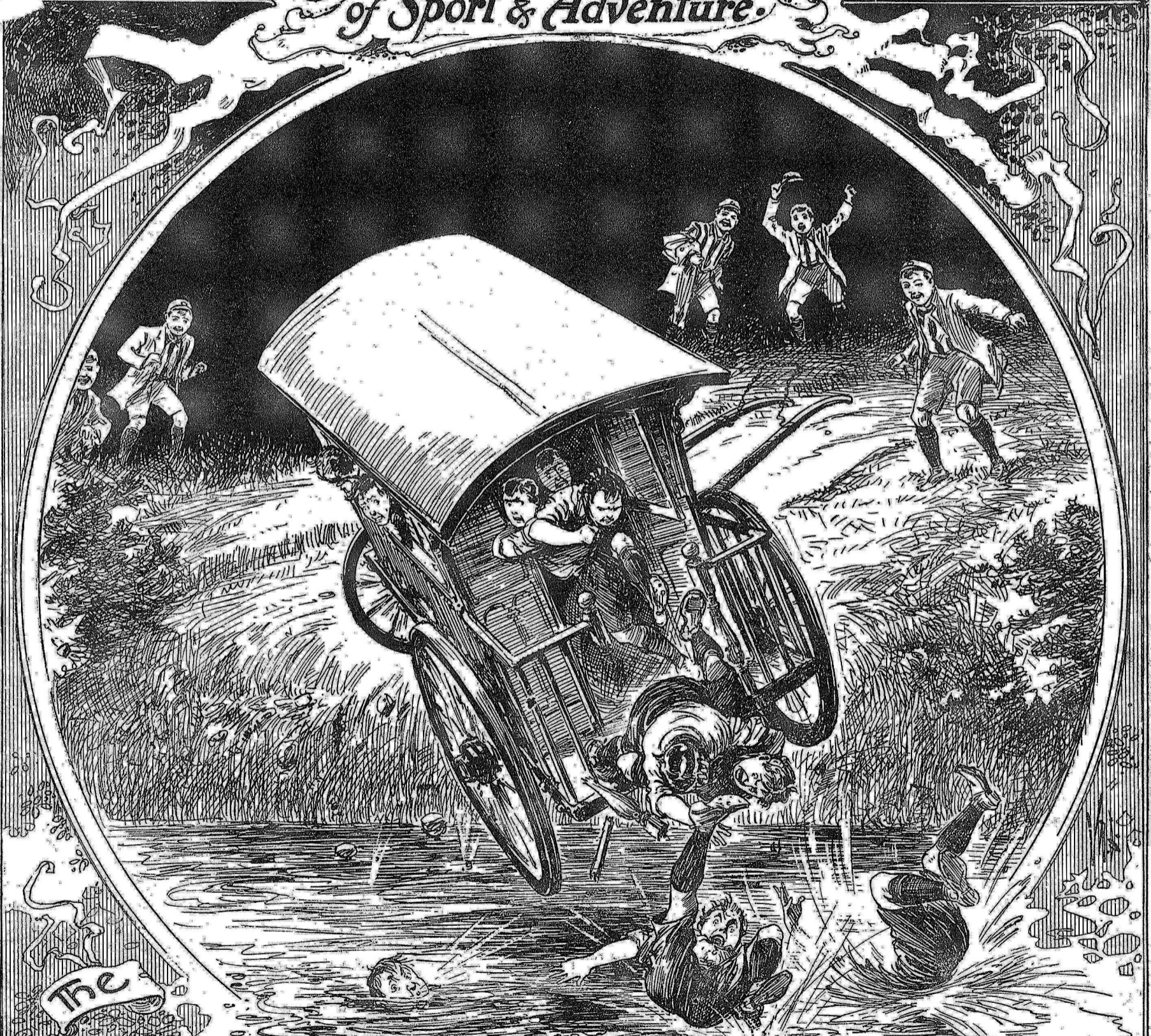


THE YOUNG FOOTBALLERS' PAPER!



The Boys' Realm

of Sport & Adventure.



