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The Boys' Realm 19



HOW THE "NINES" GOT EVEN

ARTHUR REDFERN'S VOW.

A Rollicking Tale of School Life. By CHARLES HAMILTON.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS ARE:

ARTHUR REDFERN, a Sixth-Former and a prefect at St. Dolly's School.
SIDNEY REDFERN, or "Redfern minor," Arthur's brother. A bright, fun-loving lad. St. Dolly's is divided into two educational sections—Modern and Classical. Sidney is a Classical, and firm chums with **SKELTON** and **BROWN**, of the Fourth. A deadly feud exists between the Classicals and the Moderns, the latter being led by **TAFFY MORGAN**, **VERNON**, and **RAKE** of the Fourth.

RANSOME, a Sixth-Former. A slacker and a good-for-nothing, who, exercising a strong influence over Arthur Redfern, gets the prefect mixed up with a betting gang. Thanks to his younger brother, Arthur gets clear of this unsavoury crowd, and promises Sidney that he will have nothing further to do with Ransome's shady transactions.
 Ransome, resenting this, vows vengeance, and seeks to draw other St. Dollyites under his wing.

The opening of a new term finds the school captainship vacant, and Arthur Redfern and another lad named Knowles are proposed for election. Additional interest is added to the election by the fact that Arthur is a Classical and Knowles a Modern.

Ransome, though a Classical himself, intends voting for Knowles, the Modern candidate, and endeavours to persuade other Classicals to do likewise; but with no great success, thanks to Redfern minor and Skelton. The day of the election comes, and despite Ransome's efforts, Arthur Redfern heads the poll, and becomes the new captain of St. Dolly's.

Knowles, chagrined at his defeat, is an easy prey for Ransome, who lures him into his clutches, and encourages him to set at naught Arthur Redfern's authority.

Redfern minor and the rest of the Classicals plan a splendid jape on their rivals, the Moderns. They order a dozen or so pair of roller-skates from town, and intend, after perfecting themselves in the art of skating, giving a public display. The whole affair is kept a dead secret, and a large box-room at the top of the school is turned into a nondescript kind of practice-rink. Here the Classicals practise in secret.

(Now read this week's instalment.)

The Classicals on Wheels.

REDFERN MINOR was very busy in the large box-room on the top floor, the juniors had cleared back the empty boxes and trunks and other lumber, and left a considerable space clear for the rink.

The space was certainly confined for a score of roller-skaters, especially beginners, who naturally need more room than older hands. But, as Redfern remarked, beggars could not be choosers. They were lucky to have the room at all. The floor was of boards, and there were some cracks and ruts upon which skaters were likely to come to grief. But the Classical juniors entered into the scheme with keen enthusiasm.

The parcels were unlocked from the trunk, opened, and the roller-skates distributed. Redfern minor was a good skater, and Skelton had skated on ice, and some of the others could be trusted on wheels. But the majority found it new, and there were likely to be happenings when they started.

"You—you'll hold me up, Redfern, won't you?" said Fatty Spratt nervously, as he eyed his skates.

"My hat," said Redfern, "that's a big order! You ought to take round a private elephant to hold you up!"

"Oh, don't be a beast, you know! I suppose I'm going to skate as well as the others. As a matter of fact, a fellow with a good weight makes a better skater than any of you bony chaps," said Fatty Spratt.

"Ha, ha! You ought to be first-rate, then." "Fasten the skates on for me, there's a good chap!"

Redfern minor was the soul of good-nature. It was no light task to teach Fatty Spratt to skate, but it was quite clear that Fatty never would skate unless somebody helped him, and so Redfern undertook the task.

"Lend a hand, Skelton!" he said. "Oh, all right! I'll take a round or two first!"

Skelton had his skates on. He whisked off across the room, and caught his left skate in a crack, and went down with a bump and a clatter.

"Ow!" "Hallo!" exclaimed Redfern, in astonishment. "What's that? Not tired already?"

