THE OUTCAST'S LUCK!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

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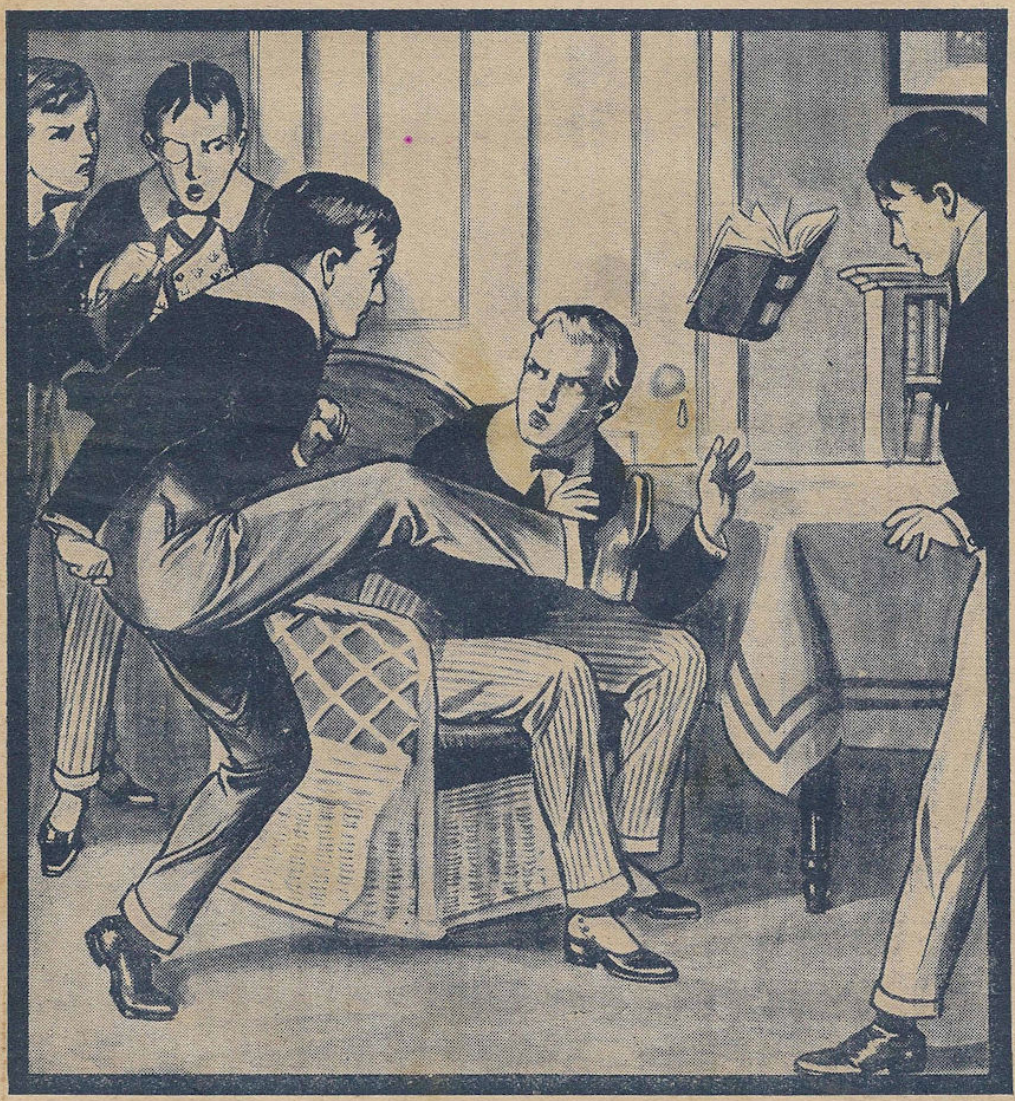

THE EXTREME POLITENESS OF GRUNDY!

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THE OUTCAST'S LUCK!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete Story of Tom Merry and Co. at St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.
The Letter from Wodehouse.

"ANY letters?"

Tom Merry & Co. had come into the School House, ruddy and cheery after some good cricket practice.

Funds were low with the Terrible Three, and they naturally gave the letter-rack a glance when they came in.

There was always the hopeful possibility of a remittance arriving, and there were still a few articles on the market upon which a remittance could be expended without offending the Food Controller.

Baggy Trimble of the Fourth was regarding the letter-rack with intense interest.

The afternoon's post was in, but there was no letter for Baggy. In spite of Baggy's frequent descriptions of the splendours of Trimble Hall, remittances seldom arrived at St. Jim's from that palatial dwelling. But Baggy always took a keen interest in other fellows' correspondence. He would read another fellow's postcard without scruple, and had often earned a thick ear by doing so. And any fellow whom Baggy suspected of receiving a remittance was sure of Baggy's most polite attentions afterwards.

"Nothing here for you chaps," said Baggy, as the Terrible Three came along. "My letter hasn't come, either, somehow."

"Not the hundred-pound cheque from Trimble Hall?" asked Monty Lowther sympathetically.

"Not the wad of banknotes you were expecting?" asked Manners. "Anything wrong at the Trimble Arms—I mean, Trimble Hall? I suppose the beer restrictions have hit your pater pretty hard, Trimble?"

"You silly ass!" spluttered Trimble. "What do the beer restrictions matter to my pater?"

"Well, any man who keeps a pub——"

"You know Trimble Hall isn't a pub!" howled Trimble.

"My mistake," said Manners blandly. "Nothing here for us, you chaps. Come on, and let's see if there's anything left in Hall."

"I say!" exclaimed Trimble. "There's a letter here for Cardew of the Fourth! It's rather a fat letter. Might have currency notes in it."

"What do Cardew's currency notes matter to you, you fat bounder?" growled Tom Merry.

"Oh, nothing, of course! I shouldn't think of borrowing anything from Cardew. I don't like the chap. But I've been thinking," said Trimble, blinking at the chums of the Shell. "Cardew was sent to Coventry by the school, and it serves him right. But don't you fellows think it has gone on long enough?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to cackle at. After all, Levison and Clive speak to him. I really think I've cut him long enough. I'm a good-natured chap——"

"Especially when you think anyone's got a remittance," grinned Lowther.

"Oh, of course, that's got nothing to do with it! But it would be only good-natured to take him his letter, wouldn't it? He doesn't know its come."

"Let his letter alone, you fat oyster!"

"Well, I don't see why I shouldn't be civil, even if he is in Coventry," said Trimble, eyeing hungrily the letter he suspected contained currency notes. "Cardew has big remittances, you know—whacking! He may be anxious about that letter."

"If he's anxious about it, he can come and fetch it."

"Yes; but I think I ought to take it to him. Besides, I think it's from his old school," said Trimble.

"How on earth can you know that?" exclaimed Tom Merry in astonishment.

"Well, the postmark's Woodford, and that's the town near Wodehouse School, where Cardew used to be."

"So you've been nosing over the postmark!"

"Not at all. I just happened to notice it. I'm an observant chap. Upon the whole, I think I ought to take it to Cardew, though he's sent to Coventry——"

"N.G.!" said Lowther, with a grin. "If it's a letter from a chap at Cardew's old school, there can't be money in it, so you needn't take the trouble."

"Tain't from a chap."

"Oh, how do you know that?"

"Because it's addressed in a man's fist," said Trimble. "Looks like an old johnny's writing."

"You know all about it," said Tom Merry. "I think you've been told before, Trimble, that you know too much about other fellows' letters. What you want is a jolly good bumping. What do you think?"

"Look here, you know—— Yah! Leggo!"

The Terrible Three laid hands upon Baggy Trimble, and swept him from the floor. Trimble descended upon the floor again, and smote it hard, and roared.

That duty done, Tom Merry & Co. walked cheerfully away, to ascertain whether anything in the grub line was still going in Hall.

Baggy Trimble sat and gasped for some moments.

"Yah! Rotters!" he mumbled.

Then he picked himself up, and took Cardew's letter from the rack. He scuttled away upstairs with it.

It was true that Ralph Reckness Cardew, of the Fourth Form, had been sent to Coventry by the whole school, and was not now on chummy terms even with his old friends and study-mates, Levison and Clive. Baggy Trimble had joined in the sentence of exclusion with zest. It was quite delightful to the tubby junior to be able to treat the lofty and supercilious dandy of the Fourth with contempt—quite a pleasant experience. But Baggy was, as he had said, a good-natured chap—when there were remittances about.

Cardew, with all his faults, was about the wealthiest fellow at St. Jim's, and that covered a multitude of sins in Baggy's eyes.

So Baggy Trimble headed for No. 9 Study in the Fourth-Form passage, with Cardew's letter in his fat hand.

He slipped it hastily into his pocket as he almost ran into four juniors on the landing. Blake & Co., of Study No. 6, were coming downstairs. Baggy's hasty action and his guilty look caused the juniors to glance at him keenly.

"Hallo! What are you up to?" demanded Jack Blake.

"Nothing," said Trimble promptly. "There isn't a letter for Cardew, and I'm not taking it to him—I mean——"

"Bai Jove! That boundah gwows a more feahful Pwussian evewy day!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "What are you takin' a lettah to Cardew for, Twimble?"

"Well, I'm a good-natured chap, you know—I mean, I'm not doing anything of the sort——"

"You know Cardew's in Coventry, you fat rotter!" growled Herries.

"Bump him!" suggested Digby.

"Yaas, wathah! I weally think Twimble wequiahs a bumpin' for wollin' out such feahful whoppahs!"

Trimble made a rush to escape; but Study No. 6 collared him, and for the second time that afternoon the fat junior smote the floor with violence.

Blake & Co. went on downstairs, leaving Baggy trying to recover his breath. He was always short of breath. In spite of the food regulations, Baggy Trimble was as fat and short-winded as ever.

"Yow-ow-wow!" mumbled Trimble. "Oh, the rotters! I'd lick 'em all round, if—if I had time! Wow!"

The toe of a boot applied to his plump ribs shifted Baggy out of the way as Kangaroo of the Shell came by.

"What are you sitting there for, you fat duffer?" demanded the Cornstalk. "Want me to fall over you?"

"Yarooh!"

"Let me give you a lift up," said Kangaroo kindly, and he took a firm grasp upon Trimble's fat ear.

"Yow-ow! Leggo!" roared Trimble.

Kangaroo set him upon his feet, and walked on, grinning, Trimble glaring after him with an expression that was not at all grateful.

He shook a fat fist after the Cornstalk junior, and rolled on to Cardew's study.

CHAPTER 2.
Black Ingratitude.

CARDEW of the Fourth was alone in his study.

The barred junior was not looking cheerful.