The Octon Giant

The caravan left the road with a tremendous bound, and sauntered gaily into the middle of the stream with a terrific splash, and rolled over passively on its side. Out of the open door tumbled the discomfited Herons. (See the grand, complete football tale inside.)



REDFERN MINOR.

A Rattling Long Instalment of Charles Hamilton's Fascinating School Tale.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS ARE:

SIDNEY REDFERN, a bright, fun-loving lad, who is a new pupil at St. Dorothy's School.
ARTHUR REDFERN, Sidney's elder brother, who is a prefect in the Sixth Form. Arthur Redfern is inclined to be easily led, and is under the by-no-means good influence of
RANSOME, another Sixth-Former, a slacker, and a good-for-nothing.
SKELTON and **BROWN**, two Fourth-Formers, and leaders of the Classical side of St. Dorothy's.
TAFFY MORGAN, **VERNON**, and **RAKE**, the leaders of the Modern side at St. Dorothy's, deadly rivals of Skelton and Brown.

At St. Dorothy's there is a deadly and everlasting feud existing between the Classical and Modern sides. Sidney Redfern allies himself to the Classics, to the rule and humiliation of the Moderns. Ransome and Arthur Redfern have got themselves into difficulties with a bookmaker named Cunliffe, who threatens to report them to the head-master unless they pay him the money they owe him. Sidney learns of Ransome's true character, and refuses to tag for him. The Sixth Former informs the boy that his elder brother is heavily in debt to Cunliffe, and that unless Arthur can scrape together twenty pounds with which to pay the bookmaker, Cunliffe will report him to the Head. This would, of course, mean the expulsion of Redfern major. Ransome knows Sidney to be a clever little boxer, and offers to show him a way by which he can earn twenty pounds, and save his brother. Ransome's plan is that Sidney shall participate in a boxing contest for a purse of money. Sidney at first refuses scornfully, but then it occurs to him that Arthur must be saved at any cost.

(Now read this week's instalment.)

The Old Story.

"I HAVE told you that Arthur owes Cunliffe twenty pounds," said Ransome coolly. "If you fight, and win, I can guarantee you the money. I think you would win. I want you to meet a kid about a year older than yourself—a tough young specimen, who has knocked out fellows over twenty—but I think you could handle him, with what I've taught you, and what you know. Where's the harm in it? There's a purse put up for the winner. It will be a good fight—gloves on, and little harm done. You're not afraid of a few hard knocks, I suppose?"
 "It's not that."
 "It will be a dead secret. You leave St. Dolly's with me, with a pass from a prefect. We get back early, nobody the wiser. You're letting a big chance slip."
 "Does Arthur know?"
 "What does that matter?"
 "Answer my question, anyway."
 "Well, no," said Ransome; "he doesn't know. He knows I've undertaken—ahem!—that I've thought of putting up somebody to meet the Chicken, but that's all he knows. He hopes to raise some tin on the affair."
 "If you told him—"
 "I'm not going to tell him. He would be responsible, as a prefect, if he knew. What's the good of adding to his worries? He's got enough at present."
 Redfern nodded. He did not believe that Ransome was as considerate as his words implied; the cad of the Sixth had some other motive for keeping the facts away from Redfern major.
 "But—but it was only last week that Arthur lost money to Cunliffe and his set!" the junior broke out. "You've been taking me up for boxing for weeks. You had this idea in your mind all along."
 "Why not?"
 "And how do I know you're telling me the truth?" exclaimed Redfern. "How do I know my brother is in that fix? I'm jolly well not going to take your word!"
 "You can ask him."
 "Ask him?"
 "Yes; without mentioning what I have just told you, of course. You'll find him in his study."
 "I will ask him," said Redfern, looking the senior full in the eyes; but Ransome only nodded coolly.

"Good! And if he tells you how he stands—will you take it on?"
 "I—I don't know."
 "It's not a chance that comes every day."
 "I'll let you know. I'd do a great deal for Arthur, but— Hang it, I'll go and see him now, and let you know!"
 "Right-ho!"

Redfern minor quitted the study. He went along to Arthur's door in the Sixth-Form passage and knocked. There was no reply to the knock, and the junior opened the door and looked in.

