so faintly that it was evident that the walker was moving with deliberate stealthiness, with the intention of escaping observation.

The junior's hearts beat hard.

It must be a prefect on the watch! There could be no other explanation—at all events, they could think of no other. The Head, if he were taking a turn under the trees, would not be walking stealthily like that.

With thumping hearts the juniors crouched close in the ivy, while the footsteps became more distinct, and then died away.

They had passed; and the juniors had seen no one in the gloom—and they had not been seen, evidently.

Brown gave a gasp of relief.

"Great Scott," murmured Skelton breathlessly, "that was a narrow shave!"

"My hat, it was!"

"It must have been a prefect."

"I suppose so," muttered Redfern, in perplexity. "He must have had some hint that there was something on, you know; and must have come out to watch. But he never looked up at the dorm. window—he must have seen that it was open if he had."

"Careless of him—and jolly lucky for us!"

"What-ho!"

The juniors waited for a few more minutes; but there was no sound. Then they emerged from the ivy.

Redfern minor glanced once more towards the window of the Head's study.

A dark shadow was crossing it, and this time he caught clearly the outlines of the form.

It was that of a senior, he was certain; and there seemed something familiar in the lines of the silhouette, but he could not recognise the figure. It appeared only for a second, passing the light, and vanished into the gloom.

"It wasn't the Head!" muttered Skelton.

"No! Look! There's the Head!"

The handsome, portly figure of Dr. Cranston had suddenly appeared at the open window. The doctor had a pen in his hand, and he had evidently stepped there for a moment to refresh himself with a draught or two of the clear night air.

The juniors did not venture to move while he was at the window; but the dark form vanished from the light in a few moments.

Quickly enough now the three seniors clambered up the rope, and climbed into the dormitory window. They pulled in the rope after them, and closed the window. Benson coiled up the rope, and tucked it away under a mattress.

"Good luck?" he asked.

"Yes! It's all serene."

"You're looking jolly scared about something," said Benson, peering at them in the light of a wax match.

"There's a prefect out; and we were nearly spotted!"

"Phew!"

"But it's all serene!"

"Good!"

And the juniors, tired and sleepy enough now, tumbled into bed.

Skelton and Brown were soon fast asleep; but Redfern was longer in closing his eyes. The picture of that dark shadow, which he had twice seen crossing the light of the Head's window, seemed to haunt him.

Who was it? What did it want there?

It seemed to Redfern that he was upon the edge of a mystery—a strange mystery he could not penetrate.

It was some time before he slept.

CHAPTER 23.

Under a Cloud.

"SOMETHING'S up!"

It was Benson, of the Fourth, who made the remark.

But the thought was already in many minds. That something was "up" was quite clear, though nobody seemed to have any idea what it was.

Some of the juniors had noticed it immediately they came down that morning. And when they went into the dining-room to breakfast the fact became more apparent still. The faces of the masters there were grave—very grave. Some of the prefects, too, were noticed to be looking absolutely solemn. Mr. Ford, at the head of the Fourth-Form table, wore a decidedly worried look.

Something certainly was "up."

The juniors wondered what it was. Redfern minor had a sort of uneasy twinge as

he thought of the expedition of the previous night. Breaking bounds after lights out was a serious matter, if it came to the notice of the powers. True, the juniors had gone out for a perfectly innocent purpose, so their consciences were clear on that point. But rules were rules, and the penalty of breaking them was severe.

But, somehow, Redfern felt that it was not that. In the first place, if that escapade had become known, he would naturally have been called to account for it at once. There was no reason why the matter should be left unreported to till after breakfast. Besides, seriously as breaking bounds at night might be regarded, it was hardly serious enough to cause this strange solemnity in all looks. There was something else.

What was it?

"Something's up!"

"What the dickens is the matter?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"Trouble ahead for somebody, anyway."

"What-ho!"

Mr. Ford seemed to be unaware that a whispered conversation was proceeding almost under his nose. His worried look seemed to deepen every minute. Once his glance turned upon Redfern minor, and there was something so strange in his look that the junior gave an involuntary start.

He realised in a flash that the "something" which was "up" was in connection with himself. He felt certain about it. Was it that escapade of last night, after all? But how could it have become known? If it was known, why had it not been mentioned? And why should Mr. Ford look at him so curiously, and not at Skelton and Brown, who were equally involved in the matter? It was very curious. Redfern minor felt a growing sense of uneasiness. Mr. Ford did not glance at him again. In fact, he seemed to sedulously avoid turning his eyes in Redfern minor's direction.

A kind of chill of painful expectancy fell upon the boys. As yet nothing had been said, but they all knew that something serious was on the tapis. It was in the very atmosphere.

After breakfast, as the boys were leaving the dining-room, Redfern minor was not surprised to hear Mr. Ford call to him quietly.

"Redfern minor, you will not go into the Form-room after prayers. Dr. Cranston wishes to speak to you in his study."

"Yes, sir," said Redfern, with a sinking heart.

Skelton and Brown stared at him blankly. They walked towards the chapel in gloomy silence. Skelton broke it.

"So it's out!" he said.

"Looks like it," said Brown, as Redfern did not speak. "That blessed shadow we saw on the Head's window last night, Reddy, it must have been a prefect, and he must have spotted us."

Redfern minor shook his head.

"I can't think it's that," he said slowly. "If a prefect saw me, he must have seen you and Skelton also, and you'd be called up before the Head with me."

"Then what can it be?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"Perhaps it's that confounded anonymous letter again," suggested Skelton. "That expert chap—Craven, I think his name is—is to be here this morning. He may be here now, if he's come by the early train."

"It's possible. Ford looked as if something serious was the matter. But, hang it all, I've done nothing, and I don't see why I should worry!" exclaimed Redfern.

"Hallo! Look at your major!" muttered Brown.

Arthur Redfern was striding towards the juniors, but he did not appear to see them. His face was clouded, the brows darkly contracted, and his eyes were on the ground. Redfern glanced at his brother curiously. He had no doubt that Arthur was disturbed by the "something" which seemed to be hanging over St. Dolly's like a cloud that morning.

Redfern major started as he saw the juniors, and halted abruptly. His face seemed to flame into anger as he looked at Redfern minor.

"You young fool!" he exclaimed harshly.

Sidney Redfern started.

"Arthur, what's the matter?"

"You—you duffer! Why did you do it?"

"I—I don't understand. Why did I do what?"

"Oh, don't fence with me!" exclaimed the captain of St. Dolly's roughly. "Do you mean to say that you don't know anything about it?"

Redfern went red, then pale.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said. "Has anything happened?"

"You don't know what happened last night?" demanded Arthur, and his eyes were fixed upon the junior as if he would read every secret in his breast.

"Last night?" stammered Redfern.

"Yes. Don't repeat my words like a parrot. Answer me. Do you know what happened last night?" exclaimed Arthur roughly.

"I don't know what you mean."

"I put it more plainly. Were you out of the Fourth-Form dormitory last night after lights out?"

The juniors exchanged a quick glance. Redfern minor was silent. The captain of St. Dolly's waited for some moments, and then he burst into a bitter laugh.

"You cannot answer."

"It's according to why you ask me," said Redfern minor hotly. "A chap could get out of his dorm. after lights out, I suppose, without being talked to as if he were a criminal. What have I done?"

"Answer my question. Were you out of your dormitory after lights out?"

"I want to know why you ask first," said Redfern minor sturdily. "If you're asking as a prefect and captain of the school, you've no right to ask me to confess to a thing I should be caned for. If you're speaking in confidence as my brother, Arthur, then I'll tell you anything you like. Which is it?"

Arthur looked at him searchingly.

"I'm speaking as your brother," he said.

"Goodness knows, I'd be glad to see you clear of this! You can tell me anything you like without danger of its being used against you. I shall keep clear of the whole matter. Were you out of your dormitory last night?"

"Yes."

Arthur uttered a sort of cry.

"You were! Then it is true!"

"Yes I suppose it's true," said Redfern minor, in wonder. "I broke bounds; but, hang it all, that's been done before, and nobody was the worse for it. I suppose you broke bounds sometimes yourself when you were in the Fourth?"

Arthur's brow grew stern.

"Don't prevaricate, Sidney. I don't care a rap if you broke bounds, if you did nothing worse than that."

"Do you think I did anything worse?"

"Look here, speak out plainly. Do you know what happened in the Head's study last night?" exclaimed Arthur.

Redfern minor looked bewildered.

"In the Head's study?"

"Yes—quick! The chapel bell has left off ringing. Answer me."

"No, I don't."

"Did you enter his study?"

"Enter the Head's study?" gasped Redfern.

"Yes," almost shouted Arthur. "Answer me!"

"No, I didn't."

"One word more. When you were out of the dormitory, were you alone?"

"Alone? No! Skelton and Brown were with me!"

"All the time?"

"Yes."

"You are sure—quite certain?"

"Of course! But why?"

"Never mind. Thank Heaven you weren't alone, that's all. Go to chapel now—you're late already!"

And Arthur hurried on. The juniors, utterly bewildered, followed him into chapel; but it must be said that they heard little of the prayers that morning. What had happened in the Head's study the previous night? That was the question that was beating like a hammer in Redfern minor's brain.

What had happened? What terrible accusation was hanging over him now?

CHAPTER 24.

Redfern Minor Has a Narrow Escape.

REDFERN MINOR quitted the Fourth as they went to the Form-room after prayers, and made his way to the Head's study. He went slowly and reluctantly. In spite of himself, in spite of his knowledge of his own innocence, in spite of his actual ignorance of what could possibly have happened in the Head's study, he felt uneasy.

Innocence was not always a protection; he knew that by painful experience. He had not written the anonymous letter, yet he had been believed guilty of it by half the Form. What accusation was to be made now? What did Arthur's strange words mean?

It was clear that the captain of St. Dolly's had jumped to the conclusion that Sidney was guilty—hence his great relief on hearing that Skelton and Brown had been with him outside the dormitory the previous night. Sidney Redfern's heart beat painfully as he went slowly to the Head's study. He had noticed that the Head was unusually grave at prayers that morning. What was he about to hear from him?

He reached the study door, but it was some moments before he could muster up the courage to knock. It was very seldom that Redfern minor lacked the courage for anything. He tapped at the door at last, and the deep voice of the Head bade him enter.

Redfern entered the study.

Dr. Cranston was seated at his writing-table. There were two other gentlemen in the study. One was Mr. Ford, Redfern's Form-master. The other was a plump, well-dressed person, whom the junior had never seen before, but whom he at once guessed to be the handwriting expert, Mr. Craven.

Dr. Cranston raised his eyes to Redfern as he entered, and fixed upon him a penetrating and disconcerting gaze. Redfern had intended to meet the doctor's gaze with perfect calmness; but he found his face growing hot under that steady gaze. The knowledge that he was colouring made him colour still more, and his face flamed under the gaze of the Head. He felt that he was looking guilty before he was accused, but he could not help it.

The Head gave a slight sigh.

"Redfern minor, I suppose you know why I sent for you?"

"No, sir!" said Redfern firmly. "I don't, sir."

"You are unaware of what happened last night?"

"Yes, sir! I have heard that something happened, but I do not know what it was. I have not the faintest idea."

"Were you out of your dormitory last night?"

Redfern hesitated. It was the same question that Arthur had asked, and it placed him in an awkward position.

"Answer my question, Redfern!" said the Head sternly.

Redfern cast an appealing glance at Mr. Ford, whom he felt instinctively would understand. The master of the Fourth nodded slightly.

"It is possible, sir, that Redfern may have left his dormitory without knowing anything of what happened in this room," he suggested. "It might be advisable to assure him that any boyish escapade will be overlooked if he is guiltless of the serious charge."

The Head's brow cleared a little.

"You are quite right, Mr. Ford. Redfern, you may answer me with confidence. I will tell you what has happened. You are aware that this gentleman, Mr. Craven, was coming this morning to examine the anonymous letter, with a view to discovering from the writing the real identity of the writer?"