In public, under the eyes of the other fellows, the dandy of the Fourth kept up an unvarying appearance of cool nonchalance.

The way he had taken his sentence surprised and exasperated most of the St. Jim's juniors.

There was hardly a fellow there who did not believe that Cardew had been

expelled from his former school for theft. The charge had been made, and if false it could have been disproved. Cardew had not disproved it.

Naturally he was barred by the school. A thief was not quite good enough for St. Jim's.

But Cardew's nerve was equal to the test. He had taken his exclusion without turning a hair.

But now, as he sat alone in his study, he was looking moody.

He had faced the music without flinching. He was grimly determined that he would not be driven from St. Jim's. His defiance of the school was a solace to his pride. But otherwise there was little that was satisfactory in it.

But the cloud vanished from his face at once as the door opened. It was the cool, careless face St. Jim's knew so well that he turned towards the newcomer.

Baggy Trimble looked in.

The fat Fourth Former's actions were peculiar. He looked round the study, evidently to make sure that Cardew was alone. Then he stepped back into the doorway, and glanced up the passage and down the passage, Cardew watching him in astonishment.

Then he stepped into the study and closed the door very cautiously.

Feeling safe from observation at last in his visit to the barred junior, he bestowed a fat grin on Cardew.

"Well, what does all this mean?" asked Cardew.

"I thought some of those beasts might have an eye on me, you know," Trimble explained. "That beast Grundy, or that other beast Gore, would think nothing of going for a chap if he spoke to you, Cardew. I'm a good-natured chap——"

"Will you be good-natured enough to get on the other side of that door?" asked Cardew coolly. "Because if you don't I shall put you there—quick!"

"Look here, you know," stammered Trimble, quite taken aback by this inhospitable reception. "Look here, I've come——"

"Are you goin'?"

"I mean to be friendly, really!" urged Trimble, feeling that Cardew did not quite grasp the real extent of his intended generosity. "You see, you're in Coventry, and most of the fellows wouldn't speak to a chap who was kicked out of his last school for stealing. But I'm good-natured——"

Trimble had no time to get farther.

Amazing as it was to Baggy, Cardew did not seem to feel the least ray of gratitude for his excessive kindness.

He jumped up, seized Baggy by the collar, and spun him towards the door. With his other hand he opened the door.

Baggy Trimble wriggled in his grasp in breathless astonishment and rage.

"Look here, you know!" he spluttered. "I—you—grooogh! You're chook—chook—chooking me, you rotter! Leggo! Yooooooop!"

With a swing of his arm Cardew sent the fat junior spinning into the passage.

Trimble collapsed there with a gasp.

Slam!

The door closed.

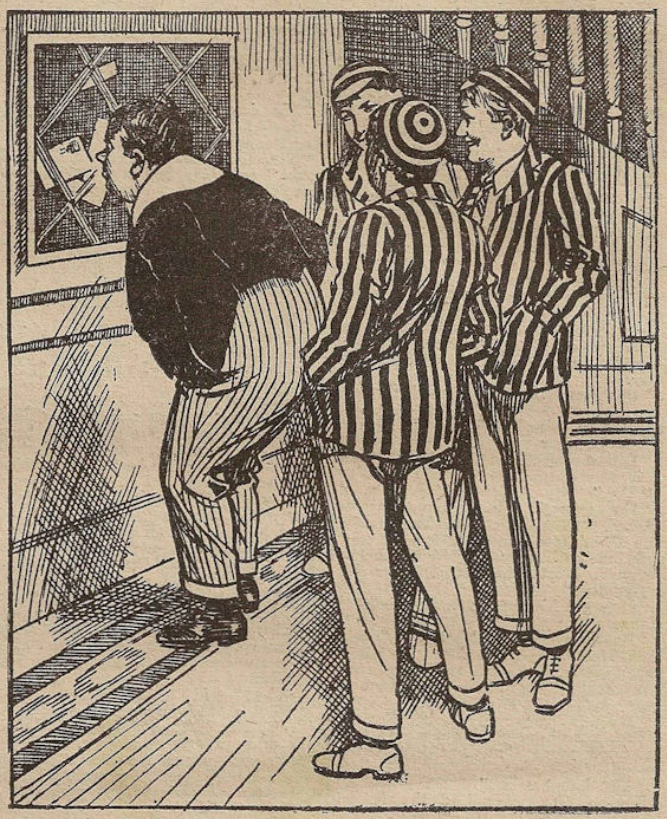
Baggy Trimble sat up, and blinked at the door and struggled for breath.

"Mummum—my hat!" he gasped. "The rotter—the ungrateful rotter! I jolly well won't give him his letter now! Groogh! Ow! Ugh!"

Baggy picked himself up painfully and limped away.

Baggy would rather have ventured into a lion's den than into No. 9 Study again.

He limped and gasped into his own study, and plumped down into the armchair, and for several minutes did nothing but gasp.



Baggy is interested.
(See Chapter 1.)

Then he bethought him of Cardew's letter, which was still in his pocket. He drew it out, and turned it over and over in his fat fingers.

Baggy was curious to know what was in that letter. He wondered whether its contents would throw any light upon the real reason why Cardew had left Wodehouse School. And he wondered still more keenly whether there was a remittance in it. Baggy had few scruples, if any; but even his obtuse brain realised that it was a serious matter to open a letter addressed to another person. But he was feeling extremely exasperated, and it was only too clear that none of that remittance—if there was one—would be lent to him. Cardew was an ungrateful beast, and if he was a thief he ought to be shown up, and—and before Baggy Trimble's reflections had gone any farther the envelope had somehow opened!

The envelope being open, the letter was naturally drawn out by Trimble's fat fingers. Casting his last fears and scruples to the winds, Baggy unfolded the letter and feasted his inquisitive eyes upon it.

There was no remittance.

The letter was in a man's hand—a scholarly hand. And as Baggy's curious eyes ran over it they grew wider and wider with amazement.

After he had read the letter he stared at it blankly.

"My only hat!" he ejaculated at last. He stared at the letter again.

Evidently its contents had flabbergasted the Peeping Tom of St. Jim's.

"My word! Cardew would be glad to see that!" he murmured. "So would Levison and Clive, as they're still sticking to the rotter! I—I suppose Cardew's got to have it, but—but I can't put it back in the rack like this! I—I can't! They'd know who opened it! Oh, dear!"

It dawned upon Trimble's fat brain that he was in an awkward situation.

He had gratified his burning curiosity. But after the feast came the reckoning. And the reckoning was certain to be heavy.

What would Cardew do when he knew? Suppose he complained to the Housemaster? That would mean a flogging!

A step sounded in the passage, and Trimble hastily thrust the letter into his pocket. He could not put it back where he had found it. He dare not take it to Cardew. After all, as Cardew was in Coventry, nobody would mention to him that there had been a letter for him at all. Trimble found comfort in that reflection.

Mellish came into the study. He glanced curiously at his study-mate's red and guilty face.

"My hat! If you've bolted all the grub, Trimble, I'll skin you!" said Mellish. It was a natural suspicion.

Trimble slipped out of the study as Mellish peered into the cupboard. The

letter was still in his pocket. Baggy was turning over in his fat mind the best expedient for getting rid of it.

CHAPTER 3.
Guilty, or Not Guilty?

"HALLO! Looking for a thick ear?" asked Tom Merry pleasantly.

Gordon Gay, of the Fourth Form at Rylcombe Grammar School, sauntered in at the gates of St. Jim's. He bestowed a cheery grin upon the Terrible Three.

"Pax!" he announced.

"Have you come about your boat?" asked Tom Merry, laughing. Gordon Gay's boat, captured by Cardew in an encounter with Grammarians, still lay upon the St. Jim's landing-raft by the river.

"I've come to see Cardew," Gordon Gay said.

"Pass on, friend, and all's well!" said Monty Lowther

"Is that chap still in Coventry?" asked Gay.

"Yes."

"It's queer," the Grammarian remarked. "You know that it was Cardew who dived into the Ryll for me and pulled me out. He came jolly near being drowned. That's the sort of fellow one can admire."

"He's got his good points," admitted Manners.

"But he's a chap with a past," said Tom Merry, with a smile. "It seems pretty clear that he was sacked from his last school for theft. We don't want to have anything to do with him."

"But it's not proved?" asked Gay.

"It's not disproved. If it wasn't true he could prove that it wasn't, easily enough!"

"Yes, I suppose so."

Gordon Gay went into the School House, with a thoughtful expression upon his face. He could not believe his plucky rescuer a thief.

He found Levison and Clive in the hall.

"Cardew about?" he asked.

"In the Common-room, I think," said Levison. "Down the passage there."

"Thanks!"

Gay walked on into the junior Common-room. Ralph Cardew was seated by the open window, reading. He glanced up as Gay came towards him.

"I've come over to see you, Cardew," said the Grammarian junior. And he held out his hand.

"Don't you know I'm sent to Coventry here?"

"That has nothing to do with me."

"Oh, all right!"

They shook hands, and the Grammarian sat down in the window-seat. Cardew put his book on his knee.

"I've learned that it was you who pulled me out of the river the other day," Gay began.

"Yes?" said Cardew in a tone of polite inquiry.

"I'm awfully obliged to you!"

"Oh, don't mench!"

"It was a jolly plucky thing to do!"

"Oh, I don't happen to be a funk, that's all!" said Cardew calmly.

"Why did you clear off before I came to?" asked Gay.

"I wanted a change of clobber."

"Oh!"

"And I didn't want any jaw," said Cardew, smiling. "The fellows think I'm rather given to swank, but there are some sorts of swank I don't care for. I didn't want to pose as a hero. It would have looked like trying to curry favour with the fellows who cut me. Nothing would have come out but for that ass D'Arcy."

"I'm glad it came out," said Gay. "You saved my life. I'm not ungrateful."

"My dear chap, I don't want any gratitude! I suppose you would have done the same for me."

"Yes, that's so. Anyway, I think I would," said Gay honestly. "But that doesn't alter the fact that you did it for me, and I didn't do it for you." He hesitated. "You understand, Cardew, I don't want to chip into your private affairs. But—but can't anything be done to set you right with the fellows here?"

"Nothin'."

"You don't mind if I mention it?"

"Not at all."

"I can't believe that you were sacked from Wodehouse——"

"I wasn't sacked. I was asked to get out quietly."

"Oh!" said Gay.

"That was to save a scandal. If I hadn't gone quietly I should have been sacked," said Cardew, with as much nonchalant calmness as if he were discussing a cricket innings. "I may as well own to it, you see, because that chap Lacy at your school, who used to be at Wodehouse, has told you all about it."

"We don't think much of Lacy," said Gay. "He's a good bowler, but not a fellow one likes. I shouldn't have believed his yarn about you."