"Tired? No, you ass!" "Then what are you lying down for?"

"I'm not lying down!" shrieked Skelton. "I've fallen down, because I caught my blessed skate in a blessed crack."

"Oh, I see! I shouldn't recommend doing that often; you might go through into the box-room underneath."

Skelton snorted. His feelings were too deep for a verbal reply. He got up again slowly and painfully, with a loud clatter of skates.

Then, taking more care of the cracks, he skated on again. He circled round the room two or three times, and pronounced it ripping. The way he avoided running into the boxes, the walls, and the other juniors was quite wonderful.

"Jolly good!" said Skelton. "Ripping! The St. Dolly's rink will be the most successful wheeze of the term. Good!"

"Well, come and lend me a hand with Fatty!"

"All right," said Skelton, a little dubiously. "He's a tidy weight. Can you skate at all, Fatty?"

"I—I don't know," said Fatty. "I haven't tried."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Well, how is a chap to know till he's tried?" demanded Fatty.

"Ha, ha, ha! Give me your fin. Take his other flipper, Reddy, and mind you don't let go. If I get all his weight, something will go."

"Right-ho!" Redfern gripped the fat junior by his right arm, while Skelton fastened a grasp of iron on his left. Fatty Spratt stood up between them. He stood up because they lifted him, and he had to rise; but he did not stand on his feet. His skates ran up and down, clattering and battering on the floor, and Fatty Spratt gasped helplessly.

"I—I think there's something wrong with the skates, Reddy. They won't stand still."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Ow! Don't let me go!"

"You're all right. Begin by walking," said Redfern encouragingly. "When you can tramp on skates you can skate on them. Now, lift one foot after the other right off the floor, and tramp down with it—like this!"

And Redfern minor tramped on his skates. "Oh, I see," said Fatty. "That looks easy enough."

"Ha, ha! Go it, then!" Fatty clattered and battered and tramped. He succeeded in getting his right foot into the air, and he brought it down with a crash. There was a wild roar from Redfern minor.

"Ow! You!" "What's the—?" "Yarook!"

Fatty Spratt had unfortunately brought his skate down with terrific force upon Redfern minor's foot. The unfortunate junior yelled with pain, and let go Fatty Spratt, and simply danced on his skates. That was hardly a safe thing to do, especially upon an uneven floor. Redfern's feet flew into the air, and he came down with a terrific bump.

"Oh!" "Help!" shrieked Fatty Spratt. "Ow! Help! I—I—I'm going!"

He threw both arms wildly round Skelton's neck. The captain of the Fourth Form staggered under his weight.

"Oh!" he gasped. "Don't! Gerroff! Leggo! I'm going! Drag him off! Slay him! Jump on him! Ow!"

"Bump!"

Skelton went down heavily, with the fat junior sprawling across him. Skelton groaned feebly under Spratt's weight.

"Ow! Help!" Brown dashed to the rescue, and rolled Fatty Spratt off his unfortunate chum. Skelton sat up breathlessly and dazedly.

"Oh—oh! Groo!" "Oh, the ass!" gasped Redfern minor. "He's crippled me! He's smashed my foot! Ow! Yah! Ow! Oh, my blessed foot!"

"I—I only did what you told me!" stammered Fatty Spratt. "You—you t-told me to tramp with my skates, you know."

"Yow! I didn't tell you to tramp on my foot, you frabjous ass!" roared Redfern. "Ow! My foot! My beastly foot! Yow!"

"Oh, never mind; stick to it!" said Brown. "I'll take Fatty for a bit, if you like."

"Good! I don't feel quite equal to it just now," grunted Redfern. "My hat! He ought to have a label on, 'Dangerous to skaters!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Skelton and Brown took Fatty Spratt's arms again. They dragged him up. His skates clattered loudly on the bare boards. Meanwhile, the other juniors were getting their skates on, and a dozen of them were tramping and gliding and clattering round and about the box-room.

The space was getting full. There was a yell whenever anybody went down, and he was generally joined on the floor by two or three more.