Redfern major was there. He had not heard the knock; he did not hear the door open—did not know that his young brother was standing there, looking at him. He sat at the table, and his head had fallen into his hands, his elbows resting on the table. His whole attitude was one of utter dejection and misery.

Redfern's heart sank as he looked at his brother.

Little more was needed to bear out Ransome's statement. But Redfern felt that he must know for certain. He came quickly into the room.

"Arthur!"
 The senior started, and raised his face. It was white as chalk.

Redfern made a quick step towards him. He had never seen Arthur look like that before. He would have preferred to see the blackest frown on his brother's face, rather than that grim and hopeless dejection.

"Arthur, old man, what's the matter?"
 Arthur smiled in a ghastly way.
 "I've just had a letter, that's all. It's all right."

"From Cunliffe?"
 Arthur started.
 "How do you know, Sid?"
 "Never mind that. Look here, Arthur, do you owe that man money?"

At another time, the question would have brought fierce words from Arthur. But now he seemed to have no spark of anger left in him. He nodded weakly.

"Yes, Sid. I owe him twenty pounds!"
 "Oh!"

"I've been the biggest fool at St. Dolly's," said Arthur miserably. "I don't know how I drifted into it. It's no good telling you—you can't help me—but you'll soon know all about it, anyway. Cunliffe only gives me till Monday."

"And then?"
 "Then he is coming for his money. It's the old story over again—the Lexham match ought to have been a lesson to me. But—"
 He broke off wretchedly.

The junior's heart ached. He had never thought of seeing Arthur like this—so utterly broken down, so crushed by the results of his own folly. And the boy had never felt so tender towards him as at that moment.

"It's twenty pounds, Arthur?"
 "Yes."
 "And you can't raise it any how?"

"Not a twentieth part of it. It's all up!"
 Arthur gave a groan. "He's got my signature for it, you see, and if he shows that to the Head, I'm done."

"The bounder!"
 "Oh, it's all right. I owe him the money. I ought to have had more sense. Mind you don't drift into anything of the same sort, Sid, that's all. It's easy enough to get in, but there's no getting out again."

"But if you got out, Arthur—"
 "It's impossible!"
 "Suppose the money were found—?"
 "It can't be found!"

"But suppose it were—what would you do?"
 Arthur's face brightened for the moment.

"I'd clear off Cunliffe, and never go near his place again," he said. "Good heavens, if only I had a chance to make a fresh start, I wouldn't be such a fool again!"

"And Ransome," said Redfern quietly. "He's helped you into all this—and he can't help you out."

"That's true enough."
 "Would you 'drop him—cut him dead, if—if you got clear this time?"
 "Yes."

"Honour bright?"
 "What do you mean? You haven't twenty pounds to lend me, I suppose?" said Arthur, with a bitter laugh.
 "I might find it."
 "You?"

"Yes," said Redfern minor. "Never mind how. Suppose I could find the money, Arthur. It's not certain; but it's a chance. Suppose I found it—"

"You couldn't!"
 "But suppose I did—you'd stick to it, then—and drop Cunliffe and Ransome—never speak to either of them again?"

"Yes—honour bright! But you couldn't!"
 "I'll try," said Redfern minor.
 "But—but how—"

"Never mind that. I'm going to try, that's all."

And Redfern minor quitted the study. Arthur remained still for some moments, an expression of astonishment upon his face; and then, with an irritable gesture, he rose to his feet. He had no faith in the prospect of help from his minor. How could he? What was he to do? He tramped to and fro in the study, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his brows blackly wrinkled, asking himself that question again and again, but without finding an answer to it.

Skelton and Brown Keep an Eye on Redfern Minor.

"HERE the bounder is!"
 Skelton and Brown rushed up to Redfern minor in the Sixth-Form passage, and collared him, one taking each arm. Redfern started, and stared at them. He was not in a mood for fun just then, after the scene in Arthur's study. But, as it happened, Skelton and



Redfern minor looked back from the lane. In the gateway was a confused and struggling heap of bodies and legs and arms. Gasps and grunts came from the midst of the whirling mass.