"Everybody here does."

"That's because you haven't disproved it," said Gay. "Why don't you? It's rot to suppose you did what you're suspected of!"

"Why?" said Cardew coolly.

"Well, a thief isn't a kind of chap to risk his life for another fellow. A thief is a mean worm," said Gay. "If you had to get out of Wodehouse on that charge I think there was some mistake, and one you could set right, perhaps."

"I could if I liked."

"Then why don't you?" exclaimed Gay in amazement.

Cardew hesitated a moment.

"It sounds too steep," he explained. "What's the good of telling you that I could only set it right by breaking a promise, and giving away the real fellow, who has my word of honour?"

"Oh!" said Gay blankly.

"You see, you don't believe me!" said Cardew, laughing. "Suppose I pitched that yarn here, what would the fellows think? They'd think it was about the silliest lie a chap ever invented!"

"I must say it sounds steep," confessed Gay. "But I believe it all the same, after what you did for me."

"No doubt. But I haven't pulled all St. Jim's out of the river!" grinned Cardew. "My own study friends told me it was steep—too steep—when I hinted it to them."

"It's a queer bizney. Do you mean to say that it will never come out, and that you're always going to be under a cloud like this?" exclaimed Gay.

"Oh, no! I think it's bound to come out sooner or later. You see, the chap I stood by is a regular rotter, and he's bound to be caught out in time. When that happens I think he'll have the decency to own up about me, as it won't make matters any worse for himself."

"That's rather a feeble reed to lean on."

"It's all there is. I think it will happen some day. The fellow simply can't keep straight, and what he's done once he'll do again when he's in a fix, and sooner or later the chopper will come down."

"A Wodehouse fellow, of course," said Gay.

"Naturally."

"Lacy says that all Wodehouse believed you guilty, excepting the captain of the school, a fellow named Horseley."

"Ha, ha! Does he say that Horseley stood up for me?"

"Yes; he was the only chap who did."

"Well, that was kind of him!" said Cardew, with a peculiar glimmer in his eyes. "I dare say he knew me better than the others."

"But were you chummy with the captain of Wodehouse—you a junior in the Fourth?" asked Gay.

"We had tastes in common. You see, some of us were rather a gay crowd at Wodehouse—regular blades and dashers," smiled Cardew. "Horseley used to have little bridge-parties in his study, and I was asked because I had plenty of cash. Lacy was one of the merry circle, too. We thought ourselves awfully sportin'. I chucked it after I came here—till lately. I've taken it up again to kill time. I'm a visitor at the Green Man now—under the rose, of course. A fellow must talk to somebody."

"You're too decent for that sort of thing, Cardew! It's all very well for a chap like Racke or Crooke."

"I've had that from Clive and Levison," said Cardew unmoved. "They're willin' to stick to me, just to keep me out of naughty ways. I've told 'em to go and eat coke!"

"Well, you needn't tell me to go and eat coke," said Gay, laughing. "I'm not going to interfere, of course, but it seems to me a pity. I wish you could be set right with the fellows here."

"Nothin' doin'!" said Cardew.

Gordon Gay rose.

"Hold on a minute!" said Cardew. "I'll come down to the raft with you and hand you over the boat. You must be wantin' it."

The two juniors left the School House together. A good many glances followed them in the quadrangle.

Cardew unlocked the padlock that secured the captured Grammarian boat. Gordon Gay looked hesitant.

"I didn't come over about this, you know," he said. "It's all in the game if you keep it till we can recapture it. I've tried once."

"That's all serene. I was goin' to make you beg for it," said Cardew. "But never mind that now. Will you row it back?"

"Thanks!"

Gordon Gay shook hands with Cardew and leaped into the boat.

"Remember, if there's anything I can do any time!" he said.

"I'll remember, old scout."

"And I believe you're as straight as a die, remember that!" said Gay. And he pushed off.

Cardew watched him from the raft as he pulled the boat away down the river. His brow was very thoughtful. He turned back at last towards the school. Somehow the Grammarian junior's honest faith in him had touched Cardew. The hard expression had left his face.

It returned, however, as he entered the school gates and passed Julian and Kerruish of the Fourth. The two Fourth Formers deliberately looked another way, and Cardew's eyes glittered as he walked on.

"I say, Cardew!" It was Baggy Trimble.

Cardew gave the fat junior a shove, and Trimble sat down. The dandy of the Fourth went into the House. Whether Coventry was agreeable or not, Trimble's conversation was not desired.

Trimble blinked after him, savagely.

"Well, you rotter, you won't get the letter, anyway, and you'd be jolly glad to get it!" he muttered vengefully.

CHAPTER 4.
Grundy Goes It!

"GENTLEMEN——"

"Dry up!"

A crowd had gathered in the junior Common-room of the School House.

Grundy of the Shell was mounted upon a chair, with the evident intention of addressing the assembled juniors. But there seemed no general desire to listen to Grundy's eloquence.

"Yaas, wathah, dwy, up, Gwunday!" said D'Arcy of the Fourth. "You are a feahful bore, you know. I object to your makin' a speech."

"Gentlemen——"

"Ring off!" roared Blake.

"You are intewwuptin' me, too, Gwunday," said Arthur Augustus. "Now, you fellows, as I was sayin'——"

"Were you saying anything?" yawned Blake.

"Gentlemen——" roared Grundy.

A cushion whizzed through the air, and smote George Alfred Grundy on the chest. He disappeared from the chair with some suddenness.

"As I was sayin'," resumed Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass chidingly upon Jack Blake, "I think it is time the Wah came to an end. There is a vewy alarmin' wumour that the manufacture of silk hats is goin' to be stopped till aftah the Wah. I can hardly believe that the Government will pwoceed to such extwemities——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' to cackle at, deah boys. For the sake of beatin' the Germans I should be willin' to weah a cap for the west of my life," said Arthur Augustus nobly. "But the question awises, ought not the Wah to be stopped befoah these howwahs come upon us?"

"Neckties may go next," remarked Monty Lowther solemnly. "Talk about a shortage of bread! Fancy, a shortage of neckties!"

"Howwible!" said Arthur Augustus, unsuspiciously. "Bai Jove, that fellow Gwunday is still makin' a wow! What a feahfully noisy chap that fellow Gwunday is!"

Grundy of the Shell was seeking the fellow who had hurled the cushion. His intended speech was apparently postponed till vengeance had been satisfied.

"Howevah, to wesume. I have thought of a wippin' plan for endin' the Wah in a perfectly satisfactowy mannah," said Arthur Augustus. "I want it to be discussed when the debatin' society meets again, and we can forward a wesolution to Mr. Lloyd George——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway be sewious, deah boys! I have been givin' this mattah a lot of thinkin'——"

"What with?" asked Lowther.

"Wats! I have thought out a vewy satisfactowy solution. You fellows have heard of the United States of Amewica?"

"I think I've heard the name mentioned somewhere," said Blake musingly.

"Now, suppose the States were not united," continued Arthur Augustus, who had evidently given this matter a lot of deep thought, "then they would vewy often be at war with one anothah, like Euwopean countwies. New York might go to war with Flowida, and California might go to war with Michigan. There would always be a lot of hot-headed asses weady to wag flags, and tell them it was patwiotic to shoot one anothah. The Amewican States are saved all this wowwy and bothah because they are united."

"Good!" said Blake. "Now, about the Greyfriars match——"

"Nevah mind the Gweyfwiahs match now, Blake. This is a much more important mattah. Now, suppose the vawious countwies in Euwope were united like the Yankee States——"

"But they're not."

"I am quite awaah of that, Blake. But that is my ideah," explained Arthur Augustus. "Wahs in Euwope can be ended by pwoclaimin' the United States of Euwope."

"Oh, I see! But the Greyfriars match——"

"Bothah the Gweyfwiahs match!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, exasperated. "Don't you see what a wippin' idea it is? Instead of a lot of little countwies always quawwellin' with one anothah and goin' to war, there would be a Euwopean United States always at peace. I want this ideah suggested to Mr. Lloyd George, so that he can bwing it about aftah the Wah."

"But the War isn't over yet. It may last another ten years," remarked Manners.

"Yaas; but an ideah of that kind is good enough to end it," explained Arthur Augustus. "Once all the duffahs wealise that they belong to one big countwy, instead of a lot of silly little ones, they will chuck killin' one anothah, I wathah think, and pull togethah."

"I'm not going to belong to a merry United States that has Prussia in it!" grinned Blake. "Must draw a line somewhere."

"Yaas, that is a weal difficulty. It is vewy unfortunate that those howwid Huns live in Euwope at all," confessed Arthur Augustus. "But I have thought that out, too. You see, in a United States of Euwope, Bavaria and Saxony, and the other German countwies, would all be independent States. Pwussia would have her teeth dwawn for good that way. And, weally, it's the only way, you see, for it is not pwoposed to kill all the Pwussians, so there must be some awwangement for dwawin' their teeth aftah the Wah."

"There's another merry little difficulty in the way," grinned Monty Lowther. "If all Europe had only one Government nine-tenths of the politicians in all countries would lose their jobs."

"What would that mattah, Lowthah?"

"Nothing to us, but a great deal to the merry politicians. You see, if they lost their jobs they would have to work. So I fancy they'd prefer the Disunited States of Europe, and keep their jobs."

"I wefuse to believe they would be such wottahs, Lowthah!"

"You're too good for this world, Gussy, old chap," said Blake affectionately. "Your proper place is really in the British Museum."

"Gentlemen——"

"Hallo! There goes Grundy again!"

"Wing off, Gwundy, you ass! Now, I am goin' to explain my ideah to you fellows fwom beginnin' to end——"

"You're jolly well not!" said Blake promptly.

"Gentlemen——"

"Give Grundy a turn," grinned Herries. "You've had your innings, Gussy. Go it, Grundy!"

Grundy was on the chair again. And to Arthur Augustus' surprise and exasperation, his hearers turned their attention to Grundy. The United States of Europe had to wait till George Alfred Grundy had had his innings.

"Gentlemen, I have a few words to say——"

"The fewer the better," agreed Gore.

"A few words on the subject of Cardew of the Fourth. Cardew has been warned that he's got to get out of St. Jim's, or drastic measures will be taken. Well, we haven't taken any drastic measures yet."

"Give us a rest!" suggested Tom Merry.

"It's time the matter was dealt with," said Grundy firmly. "It's a disgrace to the school for that fellow to be in it."

"Hear, hear!"

"Bai Jove, heah he comes!" remarked Arthur Augustus.

Cardew of the Fourth strolled into the Common-room. He paused a moment in the doorway as he heard his name. But he did not retreat. With a contemptuous smile on his face he walked in, and seated himself, book in hand. Evidently the outcast of St. Jim's was quite indifferent to the views expounded by Grundy of the Shell.