"Yes, sir!"

"It was discovered this morning that the letter had been removed."

Redfern stared blankly.

"Removed, sir?"

"Yes. The drawer of my desk, in which it was kept, was wrenched open with a chisel, or some such instrument, and the letter was taken!"

Redfern could only stare. The news was utterly unexpected. Who could have broken open the Head's desk to take the anonymous letter? Like a flash, the answer to that question came into his mind. The writer of it, of course—who knew that the expert was coming, and was terrified at the idea of discovery.

"Now, Redfern, if you had nothing to do with taking the letter, you can speak without fear as to your movements last night. You understand that suspicion fixes upon you in the first place. You had been accused of writing the letter. An expert was sent for to establish the identity of the writer beyond doubt. The natural conclusion is that you were afraid of the consequences, and, consequently, purloined the letter. But I will condemn no one unheard. Did you take the letter?"

"No, sir!"

"You do not know who has taken it?"

"No, sir! I had no idea it had been taken."

"You were out of your dormitory last night?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Did you enter my study?"

"I did not!"

"Why did you leave your dormitory?"

"To go to the village."

The Head started a little. It came as a little shock to him to hear the junior so quietly confessing that he had not only left his dormitory, but had broken the school bounds after lights out. But Redfern realised clearly that complete frankness was the best course now.

"For what reason?"

"To fetch a parcel that was sent to the station for me from London."

"In that case, the officials there will bear out your statement?"

"Yes, sir, certainly!"

"Very good! Did you go alone?"

"Oh, no, sir! Skelton and Brown were with me."

"They will bear out your statement, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir! Ask them, and see!"

"Mr. Ford, will you kindly summon Skelton and Brown?"

Mr. Ford left the study quietly. He was looking much relieved. He had evidently believed Redfern minor guilty, but was changing his opinion now.

"I am afraid, Mr. Craven, that your journey has been taken for nothing," said the Head courteously. "The thief, I imagine, has undoubtedly destroyed the letter. Of course, you will not be a loser; but I am very much disappointed. I had hoped to clear up this painful matter."

"I am sorry too," said Mr. Craven. "If I may offer an opinion, Dr. Cranston, I

should say that that lad is quite innocent. I am accustomed, in my profession, to read faces as well as handwriting, and I am sure that he was genuinely surprised to hear that the letter had been stolen. If it should be recovered, of course, you have only to call upon me for my services."

And the expert took his leave. The Head remained with a deeply thoughtful frown upon his brow. Mr. Craven's words had impressed him very much. They coincided with his own opinion. He believed that Redfern minor was innocent. "But who, then, was guilty? The Head was aroused from a gloomy reverie by the return of the Fourth-Form master. Skelton and Brown, both looking very much alarmed and uneasy, followed the Form-master into the study.

The Head fixed his eyes upon them.

"You were both with Redfern minor last night when he quitted the dormitory?" asked Dr. Cranston abruptly.

Skelton and Brown gave a simultaneous jump.

"Speak out, kids," said Redfern. "It is all right!"

"Yes, sir," stammered Brown. "We were with him."

"You went to the railway-station with him to fetch certain parcels?"

"Yes, sir!" said Skelton, in his turn.

"Where are the parcels now?"

"We—we hid them in the wood-shed, sir, among the faggots."

"Why?"

"It's a—a wheeze, sir. I—I mean a jape!"

"A what?"

"A rag, sir. I—I mean a joke on the Modern cads—kids, sir," stammered Skelton. "We're getting up a little surprise for them, sir!"

The Head smiled slightly.

"The parcels are still there, I presume?"

"Oh, yes, sir! We were going to get them up to the box-room after morning school."

"Ah! Mr. Ford, will you send Phipps to bring the parcels here?"

"Certainly, sir!"

"I—I say, sir, it's not a feed," stammered Skelton. "It's only roller-skates, sir. It's a rinking wheeze, and we're keeping it dark."

"If your statement is quite correct, Skelton, your secret will be kept, as far as I am concerned," said the Head, smiling. "It was very wrong of you to go out and fetch the skates at night; but I have decided to pardon this escapade for the sake of getting at the truth of a more serious matter. Were you with Redfern minor all the time he was out of the dormitory last night?"

"Certainly, sir."

"You did not lose sight of him for a single instant?"

"Not a second, sir," said Skelton wonderingly.

"Did he enter my study?"

"Y-y-your study, sir? Why, you were here all the time yourself," said Skelton.

"We saw you at the window once."

"You are sure he did not do so?"

"Quite sure, sir. We kept as far away from your window as we could."

"At what time did you leave the dormitory?"

"About ten, sir."

"And when did you return?"

"I remember hearing the school clock strike eleven just after I got into bed, before I went to sleep, sir," said Brown.

And Skelton nodded corroboration.

"Very good. Ah, Phipps, I see you have the parcels!"

"Yes, sir!" said Phipps, the house-porter, grunting as he came in carrying the three heavy parcels. "'Ere they are, sir."

"Very good. You may leave them here."

Phipps set down the parcels and departed. The paper of one of them had burst at the corner, and the wheel of a roller-skate was sticking out—an ample proof of the junior's statement as to what the parcels contained.

The Head was looking very much relieved.

"I am quite satisfied, Redfern," he said.

"You certainly did not take the letter. The theft was committed between a quarter to eleven and eleven o'clock last night, while I was temporarily absent from the study. After that the place was locked up, and no one could have entered. Had I glanced at my desk when I returned to my study, I should have seen that the drawer had been wrenched open, but I did not; and it was not discovered till this morning. You have succeeded in proving an alibi; but I may point out to you the unexpected dangers you may run by an infraction of the school rules. Had you been alone last night, the inevitable conclusion would have been that you left the dormitory to steal the letter, and you could have produced no witnesses. You may go. You may take your parcels with you."

"Thank you, sir!"

And the three juniors left the study.

CHAPTER 25.

The Rinkers.

"So the letter's been stolen?" said Skelton breathlessly.

"Yes."

"The chap who wrote it, of course?"

"I suppose so."

"Jolly lucky for you we were with you last night, Reddy," said Brown, with a deep breath. "You'd have been nailed this time."

Redfern nodded.

His heart was still beating hard. He realised fully what a narrow escape he had had. He was thinking, too, of that dark shadow he had twice seen cross the light of the Head's window the previous night. It had not been a prefect on the watch; it had been the anonymous letter-writer, on the watch for a chance of stealing the letter before it could fall into the hands of the expert.

Redfern minor understood that now. If he could only have seen who it was!

A suspicion was forming in Redfern's mind. But it was vague, intangible, and he would not utter it even to his chums.

Without a shred of evidence to go upon, it was not fair to mention Ransome's name.

The juniors carried the parcels to the box-room, and locked them up in an empty trunk. Skelton chuckled as they made their way to the Form-room.

"We've been lucky all along the line," he remarked. "This has given us a chance of getting the skates into the house while the blessed Moderns are all in the Form-room grinding Latin. It's ripping!"

"Yes, rather!"

The three juniors entered the Form-room and took their places. The rest of the Form looked at them with great curiosity. They were simply burning to know what had happened, but they had to contain their curiosity till after morning lessons.

But when the Fourth Form were dismissed, and the juniors crowded out into the passage, there was a perfect hail of inquiries.

Redfern minor concisely explained.

"My only hat!" exclaimed Taffy. "The letter stolen! Poor old Reddy! You'll have every ass in the school braying out that you took it now!"

Redfern grinned.

"I've proved a giddy alibi," he said. "Skelton and Brown and Benson and Miller all know that at the time the letter was taken I was getting into the dormitory window, after going to the village."

"Good! But, I say," exclaimed Taffy, "what did you break bounds for? What's the wheeze?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"What are you Classical worms up to?" demanded Taffy. "I know you've had some silly wheeze on for the past week."

"My dear chap, don't ask questions, and I won't tell you any whoppers!" said Redfern serenely. "If it's a wheeze, I dare say you'll hear all about it soon."

"Look here——"

"Rats!"

And Redfern strolled away with his chums. Taffy & Co. looked at one another in great exasperation.

"There's something on, I know that," said Taffy.

"Just what I was going to say," remarked Rake; and Vernon nodded.

"It must be a big feed," said Taffy. "They went out last night to get in the grub. That's the only possible explanation."

"Yes, rather, chappy!" said Vernon.

"We'll jolly well give them a look-in in their dormitory to-night," said Taffy darkly.

"If there's a feed, there'll be a raid, too."

"Good egg!"

Meanwhile, word had been passed round among the Classics. In twos and threes, or singly, they made their way to the big box-room, which Redfern minor had selected as the scene of the commencement of the new scheme.

In ten minutes after morning classes were dismissed, the Classical half of the Fourth Form were in the box-room, and the door was locked.

It occurred to Taffy & Co. that they might as well keep an eye on the rival juniors to ascertain where the supposed "feed" was hidden away. But when they started looking for the Classics, they found them missing. There was not a single Classical Fourth-Former to be discovered in the quadrangle, in the passages, in the gym., or in the playing-fields.

Taffy & Co. were amazed.

"Where on earth have the bounders got to?" exclaimed Taffy.

"Hello, you youngsters!" It was Arthur Redfern's voice. "Have you seen my minor?"

"Oh, he's disappeared!" said Taffy crossly. "So have they all. The Fourth-Form Classics have all bunked."

"I want to speak to Sidney," said Arthur anxiously. "Sure you don't know where he is?"

"Haven't the remotest idea. We're looking for him ourselves."

Arthur walked away with a troubled look. He wanted to speak to Sidney, to tell him how glad he was he had been cleared, and how sorry he was to have doubted him.

But Redfern minor was not to be found.

The reason was simple. The Classics were at that moment in the box-room—"putting in practice," as Redfern minor expressed it, for the great skating exhibition to come.

CHAPTER 26.

The Vow Renewed.

ON the whole, in Redfern minor's opinion, the practice had not been altogether a failure, in spite of the limited space afforded by the box-room.

Some of the Classics showed signs of being really skilful on wheels, though others would need a good deal of practice yet.

Redfern minor was satisfied.

Rake, of the Moderns, met him in the passage, and eyed him curiously.

"Your major's asking for you, Redfern minor," he said. "I say, what have you been up to, you bounder?"

"Thanks very much, Rake!" returned Redfern affably, apparently not hearing the question. "I'll see him now."

And he passed on, with a beaming smile, leaving Rake both mystified and annoyed.

Redfern minor looked into his brother's study. Arthur made an eager step towards him, his face flushing.

"Chap told me you wanted to see me," said Redfern minor briefly.

"So I do, Sidney. Come in!"

Redfern came in. His manner was somewhat different from usual. It was easy for Arthur to see that his minor had not forgotten his suspicion and distrust.

"First of all, Sidney, I want to tell you I'm sorry," said Arthur abruptly. "I was a fool to doubt you for a moment. But—but it did not seem so clear."

Redfern minor smiled drily.

"It wouldn't have seemed clear to me if

you had been accused of writing an anonymous letter, and then stealing it from the Head's desk," he said.

Arthur flushed.

"I know I ought to have had more faith in you, Sidney. But—but you see how it was. The letter being written on a sheet from your exercise-book—the hand being disguised—and yet like yours; and, then, the letter being taken from the Head's study late in the evening, and your being out of your dormitory at the time—"

"It's jolly lucky for me I was out of the dormitory at the time," said Redfern. "If I had been asleep in bed, and all the others asleep, who could prove that I had not sneaked down to the Head's study and taken the letter?"

Arthur started.

"By Jove, you're right, Sid!"