The fun was growing fast and furious. Redfern, the best skater there—in fact, the only good one so far—glided gracefully among the plunging and staggering beginners, lending a helping hand here and there. He relieved Brown of Fatty Spratt at last.

"Take a run, old chap," he said. "I'll look after Fatty."

"Thanks!" gasped Brown. "He's a weight, you know!"

Redfern gripped the fat junior firmly by the arm.

"Now, Fatty, you're getting used to it. I'm going to take you right across the room."

(Continued on the next page.)

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"Hadn't I—I better stick to the w-w-wall a bit longer?" gasped Fatty. "I—I don't feel q-quite safe yet."

"Oh, you'll be all right," said Redfern encouragingly.

And he piloted the clattering Fatty out from the wall.

"Now, plunge one foot forward, and then the other," he said. "You see—"

"Oh!"

Fatty plunged forward. His skates were going now with a vengeance—both of them—and his weight carried him on with a terrific impetus that wrenched him fairly out of the grasp of Skelton and Redfern.

"Hold on!" shouted Redfern.

But Fatty could not hold on. He plunged straight ahead into the midst of the crowded skaters, and his weight was like that of a battering-ram. He knocked the unfortunate juniors right and left, and a terrific uproar accompanied every plunge of his skates. Benson and Miller fell over one another, and Brown was added to the heap, and still Fatty rushed on his destructive path.

"Stop him!" shrieked Smith minor. "Hold him! Ow!"

"Stop him!"

"Help!"

"Ow—ow! Grooh!"

"Oh!"

By a kind of miracle Fatty Spratt remained on his skates instead of rolling over; but every collision sent him whirling off in a fresh direction, and he bore down on the unfortunate skaters like an escaped locomotive.

A dozen juniors were on the floor, and the rest clattering wildly in their attempts to escape. Redfern and Skelton rushed on Fatty to capture him, and he threw his arms round their necks to save himself; but they were not equal to the sudden weight.

"Stop it!" gasped Redfern. "Gerroff! I—I— Oh!"

He rolled over with Skelton upon a heap of fallen juniors, and Fatty Spratt rolled on him, and for a full minute there was a din in the box-room as of Bedlam broken loose, and nothing could be seen but rolling and gasping juniors, and feet and skates whirling in the air.

A Great Mystery.

BUMP!

Crash! Clatter!

Redfern minor sat up amidst whirling legs and skates. There were gasps and groans from all sides.

"Well, of all the silly asses!" ejaculated Redfern minor.

"It was that dummy Spratt's fault!" gasped Brown, struggling to a sitting position, with his hand clasped to his nose, and the "claret" oozing through his fingers. "It was his fault, the duffer! I hope somebody has fallen on him!"

"Ow!" came a wheezy groan from the fat Fourth-Former, who was extended upon his stomach, with three or four juniors sprawling across him. "Ow! Help!"

"Don't get off him, you fellows!" said Brown crossly. "Squash him!"

"Ow! I'm suffocating!"

"Jolly good thing, too!"

"Ow!"

The fellows picked themselves up one after another. Most of them were hurt, and some of them were cross. Those who had not been hurt were laughing. They could see the comical side of the matter. But Brown, with his nose streaming red, could not be expected to see anything funny in the incident; nor Benson, with a bump on his knee; nor Skelton, with the thickest of thick ears.

Fatty Spratt was the last up. He puffed and wheezed painfully.

"Ow! I thought I was a goner!" he gasped.

"Ow! Some idiot was sprawling over me—"

"Some what?" demanded Benson aggressively.

"Some fellow, I mean," said Fatty, backing away. "I—"

Rap!

It was a sharp knock at the box-room door. The juniors started.

"This is what comes of making such a blessed row!" said Redfern minor severely.

"Here's a giddy prefect come up to chuck us out."

"Don't open the door," said Skelton. "It may be one of the Modern worms on the prowl."

Redfern skated to the door.