CHAPTER 5.
Not Friendless!

GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY bestowed a disdainful glare upon Cardew. The Fourth-Former did not even see it. He turned the pages of his book unmoved.

"Gentlemen——"

"We've had that," remarked Julian.

"It's time that rotter was dealt with! He's been warned to get out of the school, and we know he could go if he liked. He won't go. Well, I propose taking the matter into our own hands."

"Hear, hear!" said Wilkins and Gunn.

As Grundy's study-mates, they felt called upon to cheer.

"I suggest ragging the bounder till he gets fed up with St. Jim's," said Grundy.

"Hands up for that!"

But not a single hand went up.

Most of the fellows considered that Cardew, if he had any proper feeling at all, would be glad to get out of the school. But if he did not choose to go, the sentence of exclusion was enough to him. It was pretty certain that he was not enjoying himself at St. Jim's.

Grundy looked round in search of support, but he found none.

"Well, there's another idea," he said.

"Do you mean to say you've got two ideas in one term?" ejaculated Monty Lowther.

"Shut up, Lowther! I'm doing the talking. My idea is a deputation to the Head," said Grundy. "We don't want a thief in the school, and the Head would send him away if he knew. Well, a dozen of us might go in the deputation, and request him—respectfully, of course—to turn Cardew out."

"Rats!" said Levison.

"Sneak!" shouted Clive.

Grundy crimsoned.

"It wouldn't be sneaking!" he said. "It would simply be doing a duty!"

"It would be informing!" said Tom Merry. "An informer is as bad as a thief."

"It might be a fellow's duty to be an informer sometimes," said Grundy.

"It can never be a fellow's duty to be a mean, sneaking cad!"

"Wathah not! You are an uttah ass, Gwunday!"

"Chuck it, old man!" murmured Wilkins. "You'll get bumped, you know!"

"Well, come to think of it, perhaps it would be a bit like sneaking," admitted Grundy. "I hadn't thought of that. But the fellow's got to go!"

"Oh, let him alone!" said Tom Merry.

"I'm not going to let him alone! I've got my duty towards the school to consider!" said Grundy loftily. "I think of the good name of St. Jim's, Tom Merry, if you don't!"

"You silly ass!"

"Cardew's got to go, that's settled! A deputation to the Head would fix it, or a House ragging. If you don't like those ideas, I'm willing to hear suggestions," said Grundy condescendingly.

"I've got a suggestion to make," said Lowther meekly.

"You can make it, Lowther."

"Well, I suggest that you could keep your head shut a bit, and give us a rest."

"I don't want any of your rot, Lowther!" said Grundy darkly. "Now, there's a third way of dealing with that rotter if he won't get out."

"My hat! Grundy's got three ideas in one term!" exclaimed Monty Lowther in wonder. "Who said the age of miracles was past?"

"Shut up!" roared Grundy. "Now, the idea is this—for a fellow to tackle the cad on his own, and lick him every day till he goes. I don't want to shove myself forward. I'm willing to leave it to Tom Merry, as junior captain."

"Declined with thanks!" said Tom, laughing.

"If Blake chooses——"

"Blake doesn't," said that individual drily.

"Very well, then I'll take it on myself!" said Grundy. "I'm not keen on it, because I'm bigger than Cardew, and he wouldn't have a dog's chance against me, and I don't want to do anything that looks like bullying. I'm willing to leave it to you, D'Arcy."

"Wats!"

"Or you, Julian."

"Go and eat coke!"

"Or Herries."

"Dry up!"

"Well, it's left to me, then," said Grundy, jumping down off the chair. "I'll take it in hand at once. I'll give Cardew a licking regularly every day till he goes. You hear that, Cardew?"

Cardew was turning a page of his book. He did not even look up.

"Hold on, Grundy!" said Tom Merry. "You'll let Cardew alone, please. He's not up to your weight, and you won't be allowed to bully him."

"It's not bullying, you silly ass! It's doing a duty."

"Well, whatever it is you'll be stopped."

"Who'll stop me?" roared Grundy, with a very warlike look.

"I will, if necessary!"

"I'll lick you another time, Tom Merry. At present I'm going to lick Cardew."

Cardew did not move.

"Do you hear me?" roared Grundy.

Cardew did not give a sign.

Grundy strode up to him and kicked the book out of his hands.

"Now——" he began.

Cardew moved then—quickly. He leaped up, hitting out as he leaped, and Grundy went over backwards, landing with a crash on the floor.

"Yarooh! Oh!"

Cardew stood ready, his fists clenched and his eyes gleaming. He was no match for the burly Shell fellow, but evidently he was not afraid of the encounter. He waited for Grundy to pick himself up.

Grundy sat up, rather dazed. He was purple with wrath. Wilkins gave him a hand to rise.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Grundy. "Why, I'll—I'll——"

He did not finish, but he made a rush like a bull at the slim, elegant Fourth Former.

Cardew would certainly have been bowled over by that heavy headlong rush if it had reached him. But Clive and Levison rushed between, and Grundy was collared.

"Leggo!" he yelled.

Bump.

Grundy came down on the floor again. Cardew joined his study-mates, and the three of them grasped the burly George Alfred and swung him into the air.

Bump!

"Yarooh! Yooppp!"

Wilkins and Gunn made a movement to go to Grundy's aid, but Tom Merry & Co. promptly interposed.

"Keep off the grass!" said Tom. "Grundy's asked for it, and now he's getting it. It will do him good."

Wilkins and Gunn, who were not far from being of Tom's opinion, gracefully yielded the point.

Bump, bump, bump!

Even the powerful Grundy struggled in vain in the grasp of three sturdy juniors. He smote the floor of the Common-room again and again.

"Yarooh! Help! Yoop! Leave off! Oh, crumbs! Oh, Jerusalem! Yooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare of the Sixth came in at the door.

"Bedtime, kids. Hallo! Stop that row!"

Levison & Co. released Grundy. He lay gasping on the floor. It was some minutes before Grundy recovered sufficiently to limp away to the Shell dormitory. He did not give Cardew another look. Even the truculent Grundy had had enough—for that evening, at least.

Cardew grinned at his two friends as they went up to the Fourth-Form dormitory.

"Thanks!" he drawled.

"We're standing by you," said Levison. "You know that."

Cardew hesitated a moment.

"It's jolly good of you!" he said. "Look here, I'm sorry I answered as I did the other day when you offered to come round. It was only my rotten temper. It's jolly decent of you to stand by me after that. And—and if you like, to-morrow I'll explain to you about Wodehouse."

"Done!" said Clive.

And they went into the dormitory.

CHAPTER 6.
A Strange Story.

TOM MERRY was coming down the Form-room passage, after lessons the next day, when Levison of the Fourth stopped him.

"Busy?" asked Levison.

"Not specially. We're going down to cricket practice," said Tom. "Aren't you coming?"

"Not just now. If you've got a little time to spare I'd like you to come to my study."

"Oh!" said Tom, pausing.

He did not quite know what to say. He was on very friendly terms with Levison, now that Levison was running straight. But Cardew was in Levison's study, and Tom Merry did not want to see Cardew. It really looked as if Levison was wanting in his usual tact.

Levison understood the unspoken thought, and coloured a little.

"I want you specially," he said. "You spoke to Cardew, after it came out about his fishing Gay out of the river. You told him if he could explain about that queer business at Wodehouse it would set him right here."

"Right enough," said Tom. "But he couldn't, or wouldn't."

"He's going to explain to us—Clive and me. I've asked him to let you be present. Clive and I think he is square, and we want you to think so too."

Tom Merry whistled.

"If he wants me to hear what he's got to say, of course I'll come!" he said. "But I don't see why he couldn't explain before, if he can explain at all."

"He's got his reasons. He doesn't expect to be believed, for one thing."

"Oh!" said Tom.

"And he can't mention names, as he's bound by a promise."

"Oh!"

Levison looked a trifle discouraged.

"You mean that you're already thinking that he's made up a spoof yarn?" he asked.

"Well, I don't know," said Tom honestly. "Cardew's a queer customer. He's done a jolly plucky thing—he's done plucky things before. But he's a good bit of a blackguard as well. You know it as well as I do. I know he took a flogging once rather than sneak about Redfern. But I know he's played dirty tricks worse than sneaking. I don't understand him. To be quite plain, I shouldn't have thought he was the kind of chap to be specially set on keeping a promise, if it cost him very much."

"That's where you do him injustice," said Levison earnestly. "You've often said I'm a keen chap——"

"You are," agreed Tom. "Keener than I am, by a long shot."

"Well, I believe in him, with all my keenness. My minor does, too—young Frank. So does Clive. Can't you give him a chance?"

"But why can't he explain to everybody, if he's got an explanation? Why me specially?"

"I've asked him to agree to your being present. He wouldn't agree at first. He thought it was like trying to squeeze out of Coventry, and he's thinking of his pride."

"Oh, blow his pride!" said Tom. "I'll come, if you like."

"Come on, then."

The captain of the Shell followed Levison to No. 9 Study. He was considerably puzzled. There were many things about Cardew that puzzled him.

Tom was a straightforward fellow himself. Anything tortuous was quite out of his line. He could not understand a fellow being a hero one minute and a rank outsider the next. In his frank, direct way he failed to make allowances for Cardew's curious and complex nature, and for the effects of a bad training upon a nature originally good and high-spirited.

But a fellow who had done disgraceful things and lied about them was not a fellow Tom Merry could stand.

Clive was in the study with Cardew. The latter rose as Tom Merry came in, and gave him a ceremonious bow, which made Tom colour with vexation. He was already sorry he had come.

But Levison pushed him into the armchair, and Tom sat down.

"Go ahead, Cardew!" said Clive.

Cardew laughed, not quite pleasantly.

"Quite a cheery little meetin'," he said. "If you'll excuse my speakin' to you, Merry, as a chap in Coventry, I beg to apologise for borin' you. It was Levison's idea to drag you here, when you'd rather be playin' cricket, an' I let Levison have his way, because it's too much trouble to argue."

"Well, I'm here," said Tom. "I'm not specially curious, but if you want me to hear what you've got to say, my ears are open."

"My dear man, I don't care a twopenny interjection whether you hear or not, or whether you believe me or not when you've heard. In fact, I'll bet you two to one in quids that you think I'm spinnin' you a fairy tale."

"You're not at the Green Man now," said Tom drily. "Never mind about betting. Get on with the washing."

"Yes, get on, Cardew," said Levison anxiously.

He was afraid that this talk might end in anything but a friendly understanding.