"The fellow counted on that when he took it," said Redfern minor. "He meant to put it on me. He never knew, and never calculated, that I meant to break bounds that same night, and go down to the village with Skelton and Brown. Now, as it happens, Skelton and Brown and Benson and Miller can prove how I was engaged at the time when the letter must have been taken, and the biggest ass in the school can't imagine that I took it. And as it's clear that the chap who took it was the chap who wrote it, because he was afraid of the expert seeing it, I suppose the asses will leave off braying out that I wrote the blessed thing. I've been jolly lucky—the fellow, whoever he was, planned it carefully enough, and I've escaped by a fluke."

"Who do you think it was, Sid?"

"Who do you think?" said Redfern.

"The chap who wrote the letter in the first place wanted to give you away to the Head, and get you sacked from the captaincy if possible. He wanted to make trouble between you and me. He wanted, if possible to get me kicked out of the school, because I back you up. There's only one fellow in St. Dolly's who answers to all that, and who's cunning enough to work it, too."

"You don't mean Knowles?"

"Of course not. I mean Ransome."

Arthur wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

"It's horrible to think that he would be guilty of such treachery," he said.

"Well, somebody was guilty of it," said Redfern minor practically.

"Yes, that's so."

"There's no atom of proof, and we can't say a word, but you ought to keep your eye on Ransome. He has determined to clear you out of the captaincy of St. Dolly's, because you've set your face against black-guardism in the Upper Forms, and he's using Knowles as a tool. That's as clear as anything. You would never have fought with Knowles at all but for Ransome making trouble between you, from what I can see."

Arthur nodded. He felt that his minor's quick, keen brain had grasped the position just as it stood.

"And he'll begin again," said Redfern minor. "He has saved himself by the skin

of his teeth in getting that anonymous letter destroyed before the handwriting expert could see it, and trace it home to him. But you've got Ransome against you all the time, until you lose the captaincy and he wins, or else till he's shown up and sacked from the school. It will be a fight to a finish."

Arthur's face hardened.

"I'm afraid you're right, Sid. Goodness knows, I wanted to be at peace with everybody when I became captain of St. Dolly's, and to do my best to make up differences between the fellows. But I know there's going to be trouble, and it looks as if Ransome is at the bottom of it all. Well, if he wants war, he shall have it."

"That's the idea—let him have it hot!" said Redfern minor. "It's no good taking it lying down—hit out every time, that's my motto!"

Arthur smiled.

"We're together in this, kid. I'm sorry I allowed myself to think for a moment—"

"Oh, never mind that now!" said Redfern minor cheerfully. "Don't let that worry you. It's all over now."

Arthur held out his hand silently, and his minor gripped it for a moment, and then he left the study. But that handgrip told of renewed confidence and comradeship, and the cementing of a faith that would never admit of a doubt again. And the time was coming when the tie of comradeship between the brothers would be put to a terrible test.

CHAPTER 27.

The Moderns Fathom the Secret.

"ROLLER-SKATING!"

R Taffy, of the Moderns, said the word as if he were not sure of it, and stared vaguely at his chum, Rake.

The latter was looking quite excited.

"Yes, roller-skating!" he repeated vehemently. "Roller-skating! That's what they were up to! In the box-room, you know. My hat!"

Taffy and Vernon exchanged glances.

"You're sure that's it, Rake?"

"Of course I am! There was a terrific racket going on in the box-room, and I thought I'd hang around for a bit. I couldn't for the life of me make out what caused the row at first. Sounded like wheeling tables about, and banging them into things, you know—"

"Then how—"

"Half a minute!" said Rake. "Presently the sounds stopped, and a tribe of Classicals trooped out. I stopped Redfern, and told him that his major wanted him—he does, you know—"

"Less gas!" said Taffy tersely.

Rake grinned.

"Then I asked him what the game was, but he wouldn't split. Then he walked off to his major's study—"

Taffy groaned.

"I can see this lasting the whole blessed evening! Go on!"

"And as he went," said Rake, slowly drawing something from his pocket, "there was a clink—"

"A whatter?"

"A clink! The sound of a metal thing falling. And this is what I picked up!"

And Rake displayed the article he had taken from his pocket. It was a skate-key!

Taffy rubbed his hands with satisfaction.

"That settles it!" he said. "We'll see what we can do about those skates—this very evening!"

"Quiet!"

Taffy muttered the word in cautious tones.

He was creeping up the stairs to the top box-room, with all the stealth of a Red Indian on the war-trail. Behind him came Rake and Vernon, equally cautious, equally excited, breathing hard through their noses.

Taffy & Co. were on the track!

The finding of the skate-key had made all clear to Taffy. He understood the meaning of the bumping and swishing heard outside the locked door. The Classicals had spent hours in the box-room in practising roller-skating. And as the roller-skates were never seen in the school, it was pretty clear that each time the practice was over they were hidden somewhere in the box-room.

Taffy & Co. were going to look for them. Not a word had they breathed of their discovery, even to the Moderns. It was a dead secret among the three, till they were ready to carry out their plans and "dish" the Classicals.

"Quiet!"

It was evening, and the juniors were mostly at prep. in their studies. It was a favourable moment for exploring the box-room without discovery, for there was small chance of anybody being there or coming there at that hour. But Taffy & Co. had to be very careful that the Classicals did not see them go, or hear them on the creaky old stairs.

"It's all right," muttered Rake. "They can't hear us."

"Don't jaw, old chap!"

"Look here, you—"

"Not a word! Tread on tiptoe."

"Really, chappy—"

"Do ring off, Vernon, old man, and be quiet!"

"You're saying a blessed lot yourself, anyway," said Vernon. "Why don't you set a giddy example of shutting up?"

"Just what I was going to say," remarked Rake.

"Well, of all the asses!" said Taffy. "If they're not stopping here, at a time like this, to begin a blessed argument! My only hat!"

"You began it, chappy!"

"Just what I was going to—"

"Hush! Cave! Somebody's coming—"

There was the sound of a footstep in the Fourth-Form passage, from which the narrow staircase to the top box-room ascended. The three Moderns crouched in the dark shadows of the unlighted staircase, and waited anxiously. The footsteps paused at the stair, and they could dimly make out

the form of Benson, of the Fourth. Benson had apparently heard some sound, for he glanced up the staircase.

The Modern chums scarcely dared to breathe.

But Benson gave the stairs only a casual glance, and then passed on carelessly. The Moderns respired again.

"That was a blessed narrow shave," murmured Taffy. "I suppose even you fellows will be willing to stop jawing now for a bit."

"Look here——"

"Oh, come on!"

Taffy trod cautiously up the stairs, and reached the small landing outside the box-room. He opened the box-room door, and the three passed in, and Taffy carefully closed it. Then the Modern chums breathed with relief.

"Well, we're safe here, chappies," remarked Vernon.

"Just what I was going to say."

"Now we're going to find their blessed skates," said Taffy. "They're hidden in this room somewhere. We've seen them come out after their meetings, and they never have any skates with them."

"No; they're hidden in this room, right enough."

Taffy lighted the gas, turning it just high enough to show a light for the purpose of searching the box-room. He did not want it to attract attention from anybody who might happen to look up from the quadrangle outside.

In the dim light the three Moderns searched diligently through the box-room.

It was a very large room, and there were several capacious old cupboards in it, and in these, and among the boxes, the juniors hunted, but without discovering any trace of the skates. Taffy examined the wide old chimney, and even the ivy outside the window, but without result. But one thing was clear to the juniors, now that their attention was directed to it. The floor showed signs of scratching and scoring, and was sufficient to prove that roller-skates had been continually used there, even if Taffy had had any doubts otherwise.

After a quarter of an hour of diligent search the Moderns paused.

"They're hidden in one of the boxes," said Taffy decidedly. "There's a good many to look through; but here goes!"

"Right-ho!"

They began to search inside the stacked boxes, trunks, and packing-cases. Most of them were open to the touch, and could easily be examined. In none of these was found anything like roller-skates. There were a dozen or more locked boxes, and any of them might have contained the skates.

Vernon eyed them doubtfully.

"Are we going to bust them?" he asked.

"We're going to bust the right one."

"But how are we to tell which has the skates in it, till we've opened it?"

Taffy smiled compassionately.

"It's a jolly lucky thing for you, Verney, that your pater is a jolly rich man," he remarked. "If you had to make your way in

the world with your brains you'd be in an awful fix."

"Look here——" began Vernon warmly.

"Oh, don't begin to argue! I suppose there are about twenty pairs of roller-skates, and they weigh something, I suppose. These boxes are empty. Let's lift them one after another, and the one that weighs heavy has the skates in it."

Rake looked at his leader in great admiration.

"By George," he said, "that's awfully cute of you, Taffy! I should never have thought of that, you know."

"Go hon! Let's try it before any of those Classical rotters come bothering."

The juniors lifted the locked trunks in turn. The fifth that they essayed to lift was decidedly heavy, and when they rolled it from side to side there was a rolling and a clinking within it.

Taffy's eyes gleamed with triumph.

"They're here!"

The three Moderns gathered triumphantly round the trunk. It was locked, but the lock was a common one, and Taffy had no doubt he would be able to find a key to it.

"This is where we gloat!" murmured Taffy. "Aha, aha! There's a giddy surprise in store for those innocent Classical chicks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Moderns chortled in chorus.

From the bag he took an assortment of good things—ham-patties, pork-pies, sandwiches, cakes, tarts, and cream-puffs. His fat face glowed, and his round eyes glistened as he looked at them. He spread them out on the lid of the trunk, and contemplated them for some moments with beaming satisfaction before he began to eat.

The Modern chums looked at one another in utter dismay.

Fatty Spratt had evidently come there for a feed, choosing the top box-room as a quiet spot where he was not likely to be interrupted or requested to "share" by some hungry acquaintance. If he intended to eat all he had brought with him he was likely to be occupied for a considerable time. And Taffy and Co. had no doubts upon that point. They knew Fatty Spratt of old.

"My only hat!" murmured Taffy silently.

They waited.

Fatty Spratt started on the ham-patties, and continued with the pork-pies. All was grist that came to Fatty's mill. The Modern chums, keeping well in cover, watched him as if fascinated.

They dared not move; they hardly dared to breathe. Fatty Spratt was not only a Classical, but he was the most talkative fellow in the Fourth Form at St. Dolly's. If he discovered the Moderns there, it would not be many minutes before Redfern minor knew it; and Reddy would guess what they wanted there, too.

"We've got to stick it out!" murmured Taffy silently, the moving of his lips indicating to his chums what it was he wanted to utter.

And Rake and Vernon nodded silently, and prepared for the ordeal.

Fatty Spratt slowly progressed through his substantial meal.

Taffy and Co. would have given worlds and universes to rush forth from their place of concealment and bump Fatty on the floor and plaster his face all over with jam-tarts and cream-puffs and pour his lemonade down his back.

But that would have been to betray themselves utterly; and they restrained the natural impulse.

Fatty Spratt was a big eater, but a slow eater. It seemed to the tired and cramped Modern juniors that his attack upon the pile of provisions made no sensible diminution of it; yet they knew he would not move till he had finished the whole.

Cramp attacked their limbs, and they suffered endless pains and tortures; but they hardly dared to move, even when the "pins and needles" ran tingling through their limbs.

Once Vernon could not avoid uttering a slight gasp, and Fatty Spratt was seen to start and glance round him.

The Modern chums held their breath.

But Fatty only just glanced round, and then resumed his work of destruction upon the jam-tarts.

Taffy and Co. sat huddled up, cramped and forlorn, burning with suppressed wrath. It seemed to them an age before the last tart was in the hand of Fatty Spratt, and was conveyed to his mouth.

Fatty's jaw seemed to linger lovingly on the final tart.

His fat face seemed fatter and ruddier than ever, his round eyes seemed to be bulging, and a sort of shininess had come all over his skin. Fatty Spratt had "done himself well," as he would have expressed it.

He rose at last from the trunk, with a deep sigh of satisfaction.

Taffy almost gasped with relief.

"He's going— My hat!"

For Fatty Spratt sat down again on the trunk. Either his exertions had tired him, or he felt a natural disinclination to move in a hurry after that heavy meal.