Brown were not out for fun, either. They were in deadly earnest.
 "Here he is!" repeated Brown. "We've been to Ransome's study for you, Reddy, and lo and behold, here you are! Ransome said we could go and eat coke when we asked for you."
 "We haven't done it," said Skelton. "I said he was a low beast."
 "Phew! What did he say to that?"
 "Well, he didn't hear me," confessed Skelton. "I said it after we had shut the door, you see. Come on and have tea. We've got herrings."
 "Good! I'll come along in a jiffy."
 "No, you won't! You'll come along now! March!"
 "I've got to speak to Ransome."
 "Rats! Blessed if I can see the charm in Ransome's conversation. You've done enough jawing to him. The herrings are cooked."
 "Yes, but—"
 "They will get cold."
 "Look here—"
 "They're done to a turn," said Brown III, persuasively. "I don't brag of my cooking, but really, I think I have turned those herrings out rippingly. Better come."
 "I've got to speak to Ransome."
 "Bosh!"
 "But I tell you—"
 "Nuff said! Yank him along, Browney."
 "What-ho!"
 Redfern struggled as his chums "yanked" him along the passage. Skelton and Brown were not to be argued with. But it was necessary for Redfern to see Ransome and tell him that he accepted his proposition—for he had decided to accept it.
 He wrenched himself loose, and ran.
 "After him!" roared Skelton.
 The two juniors raced on Redfern's track. Redfern was an easy first, however, at Ransome's door. As it happened, the Sixth-Former was just opening his door to come out, and Redfern bolted fairly into him.
 "Oh!" roared Ransome.
 He went backwards into the study, and sat down on the carpet with a terrific bump. Redfern, unable to save himself, pitched forward upon him headlong, and fell with his arms round Ransome's neck. Skelton and Brown were coming on at top speed, and they dashed into the study and rolled over Redfern before they knew what was happening.
 Ransome's feelings, with three heavy juniors bumping down upon him, may be imagined.
 "Ow!" he gasped. "Gerrup! I'm being squashed! Ow! Help!"
 "My hat!" gasped Skelton. "It's Ransome! Get off my legs, Browney!"
 "All right—"
 "Well, hurry up, then!"
 "Ow! Gerroff! You young beasts!"
 The juniors seemed in no hurry to get off. Perhaps they were not sorry for an opportunity of giving the cad of the Sixth a little rough handling. But Skelton and Brown rolled off at last, and Redfern staggered up, Ransome lay gasping for a full minute before he could get upon his feet.
 When he did get up, there was a gleam in his eyes which made Skelton and Brown go back along the passage faster than they had come. But Redfern minor remained in the study.
 Ransome gave him an evil look.
 "Is this one of your tricks, you young cub?" he snarled.
 "No. I don't feel much in a humour for playing tricks," said Redfern, coldly. "I'm sorry I bumped you. I came here to tell you that—"
 "You have seen your brother?"
 "Yes."
 "And you've altered your mind?"
 "Yes. I'll do as you wish—for twenty pounds."
 "Twenty pounds if you win—nothing but a licking if you lose," said Ransome, with a grin. "You understand that, of course?"
 "Of course."
 "Good! It's settled, then."
 "But do you really think I can face a chap who fights for a living?" said Redfern, in wonder. "I can't believe it myself."
 "I shouldn't risk money on you if I didn't think so."
 "I suppose not. When is the fight to take place?"
 "This evening."
 Redfern started.
 "Then you had it all cut and dried ready?" he said bitterly. "I shouldn't wonder if you made Arthur lose that money on purpose."
 Ransome shrugged his shoulders.
 "You'll be ready to leave the school at seven," he said. "We shall easily be back by your bedtime. You needn't take anything with you. Everything that's required will be on the spot. We'd better not go out together—it might be noticed. I'll meet you on the footpath at the stile at ten-past seven."
 "Very good. Where will it take place?"
 "At Wyndale."
 Redfern minor nodded, and left the study. His face was harassed in expression as he went along to his own quarters. He was in for it now, that was certain; yet how could he regret it, when it was the only means of saving Arthur?
 As he turned into the Fourth-Form passage, Skelton and Brown grasped his arms and marched him into Study X. They closed the door and jammed Redfern up against it, pinning him there. The junior looked at them in amazement.