"Oh, all serene!" said Cardew. "Mind, I'm not askin' you to believe me. This is how the matter stands. I was at Wodehouse School before I came here, and in rather a sportin' set. That chap Lacy, who's at the Grammar School now, is a fair specimen of the

crowd. We were gay dogs, somethin' like Crooke an' Racke an' Cutts of the Fifth, but a bit more classy. We rather prided ourselves on bein' the salt of the earth, somethin' like the St. Jim's fellows do, but on rather different grounds."

"Quite different grounds!" said Tom, with just a touch of snap.

"Oh, quite! Well, in my set at Wodehouse there were most of the fellows who were well heeled—I mean, who had plenty of tin. The great chief was Horseley, the captain. He had merry parties in his study, sometimes, and used to go to the races on the quiet, too. Very improvin' company for a junior in the Fourth—what?"

"Very!" said Tom drily.

"But, like a young ass, I was jolly pleased to be on pally terms with the head of the Sixth. He was a fellow just of my tastes, too—smokin', racin', bridge-playin', an' so on. But I'm shockin' you, my dear fellow."

"Get on!" said Tom Merry curtly.

"Well, there was a fellow in our set—I won't mention his name—who was more goey than the others. Good-natured chap, too, but a regular wrong 'un. I used to help him out of bounds of a night sometimes. He was a senior, an' ought to have known better, but he didn't. He had plenty of money from his people, but he lost it at cards and on gee-gees, and was sometimes so hard up he used to sell his books to the fags." Cardew laughed. "There are ups and downs in a merry sportsman's life, you both. He went right to the bad at last."

The three juniors listened with keen interest now.

There was a mocking, sneering manner about Cardew which made Tom Merry doubtful whether he was telling the truth, or preparing a "spoof yarn." But, at all events, the captain of the Shell was interested.

"This chap—never mind his name—got into pretty deep trouble with a bookie," resumed Cardew. "He tried to get out of it by plungin'—the old game, you know, winnin' back your losses an' a little more besides. Instead of winnin' back his losses, he doubled or trebled them. You know how it goes, Levison—you've been there."

"I've been there," said Levison, unmoved.

"I'd noticed that the chap seemed a bit off his feed, but, naturally, he never confided his concerns to a Fourth-Form kid. I didn't know how he stood. Some of his pals in the Sixth knew, I dare say, but they couldn't or wouldn't help him out. As I found afterwards, he was in the cart to an extent that was too deep for any of them to help. He had come a regular mucker. One night I came down from the dorm to get out—I was addicted to such things in my unregenerate youth—an' I found that chap sneakin' away from old Dr. Tracy's study. He was as white as a sheet, and looked a thief all over. I could see what he'd been up to at once. He nearly fainted when he saw me, and dragged me off to his quarters, an' begged me, with tears in his eyes, almost on his bended knees, to keep it dark."

Cardew's lip curled.

"He was in debt to the tune of fifty quid, and he had helped himself. It was the only way to avoid a show-up, he said. The Head kept money in his desk, and this fellow had found a way of opening it. He'd thought it all out. He had pinched fifty quids in banknotes from the desk, and was goin' to hand the tin over to a set of rotters on the morrow—fellows who had been dunnin' him an' threatenin' to show him up. I talked to him like a Dutch uncle, though he was in the Sixth. I told him I couldn't keep it dark, and become a party to a theft, so he would have to put the money back where he'd taken it. Bein' a good-natured sort of ass myself, I offered to help him out with as much tin as I could lend him the next day, and to lend him my diamond pin to raise the rest on."

Cardew paused for a moment. There was silence in No. 9 Study. The three hearers were too interested to speak.

"Well, I talked him round," continued Cardew. "But he was in a state of nerves, afraid of his own shadow. He'd nearly died of fright, I think, when I came on him, and nothin' would induce him to go back to old Tracy's study. I wasn't worried with nerves—never have been. There wasn't a chance in a million of the Head comin' down, of course—why should he? I offered to take the notes back for him."

"Oh!" murmured Tom Merry.

"He agreed to that. I hadn't left him a shadow of excuse for keepin' the stolen money, you see. I promised to help him out of his debt next day, as I've said. I gave him my word of honour never to give him away, and generally soothed him, as if he'd been a scared kid. He told me exactly where he's taken the notes, handed them to me, and I took them back to the doctor's study."

"And then——" said Clive.

Cardew laughed sardonically.

"Then my luck was out! There wasn't a chance in a million of the Head comin' down, but it was the millionth chance that happened. Of all weird things, there was a Zeppelin alarm, an' just as I reached the Head's study I heard the guns begin to go, and half Wodehouse turned out of bed. The doctor came down in his dressing-gown, one or two other masters with him. I knew I shouldn't have time to get out of the study unseen if I went in, so I didn't go in. What to do I didn't know. But it was settled by a prefect spottin' me skulkin' in the passage, an' draggin' me out into the light. As I was fully dressed, even to my overcoat, everybody knew I was down to break bounds, an' I was shut up in the punishment-room for the rest of the night, after the Zepp had cleared off, to wait for a floggin in the mornin'. In the mornin', of course, the banknotes were missed from the doctor's desk. The duffer had turned the things about in the desk lookin' for them, too. Old Tracy naturally suspected me at once, as I had been down. I was searched, and fifty quids in banknotes came to light. And that was the finish for me at Wodehouse."

"And you never told about the other fellow?"

"I'd given him my word."

"But—but do you mean to say a Sixth Form chap let you be sacked, for what he'd done himself, without owning up?" exclaimed Tom.

Cardew laughed mirthlessly.

"If you knew the chap, you wouldn't wonder. He couldn't afford to be sacked for theft. If I'd given him away, he would have denied it. But I didn't give him away—I couldn't! I had to face the music, an' I faced it. I said nothin'. Owin' to my classy connections, I was allowed to leave quietly instead of bein' sacked. That's all."

Cardew stopped, and yawned.

The three juniors who had listened to his story looked at him very oddly.

"You don't believe me?" smiled Cardew. "Of course you don't! I shouldn't believe such a thumpin' yarn myself. It happens to be true, but there's no reason why you should think so."

"I believe you," said Clive simply.

"Same here," said Levison. "Every word!"

"Then you're a pair of duffers!" said Cardew coolly. "I shouldn't. Now, Merry, tell me you think it's spoof from beginnin' to end, an' shake the dust of the study from your feet!"

"I'm blessed if I know whether to believe you or not," said Tom slowly. "It's all possible enough, but—but——"

"But rather too steep?"

"Well, yes."

"I should have won that bet if you'd taken me on," said Cardew, with a laugh.

"And you left Wodehouse, with this cloud on you, for good?" asked Tom.

"Not at all. I'm waitin'."

"Waiting for what?"

"For that merry merchant at Wodehouse to come another mucker," said Cardew coolly. "He can't keep straight. Next time he's in the same fix he'll play the same game—if I know him, an' I think I do. When he gives himself away, he's good-natured enough to own up—when it won't hurt him any longer to tell the truth. Then I shall be cleared. I expect it to happen. I don't know when, and don't much care. I came here, never dreamin' that a Wodehouse chap would come bumpin' along. Lacy comin' to the Grammar School floored me. Of course, he'd turned his back on me at Wodehouse. He'd been my toady up till it happened. He believed me guilty, of course, same as the rest."

Cardew rose to his feet.

"I've spun my yarn, as I said I would," he said. "Don't repeat it outside. I don't want to be set down as a liar as well as a thief. You can get along to your cricket, Merry, an' just forget all about it."

"I sha'n't forget about it," said Tom. "I'll think over it. I can't say that I believe it all, but I'll try to."

"Thanks awfully!" said Cardew sarcastically.

Tom Merry left the study, looking very thoughtful.

Cardew glanced at his study-mates, and laughed.

"Now you've heard the yarn," he said. "You know now why I've never explained about Wodehouse. This isn't a yarn you'd advise me to tell in the Common-room, is it?"

"Well, no," said Levison slowly. "But it's good enough for us, Cardew. We believe it, every word."

"Every word," said Clive.

"Oh, good! Let's go and get some cricket."

And Cardew lounged carelessly out of the study.

CHAPTER 7.
Trimble's Problem.

"WHAT's the mattah, deah boy?"

It was extremely unusual for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the ornament of the Fourth Form, to address Baggy Trimble as "dear boy."

But the swell of St. Jim's was feeling kindly disposed.

He had come upon Trimble on the bench under the elms in the quad, and Trimble was looking very downhearted.

As Baggy Trimble's despondent moods were generally due to a shortness of cash, the kind-hearted swell of St. Jim's felt for loose change in his pockets.

Trimble gave him a dolorous look.

"Wowwyin' about the food wegulations?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Nunno."

"Hard up?"

"Not at all," said Trimble. "If I happened to be short of cash, I should merely have to drop a line to Trimble Hall."

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"But as a matter of fact, I've lent my last five bob to Talbot of the Shell, and if you've got five to spare—till Talbot squares——"

"I weally wish you would not tell such feahful woppahs, Twimble. I know vewy well that Talbot has not bowwowed anythin' of you. But if you want five shillin's for anythin' special, here you are."

Arthur Augustus was in funds, and Trimble was looking so woebegone that he really considered it was worth five shillings to restore his spirits.

Baggy's podgy fingers closed on the coins. All was grist that came to Baggy's mill. But the despondent expression did not fade from his fat face.

"Thanks!" he said. "I'll settle this up when Talbot settles—I mean, when I get another remittance from Trimble Hall."

Arthur Augustus smiled. He was quite aware that the splendid and ancestral Hall of the Trimble family existed only in Baggy's fat imagination.

"Anythin' else the mattah?" he asked.

"Yes. It's rotten! I—I really don't know what a fellow ought to do, you know!" mumbled Trimble.

"Pway confide the mattah to me, Twimble, and wely on my advice," said Arthur Augustus. "I wathah pwide myself on bein' a fellow of tact and judgement."

"You see, I'm a good-natured chap," said Trimble. "Suppose I was doing a good-natured action——"

"Yaas, deah boy?" said D'Arcy, manfully concealing his surprise.

"Suppose I was taking a fellow a letter?" said Baggy, in an argumentative way. "Suppose he misunderstood me, and slung me out of his study, like an ungrateful beast?"

"Bai Jove! That would be wathah hard lines! I should wecommend you to leave a fellow's lettahs alone, upon the whole, Twimble."

"Suppose I had the letter in my pocket, you know? Suppose it came open?"

"How could a lettah come open in your pocket?"

"Well, I might have been turning it over in my hands," said Trimble, with what he considered great caution. "I don't say I was. I might have been."

"And it came open by accident?"

"Well, suppose it did?"