"Who's there?" he called out.

"I am!" came back the voice of Taffy Morgan. "I want to come in."

"Rats!"

"Open this door!"

"More rats!"

There was a growl outside, and Taffy was heard whispering to his companions.

Redfern minor grinned.

"It's Taffy on the track," he said. "They've heard the row. We've had enough roller-skating practice for this time, I think. Let's get out."

"They'll see when we open the door—"

"They won't see anything that matters. The skates will be locked up in the trunk again. Ten to one Taffy guesses nothing."

"Good!"

"Get the skates off, and I'll lock them up."

The juniors had had enough of the practice for the time. Many of them wanted a rest to look after the injuries caused by the mishaps attending Fatty Spratt's attempt to skate.

The roller-skates were taken off and col-

lected, and packed away in the empty trunk. Redfern minor closed the lid, and carefully locked it, and put the key in his pocket.

Except for the scratching and scoring on the floor, there was nothing to indicate that the juniors had been using the box-room as a skating-rink.

The boxes were dragged back to their places, and the room put in its usual order; and then Redfern minor unlocked the door.

Taffy & Co. were standing outside. Rake was in a stooping posture, and had evidently had his eye to the keyhole, in the hope of discovering the mystery. As the keyhole had been carefully blocked with the key, Rake had gained nothing but a crick in the neck.

He straightened up, looking rather sheepish, as the door swung open.

Redfern minor chuckled.

"Hallo!" he remarked.

"Hallo, chappy!" said Vernon.

"What the dickens have you kids been up to?" exclaimed Taffy wrathfully. "We heard a fearful row in there."

"Yes! What the dooce have you been up to?" demanded Vernon.

"Just what I was going to say!" remarked Rake. "What have you been up to?"

Redfern minor looked very serious.

"Well, to tell you a great secret—"

"Well?"

"You'll keep it dark?"

"Of course!"

"Mind, not a whisper must be allowed to go any further—"

"Of course not!" said Taffy eagerly. "You can rely on us."

"Look here, Reddy," exclaimed Skelton, "you're not—"

"You shut up!" said Taffy promptly.

"Let Reddy say what he likes. Go on, Reddy, old fellow. Don't you be bullied."

"What-ho!" grinned Redfern minor. "Well, if I can really rely on you chaps—"

"Certainly!"

"Absolutely, dear boy!"

"Just what I was going to say."

"Well, as a matter of fact," said Redfern, lowering his voice mysteriously—"as a matter of fact, it was Fatty Spratt practising a fairy dance. That's all. Good-bye!"

The Classics burst into a simultaneous chuckle and walked on, before Taffy & Co. had recovered from their astonishment.

"You—you ass!" grunted Taffy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Moderns looked at one another. Redfern minor had been gently "pulling their leg," of course.

The idea of Fatty Spratt in connection with a fairy dance made even Taffy smile.

But what was the secret, then?

"I simply can't make it out," said Taffy.

"There was a tremendous row, and I heard a sort of swishing sound, too."

"Let's look in the room; we're bound to find some traces of what they've been up to," said Vernon, mystified.

"Come on, then."

The Modern juniors searched the box-room from end to end.

They looked among the trunks, they looked in the cupboards, and up the chimney, and out of the window.

But they discovered no clue to the mystery.

Whatever the Classical juniors had been "up to" in the box-room, they had succeeded in covering up their traces perfectly.

Taffy smote his forehead.

"Blessed if I can make it out!" he exclaimed. "But I'm jolly well going to keep

on the track till I do find it out. It's some wheeze, of course, and up against us; and if we don't get on to it, they will be making us look small."

"But what on earth can it be?"

"It's a giddy mystery."

And the Modern chums, very much puzzled and mystified, left the box-room.

A Smart Capture.

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 blackguardism 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.