"What's the row?" he demanded.
 "Explain yourself, you boulder!" said Skelton sternly.
 "Eh! What do you mean?"
 "What's on?"
 "On?" said Redfern vaguely.
 "Yes. What has Ransome been dragging you into?" said Skelton. "Didn't I warn you from the start that he was a rotter, and would be getting you into mischief? Now you've gone into it with your eyes open."
 "My dear chap—"
 "It's no good trying to pull the wool over my eyes!" said Skelton severely. "You've got into something or other with Ransome. That's what all his soft sawder was for. Oh, I know him! You're going to play the part of the cat to pull his chestnuts out of the fire. We're going to look after you!"
 "Look here—"
 "You're not going to get into mischief while you've got two friends in the school," said Skelton. "Friendship apart, it's my duty as captain of the Fourth to look after the kids. I'm going to look after you!"
 "Oh, don't be an ass, old chap!" said Redfern, with a miserable feeling of alarm, as he realised what this watchfulness on the part of his chums might mean that evening.
 "That's not the way to speak to your Form captain! Now, are you going to explain what the little game is?"
 "Oh, let's have tea!"
 "Will you give us your word that there's no little game, then?"
 "Those herrings smell ripping!"
 "You see, he won't give his word!" said Skelton to Brown. "That shows there's something on. Well, if you won't explain, Reddy, we shall look after you! I'm not going to have you yanked into any blackguardly bizness, and expelled from St. Dolly's—not if I know it! I want you in the Classical team to play the Mods. at footer, for one thing!"
 "Oh, let's have tea!" said Redfern.
 And they sat down to tea and herrings.

Too Much Friendship.

REDFERN MINOR did not look quite as cheerful as usual over that tea in the study. It was seldom that Redfern was depressed, but he was worried now. The idea of taking part in a glove contest in the ring was a surprise to him, and not a pleasant one. He had agreed—for Arthur's sake. But the prospect was grim and unpleasant. He could guess the kind of people he would meet there—Cunliffe and his set from the Green Man—coarse and beery faces, brutal voices, low minds and talk. That was bad enough, and the risk of discovery and expulsion from the school loomed in the background. On top of it all came the determination of his chums to keep an eye on him, as Skelton expressed it.

To tell Skelton and Brown what was intended was impossible. Whatever his motives might be, they could not sympathise with them. They did not like Arthur, and his loyalty to his brother had more than once caused something like a straining in the friendship of Study No. X. They would only look at the matter in a disinterested, practical sort of way. They would decide that he was going to do a blackguardly thing that he might be expelled for, and they would use every means in their power to stop him. He was certain of that.

Skelton and Brown must not know! But how was he to elude their vigilance that evening? They had determined to keep an eye on him. It was true friendship on their part; they believed that the cad of the Sixth was leading him into some unsavoury mischief, as, indeed, he was. It was friendly of them, but it was horribly awkward just now.

Skelton and Brown assumed expressions of Spartan virtue over the herrings. They had decided that Redfern shouldn't be dragged into trouble, and they thought he ought to be grateful for the trouble they were taking on his account. But gratitude or no gratitude, they were going to do their duty. Redfern would be glad some day that he had had two true chums to look after him at a critical time.

There wasn't much talk over tea. The herrings were really very good, but Redfern did not notice it. He finished up what was on his plate, however; worries of any kind seldom interfered with his healthy appetite.

When he rose from the table Skelton and Brown rose, too.
 "I think I'll take a stroll round the quad," he remarked.

"Jolly good idea!" agreed Skelton. "That's just what we want, all of us! The herrings were very good, but it can't be denied that they made the study niff a bit."

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"Exactly!" said Brown.
 "Aren't you fellows going to do your prep?" asked Redfern.
 "Oh, that's all right!" said Skelton affably.
 "We'll do ours when you do yours!"
 Redfern set his lips a little, and left the study. Skelton and Brown walked, one on each side of him, with an air of exaggerated carelessness, which showed plainly enough that they were on the watch in case he should bolt.