"My dear chap, I'm just the fellow to advise you. You had bettah take it to the chap concerned, and explain that it came open by accident. Unless he is a vewy suspicious chap, he will not suspect that you have wead it."

"Oh, won't he?" said Twimble.

"But if he does, Twimble, you can assuah him that you have done nothin' of the kind, of course. That is, of course, if you have not weally wead it," added Arthur Augustus, struck by an afterthought.

Trimble grunted.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's brow became stern.

"Do you mean to say, Twimble, that you have opened anothah fellow's lettah and wead it? You howwid little beast!"

"Suppose it was a fellow under suspicion of being a thief?" said Trimble defensively.

"Do you mean Cardew?"

"I don't mean anybody in particular, of course," said Trimble hastily. "I—I'm only putting a case. Detectives open people's letters, you know, when they suspect them—and that's right, isn't it?"

"A w'ong thing can nevah be wight, Twimble, whoevah does it, and for whatevah weason. Besides, you are not a detective."

Trimble gave another grunt. He had not found Arthur Augustus very comforting so far.

"Well, suppose it happened like that?" he said. "Suppose a chap had a letter in his pocket, and was willing to pass it on to the chap it was addressed to—but suppose that chap was a quick-tempered beast, who might land out with his boot? Suppose a chap didn't want to be kicked—what? Suppose——"

"If you have another fellow's lettah in your pocket, Twimble, you are bound to give it to him at once, and if he kicks you it serves you wight!"

"That's all very well for you! You ain't going to get the kicking!" said Baggy. "I am, and that makes all the difference."

"You must take the chap his lettah at once, Twimble!"

"Suppose he complained to the Housemaster? I might get a flogging. Railton wouldn't understand."

"I wathah think Wailton would undahstand," said D'Arcy drily; "and I wegard it as vewy pwob that you will get a floggin', you howwid little Pwussian! You have acted like a disgustin' Hun!"

"Oh, rot! Suppose——"

"Nevah mind supposin' anythin', Twimble. You must take that lettah to its ownah at once!" said D'Arcy sternly.

"Look here, you know——"

"Come with me, Twimble, and I will see that you do it!"

"I—I was only asking your advice, you know," said Trimble, in alarm. "The—the fact is, I—I haven't a letter. Nothing of the kind! I never took it from the rack, and—and it never came open. It wasn't a letter from Wodehouse—nothing of the sort! I was only putting a case, you know."

Arthur Augustus looked at the fat Fourth-Former with feelings almost too deep for words.

When it came to downright lying, Baggy Trimble could out-Kaiser the Kaiser at his very best.

Cardew's letter was almost burning a hole in Baggy's pocket by this time. He dared not destroy it, and he dared not hand it to Cardew, and what to do with it was a problem Baggy's obtuse brain could not solve.

With that letter in his pocket, the unhappy spy of the School House felt like Eugene Aram, vainly trying to dispose of the body of the murdered man.

"I'll tell you what, D'Arcy," murmured Trimble. "Suppose you go to Cardew, and tell him you opened the letter?"

"What?" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"You can lick him, you know," urged Trimble. "I'll hold your jacket, if you like."

"You howwid young rascal!"

"Oh, I say——"

"I insist upon your takin' Cardew's lettah to him immediately, Twimble!"

"I—I haven't got it!" howled Trimble. "I—I was only—only putting a case, you know. Yarooh!"

Trimble jumped up from the bench as Arthur Augustus advanced upon him, and bolted round the tree.

"Come back!" shouted D'Arcy wrathfully.

But Baggy Trimble did not come back. He was fleeing for the School House as fast as his podgy legs would carry him.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "Of all the howwid, little, unscwupulous Pwussian wottahs, I weally think Twimble takes the cake. I am bound to see that Cardew has his lettah now; and—and I don't want to speak to the chap, but I can't let Twimble keep his lettah. Now, how am I goin' to tell Cardew Twimble has a lettah of his without speakin' to him?"

Arthur Augustus had a problem to solve now, as well as Baggy Trimble.

CHAPTER 8.
A One-Sided Conversation.

TOM MERRY & CO. were on the cricket-field, and Cardew of the Fourth was looking on at the practice, when Arthur Augustus came along.

Cardew did not join in the cricket. No one would have said him nay, perhaps, but he was not wanted on Little Side. He stood, with his hands in his pockets, looking on placidly, when the swell of St. Jim's approached.

D'Arcy's manner showed that he intended to speak to the barred junior, and Cardew could not fail to observe it; but he kept his eyes fixed on the game. If Arthur Augustus meant to break the ice, his task was not be made easy for him.

Arthur Augustus coughed awkwardly. It was an awkward position enough. He did not want to speak to Cardew. But now that he knew that the Peeping Tom of St. Jim's had a letter belonging to Cardew in his pocket, how could he leave the junior in ignorance of the fact?

The letter might be important—it might even contain money, it might contain serious news. Trimble had refused to give it up or to take it to the owner, and D'Arcy felt bound to chip in. But it certainly was awkward.

He coughed again, more emphatically than before. Cardew did not turn his head. He appeared to be intensely interested in Levison bowling and Talbot batting.

"Ahem! H'm! Ahem!"

Still no sign from Cardew! Arthur Augustus took the plunge at last.

"Pway excuse me, Cardew! It is necessawy for me to speak to you," he said stiffly.

Cardew did not seem to hear. D'Arcy's colour deepened.

"Cardew!"

"Well bowled, Levison!" called out Cardew, still deaf to the voice of the charmer.

"I am speakin' to you, Cardew!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, his temper beginning to rise

Cardew was as a stone image.

"It is not by my own wish that I come heah to speak to you, Cardew. I can assuah you that I have no desiah to do so."

No sign from Cardew.

"I have a vewy great mind, Cardew, to wetiah, without speakin' to you at all!"

Silence.

"What are you pwetendin' to be deaf for, you sillay ass?" shouted Arthur Augustus, in exasperation. "You know perfectly well that I am addwessin' you, Cardew." And he tapped Cardew on the arm.

Cardew took out his handkerchief, and carefully flicked his sleeve where Arthur Augustus's elegant fingers had touched him, as if to flick away a stain. Then he stepped farther away.

Arthur Augustus viewed this proceeding, trembling with wrath.

"Bai Jove!" Never had the noble Gussy been so near bursting into a terrific rage, like an ordinary mortal. "Bai Jove! If you want a feahful thwashin', you insultin' cad, you have only got to say so!"

"What on earth are you jawing to that chap for, D'Arcy?" asked Dick Julian, who had been an amazed witness of the peculiar scene. "Why can't you let him alone? He's in Coventry."

"I have no desiah to speak to him, Julian! I wegard him as uttahly unfit to speak to! I look upon him as a

cwawlin' worm! But I am bound to tell him about his lettah."

Cardew's eyes were glimmering, but he did not smile.

"Well, you needn't bother about Cardew's letters!" said Julian, in astonishment.

"You misappwehend me, Julian. A wotten fellow has collahed a lettah belongin' to Cardew, and is keepin' it. I feel bound to appwise Cardew of the fact."

"Oh! I see." Julian grinned.

"Cardew!"

No answer.

"Although you are tweatin' me with uttah diswespect, Cardew, I feel bound to appwise you of the facts. A certain fellow has collahed a lettah belongin' to you. As the wottah mentioned the mattah to me in askin' my advice, I cannot tell you who it is, unless you pwomise to ovahlook the mattah, if he gives you the lettah. I twust you compwehend?"

Cardew moved a little nearer the nets. He might have been as deaf as an adder, for all the sign he gave of hearing Arthur Augustus' remarks.

"Will you weply to me, Cardew?" asked D'Arcy, his voice trembling with wath.

"Well bowled, Levison!"

"You uttah wottah——"

Arthur Augustus pushed back his spotless cuffs. Dick Julian caught him by the elbow and jerked him back.

"Don't Gussy! You can't fight a fellow in Coventry!"

"I have been tweated with diswespect, Julian. I have no alternative but to give that uttah cad a feahful thwashin'!"

"Not worth it, Gussy!" urged Julian. "Come and do some batting, instead!"

Arthur Augustus hesitated a few moments, and then he nodded, and moved away with Julian. The peacemaker took him away to the nets, and the fearful thrashing was not administered.

Cardew smiled, and sauntered away from the pavilion.

Although he had not taken the trouble to reply to Arthur Augustus, he had received the information D'Arcy had come to impart, and he was curious to know about the letter that had come for him, but had not reached him.

The smile was still on his face as he went into the School House.

When Tom Merry & Co. came in to tea, they found a notice pinned on the board, which made them open their eyes a little. They gazed at it in wrath. It was in Cardew's elegant caligraphy, and it ran:

"The honourable person who has stolen a letter addressed to R. R. Cardew, is requested to bring it to No. 9 Study. Otherwise a complaint will be laid before the Housemaster."

"What the merry thunder does that mean?" exclaimed Jack Blake. "Some more of Cardew's rotten cheek, I suppose."

Tom Merry knitted his brows darkly.

He understood the taunt that was pinned up there on the notice-board. The St. Jim's fellows barred Cardew because he had been sacked from his last school on the charge of stealing. Now the barred junior had thrown this taunt in the faces of the rest.

"The rotter!" growled Grundy of the Shell. "All spoof, of course. He would like to make out that a St. Jim's chap was a thief—on a level with himself. You fellows remember how he planted a banknote on me. A rotten trick!"

And Grundy jerked down the notice, and tore it into a dozen pieces.

"I'm going to see Cardew," he added.

Levison and Clive were still on the cricket-ground. Nobody else felt inclined to interfere when George Alfred Grundy started for Study No. 9. Cardew's taunt had aroused deep anger, and the general opinion was that Cardew wanted a licking—and there was no reason why Grundy of the Shell shouldn't be the person to give him one.

CHAPTER 9.
Out at Last!

"HAND it over!"

Cardew made that demand in a matter-of-fact tone, as Grundy of the Shell hurled open his study door and strode into No. 9.

Grundy stopped, nonplussed for a moment. George Alfred's mighty brain did not work quickly.

"Eh? Hand what over?" he ejaculated.

"My letter!"

"What letter?"

"Haven't you seen the notice on the board?" asked Cardew, smiling. "I thought you'd come about that."

"I have come about that!" spluttered Grundy.

"Quite so. Well, hand over the letter."

"You silly chump, I haven't any letter——"

"Oh! You're not the fellow who stole it?"

"S-s-s-stole it!" stuttered Grundy.

"Oh! You haven't come here to restore the letter?" asked Cardew calmly. "I don't see what you have come for, then. Would you mind gettin' out? There's the door!"

Grundy breathed hard.