He sat on the trunk, resting.

The Modern juniors groaned in spirit.

Would the villain never go?

Five minutes—six—seven, by Taffy's watch, Fatty Spratt sat there, like Hercules resting after his labours.

CHAPTER 28.

Something Like a Row.

REDFERN MINOR jumped up. He was sitting in the study at work at the table, getting through his prep., and Skelton was opposite him, dividing his attention between work and roasted chestnuts.

Brown III. was not there. He had suggested that prep. was dull work, and that a cup of tea would help them through it. Redfern had cordially agreed, and suggested in his turn that Brown should go and fill the kettle and light the fire when he came back.

Brown did not seem eager to adopt this suggestion; but finally he departed with the kettle, remarking that he expected to find the fire lighted when he came in again. His expectations were not likely to be realised, as neither Redfern nor Skelton had stirred from the table while he was gone.

But Redfern jumped up as Brown came in.

He came in in the most unexpected manner. There was a patter of rapid footsteps in the passage, and the junior came dashing in at top speed, the kettle held before him, and liberally splashing its contents over the floor.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Redfern. "What the — Look out!"

But Brown was going too fast to stop. He rushed right into the table, and the table simply staggered. Brown clutched at it to save himself, depositing the kettle fairly on top of the work that had taken the juniors the last half-hour to get through.

Skelton gave a yell.

"Oh, you giddy ass!"

Redfern minor looked round for the cause of Brown's frantic haste. It was soon apparent. Knowles, the Modern prefect, looked into the study, with a red and angry face. Behind him was Ransome, also looking angry.

"Here he is!" exclaimed Ransome.

Redfern stepped in between the gasping Brown and the two seniors as the latter entered the study.

"What's the row?" he said quietly.

"Mind your own business, you cub!" said Ransome.

Redfern's eyes sparkled.

"Get out of our study," he said. "I don't care if you are seniors. You've no right to shove yourselves in here!"

"I am a prefect, you young sweep!" said Knowles angrily.

"Yes—a Modern prefect. You know jolly well we're under the prefects of our own side," said Redfern minor independently.

"Let Brown alone!"

Knowles snapped his teeth.

"I am going to lick him! The young cad shoved his kettle on my clothes in the passage—"

"It was an accident," said Brown, gasping for breath. "I didn't know you were just going to turn the corner, Knowles. How should I?"

"It was not an accident. Ransome saw you—"

"Oh, Ransome!" said Redfern minor contemptuously. "Ransome would say anything."

The cad of the Sixth flushed with rage.

"I saw Brown do it, and it was not an accident," he said. "If I were Knowles I would lick him for his cheek."

"I'm going to!" said the Modern prefect savagely.

Redfern minor drew a deep breath. It was no light matter for a junior to resist a prefect; but, as he said, each side at St. Dolly's had its own prefects, and they were not expected to interfere with the other side. If Knowles came into a Classical study, he came in his private character.

The prefect stepped across towards Brown,

who promptly put the table between him and his pursuer. Knowles ran round the table after him, and Brown dodged, and Ransome sprang to stop him.

That was enough for Redfern minor.

He put out his foot, and Ransome tripped over it, stumbled headlong, and rolled on to the hearthrug.

"Oh!" yelled Ransome.

He sprang up in a fury and rushed at Redfern.

In a moment more the study was a scene of wild confusion.

The uproar was at its height when the form of the captain of St. Dolly's appeared in the doorway.

"What's all this confounded noise about?" exclaimed Arthur Redfern irritably.

He looked at the scene in astonishment.

"Knowles!"

The scuffle ceased. Knowles, red and dishevelled and angry, glared at the captain of the school.

"What on earth does this mean?" exclaimed Arthur. "I came up to stop the row, and didn't expect to find a prefect scuffling with juniors!"

"Mind your own business!" said Knowles hotly. "Do you think I'm going to be cheeked by the cads in this study, because you've taken them under your wing. There's been enough of rotten favouritism since you became captain."

"There's been nothing of the sort," said Arthur, flushing. "You know jolly well you've no business here."

"I'll do as I like!"

"You won't bully us in our own study," said Redfern minor, between his teeth. "Nor that cad Ransome, either!" He picked the poker out of the grate. "Now, begin again, if you like, and you'll get some of the cracks."

"What's it all about?" demanded Arthur. Knowles growled.

"Find out!"

"Then you'll get out of this study!" said Arthur decidedly.

"I'll please myself about that."

Arthur's face set grimly.

"You'll get out of this study, and Ransome, too!" he said. "You seem to forget that I am captain of this school. You'll go!"

Knowles looked at him. Ransome looked at him, too, and quietly stepped out into the passage. The Modern prefect saw that he would have no help from his friend, at all events. He bit his lip and stepped out.

Arthur Redfern looked severely at the juniors.

"I don't know what this row was about," he said. "But you heard what Knowles said. If I stand up for this study I get accused of favouritism, because my minor's here. When you start these rows I think you ought to remember that."

"But we didn't start it, Arthur," said Redfern minor earnestly. "It was Ransome at the bottom of it all. I believe he's at the bottom of every blessed atom of trouble that ever happened here. He put Knowles on to rag us, and, of course, we weren't going to stand it from a Modern."

Arthur nodded shortly, and quitted the study. The three juniors looked round the room, and then looked at one another.

The study was simply a wreck.

Everything was broken and upset, and the juniors themselves were in a dishevelled and dusty state, and aching all over from the hard knocks they had received.

"Well, this is jolly!" said Skelton at last. "Still, I'm jolly glad we stood up for our rights."

"Yes, rather!"

"Phew! What's this?" exclaimed Brown suddenly.

He stooped and picked up a crisp and rustling slip of paper from the floor. It was a banknote for five pounds.

Skelton and Redfern minor stared at it.

"My hat!" exclaimed Redfern. "Which of you chaps has been robbing a bank, and shedding his ill-gotten gains over the floor?"

Skelton chuckled.

"Knowles or Ransome must have dropped it in the row."

"Ah, of course! I didn't think of that."

"Somebody had better take it and inquire," said Brown. "Blessed if I want to go to Knowles's study just now, though. He seemed annoyed at that kettle bumping on his waistcoat in the passage."

"Ha, ha! I'll take it!" said Redfern. "It wouldn't do to leave it hanging about. Knowles may miss it, you know—or Ransome—whichever it belongs to. I'll ask them both, and find out the owner."

"Right you are!"

And Redfern minor took the banknote and left the study.

CHAPTER 29.

The Five-Pound Note.

RANSOME was standing in his doorway in the Sixth-Form passage. There was a cloud upon Ransome's brow, and a very unpleasant glitter in his eyes. Ransome had had some hard knocks in the scuffle in the junior study, and Ransome was a fellow who never could stand hard knocks. Although he had been the means of bringing about a fight between the captain of St. Dolly's and the head Modern prefect, it was noticeable that Ransome never entered into a fight himself. If he had a score to pay off, but generally found a quieter and a safer way. There were bruises on Ransome's face, and one of his eyes showed a strong tendency to close. But that was probably not all that was troubling the cad of the Sixth. The deep wrinkle in his brow seemed to indicate some trouble more deeply seated.

He was evidently waiting at his door to catch somebody as he passed. He looked up quickly as a door opened up the passage. Courtney of the Sixth came out of Arthur Redfern's study. He came down the passage, and nodded to Ransome in a distant way; but Ransome made him a sign to stop.

"Come into my study a minute, will you, Courtney?"

"Yes, if you like."

The good-natured Sixth-Former stepped in. He wondered what Ransome could want; for they were not on the best of terms. The cad of the Sixth coloured a little as he met Courtney's eyes.

"Well?" said Courtney, in wonder.

"Look here, Courtney, it's an odd thing to ask, but—will you lend me some tin?"

Courtney stared.

"Certainly!" he said. "How much?"

"Five pounds."

Courtney looked at him, and laughed.

"You're joking, I suppose?"

"I'm not," said Ransome. "I've allowed a bill to become overdue—it's for some things I ordered last—last term, and I've got to meet it. As a matter of fact, I had forgotten it. It has come on me suddenly, with a note to say that if it isn't paid it will be sent to my father."

"Phew! That's rough!"

"I shall have the money next week," said Ransome. "I know you sometimes have big tips, and I thought you might help me out."

"I would if I could," said Courtney. "But, my dear chap, five pounds is a big sum. I don't think I could raise more than fifteen bob till Saturday, and then not more than thirty. It's beyond me."

"Oh, all right!"

"Why not try Knowles?" suggested Courtney.

"I will. Of course, you won't mention this?"

"Of course not," said Courtney, and, with a nod, he quitted the study.

Left alone in the room, Ransome clenched his hands hard, and bit his thin lips.

"What the deuce shall I do?" he muttered. "It's the chance of a lifetime. Ben Bolt must carry off that race, and I can't lay without the ready-money. With a five-pound note now I could raise a hundred pounds next week. It's a dead, sure nip, and it's the chance of a lifetime. Courtney can't lend me the tin, and Knowles can't. I've asked him already. What the dickens—"

He paused, and uttered an angry exclamation. A boyish face was looking in at the open door of the study. It was Redfern minor's.

"You cub!" he exclaimed savagely. "What do you want here?"

"Nothing," said Redfern.

"Get out!"

"Certainly. I looked in to ask you if you had lost a five-pound note?"

Ransome started violently.

Redfern's words chimed in so curiously with his thoughts, that for the moment he could not help thinking that the junior was mocking him. He started forward.

"You young cub! I'll break your neck!" Redfern retreated warily into the passage.

"Keep your wool on," he remarked. "If you haven't lost the note, you can say so, I suppose, and I'll go and ask Knowles."

"What do you mean?"

"Somebody dropped a five-pound note in my study," explained Redfern. "It doesn't belong to Skelton or Brown or me, so I suppose it was you or Knowles dropped it there."

Ransome's face changed. There was a steely glitter in his eyes as he fixed them upon Redfern minor.

"Oh, I see! Come in!"

Redfern came into the room again.

"You picked up a five-pound note?" said Ransome.

"Well, Brown picked it up. Somebody dropped it in the row," said Redfern calmly.

"As it doesn't belong to us, we thought it must belong to either you or Knowles, and I've brought it along to see, you see."

"Let me see it."

Ransome felt carefully through his pockets, as if to ascertain whether there was a bank-note there. He knew perfectly well that there was not. He uttered an exclamation.

"By Jove!"

"You've lost a note?" asked Redfern minor.

"Well, mine's gone!"

"Then this is yours?"

"I suppose so."

"Look at the number," said Redfern minor.

"Do you take the numbers of your notes? I never do. I never have any notes."

Ransome took the note, and made an elaborate pretence of comparing the number with an imaginary number in his pocket-book. He nodded as if satisfied.

"That's all right," he said.

"It's your note?"

"Yes."

"Good!" said Redfern minor. "Ta-ta!"

"Thank you for bringing it to me," said Ransome. "It was very honest of you."

Redfern's lip curled.

"Thank you for nothing," he retorted. "I suppose anybody who wasn't a worm would return any money he found, wouldn't he? There are no thieves in my study."

Ransome changed colour at the word. Redfern minor walked out, and returned to his own study.

"It's all right," he announced. "The note belonged to Ransome, and he had the number in his pocket-book. That's settled."

"And so is our blessed study," grunted Skelton. "I wonder if we shall ever get it in order again."

Meanwhile, Ransome had placed that bank-note carefully in his pocket-book. His actions for the next few minutes were curious. He stood for a while in deep thought, and then he opened the pocket-book, took out the banknote, and went down the passage to Knowles's study. He stopped outside the door, the banknote crumpled in his hand, and his brows knitted. But he did not enter. With quiet steps he returned to his own study, and once more the five-pound-note was placed in the pocket-book.

Then Ransome donned his hat and coat, and quietly left the house.