"I say," Redfern remarked, as they went into the quadrangle, "what about that celebration feed, you know?"
 "Well, what about it?" asked Skelton.
 "It was coming off two or three days ago. Hadn't you chaps better look to it now? It's no good leaving it too late!"

Skelton and Brown grinned. Several days had elapsed since the abortive collection for the celebration feed, and the funds necessary for the purpose had not yet been raised. The fight between Skelton and Benson had been the only celebration, so far. But Redfern had not mentioned the matter before.

"Oh, the feed will be all right!" said Skelton. "We'll see about it to-morrow! I suppose you hadn't anything special on this evening, Reddy?"

"Eh? Why do you ask that?"
 "Well, you are so concerned about our prep, and about the feed that it really looks as if you weren't pining for our society!" grinned Skelton. "Of course, I couldn't possibly suspect you of wanting to get rid of your chums, but it does look suspicious."

"Oh, rot!" said Redfern uneasily.
 "You're not walking round the quad," said Skelton blandly. "That's what you came out for. And here you are standing under the elms, blinking at us, instead of taking a walk for your health. Get a move on!"
 "Oh, hang!"

"If that's the Redfern brand of politeness, old chap, I recommend you to change it for another!"

"Look here, you ass—"
 "Certainly, duffer!"
 "Look here, I have got something on for this evening! I know you chaps mean well, and I'm obliged to you, and all that—but—"
 "Jolly good! He's obliged to us, and all that, Brown!"

"Jolly good!" said Brown III.
 "Oh, don't be an ass!" broke out Redfern. "Can't you see I'm worried? I must get out this evening! It's all right; I shall have a pass! Don't bother now! I've got to go!"

"For Ransome?"
 "Well, in a way—yes!"
 "Then you're jolly well not going!" said Skelton grimly. "I know the dodge; he's sending you to a pub!"

"It's not that; honour bright!"
 "Then it's something worse!"
 Redfern was silent.

"You can't take us in, old chap!" said Skelton kindly. "Better make a clean breast of it! What is it the rotter wants you to do?"
 "I can't tell you! It's all right, but I've got to keep it dark. I said I would, for one thing."

"Then it's something he's afraid to have known. Blessed if it doesn't look more serious every minute!" said Skelton. "It's no good, Reddy! If you saw me getting into a mess like this, you and Brown would try to yank me out of it."
 "What-ho!" said Brown heartily.

"And so we're going to keep an eye on you, Reddy. You'll be jolly thankful for it some day, I can tell you."

"For goodness' sake don't be an ass!" said Redfern, with a harassed look. "I tell you I needn't go unless I like; it's my own free choice."

"Rats! I expect it's fixed so that you can't refuse! I know Ransome! He's as deep as a well, and always up to some dodge!"
 "We all know him," said Brown. "Reddy doesn't, because he hasn't been long at St. Dolly's. He's a snake in the grass, and—"

"Shut up, you ass!" whispered Redfern hurriedly.

Ransome had just come out of the House, and he was coming straight towards them in the dusk. He nodded agreeably to them, apparently not having heard Brown's words. He had a paper in his hand, which he held out to Redfern.

"That's your pass, Redfern minor," he said; "I've got it for you. Mind you're home by the right time, you know!"

Redfern did not reply. Ransome's words were meant to imply that they would not be together that evening, and Redfern would enter into no deception. The cad of the Sixth looked at him curiously for a moment, and strolled away.

"So that's your pass, is it?" said Skelton. "Signed by your major, I'll be bound! Let's have a look at it!"

Redfern was looking at the pass. He could not help remembering the trick Ransome had played upon him once before. But in this instance there had been no double dealing; the pass was quite in order, and it was signed by Arthur Redfern.

The junior put it into his pocket. Skelton watched him with an expressive look.
 "More giddy secrets!" he remarked.

"Oh, don't bother!" said Redfern, his temper beginning to get a little edgewise under the stress of mental worry. "Look here, I know you chaps mean well, but I can't stand it! I want you to let me alone!"

"The infant is getting his ears up!" said

Skelton, with perfect calmness. "Never mind; we must take things as they come!"

"Will you let me alone?"
 "Bless you, no!" said Skelton, with an air of surprise. "You mustn't ask it really!"