He knew very well that Cardew did not suppose for a moment that he had taken the letter, and had come to deliver it up. The question was only intended to exasperate him. Not that Grundy needed any exasperating just then.

"I'm not going to talk to you!" roared Grundy.

"Thanks, awfully. I was afraid you were!"

"I've come here to lick you!"

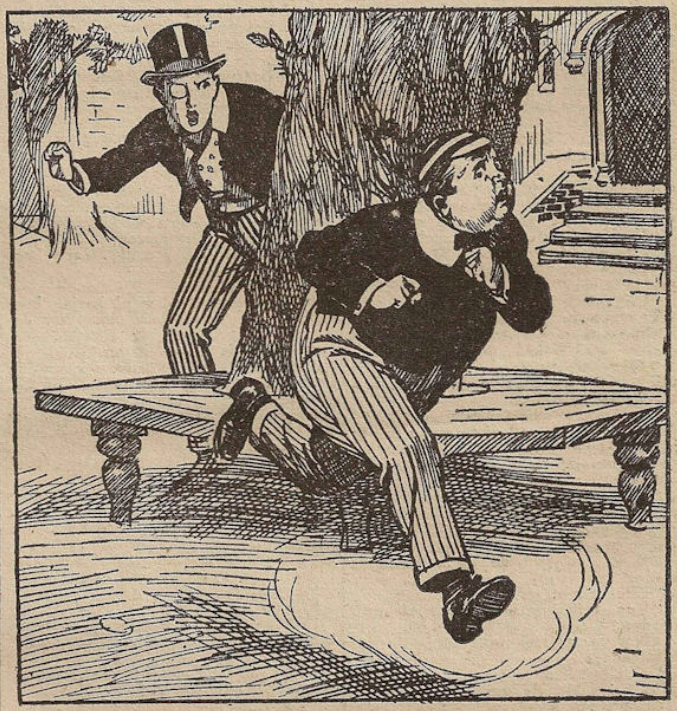
"Really?"

"You haven't got out of St. Jim's yet."

"May I congratulate you upon your perspicacity?" asked Cardew politely. "As I am still here, it seems pretty clear that I have not got out. Still, I dare say it is very keen of you to work that out for yourself. Did you do it in your head?"

"I—I—I——"

Words failed Grundy. After all, it was not a time for words, but for actions.



Running away from good advice.
(See Chapter 7.)

In words Cardew certainly had the advantage. But in the fistical line the position was likely to be reversed.

Without wasting any more words on the dandy of the Fourth, Grundy rushed upon him.

Cardew's nonchalance vanished in a flash. He stood up to the rush of the burly Shell fellow with hard-set face, ready hands, and glinting eyes.

He had to give ground a little under Grundy's weight, but his knuckles came home on George Alfred's face with terrific force.

"Yooop!" gasped Grundy.

"Oh, come on," smiled Cardew, "I'm your man, you clumsy fathead!"

"I—I—I'll——"

Grundy pressed on, lashing out with his fists. Cardew was a cleverer boxer than Grundy, and his cleverness came in useful now. But weight and strength were bound to tell.

Fighting hard, the Fourth-Former was

driven round the study, keeping his feet, however, and giving very nearly as much punishment as he received.

But Grundy did not care for punishment. He was as hard as nails.

He pushed Cardew harder and harder.

The din in the study was great, as the boots trampled, and chairs and other furniture were knocked right and left.

A crowd of fellows began to gather round the open doorway, looking on.

Cardew had no friends there, but there was a certain admiration for the way the slim Fourth-Former was standing up to his bulky antagonist.

Cardew had once stood up to Cutts of the Fifth. And though he had little chance, in the long run, against a tremendous fellow like Grundy, he was quite ready to fight to a finish. So long as strength lasted, courage would not fail.

But before the unequal combat could be decided, there came a howl of warning from the passage.

"Cave! Housemaster!"

Neither of the combatants heeded. They had clinched now, and were pommelling away with terrific energy. But the crowd in the passage scattered as Mr. Railton strode on the scene.

The uproar in the Fourth Form quarters had been heard; and the School House master had come on the scene, thoughtfully bringing a cane with him. His brow was thunderous as he strode into the study.

"Cease this instantly! Separate, do you hear me?"

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Grundy.

The two juniors let go, and stepped back, panting. Cardew recovered his coolness very quickly, however.

"How dare you fight in the study in this way?" Mr. Railton asked sternly.

"Ugh!" gasped Grundy.

"Sorry, sir," said Cardew politely.

"Grundy, I have had to speak to you before about assaulting boys younger than yourself. Is this another case of bullying?"

"Bullying, sir? Certainly not!" exclaimed Grundy indignantly. "I hope I'm not going to be accused of bullying. I despise a bully!"

"What are you doing in Cardew's study?"

"Licking him, sir."

"You came here to quarrel with Cardew?"

"Not to quarrel with him, sir; to lick him!"

"Kindly tell me the cause of this dispute," said Mr. Railton.

Grundy was silent.

"You may answer me, Cardew."

Cardew smiled.

"I am really rather at a loss, sir," he said calmly. "Grundy appears to have some personal objection to me. I have an equally strong objection to Grundy. This somewhat disagreeable scene is the result. I regret very much that you have been disturbed, sir."

"I did not ask for impertinence, Cardew! However, as I find you in Cardew's study, Grundy, I shall conclude that you are the aggressor."

"Well, I like that!" said Grundy. "I—I mean, it's quite a mistake to suppose that I'm an aggressive chap, sir. There never was such a peaceful chap as I am. I've fought fellows, lots of times, because they were quarrelsome. Cardew knows why I've decided to lick him every day!"

"To what, Grundy?"

"Lick him every day, sir. I don't specially want the job—I offered Tom Merry to leave it to him—and Blake, too. They wouldn't. It was left to me because I've got a stronger sense of duty than other chaps, I suppose."

"For what reason, Grundy, have you formed this extraordinary project of fighting every day with Cardew?" exclaimed the astounded Housemaster.

"He knows, sir."

"I am not asking him, but you, Grundy. Answer me at once!"

"I can't very well do that, sir."

"What?" thundered Mr. Railton.

"You see, sir, the fellows would call it sneaking, though I shouldn't say myself that it was anything of the sort," explained Grundy. "Cardew knows he ought to get out of the school. If he won't go, he must expect to have things made a bit unpleasant."

"Are you out of your senses, Grundy? Why should Cardew leave the school?"

"We don't want his sort here," said Grundy sturdily. "There's the good name of the school to be considered. A fellow who was sacked from his last school isn't good enough for St. Jim's!"

Mr. Railton gave Grundy a searching look. Then, very quietly, he turned to Cardew.

"Is it true, Cardew, that you were expelled from some other school before you came here?"

"No, sir!"

"What has put such a belief into your mind, Grundy?"

"It's true, sir."

"Cardew denies it," said Mr. Railton.

"He would!" said Grundy, contemptuously. "A fellow who would steal would tell lies, I suppose."

"What word did you use?" exclaimed the Housemaster.

"Steal, sir."

"You accuse Cardew of having been expelled from a former school for dishonesty!" exclaimed Mr Railton.

"Everybody knows it, sir."

"Everybody does not know it, Grundy! I do not know it, and Dr. Holmes does not know it. I have no faith whatever in your statement. Since you have made it, however, I shall examine into the matter. Cardew, you repeat your denial that you have been expelled from another school?"

"Oh, yes, sir." Cardew drew a deep breath. "But don't mistake me. I was not expelled from Wodehouse; but I had to go."

"Do you mean that you were ordered to leave?"

"Yes, sir."

"For what reason?"

"On suspicion of having done something that another fellow had done, sir," said Cardew quietly.

"And what was the charge," exclaimed Mr. Railton sternly.

"Theft, sir!"

CHAPTER 10.
Sentenced!

THERE was a grim silence in Study No. 9. It lasted a full minute. Cardew was still cool as ice, but he was a trifle pale now. This had been bound to happen sooner or later. But now that the Housemaster knew it was certain that things could not go on as before. Cardew had been able to defy the sentence of the school. He would not be able to defy the Housemaster and the Head.

He knew it, and he knew that he was very near the end of his tether. But his eyes met fearlessly those of the Housemaster.

The end was near; but Cardew was game to the last!

"This is a very serious matter," said Mr. Railton, breaking the silence. "This fact, which you now mention for the first time, could not have been known to Dr. Holmes when you were admitted here, Cardew."

"It was not, sir."

"You confess, then, that you deceived the Head?"

"Not at all, sir. I was not bound to tell him. If I had been guilty it would have been a different matter, of course. I was innocent, and my grandfather believed in me." Cardew's voice was quite steady. "Under those circumstances it was not necessary to close every other school against me by stating that I was the victim of a false accusation."

"If the accusation was false, Cardew, why did you not prove it to be false in your old school?"

"I could not prove it."

"You mean that you were found guilty on evidence that was satisfactory to the Headmaster of your school?"

"Yes, sir."

"After that, Cardew, you can scarcely expect that anyone will be found to place faith in your innocence," said Mr. Railton drily.

"There are two fellows here who believe in me, sir," said Cardew coolly. "Clive and Levison, my study-mates, know I'm quite straight."

"The opinion of two juniors, who cannot know the facts, does not alter the matter, Cardew. However, you will be given an opportunity to make out what case you can. I shall take you to the Head, and you will explain the matter to him, so far as you are able."

Cardew's lips set firmly.

"I cannot do that, sir," he said.

"And why not?" asked the Housemaster sternly. "If, as you say, a mistake has been made, Dr. Holmes will communicate with the Headmaster of your former school, and the matter may be set right."

"The matter can only be set right by the real fellow being found out, sir; and I can't give him away."

"For what reason."

"Because I gave him my word I would not. If I take any step in the matter at all it's as good as giving him away. If I explain it to the Head as I've explained it to my study-mates, he will write to Dr. Tracy, I suppose—and then the Head of Wodehouse will know where to look for the real chap. If I were going to betray the fellow, I'd do it openly—not in an underhand way. I'm not goin' to. I gave him my word."

"You must be aware, Cardew, that all that you are saying sounds to me like falsehood of the flimsiest description?"

"I'm quite aware of it, sir, and I don't expect you to believe a word of it," said Cardew, unmoved. "As I'm not goin' to break my promise, and as it's useless to spin a yarn that can't be believed, I'm goin' to say nothin'. I know the game's up here—and I'm ready to face it."

"You will be taken at once to Dr. Holmes," said Mr. Railton. "You can tell him as much or little as you think fit; but, unless you satisfy him, you will certainly leave this school to-morrow." Mr. Railton turned to Grundy of the Shell. "I understand your motives now, Grundy. But you have no shadow of right to take the law into your own hands as you have done. You will take five hundred lines, and you will remain in the Form-room next half-holiday to write them out."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Grundy.