He turned his back upon St. Dolly's, and strode away swiftly through the gloom. The banknote was in his pocket. But did it, as he had told Redfern minor, belong to him? Ransome, the black sheep of St. Dolly's, had gone pretty near the limit many times in his career as a "sportsman." Had he passed it now?

CHAPTER 30.

A Surprise for the Classics.

"MY only hat!" Redfern minor uttered the ejaculation.

He was passing through the hall when the sight of a crowd of juniors round the notice-board drew his attention in that direction. He strolled up to join the group, wondering which of the various papers pinned on the board was exciting so much interest among the Lower-Form fellows.

And then he ejaculated.

Among the various notices on the board was one that could only have been written by a junior. It was in a big, sprawling hand, which Redfern minor recognised at once as Taffy's.

There was nothing surprising in the leader of the Modern juniors putting up a notice on the board. But the notice itself!

Redfern looked at it, and ejaculated, and rubbed his eyes, and looked again.

He could scarcely believe it.

There were Modern juniors chuckling round the notice-board, and Classics with amazed faces and dismal looks.

For the notice ran as follows:

"NOTICE!

"On Saturday afternoon the St. Dolly's Rink will be opened. The undersigned have decided to introduce roller-skating to St. Dorothy's, and as a preliminary an exhibition of roller-skating will be given by Modern juniors. The gym. will be used as a rink from three o'clock to four on Saturday afternoon.

"Signed,

"D. MORGAN.

"H. VERNON.

"H. RAKE."

No wonder Redfern minor could scarcely believe his eyes.

The great rinking wheeze, which had been thought out by the Classical juniors and kept so dark—the great surprise they had been preparing for their rivals—everything was known, apparently, to Taffy Morgan, and the Moderns had calmly appropriated the idea!

How did Taffy know?

Redfern felt a tap on the shoulder, and he turned round dazedly, to find his chums, Skelton and Brown, looking at him.

"What do you think of that?" asked Skelton.

"I—I can't understand it."

"They've got on to the wheeze," said Brown III. bitterly. "Some ass has been jawing, I suppose."

"I don't think so."

"Well, they've got on to it somehow. And—and they've collared the idea."

"Boned the wheeze!" said Skelton.

"How on earth did they do it?" ejaculated Redfern. "I—I never expected this, even of Taffy. They've got on to the wheeze, and they've obtained permission to use the gym. as a rink, just as we were going to. And they're giving their show first."

"The cheek of it!"

"We're done!" said Skelton. "Done brown!"

"Looks like it."

"But—but have they got the skates?" said Redfern. "This may be only a bit of bluff, after all. They can't have taken our skates—they don't know where we keep them."

"Trust Taffy to find out when he's once got on to the wheeze," said Skelton gloomily.

"Let's go and see."

The three juniors ran upstairs at once to the top bedroom. They reached it in a few minutes, and Redfern ran to the trunk in which the roller-skates were kept locked up when the Classics were not using them for practice.

"It's all right!" he gasped. "It's still locked."

Skelton looked doubtful.

"Easy enough to get a key to a lock like that if they once knew what was in the trunk," he remarked.

"Well, I'll jolly soon see!"

Redfern groped in his pocket for the key of the trunk, and soon unlocked it. He threw the lid back.

"Great pip!"

The trunk was empty!

The roller-skates were gone!

Twenty pairs of roller-skates had reposed there when last Redfern junior had looked into the trunk, and now it was empty.

There could be no further doubt on the subject. The Modern juniors had not only borrowed the idea, but they had borrowed the skates as well.

The Classical skates were to be used to give the Classical show—by the Moderns! It was as clean a sweep as the Moderns could have made.

The Classical chums stared at one another helplessly.

"My only hat!" said Redfern.

"It's rotten!"

"We're done!"

"They've got our skates!" said Skelton wildly. "Why, it was only last evening we were practising with them, too! They must have taken them last night, and then they shoved up the notice on the board this morning—and the show's to come off this afternoon! Why, we've got no chance!"

"Let's go and see Taffy."

"Good! We can scalp those rotters, anyway!"

And the chums of the Fourth rushed downstairs again.

It was Saturday, and morning school was over. The juniors had had their dinner, and there remained only an interval of an hour before the rinking exhibition commenced. Taffy and Co. had not given any information away till almost the last moment.

Redfern kicked open the door of Taffy's study, and the Classical chums strode in. Taffy and Rake and Vernon were there, but they had evidently expected a visit from the Classical leaders, for several other juniors were in the study with them.

Taffy looked up with a genial grin as the Classical chums came in.

"Hallo!" he said affably. "See the notice?"

"Yes!" said Redfern wrathfully.

"Good! Are you coming to see the show?"

"Well, you cheeky ass!"

"All are invited," said Taffy blandly.

"Classicals will be expected to wash and put on clean collars, that's all."

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled the Modern juniors in the study.

"You—you worm——"

"You—you burglar" roared Skelton. "It was our wheeze——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Moderns.

"We thought of it——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You've boned our idea——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You've boned our skates——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Moderns rocked with laughter—all excepting Taffy. He maintained an expression of mild surprise.

"Anybody know what these chaps are talking about?" he asked.

"Look here, you Modern worm——"

"We thought of the wheeze," said Taffy.

"It was finding an old skating key knocking about that really put it into our heads. Then we happened to find a set of roller-skates locked up in an old trunk in the box-room——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Moderns.

"They're our skates!" shrieked Brown.

"Oh, rats!"

"You—you—you worm——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, if you can prove your ownership, you shall have the skates back after the show," said Taffy. "We're giving it this afternoon, you know, in the gym."

"You Modern sweep, we'll jolly well wreck it! We'll——"

"Now, don't lose your little temper! You Classical chaps can't expect to keep your end up with us, you know——"

"Why, you—you——"

Words failed the Classical chums.

With one accord they rushed at Taffy. They collared him and dragged him off his chair.

"Ow!" roared Taffy. "Rescue!"

The crowd of Moderns closed instantly upon the three Classicals.

Redfern, Skelton, and Brown were seized at once, and one after another, struggling desperately against the odds, they were hurled forth from the study.

Then the door was slammed after them.

Within the study the Moderns roared with laughter. Outside, in the passage, three dusty and dishevelled juniors picked themselves up and looked at one another ruefully.

"Well," said Redfern minor, at last, "this is a go!"

CHAPTER 31.

The Rinkers.

ARTHUR REDFERN stopped in the hall to look at the notice-board. He smiled as he read the announcement there in Taffy's sprawling hand. And the crowd of juniors round the board, see-

ing the captain of the school smile, chuckled gleefully. Redfern major's smile was taken as a proof that the thing was really funny.

Arthur knew something of his minor's plans with regard to the St. Dolly's rink, and he saw at once that the Moderns had discovered the scheme and forestalled the Classicals. It really looked as if Redfern minor was "done" this time. Arthur had just finished reading the Modern notice, when Knowles came up to the board with a paper in his hand. Knowles's face was gloomy and troubled.

Arthur glanced at him.

"Anything wrong?" he asked, impelled to ask the question, though he had hardly been on speaking terms with the Modern prefect of late.

Knowles nodded shortly.

"Yes; I've lost a banknote."

"Phew!"

"It was a fiver, and I don't know where I dropped it. I suppose I must have dropped it somewhere. I've hunted all over my study. I can't think where it's gone."

"How long have you missed it?"

"I only missed it to-day, but I saw it for the last time yesterday, just before that row in your minor's study."

Arthur's face grew very grave.

"Then surely it ought to have been found by this time, Knowles!"

"I should think so."

Knowles pinned the paper on the board. It was a brief announcement of the fact that a five-pound note had been lost somewhere in the House, or the grounds, and that the finder should take it to Knowles, of the Sixth.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Ransome, looking at the notice over Arthur's shoulder. "What's that?"

"Lost a fiver," said Knowles briefly.

"Great Scott! Where—and when?"

"Yesterday—somewhere. Dropped it, I suppose."

Ransome looked thoughtful.

"It might have fallen out of your pocket when you had that tussle in young Redfern's study," he remarked.

"Yes, I shouldn't wonder."

"In that case the juniors would have found it, I should think," said Arthur Redfern, with a glance at Knowles.

"Well, it would be a good idea to ask them."

"I will," said Knowles.

The Modern prefect walked towards Redfern minor's study. Arthur followed him, and Ransome stood looking after them, with a peculiar glitter in his eyes.

His face was a little pale.

"If Ben Bolt wins," he muttered—"if he wins, it will be all right. If he loses——"

Ransome shrugged his shoulders and walked slowly away. He stopped to speak to Phipps, the house-porter, in the passage.

"If a telegram comes for me, Phipps, you'll see that I have it at once," he said. "It's important."

"Yes, sir," said Phipps.

And Ransome went to his study.

He sat down there, and took up a book. In a couple of minutes he threw the book

aside, and lighted a cigarette. The cigarette went out, and he grunted and threw it into the grate.

Then he thrust his hands deep into his pockets and started pacing the room.

At intervals he paused at the window to glance out towards the gates of St. Dolly's, in search of the familiar uniform of the telegraph-boy.

Meanwhile, Knowles and Arthur Redfern reached the study in the Fourth-Form passage. They found it empty. There was no sign of Redfern, Skelton, or Brown.

Arthur glanced in, and shook his head.

"They're not here," he said.

"Later will do," said Knowles. "After all, if they've found the note, they'll see the notice on the board, and will know whom it belongs to, I suppose."

"I suppose so."

Knowles looked at him quickly.

"You don't think I'd suspect your minor of keeping the note, do you, Redfern?" he exclaimed abruptly.

"I hope not," said Arthur, his brow clearing. "But—to speak plainly, that's what Ransome meant."

"Surely not."

"If the note has been found, it's curious that it has not been returned," said Arthur. "A junior would naturally take it to his Form-master."

"Yes, it's curious. But I know jolly well that if Redfern minor found it, he would restore it to its owner," said Knowles. "Hang it! You can't think I'd suspect a chap of being a thief, because I'm on—well, bad terms with his major. I can't think that Ransome was intending that, either."

Arthur nodded shortly and walked away.

His brow was troubled. Where was the banknote! It was careless of Knowles to have lost it; but surely someone must have found it by this time. Why, then, had nothing been said upon the matter?

Arthur looked round for his minor. But Redfern was not to be found. As a matter of fact, Sidney Redfern was very busy at that moment.

The triumph of the Moderns was not likely to be taken "lying down" by the Classical juniors. Redfern and Co. were busy. As the time drew near for the rinking to commence in the gym., the Moderns poured into the building, and the Classicals gathered there, too. There were no roller-skates for the Classicals; but they all looked as if they meant business of some sort.

"The bounders!" said Redfern minor, as he watched Taffy and Rake and Vernon unfastening parcels containing skates. "Look at them! Our skates!"

"Our wheeze!" growled Skelton.

"Our idea entirely!" said Brown.

"And now they're going to have a ripping time," said Benson. "That's because we've got such jolly good leaders."

"Oh, shut up!"

"Well, what I say is——"

"No need for you to say anything!" said Redfern crisply. "I'll do the talking. I——"

"Look here——"

"Oh, ring off! Look here, you kids, we're not going to take this grinning. As soon as

those asses are on skates, we're going to rush them!"

"Good!" said a dozen voices.

"They can't have had much practice, at all events, and they'll be as clumsy as a lot of geese on skates."

"Yes, rather!"

"We shall knock them into a cocked hat, collar the skates, kick them out of the gym., and carry out the rinking scheme as originally arranged."

"Bravo!"

"Good egg!"

"You fellows stand ready!" said Redfern minor.

"What-ho!"

And the Classical juniors watched the Moderns with keen, warlike eyes. But Taffy was not quite so trusting as Redfern gave him credit for.

While the Modern juniors were putting on their skates two prefects entered the gym., and nodded to Taffy, and strolled up and down chatting. The Classicals glared at them.

"What on earth do those duffers want here at this particular moment?" grunted Skelton.