Redfern's lips tightened, and he walked away. Skelton and Brown strolled along with him. Redfern halted with an exclamation.

"Will you chaps stop this giddy rot?"
 "Not a bit of it!"
 "I tell you it's all right, and you're only bothering me."

"We're going to bother you, my son, until you come indoors. It's no good; you're simply not going to get into mischief."

Redfern breathed through his nose hard. A quarter to seven was striking from the clock tower, and it was time for him to go. He walked away quickly again, and Skelton and Brown dropped behind a few paces, but they still followed him grimly. It was hardly possible for Redfern to quarrel with them—and if he had done so, he knew that it would make no difference. Anything he could say or do would not prevent the chums of the Fourth from "keeping an eye" on him.

He walked very fast, but Skelton and Brown kept pace. They passed Taffy & Co. in the quad. Taffy, Rake, and Vernon were in running clothes, and out for their evening sprint. They stared in surprise at the spectacle of the Classical chums, Redfern walking ahead and the other two following in his wake.

"My Aunt Matilda!" said Taffy. "What are they up to? I say, Skelty, is that a new kind of walking match?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Skelton.
 And the Classics passed on. The Modern chums stopped and stared after them, quite at a loss to make out what it meant.

"They're off their giddy rockers, chappies," remarked Vernon.
 "Just what I was going to say," agreed Rake.

"They must be!" said Taffy. "But I don't quite catch on. It looks to me as if Reddy wants to get away, and the others won't let him. Here they come again."

The Modern juniors looked on with great interest. Redfern was walking straight towards them again, and a dozen paces behind walked Skelton and Brown.

Taffy stepped into Redfern minor's path, and tapped him on the chest.
 "Is it a new game?" he asked.

Redfern grinned.
 "No. Will you chaps do me a favour?"
 "Oh, rather. As leaders of the Fourth Form at St. Dolly's, we're always ready to do any little thing for you Classical goats," said Taffy loftily.

At any other time Taffy's claim to be leader of the Fourth Form at St. Dolly's would have led to a hot argument, and probably a fight; but just now Redfern had other matters to think of. He only nodded.

"Well, look here," he said, sinking his voice to a whisper. "I've got a pass out, and these kids won't let me go. They think they're looking after me, you know. Will you collar them and keep them in?"

Taffy burst into a chuckle.
 "Good! But why, chummy?"
 "That's my business," said Redfern. "They mean well, but they're bothering me. Let them follow me to the gate, and then collar them while I nip out. I'll do as much for you some time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Will you do it?"
 "Yes, rather," chuckled the three Moderns together, only too pleased with the idea of such a joke up against Skelton and Brown.

"Right-ho! Thanks!"
 "March on, my son—we'll work the oracle. You can rely on us."

"Just what I was going to—"
 "Never mind what you were going to say, Rake. Come on!"

Redfern stalked away towards the gate. Skelton and Brown stalked after him; and after them, in their turn, stalked Taffy, Rake, and Vernon. The Modern chums were grinning, fully entering into the humour of the thing.

The gates were not yet closed, though it was close upon locking-up time. Redfern paused at the gateway, and glanced back. Skelton and Brown were six paces behind.

"Look here, you chaps, do cut off," said Redfern.
 "Rats!"

"Look here—"
 "We're looking—after you."
 Redfern said no more; it was useless. He passed through the gateway into Okeholme Lane. Skelton and Brown followed him—but they got no farther than the gateway. Three active forms leaped through the dusk, and Skelton and Brown went down in the gateway with Taffy & Co. sprawling across them.

There was a roar of rage from the Classical youths.
 "Gerrup! Leggo!"
 "Modern cads!"

"Yah! Lemme gerrup!"
 "Got 'em!" chuckled Taffy. "It's all right, Redfern minor."

Redfern minor looked back from the lane. In the gateway was a confused and struggling heap of bodies and legs and arms. Gasps and grunts came from the midst of the whirling mass, and wild threats and demands to "leggo." Redfern minor chuckled, and hurried away up the lane.

At the Green Man.