Redfern minor walked down the passage whistling softly. He had been angry with Arthur for doubting him; but a word from his major had been more than enough to dissipate his anger. He was feeling particularly cheerful at the present moment. His name was cleared in the eyes of his schoolfellows; even the dullest of them could no longer doubt. He had made it up with Arthur, which gave him more pleasure still. And though he knew that there were rocks ahead, as he would have expressed it, he faced the future with cool courage and confidence.

What would be Ransome's next move? That was the thought that was in his mind now. He turned into the Fourth-Form passage, thinking of anything but the warfare between Classics and Moderns—to be suddenly reminded of its existence. There was a rush of feet, a grasping of hands, and he was whirled off his feet, and whisked away into a Modern study before he knew what was happening.

As soon as he realised it, he struggled desperately. But Taffy & Co. had him in their grasp.

They whirled him into their study and slammed the door.

Skelton and Brown had seen the raid from a distance, and they dashed up at top speed to the rescue.

But too late.

They hurled themselves at the door of Taffy's study just as a key clicked on the inside, and the door did not budge.

Kick, kick, kick!

Thump, thump!

A yell of laughter from inside answered the furious attack of the Classics upon the door. But the Moderns had something else to do, and the laughter quickly ceased. Redfern minor had recovered his breath, and he was fighting for his liberty.

The Moderns were three to one, but he gave them a good tussle.

They rolled over on the floor together, bumping and pommelling and gasping.

"Collar him!" gasped Taffy. "Sit on him."

"Ow!"

"You worms—"

"Roll on him."

"B-r-r-r!"

Rake rolled on the floor, knocked dizzy by a blow on the chin. Vernon sprawled all over Redfern, and they tussled and rolled. Taffy seized the Classical junior round the neck, and tightened the grip of his arm, and Redfern minor had to give in. Rake and Vernon grasped his wrists, and he was helpless.

Overpowered, but unsubdued, he sat dishevelled and flushed in the grasp of his captors.

"Now, then," panted Taffy, "we've got him!"

To which Redfern minor made the ancient and classic rejoinder:

"Rats!"

The Secret.

TAFFY grinned. He had Redfern minor safe now, and the Classics kicked and thumped upon the door in vain.

"We've got him!" gasped Vernon. "How the beast struggled!"

"Just what I was going to—"

"Yes, we've got him!" said Taffy grimly. "And now we're going to have the giddy secret. Reddy, my son, you are going to talk."

"Rats!"

"What were you Classical worms doing in the box-room to-day?"

"Rats!"

"What's the mystery about?"

"Find out!"

"That's what we're going to do, my son. Are you going to answer?"

"No!"

"Then we'll jolly well put you to the torture!"

"Rats!"

"Rake, my boy, get the red ink."

Rake released Redfern, and stepped to the table. Redfern immediately began to struggle again. But Vernon was sitting astride of his legs, and now grasped a wrist in either hand. And Taffy's strong arm was round Redfern's neck, from behind. He was helpless, and he had to give in. Taffy judiciously tightened the pressure till the Classical junior's resistance ceased.

Rake stepped back with a bottle of red ink in his hand. Redfern eyed it apprehensively. He was prepared for horseplay, because he knew very well that Taffy & Co. would not really hurt anybody, except in a fair fight, man to man. But now he was evidently going through a ragging of a different sort. Taffy & Co. meant to know the secret, and they were in deadly earnest.

"Now, Reddy, we're going to anoint you," said Taffy. "If you don't want your complexion changed to a startling thing in pinks, you'll talk!"

"Rats!"

"Mop it on the sponge, Rakey, and anoint him!"

"What-ho!"

Rake took a bath-sponge from the table, and flooded it with red ink. Then he approached the sponge to Redfern's face.

"Here, chuck it!" exclaimed Redfern indignantly. "Do you call this cricket?"

"No; we call it anointing!" grinned Taffy. "But it doesn't matter what it's called, you're going to have it, unless you talk, and explicate the mystery. Now, then, are you going to explain?"

"No!" roared Redfern. "Rescue!"

Hammer, hammer, hammer! came at the door.