Redfern snorted.

"Oh, that's Taffy's little game!"

"What is?"

"He's got those blessed prefects to stand by while the skating goes on, so that there can't be a disturbance."

"My hat!"

The Classicals bristled with wrath. There was no doubt that Taffy had done them all along the line. It was impossible to rush the Moderns, and collar the skates, while a couple of prefects were strolling about the gym. to keep order.

Taffy had outgeneralled the Classicals in every way.

With glum brows the Classical juniors watched the Moderns put on their skates, and commence rinking on the smooth floor of the gym.

Some of them could skate well, and some couldn't, and all of them enjoyed it, whether they could skate or not.

A crowd of fellows strolled into the gym. to watch them, and the gloomy looks of the Classical juniors evoked much merriment.

Redfern was pink with wrath. He felt that he was called upon to do something to retrieve the honour of the Classical side; but while the prefects were there there was nothing to be done.

"Hang it!" muttered Skelton. "Let's get out. If I see these Modern worms grinning much longer, I shall go for them, prefects or no prefects!"

"Hold on, Skelton!"

"Oh, let's get out!"

"I've thought of a dodge," said Redfern minor, with a gleam in his eyes. "If we could get those blessed prefects outside the gym., we could shut the door and lock it, and decline to hear 'em if they wanted to come in."

"Yes; but——"

"Well, listen!"

Redfern minor whispered rapidly, and Skelton and Brown chuckled. The other Classicals put their heads together to hear the scheme, and there was a general grin.

Benson and Fatty Spratt strolled out of the gym.

The Moderns were skating now in full swing, some of them tumbling over, some staggering about drunkenly, and others gliding to and fro with graceful motion. Suddenly there was a wild yelling from the outside of the building.

"Help—help! Oh! Help!"

It was Fatty Spratt's voice. Benson's was heard in response.

"I'll pulverise you! I'll smash you!"

"Ow! Help! Ow!"

The two prefects who were keeping order in the gym, looked round. The cries outside redoubled in violence, and the prefects stepped to the door and looked out. Fierce exclamations rang from the combatants round the corner of the building.

The prefects hurried out of the gym. Redfern minor was close to the door. In a twinkling it was shut behind the two seniors, and Redfern minor had locked it and taken out the key.

The Classical's exchanged a glance of triumph.

"It's done!" muttered Redfern minor.

"Good!"

"Hurrah!"

"Now for the Modern worms!"

There was a loud knock at the door, and the handle was tried.

"Open this door!"

It was Arthur Redfern's voice. Skelton and Brown looked dismayed.

"It's your major, Reddy."

"Can't be helped. I'm deaf this afternoon," said Sidney.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Rap, rap!

"Sidney, I want to speak to you, if you are there!"

Redfern minor hesitated a moment. But half a dozen Classical's dragged him away from the door.

"He can speak to you presently," said Brown. "Now, to business!"

"What-ho!"

"Down with the Mods!"

"Sock it to 'em!"

"Come on, then!"

And the Classical's rushed to the attack.

CHAPTER 32.

Turning the Tables.

TAFFY AND CO. were not prepared for that sudden outbreak. Taffy, by a master-stroke of generalship, had secured the presence of a couple of prefects to keep order during the rinking exhibition, and he had dismissed the Classical's from his mind. Redfern's ruse had passed unnoticed, and the Moderns were rinking away without a thought of danger.

The rush of the Classical's took them quite by surprise.

Right among the roller-skaters came the vengeful juniors, sending them reeling and staggering right and left.

"Oh!" roared Taffy, as he went headlong, and sat down, with Rake across his legs, and

Vernon clinging round his neck. "Ow! What the——"

"Yaroooh!"

"Oh!"

"Yah!"

"Sock it into 'em!" roared Redfern minor.

"Hurray! Down with the Mods!"

The Moderns were down with a vengeance.

Every fellow on skates was on the floor now, and on each of the fallen rinkers a Classical junior sat, to keep him there.

There was a yell of triumph from the Classical's.

"Hurray!"

"Hip, nip, hurray!"

"You beasts!" gasped Taffy. "Lemme gerrup!"

"Yow! I'm hurt!"

"Gerroff me chest!"

"Ha, ha, ha! This is where we smile!" yelled Skelton. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"What-no! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yan! Cads! Ow!"

"Rescue!"

"Help!"

There was a hammering at the door of the gym. No one took any notice of it. The crowd of onlookers, taken by surprise at first, were roaring with laughter now. No one dreamt of interfering in the internal battles of the Fourth Form. They looked on and laughed; and, as there were no prefects present, there was no one whose special duty it was to interfere.

The Classical's had it all their own way now.

They were man to man, and they had their rivals down and the Moderns had little chance of getting up, with skates fastened on their feet, and Classical's sitting on their chests.

The triumph of the Classical's was complete.

"Now, then," said Redfern, "are you going to make it pax, Taffy?"

"No!" roared Taffy.

"You'd better!"

"Rats! I won't! I'll lick you——"

"Ha, ha, ha! You don't look like licking anybody at present!" yelled Brown.

"Very well," said Redfern minor, "if you won't make it pax, we'll tie you up with your own braces, and sit you in a row to watch us skate."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you Classical beasts——"

"Begin with Taffy," said Redfern. "Tie his wrists together, and then his hoofs, and sit him against the wall."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here——"

"Will you make it pax?"

"No!"

"That settles it."

The Classical's wasted no more time in words. They proceeded, quickly and effectively, to carry out Redfern minor's instructions.

Taffy, struggling desperately but unavailingly, was bound first. His wrists were secured with a knotted handkerchief, and then his ankles with his own necktie. Then he was helpless.

He was rolled to the wall, and placed

there in a sitting position, wriggling like an eel in vain attempts to get free, and that left Redfern minor at liberty to deal with the other Moderns.

He went from one to another, while the Classics held them pinned down, and secured them as he had secured Taffy.

The crowd of fellows, of all Forms but the Fourth, looked on with shrieks of laughter. The knocking at the door had ceased, the prefects apparently having given it up as a bad job.

Taffy and Co., and all the Moderns, were seated along the wall like a row of trussed turkeys in a market, and their skates were taken off.

Under the fire of fierce glares from the Moderns, the Classical juniors put the skates on.

Redfern minor was the first to glide out into the rink. The others followed him, one after another.

The practice the Classics had had in the secrecy of the top box-room had stood them in good stead, and there were few of them who could not skate really well.

Taffy and Co. watched them in black wrath.

"The beasts!" said Taffy. "They've done us!"

"Just what I was going to say," groaned Rake.

"By Jove, I feel awf'ly uncomfy, chap-pies!" mumbled Vernon. "It would be a good idea to make it pax, and get out of this fix."

Taffy snorted.

"Rats!"

"Yes, but——"

"Rats! We won't give in!"

"But——"

"Bosh!"

"Just what I was going to say."

Swish, swish, swish! went the roller-skates on the level floor of the gym.

The Classics were enjoying themselves in their turn.

And, in addition to the joys of roller-skating, and of giving a really good exhibition to an interested audience, was the exhilaration of a triumph over their old rivals.

"Go it!" said Redfern minor. "This is ripping!"

And Skelton and Brown said:

"What-ho!"

Redfern, Skelton, and Brown were certainly the best of the roller-skaters. They glided backwards and forwards, they skated together, arm in arm, winding and turning, and then singly, dancing and keeping time on their skates to a tune they whistled as they went. And a loud cheer came from the onlookers.

"By George," exclaimed Taffy, interested, in spite of himself, "that's jolly good! Reddy is a marvel!"

"Just what I was going to say," said Rake.

"Oh, let's make it pax!" said Vernon. "Make it pax, and we can look on with a little more comfort. It's worth seeing, too."

"All right."

And pax it was made accordingly, and the Modern juniors were released. But the skat-

ing went on gaily till the time allotted for the rinking exhibition was over, and the Classical juniors one and all agreed that they had seldom had so good a time in their lives.

CHAPTER 33.

A Terrible Accusation.

REDFERN MINOR came out of the gym with a flush on his cheeks and a sparkle in his eyes. Taffy tapped him on the shoulder.

"You did us, Reddy," he said genially. "We nearly did you, though."

"Very nearly," chuckled Redfern; "but not quite."

"No, not quite. Look here, we're going to take this thing up. Roller-skating is jolly good fun."

"Ripping!"

"Suppose, instead of ragging one another, we go into the thing together for once," suggested Taffy. "We're willing, if you are."

Redfern minor gave him a slap on the shoulder.

"Good! We're on!"

"Then it's agreed."

"Yes, rather."

"Sidney!"

Redfern minor was entering the school-house when his brother's voice called to him. Redfern minor looked quickly round. There was a tone in Arthur's voice that startled him a little.

"Yes, Arthur."

"I want you."

"I—I say, Arthur, I'm sorry about not opening the door of the gym," said Redfern minor. "You don't mind, do you? There was a rag on, and that would have spoiled it all. I didn't think you would mind much."

The captain of St. Dolly's shook his head.

"No, that's all right, Sid. But——"

He paused. Redfern minor looked at him curiously, and so did Skelton and Brown. The look of the captain of St. Dolly's surprised them. It was evident that Arthur Redfern had something on his mind.

"Knowles has lost a banknote," said Arthur abruptly. "He thinks he may have lost it during the scuffle in your study yesterday."

"Oh, that banknote!" said Skelton. "It wasn't Knowles's, was it?"

"We found one," said Redfern, in wonder. "It couldn't have been Knowles's, though, because when I took it to Ransome, he found out by the number that it was his."

"Ransome?"

"Yes."

"Do you mean to say that you found a banknote in your study, after the scuffle, and took it to Ransome, and he said it was his?"

"Certainly."

"Did he keep it?"

"I left it with him," said Redfern minor, in wonder. "I suppose it was his, or he wouldn't say it was, would he? He had the number, too! What's the matter, Arthur?"

"Here's Ransome!" said Redfern major abruptly. "Ransome!"

The cad of the Sixth was entering the house. He had a telegram in his hand; he had gone to meet the messenger, and had opened the telegram in the quad. His face was white, and the telegram was crushed in his hand.

He looked absently and irritably at the captain of St. Dolly's.

"Eh, what is it? Did you speak to me?"

"Yes. Did you lose a banknote in my minor's study yesterday?"

Ransome started, and drew a quick, deep breath. It had come at last!

"No," he said quietly and deliberately.

"Sidney said he found one, and brought it to you, and you declared it was yours."

"If he found one, I should say it was Knowles's."

"He brought it to you——"

"To me?"

"Yes," said Redfern minor warmly. "You remember. You looked in your pocket-book and found out the number."

Ransome gave him a hard look.

"You are dreaming, or lying," he said.

"You brought no banknote to me. I never lost one. I never had one to lose!"

"But—but you said——"

"I said nothing. If you found a banknote in your study, I know nothing about it!"

"Do you mean to say that my minor did not bring it to you, Ransome?" asked Arthur, in a curiously strained voice.

"Certainly!"

"But——"

"It is no business of mine," said Ransome, with a shrug of the shoulders. "But if Redfern minor found a banknote, and told a yarn about handing it over to me, I should say that he could only have invented such a flimsy yarn for one reason."

"And that?"

"He has kept the banknote!"

Redfern minor looked at him almost wildly. In an instant the hideous position he was in flashed upon his mind. If Ransome denied taking the note, who was to prove that Redfern had even given it to him?

It was as if a flash of lightning had suddenly revealed to him a yawning gulf at his feet. Redfern was quite giddy for the moment—his head seemed to turn round—but his brother's strong arm caught him as he staggered.

"Steady, Sid!"

There was no doubt, no hesitation, in Arthur's voice or look. In that terrible moment there was at least one who would be staunch and true to Redfern minor, and that was Redfern major.

CHAPTER 34.

Under Suspicion.

"REDFERN MINOR!"

R

"Yes!"

"Rats!"

"So say I!"