REDFERN MINOR chuckled as he went down the lane; but his chuckle died away, and he broke into a run. He reached the stile panting a little, and a dark figure detached itself from the shadows of the trees as he came up.

"What's the matter? What delayed you? You haven't been fool enough to let the cat out of the bag, surely?"

"I'm not an ass," said Redfern impatiently. "But the fellows suspected something—they found out I was mixed up in something or other with you—and they wanted to keep me out of it. They think you are getting me into a scrape. If you want the truth, there it is. They're right, as a matter of fact."

Ransome bit his lip.
 "But they haven't discovered anything?"
 "No."

"You had better be careful to keep it dark. I suppose you know that this means your being sacked from the school if it comes out?"

"And you, too?"
 "Never mind me. I can generally take care of myself," said Ransome with a chuckle. "But enough jaw. Come along!"

They crossed the stile, and plunged into the darkness of the footpath through the wood. Redfern did not know where they were going, but he asked no questions. He was in Ransome's hands now. He knew that the destination was somewhere near Wyndale—perhaps at the Green Man itself. The thought made him shiver. But it was too late for him to think of drawing back from even that, now.

Through the wood they came out on to the Wyndale Road. There a trap was waiting, with a man sitting in it holding the reins, and even in the gloom Redfern recognised him as one of the gambling fraternity he had seen at Mr. Cunliffe's public-house.

The man looked down at them.
 "It's all right?" he asked.
 "Yes."

"Good! Jump in."
 Ransome and the junior entered the trap. The man drove off, and skirting the Wyndale Road, entered a narrow lane that ran at the back of the long garden of the Green Man.

At the end of the garden was a little wooden building, screened by thick trees and shrubbery from the inn. Redfern had never seen it before, but it was familiar ground to his companion. In that secluded building, safe from prying eyes, more than one exhibition of the so-called "manly art" had taken place, and rivals bruised and hammered one another for the satisfaction of Mr. Cunliffe and his friends, and the profit of the bookmakers.

The trap stopped in the lane, and Ransome and Redfern alighted. The trap drove away again, and Ransome opened the gate. Then he tapped at the door of the shed.

From chinks in the wooden walls, came gleams of light. There was a murmur of voices within.

Redfern caught suddenly at his companion's arm.
 "Ransome, have—have I got to face a crowd of them, then?"

The senior looked down at him with a contemptuous smile.
 "Did you think you were going to fight in a corner, Redfern? Of course, you will meet the Chicken in the ring, with a crowd looking on."

Redfern set his teeth, and said no more. It was only what he should have expected, but it came as a shock to him. The door of the shed opened from within; but, to the boy's relief, the expected glare of light, and the sea of faces, did not burst upon him. The door opened into a part of the building curtained off from the rest by rough canvas, and apparently used as a kind of dressing-room.

It was lighted by a swinging oil-lamp. There were three or four individuals in the room, and the first who met Redfern's eye was Mr. Cunliffe. The landlord of the Green Man came quickly forward.

"It's you, then!" he said, in a tone of relief, as if he had not been quite satisfied in his mind that he would see the cad of St. Dolly's, after all.

Ransome shrugged his shoulders impatiently.
 "Yes, of course. Didn't you expect me?"
 "Yes, after your note; but—"

"Well, here I am."
 "There's many a slip, you know," said Mr. Cunliffe. "But, as you say, here you are! There's a bottle on the table; help yourself. The kid looks all right. Not nervous, youngster—eh?"

"No," said Redfern quietly.
 "Over young to meet the Chicken," said one of the others, looking at Redfern very dubiously. "I didn't think of seeing a kid like that!"

"Don't discourage him before the start, Spooner."

"I don't want to discourage him," said Mr. Spooner. "But I think what I think. The Chicken would make two of him."

"He will make hay of the Chicken," said Ransome irritably. "Do you think I don't know a chap's form? I've seen this kid knock out a chap bigger than himself, and a chap who could use his fists, too, and was as plucky as need be. I've taken him in hand myself since then, and there's few tricks he doesn't know. I say that he'll make hay of the Chicken!"

"I hope he will," said Mr. Spooner; but his tone indicated that he regarded the hope as very ill-founded.

(Another powerful long instalment will appear next week.)