The Modern chums did not seem even to notice the noise.

Taffy made Rake a sign to proceed, and Rake proceeded. He mopped the inky sponge all over Redfern's face, turning him into the reddest of Red Indians in a few seconds.

Redfern gasped and spluttered. A considerable quantity of the ink found its way into his mouth, and the taste was not pleasant.

"Gr-r-rooooh! Yaroooh! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stop it! Yow!"

"Are you going to explain?"

"Yow! No! Yowowow!"

"More ink, Rakey. Anoint him round the neck and ears."

"Stop it! Ow! Yah!"

"Will you explain?"

"No!"

Rake grinned, and mopped on the ink. Redfern turned redder than ever. All that was visible of him above his collar was glowing red, and his collar was streaked and spotted thickly, and the ink was running down over his shirt and waistcoat.

He struggled vainly in the grasp of the Moderns.

"Sorry," grinned Taffy—"awfully sorry, but it's a stern necessity. You've got to explain the giddy mystery."

"I won't!" roared Redfern. "I-groo-yoooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Redfern made a desperate effort to break loose.

Vernon rocked to and fro on his legs, and knocked the side of his head against the ink-bottle in Rake's hand. Rake was bestowing more attention upon anointing Redfern than upon the ink-bottle, and the concussion knocked it out of his hand.

It dropped on Vernon's shoulder, and the ink swooped out of it in a wave over the dandy of the Fourth.

Vernon gave a dolorous yell, and sprang to

his feet, forgetting all about Redfern in the horror of the moment.

"Oh!" he roared. "Oh! You frabjous ass! Look what you've done."

Rake stared at him blankly.

"My hat!"

"I'm soaked!" shrieked Vernon. "Soaked! Drenched! With ink! Oh!"

"By George!"

"You fearful ass—"

"It wasn't my fault. You knocked your napper against the bottle."

"You dummy—"

"Look here—"

"You dangerous ass—"

"Help here!" gasped Taffy. "Lay hold of him."

Redfern was struggling again. He gripped with Taffy, and rolled the Modern leader over on the floor in the midst of the flood of ink. Wrenching himself loose, he sprang to his feet.

Rake rushed at him, to be met by a right-hander on the chest that sent him crashing into Vernon, and both of them went down together.

Redfern sprang to the door.

The key was still in the lock, and to turn it and snatch the door open was the work of a second. Redfern rushed into the passage. Taffy's grasp missed him by a quarter of an inch.

"M-m-m-my hat!" gasped Skelton, staggering back at the sight of his chum. "What have they been doing to you?"

"He's bleeding!" ejaculated Brown.

"I'm not; it's ink."

"Ink!"

"Yes, I'm smothered."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Herr Rheinberger is Alarmed.

REDFERN MINOR, little dreaming of the tell-tale evidence he had left behind in Taffy & Co.'s study, hurried away towards the bath-rooms. He was reeking with ink; the ragging had been a severe one, more severe than it would have been if Taffy & Co. had not been so excited. Two or three juniors whom Redfern met stared at him blankly in wonder at seeing his face streaming red.

Redfern took no notice of them. He was only too anxious to get himself cleaned. But as luck would have it, he almost ran into Herr Rheinberger, the German master, at the corner of the passage.

Redfern halted.

There was no avoiding the encounter. Herr Rheinberger put up his hand to his glasses to adjust them, as if he could hardly believe the evidence of his eyes.

"Ach!" he ejaculated.

He stared blankly at the junior. Redfern minor, inwardly blessing Taffy & Co., waited for the storm to burst.

"Ach! Vat is tat?" exclaimed Herr Rheinberger. "Who you vas?"

"If you please, sir—"

"Ach! I tink I know tat voice."

"I'm Redfern minor, sir."

"Himmel! Mein poor poy!"

Redfern stared. He was feeling considerably sorry for himself, but he had not expected the German master to feel sorry for him. He had fully expected to be hauled over the coals for going about in that extraordinary state.