"And I!"

"Same here!"

"Well, that's what they're saying," said

Benson of the Fourth, to a group of excited and greatly interested Classical youths. "They say he found a banknote in his study. Knowles had dropped it there. It seems there was a scrap in the study—Knowles and Ransome had gone there to bully Reddy."

"Well, that was like them."

"That part's true enough, very likely," said Fatty Spratt. "But about the banknote——"

"Reddy might have found it; but if he did, he took it back to the owner," said Miller.

"I should say so."

"Well, they say he kept it."

"It's gammon!"

"Sheer rot!"

"Hallo, here's Skelton and Brown! Let's ask them!"

Skelton and Brown were surrounded by a rush of the excited juniors of St. Dolly's. Both of them looked white and savage.

"What's the truth of this yarn about Reddy?" demanded Benson. "You ought to know, Skelton."

Skelton glared at him.

"So ought you, Benson. You ought to know as well as I do. You know jolly well that Reddy isn't a thief."

"Of course he isn't! But——"

"The truth is, that there's a plot against him, and Ransome of the Sixth is at the bottom of it, and I don't care who hears me say so!" exclaimed Skelton, with flashing eyes.

"My hat!"

"That's what I say," said Brown. "I found the banknote in our study after the scrap. Reddy said he would take it to Knowles and Ransome, and see which it belonged to. He took it to Ransome, and Ransome said it was his, and kept it."

"Phew!"

"Did you see him?"

"No. Reddy told us when he came back to the study."

"And now Ransome denies having had the note," said Skelton fiercely. "It's just a plot to get Reddy into trouble—like the anonymous letter business. I jolly well know who wrote that letter, and who stole it from the doctor's desk afterwards."

"Who, then?"

"Ransome!"

"I say, you'd better be careful!" said Benson, with a nervous glance round. "I——"

"I'm not going to be careful. I don't care who hears me. I say that if there's a thief at St. Dolly's, he's not in the Fourth, he's in the Sixth; and his name's not Redfern, either, it's Ransome!"

Skelton almost shouted out the words in his excitement and indignation. Mr. Ford, the master of the Fourth, stepped out of his study.

"Skelton!"

"You've done it now!" muttered Benson. "Ford's heard you!"

Skelton gritted his teeth.

"I don't care! If they expel Reddy, they can expel me, too, for all I care. I'm going

to stick to Reddy. Yes, sir! Did you call me?"

"Come into my study, Skelton!"

"Yes, sir!"

Skelton followed his Form-master in, and the door was closed. Mr. Ford looked attentively at the pale and excited face of the junior.

"You were speaking in a most wild and reckless way just now, Skelton," said Mr. Ford quietly. "Have you anything to back up the statements you were making?"

"I know that Ransome's a cad and a liar, sir," said Skelton grimly. "If he says Reddy never gave him the banknote, it's a lie! He's destroyed it, perhaps, to get Reddy into trouble with that yarn. He hates Reddy. He's always hated him, ever since Redfern major got in as captain of St. Dolly's. I shouldn't wonder if he's kept the banknote himself, and stolen it."

"That is a very serious thing to say, Skelton."

"Not any more serious than what he's said about Reddy," said Skelton fiercely. "You don't know Reddy as I do, sir. He's as open and honest as daylight—one of the best chums a fellow could have. And now to see him accused of such a dirty, mean thing as stealing, and to think he may be expelled all through that cad——"

Skelton's voice broke.

"I can understand your feelings," said Mr. Ford quietly. "I, too, find it very hard to credit this accusation against Redfern minor. I can assure you, Skelton, that the matter will be carefully investigated, and sifted out thoroughly, before any decided step is taken. If necessary, the aid of the police will be called in."

Skelton gritted his teeth.

"All the better, sir. I know jolly well that Reddy's innocent, and a detective might be able to find out the truth."

"I trust so."

Mr. Ford dismissed Skelton with a gesture. The Fourth-Form master remained some moments in deep thought. Then he left the room, and took his way to the Head's study.

Redfern minor was waiting in that room. Knowles, Ransome, and Redfern major were with him. Arthur had decided that the matter must be at once laid before the Head—it was all over St. Dolly's already. The three seniors and Redfern minor were waiting for the doctor to come in. They all looked round as Mr. Ford entered.

Arthur Redfern was looking pale and haggard. But his trust in his brother had never wavered for a moment. He knew that it was a plot against Sidney, and he knew very well that if Sidney had spoken the truth, Ransome must have lied. He had not, therefore, very far to look for someone to suspect. But how was he to prove that his suspicion of Ransome was well-founded? Where was the banknote?

Redfern minor was looking stunned.

He had had a narrow escape in the affair of the anonymous letter; but he had escaped. Now it seemed that the toils had closed in upon him for good and all. There was only his statement that he had taken

the banknote to Ransome. Ransome denied it. The boy could see no light.

"Does the Head know you are waiting for him?" asked Mr. Ford.

"I have sent word to him, sir," said Arthur. "I sent him a note by the page, explaining the circumstances, and asking him if he could look into the matter now."

"Very good. The sooner it is settled the better."

A few minutes later Dr. Cranston entered the study.

He was looking very disturbed, and it was evident that Arthur's note had shaken him a good deal.

He glanced round at the faces of the waiting boys, nodded to the Fourth-Form master, and took his seat at his writing-table.

"Your note amazed me, Redfern major!" he exclaimed. "It seems to me impossible that there can be a thief at St. Dolly's."

"I'm afraid there's no doubt about it, sir. But the thief is not my brother."

"Tell me the circumstances."

"Speak out, Sidney!"

"There was some trouble in our study, sir," said Redfern minor, in a low, but steady voice. "Knowles and Ransome were mixed up in it. We found a banknote afterwards, and thought that one of them must have dropped it. I took it back to them, and went into Ransome's study first, to ask him——"

"It is false," said Ransome.

The Head made a gesture.

"Let Redfern minor finish, Ransome. I will hear you afterwards."

"Very well, sir."

"I took it to Ransome, and explained how I came by it," said Redfern minor, his voice shaking a little now. "He told me it was his, and said he knew by the number. He kept it. I never thought any more about the matter."

"Is that all?"

"That's all, sir."

"Now, Ransome, what is your statement?"

"Very simple, sir. Redfern minor may have pretended to come to my study, for the sake of throwing dust in the eyes of those who knew he had the banknote, but he certainly did not come there. He did not hand me a banknote, and if he had, I should certainly not have kept it, as I had not lost one."

The Head's face was deeply lined with trouble.

He had hoped that there might be some mistake in the matter—some terrible mistake, which might be rectified by strict investigation.

But evidently there was no hope of that.

One side or the other was deliberately lying. Either Redfern minor or Ransome was a thief, and was relating a cunning falsehood to cover up his guilt.

But which?

Of Ransome's real character the Head knew nothing. He certainly did not fill a very high place in the esteem of the masters at St. Dolly's, but his ways were little suspected. He was generally cunning enough to cover up his tracks, whatever he did.

Redfern minor's record was as clean as need be. Yet the Head knew how possible it was for a lad to yield to temptation when he found a large sum of money in his hands.

Had Redfern minor retained the bank-note, and invented the story of handing it to Ransome?

"I might add, sir," went on Ransome quietly, "that I have been for some time on bad terms with both the Redferns, and that that is probably the reason why I have been picked upon for this false accusation. Redfern minor probably depended on his brother to back him up against a fellow both of them dislike."

Arthur's eyes flashed.

"That is enough, Ransome," he said. "Dr. Cranston, I have a confession to make. I should never have said a word about that villain—"

"Redfern!"

"I repeat the word, sir—he is a villain, if ever there was one!" exclaimed Arthur passionately. "I should never have said a word about him but for this wicked attempt to ruin my brother. But now I will tell the truth."

Ransome's lips went paler, but he shrugged his shoulders. He was playing for a desperate stake, and he was prepared to play it out to the end with cool effrontery.

"You know, sir," went on Arthur, speaking hurriedly and passionately—"you know what I was mixed up in last term—what you kindly forgave, and what I have tried to atone for—"

"There is no need to speak of that now, Redfern. You have more than atoned for the follies of the past."

"But I must speak of it, sir. I never told you, but all the time that I was mixed up with those betting rascals I had a companion—a companion who first introduced me among them—a companion who sneered and mocked whenever I made an attempt to lead a better life—a companion who always dragged me back into that if I escaped from it—a companion who has ever since been my bitter enemy, because I have been determined to do my duty, and fulfil the vow I made when you allowed me a chance to retrieve my mistakes. That companion was Ransome, the villain who is now accusing my younger brother of theft. You believe what I say, sir? Is he the kind of fellow whose accusation should be credited?"

The Head glanced sternly at Ransome.

"What have you to say to this, Ransome?"

"It is false, sir!"

But while his lips framed the denial, the Sixth-Former's ashen cheeks and lowering eyes told only too plainly of the truth of Arthur's words.

There was silence in the Head's study for some moments. Dr. Cranston spoke at last.

"I certainly believe every word you say, Redfern major. At this time of day, however, it is too late to refer to Ransome's actions at that time, so long as he has been more careful this term. But what you say certainly throws great doubt upon his statement. What to believe, I do not know; but

I can promise you that the truth will be discovered. I shall send for the police at once, and the belongings of both Ransome and Redfern minor will be searched immediately. Neither boy will enter his study again till after the search."

Ransome turned paler. He had not expected so drastic a step so suddenly taken. The whole thing had come upon him suddenly, before he had time to prepare for it. He had no fear, of course, of the bank-note being found in his study.

That banknote had long been passed into the hands of Jimmy Crew, the bookmaker in Okeholme. But in his desk in his study were various papers that would throw only too plain a light upon his way of life—to say nothing of boxes of cigarettes and the bottle of whisky in his locker.

But there was no help for it now. Dr. Cranston touched a bell, and Phipps, the house-porter, appeared.

"Phipps, you will lock the doors of the studies belonging to Master Ransome and Master Sidney Redfern," he said. "Take care that no one enters either room on any pretext whatever."

"Yes, sir."

"I shall now telephone to the police-station in Okeholme," said Dr. Cranston quietly.

The boys left the study. Ransome's face was like chalk.

CHAPTER 35.

Brought to Light.

"PHIPPS!"

"Yes, Master Ransome."

"Will—will you lend me the key of my room for a minute or two?"

The house-porter stared in amazement at the Sixth-Former.

"I can't, Master Ransome. It's against the Head's orders."

Ransome forced a laugh.

"I don't want to do any harm there, Phipps. You can come in with me if you like. But there are some papers I don't want the Head to see, that's all—only some private papers."

"The Head wouldn't be likely to look into your private papers, sir," said Phipps, with strong suspicion written in his face.

"Look here, Phipps—"

Ransome showed a half-sovereign glittering in his palm, but the house-porter did not make a movement to accept it. He was generally easily to be tipped, but on the present occasion he dared not. He knew that it might be as much as his place was worth.

"Thank you, sir—no!"

"I will let you go in with me, Phipps, and you shall see everything I take."

"I dare not, sir!"

"But—"

"It's no good, sir. I dursn't do it!"

Ransome gritted his teeth, and walked away. He had hardly expected Phipps to do as he wished, but it was a chance.

How was he to get the betting-book and

the whisky and the smokes out of the study in time? And the letter, he remembered, from Jim Crew, on the subject of the Burford stakes—the very race on which he had lost the five pounds.

It was ruin if the Head found them. Ransome thrust his hands deep in his pockets, and strolled out into the dusky quad. He glanced up at the window of his study.

He had climbed into that window before, when returning from some excursion out of bounds after "Lights out." He could easily do it again, but—

What if he were caught? It would be taken as a plain proof of his guilt. Yet otherwise—if he did not move the tell-tale papers, at least—was not his guilt certain to be taken for granted?

His resolution was taken. He grasped the rain-pipe that ran up the wall beside the window, and clambered up, and in a few seconds was on the window-sill. The window was partly open, and it was easy for Ransome to open it further, and jump in.

The moment he had disappeared into the room several dusky figures loomed up in the gloom of the quadrangle.

There were Redfern minor, Skelton, and Brown, and Taffy and Co., all together.

"He's gone in!" said Taffy.

Taffy, Rake, and Vernon seemed to be on the best of terms now with their old Classical foes. As Taffy nobly said, at a time like this it was the proper caper for the Fourth Form to stand by one another. As for believing that Redfern minor was a thief, Taffy was ready to punch the head of any fellow, Classical or Modern, who suggested it.

"I thought he would!" said Redfern minor between his teeth. "I guessed that he wouldn't like the Head to see, considering his habits. The banknote itself may be there. When I spotted him talking to Phipps, I guessed what he was after."

"Well, he's fairly in it now, chappies!" remarked Vernon.

"Just what I was going to say!" said Rake, with a nod.

"Fetch a prefect, one of you!" said Redfern minor. "We've got to have proof that Ransome has gone into his study, and he would deny it if we accused him."

"Right-ho!" said Brown.

And he disappeared into the darkness. In a few minutes he returned with Courtney, who was looking a little excited.

"Do you mean to say that Ransome has climbed into his study?" demanded Courtney.

"Yes, rather! He's in there now!"

"By Jove, that looks like—"

"Look!" exclaimed Redfern minor, clutching his arm.

Courtney looked up at the window. The face of someone within was seen for a moment as a sash was raised. It disappeared in a moment. Ransome had caught sight of the juniors and the prefect below.

The cad of the Sixth drew back into the study, his heart beating like a hammer. He was caught—fairly caught, at last.

He could not leave the study by the window without detection; he could not leave it by the door at all.

He could only wait there till the Head came, with the detective from Okholme, to discover him!

His brain swam as he thought of it.

His desperate attempt to retrieve his position had made matters worse. How could he explain that surreptitious entrance into the study.

There was a sound of footsteps in the passage as the cad of the Sixth stood hesitating. A hand tried the door; a key grated in the lock.

Ransome panted for breath.

As if he had seen it done, he guessed all. The prefect below the window had sent the news within that Ransome was in his study, fearing that he might destroy the banknote, perhaps, if it was there. The Head, instead of waiting for the police, was coming instantly to Ransome's room. As clearly as if he could see him, Ransome knew that it was the Head who was at the study door.

He looked wildly round.

Under the window, in the gloom, he could see the group of dark, indistinct figures.

There was no escape that way.

The study door was opening.

Was there a chance of escaping past the Head as he opened the door, of dodging away in the darkness?

No!

The portly form in the rustling gown filled the doorway, and Phipps, the house-porter, was behind.

There was no escape.

"Phipps, light the gas."

It was the doctor's deep voice.

"Yessir."

A match scratched out.

Phipps stepped into the study, and there was a faint smell of gas as he turned the burner on, and then a flood of light.

It made Ransome blink in his hiding-place behind the wardrobe.

Dr. Cranston glanced round the room.

A look of relief appeared upon his face.

"He is not here."

"The winder's open, sir," said Phipps.

"Ah, true!"

Ransome bit his lips till the blood came. In his haste and terror he had overlooked that. The lower sash of the window was still up, just as he had raised it to get out, before he discovered that the study window was watched.

Dr. Cranston stepped to the window and glanced out.

"Are you there, Courtney?"

The prefect looked up.

"Yes, sir."

"Has anyone descended from the window?"

"No, sir."

"Very good."

Dr. Cranston turned back into the study.

"Close the door, Phipps," he said.

"Yessir."

Ransome's heart was like lead as he heard the door shut. This could only mean that the study was to be searched; that he could

count the time to his discovery by seconds.

"Look about the room, Phipps, and see if Master Nansome is concealed here."

"Yessir."

Ransome, with a face like chalk, stepped out from behind the wardrobe.

"I am here, sir!" he said.

The Head turned a stern glance of inquiry upon him.

"Ah, you are here, Ransome, in spite of my positive order that you were not to enter the study!"

"I am sorry, sir. I—I came to remove some private papers—papers of no importance to the matter in hand, sir, but—but concerning someone else."

"You lay yourself open to the suspicion of having come here to remove the stolen banknote," said the Head sternly.

Ransome almost smiled—a ghastly smile. The stolen banknote was far enough away.

"Oh, sir, nothing of the sort! Merely some private papers."

"I am afraid it will be necessary for me to see those private papers," said Dr. Cranston grimly. "Kindly hand them to me, Ransome."

"If—if you please, sir——" stammered Ransome.

The Head's brow grew very dark.

"You will either hand them to me, Ransome, or Phipps shall search you."

"I—I——"

"Enough! You will kindly examine Master Ransome's pockets, Phipps, and lay on the table whatever you find in them."

"Yessir."

Ransome submitted, with a whirling brain.

All was lost now; he knew that. His career at St. Dolly's was drawing to a close.

Phipps commenced his task. The first thing he brought to light was the whisky-bottle, which was bulging out of one of Ransome's pockets. The Head started as he saw it, and then started again as a box of cigarettes was laid beside it.

"Are these the private papers you were removing, Ransome?" he asked bitterly.

The cad of the Sixth could find no words to reply.

Phipp's groping hand came upon a bundle of papers in Ransome's inside breast-pocket, and he laid it on the table.

Dr. Cranston took the papers in his hands.

"It is my duty to examine these, Ransome," he said. "Do you give me your permission to do so?"

"No!" muttered Ransome, through livid lips.

"Then I can only conclude that they contain some proof of your guilt."

"I am not guilty!"

"We shall see. With or without your permission, I shall examine these papers," said Dr. Cranston sternly. "If they should, indeed, prove to be private papers, concerning only yourself, I am sorry; but I cannot accept your statement without proof."

"I—I——"

Ransome's voice died away.

The Head was already examining the papers.

The cad of the Sixth stood like one stunned, waiting for the blow to fall.

Dr. Cranston's brows were darkening more and more.

The first paper he took up and separated from the rest was a coarse sheet, with stains of liquor and a smell of tobacco about it.

It was written in a rude, crabbed hand, which the Head had some difficulty in deciphering, and signed "Jimmy Crew."

"This letter is signed by a man calling himself Jimmy Crew, Ransome. Who is he?"

"A—a chap in Okeholme."

"There is a bad character in the village, who does bookmaking, known by that name," said the Head. "This is the same, I suppose?"

Ransome was silent.

"I take it that it is the same, as you do not reply. He makes reference in this letter to five pounds which you handed him to be laid on a horse called Ben Bolt for the Burford Stakes."

Ransome licked his dry lips.

"From the date, it appears that you laid this large bet on the same day that the banknote was found in Redfern minor's study. Are you prepared to explain and prove how you came into possession of that sum of money?"

Ransome did not speak.

"Five pounds is a large sum, even for a senior," said Dr. Cranston. "You could not have such a sum without remembering perfectly clearly how you came by it. Are you prepared to explain?"

Still the unhappy Sixth-Former did not speak.

Of what use was it to speak? The truth was known; lies could not save him now. He stood with downcast eyes and throbbing heart.

He was lost!

"Very well," said the Head quietly. "As soon as the police arrive from Okeholme, I shall direct them to visit this man Crew, and charge him with being your accomplice in the theft of the banknote. If he did not know that you came by it dishonestly, he will be able to prove it; but I suspect that he did know. In any case, the truth will come to light."

Ransome groaned aloud.

CHAPTER 36.

The Smart Set Loses its Leader.

THAT Jimmy Crew would give him away without a single scruple to save himself Ransome knew only too well.

The game was quite up!

"Have you anything to say, Ransome?" said the Head. "If you have a confession to make, and choose to make it to me now, I will send the police away when they come. For the sake of the school, and of your people, I will avoid making the matter public, and content myself with expelling you from St. Dorothy's."

"I—I confess!"

"You admit that Redfern minor brought the banknote to you?" said the Head sternly.

"Ye-es!"

"You pretended to recognise it as your own, and kept it?"

"Yes," said Ransome, with livid lips.

"And you deliberately accused an innocent lad of theft in order to cover up your own wickedness?"

Ransome did not speak.

"Very well," said Dr. Cranston quietly.

"I am glad you have confessed, at all events. I did not imagine that any boy of your age could be so wickedly unscrupulous, and I was far from dreaming that such a boy was at St. Dorothy's. I am glad that I have discovered the truth. You will be expelled, Ransome!"

"Oh, sir!"

"Any other punishment I shall spare you. The truth will be publicly announced to the whole school, to clear Redfern minor, and you will be expelled. That is all. I only hope that the lesson will not be lost upon you—that its severity will lead you to abandon your pursuits, and turn to better ways."

The Head quitted the study.

Ransome threw himself into a chair, his face ghastly. The door closed. The cad of the Sixth was left alone with his miserable thoughts. All his plotting—all his cunning—all his cynicism and his world wisdom, had led him to—this!

In the ruin of his wretched schemes, the cad of St. Dolly's realised—too late—that it

would have been better for him if he had "played the game."

There was a thrill of suppressed excitement in the crowd of boys in the great hall at St. Dolly's.

The whole school was assembled, and the morning sunlight, streaming in at the windows, gleamed on excited faces.

All knew the cause of the assembly. Ransome was to be expelled.

The boys listened with almost painful attention as the deep voice of the Head rolled through the silent hall.

With clear and concise words Dr. Cranston told of the discovery that had been made—that Redfern minor was cleared of all suspicion—that Ransome, of the Sixth, had confessed his guilt, and was to be expelled from the school.

Ransome stood there—silent, shivering.

Then the Head turned to him.

The cad of the Sixth shrank under his scornful glance.

"You are expelled, Ransome! You will leave St. Dolly's this morning, never to return. And I trust that the other lads, whom you may have attempted to initiate into your own wicked ways, will take warning by your fate!"

At which the members of the Smart Set looked very uneasy and sheepish.

Ransome went slowly from the room, and disappeared. Ten minutes later there was a

sound of wheels in the quadrangle. Ransome was going to the station.

There was no one to bid him farewell.

In the quadrangle, Redfern minor was surrounded by a crowd of congratulatory juniors. Classicals and Moderns were vying with one another in making much of him. Arthur Redfern glanced at them, and smiled as he turned away. There was a touch on his arm; he looked round; it was Knowles.

The Modern prefect looked curiously hesitating.

"Yes?" said Arthur inquiringly.

"I—I've something to say to you," said Knowles slowly. "I hardly know how to put it. I've been against you ever since you were elected captain of St. Dolly's."

Arthur nodded, with a look of wonder.

"You know it?" said Knowles abruptly.

"Yes, I suppose so."

"I don't want to say anything against a fellow who's down, and who's gone now," said Knowles, knitting his brows a little. "But—but I can see now that I played the fool. I was only being used by Ransome. He played on me as he might have played on a fiddle, and I never saw it till now."

"I'm glad you see it now."

Knowles laughed rather ruefully.

"Well, I should have to be blind not to see it now, now that the fellow has been shown up so thoroughly. Of course, I know now that he wrote that anonymous letter. I can see that he was at the bottom of all the trouble we've had this term. It was his game to set me against you, and I was wax in his hands. I—I wanted to say that—that now I can see how things were, I—I am willing to make a fresh start, if you are."

"Good!" said Arthur heartily.

"What do you say, then?" said Knowles, colouring a little. "Shall we try—to pull together, to sink any little private differences we may have, and—and try to undo the rotten work Ransome has been doing here, and stand together for the honour of St. Dolly's?"

Arthur Redfern held out his hand silently, and gripped that of the Modern prefect. That was his answer, and it was a sufficient one.

The two seniors went into the School House together, and more than one glance of surprise was turned upon them as they chatted on the best of terms. And as they went in a shout rang in the quadrangle.

"Hurrah for Redfern minor!"

THE END.

N

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