"Mein poor, poor lad," said Herr Rheinberger. "It is derrible."

his left hand, and held his face over the basin, and bathed it.

Redfern spluttered and choked.

The water in the basin was soon crimsoned with red ink, and the German master uttered ejaculations of alarm and horror as he bathed away at Redfern's face.

"Himmel! Dis is derrible! It is awful! It is vat you call terrific! I tink tat te vound must be ferry serious. Yet I cannot see te vound. Tat is strange. Redfern, vere is te vound tat cause all tis pleading?"

"Groo!"

"Vere is it, mein poor poy?"

"Gooch!"

Redfern spluttered with his nose and mouth full of inky water. The German master absently went on bathing his face while he questioned him, so that the junior had not much chance of answering.

"Redfern, vere is te vound?"

Redfern gasped and spluttered.

"If you please, sir—oooh!—there isn't any—grooooh!—isn't any—oooh!—any—groo!—yaroooh!—wound, sir!"

"You not feels any vound, Redfern?"

"No, sir. You see—"

"Tat is ferry strange. Buf sometimes te most dangerous vounds cause te least pain," said Herr Rheinberger. "Ven is tat maid coming in answer te te pell? I want te send for a doctor instantly pefore."

"There's no need for a doctor, sir!" gasped Redfern. "I'm not hurt. I—"

"Nonsense, poy!"

"I'm not, sir, really. I—"

"Tat is ferry prave of you, Redfern, but I see tat you are derribly wounded, because tat you plead so fearfully."

"Oh, sir! I—I'm not bleeding!"

"Poy!"

"I—I—I'm not, sir, really."

"Redfern! Look at yourself! You are smodered in plood!"

"Oh, no, sir! It's—it's not blood, sir."

"Vat!"

"It's—it's not blood, sir," stammered Redfern. "I—I'm not bleeding, sir. I—I'm not hurt at all."

The German master dropped the sponge into the basin, and released Redfern. The junior gladly stepped back, his face and clothes streaming with inky water, and blinked at the herr.

"Redfern! Vat you say? Tat is not plood?"

"No, sir."

"Den vat is it?"

"Red ink, sir."

"Himmel! Vat—vat do you say, Redfern?"

"It's—it's red ink, sir."

The German master stared blankly, and then adjusted his glasses carefully, and stared again. A further critical examination was sufficient to prove to the herr that it was indeed not blood, but innocuous red ink. And then the wrath of Herr Rheinberger began to rise.

"Redfern! You pad poy!"

"Oh, sir!"

"Den dis is vun shoke tat you play upon your master!" thundered Herr Rheinberger.

"Oh, no, sir! I—I—"

"You rang, sir?" said the maid, appearing in the doorway, and gazing at the scene in the herr's room in great astonishment.

The herr turned towards the door.

"Eh? Vat? No—ja—yes! I rang, but I do not vant you, ain't it? Tat is right. You may go."



Taffy made Rake a sign to proceed, and Rake proceeded. He mopped the inky sponge all over Redfern's face, turning him into the reddest of Red Indians in a few seconds.

Redfern glanced at his chums through the ink. Taffy had slammed the door of the study, realising that a recapture was impossible now.

"You cackling asses," said Redfern.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you sniggering at?"

"Well, you look funny! Ha, ha, ha!"

Redfern snorted.

"Oh, cheess it! I'm going to look for a bath-room. You can go and scout for a clean collar and shirt for me."

"Right you are! Ha, ha, ha!"

And Redfern minor stalked away. Meanwhile, the Modern chums were staring at one another in the study in blank dismay. The ragging of Redfern had not gone on exactly as they had intended. Vernon was the inkiest of the three, but all had their share. Red ink seemed to be everywhere; the study reeked of it.

"Well," said Taffy, at last, "this is a go!"

"It is!" groaned Vernon. "It are! I'm smothered with ink owing to that silly ass!"

"You banged your silly napper against the bottle."

"Hallo!" cried Taffy, springing towards the spot where Redfern had been—"anointed."

"Look at this!"

"Eh! What is it?"

Taffy had picked up a small steel object, which had evidently dropped from Redfern minor's pocket during the strenuous struggle. He held it up to view.

His eyes were blazing with excitement.

"My only hat!" he exclaimed. "Look at it! Reddy was carrying it about in his pocket—do you understand? It's a key for fastening on roller-skates—you understand? I never knew there was a single pair of roller-skates at St. Dolly's till now. Do you catch on? That's the wheeze!"

"What wheeze?"

"The Classical wheeze, ass. What was Reddy taking about a skate key for? That's what they're up to—rinking!"

And Rake and Vernon ejaculated simultaneously:

"My hat!"

They had discovered the secret!

"Yes, sir," said Redfern, in wonder.

"Do you feel a pain, Redfern?"

"Non—no, sir, only a bit of an ache," said Redfern.

"Ach! You must be ferry pad."

"Oh, no, sir—"

"But your face, mein poy, your face—"

"You see, sir—"

"Where are you wounded, Redfern?"

"Wounded, sir?"

"Ach, ja, ja! It must be a derrible vound to, cause so mooch plood."

"So much what?" murmured Redfern faintly.

"So mooch plood," said the herr anxiously. "Mein poor poy! Is it tat you have fallen down te stairs mit yourself?"

"Oh, no, sir. I—I—"

"You vas smodered mit plood. Come to my room at vunce, and I will see to it, vile tat I send for te doctor."

"If you please, sir—"

"Come, come. Dere is no time to lose. Mein poor poy!"

And the kind-hearted, short-sighted German master grasped Redfern minor by the shoulder, and hurried him away.

The junior had no choice but to go.

He would have explained, but the German was too alarmed and excited to listen. He ran Redfern into his room, and rang the bell. He swamped out water into his basin, plunged a sponge into it, and began to bathe the junior's face.

"Ach! Hold you head ofer te basin, mein poor boy!"

"If you please, sir—"

"I must bathe away te plood and examine te vound," explained the herr. "I must stop te pleading at vunce, or it may be ferry serious, pefore tat te doctor shall arrive."

"But I—"

"Put your head ofer te basin, Redfern, and do not try to talk. It is petter tat you save your strength pefore."

"Yes, sir, but— Groo! Oooch!"

A flood of water bathing over his face cut Redfern minor short.

Herr Rheinberger took him by the hair with

The maid gave him a look, and went. She confided to the cook below stairs that she had always suspected Herr Rheinberger of drinking habits, and that she was now sure of it.

Redfern would gladly have followed in the maid's footsteps; but a magisterial gesture from the herr detained him. The German master's face was very red and angry.

"So you play vun shoke upon your master, ain't it, Redfern?" he exclaimed.

"It wasn't a joke, sir," stammered Redfern. "I—I mean, it wasn't a joke on my part. Someone—er—upset the ink on me, sir. I—I was going to a bath-room to get cleaned when I met you, sir."

Herr Rheinberger had taken up a cane from his table. He looked hard at Redfern minor, and then he glanced at the cane—and hesitated. Then he looked at Redfern minor again.

"Den you did not play dis shoke on me for te fun, Redfern?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Den vy did you not explain?"

"I—I tried to, sir. but—but you wouldn't listen."

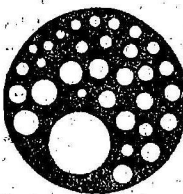
Herr Rheinberger grunted.

"I tink you vas a trootful poy, Redfern. You may go, ain't it?"

"Thank you, sir."

And Redfern minor bolted, in case the herr should change his mind. He made a straight line for a bath-room, and for the next quarter of an hour from that bath-room proceeded the sounds of puffing and blowing and splashing and scrubbing—and even then, when Redfern emerged into public view again, there was an unaccustomed blush about his ears and the roots of his hair.

(Another rollicking long instalment next week.)



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