"Follow me, Cardew!"

The Housemaster left the study, and Cardew followed him. Clive and Levison met them in the passage, fresh in from cricket. Their faces fell.

"What's up?" whispered Clive, as, smiling sardonically, Cardew passed him.

"The game is," said Cardew. And he walked on.

The two juniors stood in dismay, as the Housemaster disappeared down the staircase with Cardew.

"That means that Railton knows!" said Clive.

Levison nodded.

"He was bound to know sooner or later. It's been the talk of the House long enough, and I wonder it hasn't

come out before," he said. "But who told him? Some meddling fool?"

"Grundy!" said Clive, as the Shell fellow came out of No. 9. The South African junior's eyes gleamed, and his hand closed on the cane-handle of his bat. "You've given Cardew away, you rotter!"

"None of your cheek," said Grundy loftily. "It's come out at last—quite by accident. I certainly never meant to tell Railton a word; but he got it all out somehow."

"You blundering fool!" exclaimed Clive fiercely. "Why couldn't you mind your own business?"

"If you want a thick ear, Clive—yaroooh!" roared Grundy.

Cardew's friends did not stand on ceremony with Grundy. Whether he had intended it or not, he had betrayed Cardew's miserable secret to the school authorities. Cardew had to pay the reckoning; and they considered that Grundy had better pay a reckoning, too. And two cricket bats commenced to play operations on the burly Shell fellow, much to Grundy's amazement and indignation.

"You cheeky young rotters," he roared. "Gerroff! Yaroop! I'll pulverise you—yarooh! Oh, crumbs!"

Grundy fairly fled down the passage with two bats smiting him behind. He disappeared from the scene with great celerity.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as the two pursuers nearly ran into him on the landing. "You chaps look fearfully excited. Anythin' goin' on?"

"Cardew's booked!" said Levison savagely. "All through that fool! He's let it out to Railton."

"Bai Jove." Arthur Augustus whistled softly. "I do not appwove of Grundy lettin' it out, deah boys, but I cannot say I'm sowwy."

"What!"

"Aftah all, the soonah the fellow gets out of St. Jim's the bettah. Don't you think so?"

Clive and Levison did not tell Arthur Augustus what they thought. They collared him and bumped him on the floor, and left him there as they went downstairs. Arthur Augustus gasped, and groped for his eyeglass in a great state of indignant astonishment.

The two Fourth-Formers waited at the end of the lower passage for Cardew. They knew that he was with the Head now.

They knew, too, what it must mean.

Even if Cardew told the story he had told in Study No. 9, what chance was there of the Head believing it? How could he—without any evidence—believe that the Headmaster of Wodehouse had made a terrible mistake and expelled a fellow, with a black stain on his name, without just cause? There was nothing to hope, and they knew it. It was Ralph Reckness Cardew's last day at St. Jim's.

Their hearts were heavy at the thought. A strong friendship had grown up among the three study-mates of No. 9, different as they were. Cardew's going would be a real loss to his two chums—they knew they would miss him, and that he would miss them. And in their hearts they believed that he was innocent.

But the decision did not rest with them. As they waited, with dismal faces, in the passage, Cardew was receiving his sentence in Dr. Holmes' study.

The door opened and Cardew appeared.

He came down the passage with his head erect and his face unchanged. So cool and confident did he look that his chums hoped for a moment that all had gone well.

Levison caught him by the arm as he came up.

"What does the Head say?"

Cardew laughed—a hard, sardonic laugh.

"What could he say?" he replied. "He knows I was turned out of Wodehouse now, and I had nothin' to say to him."

"Are you sacked?" demanded Clive.

"Not exactly. It isn't a case for sackin'. I've done nothin' here—so far as the old sport knows, at all events." Cardew grinned. "I've got to leave St. Jim's, that's all. I shall look my last on the merry crowd to-morrow mornin'—just when I was gettin' so popular, too!"

"Don't joke about it," said Clive, in a low voice. "It's rotten hard lines. Why didn't you tell the Head what you've told us?"

"What's the good? Besides, I couldn't. I told you because you don't know the Wodehouse chaps. But if the Head pitched all that to old Dr. Tracy it would start him on the right track at once. It would be a mean, underhand way of givin' away the silly fool I gave my promise to, while pretendin' that I was keepin' my word." Cardew shrugged his shoulders. "I thought I was goin' to live it down in time, but it's followed me here. It will follow me everywhere, I suppose. An' when it comes out I shall have to go on my travels again. What a life! Let's go an' have tea."

And Cardew whistled a bright tune as he went to No. 9 with his two gloomy, disconsolate chums.

CHAPTER 11.
Trimble's Trouble.

ALL St. Jim's knew before long the result of Cardew's interview with the Head.

No one was surprised to hear the news.

Neither was anyone sorry. As Monty Lowther remarked, there would be quite a few dry eyes when Lord Reckness' grandson made his final bow.

Tom Merry, perhaps, was a little troubled. He had not forgotten Cardew's yarn.

Whether to believe the story or not Tom could not make up his mind.

It might be spoof from beginning to end. But if it was the truth, certainly things had gone very hard with Cardew. And with all Cardew's many faults, it was not impossible that he had come a mucker through an act of reckless generosity.

Tom wished angrily that Grundy had kept his mouth closed.

As for the Head, he had practically no choice in the matter. Probably he resented the fact that Lord Reckness had sent his grandson to St. Jim's without a word as to what had happened at Wodehouse.

Doubtless the old nobleman believed implicitly in the schoolboy's innocence. But the Head had a right to know the facts.

At all events, it was impossible for Cardew to remain at St. Jim's now that Dr. Holmes did know. It was not as if Cardew had been unlucky in his early days, not as if he had had a bad training in vicious surroundings, and had been led into evil by precept and example. He had been fortunate from his birth. He had always had all that money and social station could procure for him. If in spite of that he had stolen, it was evidently due to a dishonest kink in his character, and he was no fit associate for decent boys.

There would be no expulsion—no open disgrace. Cardew would withdraw quietly.

That evening was to be his last under the ancient roof of St. Jim's. Many fellows were curious to see how Cardew would take it, now that the chopper had finally come down.

He had braved the whole school up till now. He had repaid scorn with indifference, contempt with cool insolence. But now he had to go, and he knew that few would be sorry to see him go. How would he take it?

He took it with his usual coolness. By tacit consent the sentence of Coventry was dropped, now that Cardew was to be sacked. Some good-natured fellows took the trouble to speak to him. They had cause to repent of their good-nature, however, for Cardew gave them simply a cool stare in answer to their well-meant remarks, and turned his back upon them. He came very near having his head punched once or twice.

Strange to relate, it was Baggy Trimble who showed the only signs of distress, outside No. 9 Study itself.

Why Trimble should care whether Cardew went or not was a mystery. Certainly he had never been friendly with Cardew. But Trimble was undoubtedly troubled. When he heard the news from the talk of a group of fellows in the quadrangle his fat jaw fairly dropped.

"Cardew sacked!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, ass!" said Blake, with a start at Trimble's startled face. "What the merry dickens does it matter to you? What are you looking like a boiled Hun about?"

"Oh, crumbs!" said Trimble.

All the juniors looked at Trimble, his concern was so utterly surprising. His fat face was full of dismay.

"Bai Jove! I nevah knew you cared twopence about Cardew, Twimble," said Arthur Augustus.

"But—but what's he sacked for?" stammered Trimble. "Of course, if he's been found out going to the Green Man, and sacked for that, it's nothing to do with me."

"I don't see that it's anything to do with you, in any case," grunted Herries. "But it isn't for that. The Head knows about his being turned out of Wodehouse for stealing, now. Grundy let it out to Railton."

"Oh, crikey!" said Trimble. "It's a shame!"

"What do you mean, fathead?"

"Weally, Twimble, you are speakin' in widdles. It is quite wight and pwopah for Cardew to leave St. Jim's, undah the circs."

"We don't want a thief here," said Digby. "You've said so a dozen times yourself, you fat duffer!"

"Yes; but—but I didn't know, then."

"You didn't know what?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Trimble hastily.

"If you're going off your rocker, Trimble, you'd better apply for a place in Colney Hatch," said Blake. "It looks like it to me."

"I—I don't believe Cardew was a thief at Wodehouse," stammered Trimble.

"What's made you change your opinion, fathead?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"Well, of all the howling idiots!" ejaculated Blake.

Trimble walked away, and Study No. 6 looked after him in amazement, almost with alarm. Really, it seemed as if the glutton of the Fourth was taking leave of what wits he had.

Baggy Trimble's face was dolorous as he went into the School House. If Cardew had been own brother to him he could not have looked more worried.

"It's rotten!" Trimble muttered. "Of course, it serves him right. He's a beast, and he kicked me. But—but suppose it comes out after he's gone! Oh, dear!

D'Arcy knows I had the letter. I shall be flogged! Yow-ow! What on earth had I better do? Oh, dear!"

"Hallo! What are you mumbling about, duffer?" asked Tom Merry, meeting him in the Hall. "What's the matter with you? Going to a funeral?"

"I—I say, suppose Cardew was innocent, after all?" said Trimble uneasily. "Suppose a fellow knew he was?"

"Eh?"

"Suppose a chap had a letter, f'rinstance? I don't say a chap had," added Trimble, with hurried caution. "I'm putting a case. Suppose a chap had a letter from a chap to a—in fact, to a chap, you know?"

"My hat! What a lot of chaps!" said Tom.

"Begin again at Chap. I.," suggested Monty Lowther. "Now sing it over again to us."

"You fellows don't understand," said Trimble gloomily. "I shall get into a fearful row when it all comes out!"

"When what comes out?" demanded Tom.

"Oh, nothing!"

"When nothing comes out?" asked the captain of the Shell, staring at Trimble. "What the merry dickens are you driving at?"

"I—I was only putting a case. Of course, he's a beast, and he might as well clear off; but—but it might come out afterwards, and then——. Oh, dear!"

"If you're not dotty, suppose you explain what you're talking about?" suggested Tom Merry. "What is it?"

"Oh, nothing!"

And Baggy Trimble drifted on before he could be questioned again. He ambled disconsolately upstairs, and paused in the Fourth-Form passage to reflect. Then he made his way to Study No. 9, with an expression upon his fat face that might have befitted a fellow going to execution.

CHAPTER 12.
Game to the Last!

IT was not a merry tea-party in Study No. 9.

Levison and Clive were gloomy and almost silent.

Cardew seemed to be in good spirits, however. Whatever was to be the outcast's fate, he was ready to meet it with a shrug of the shoulders and a smile upon his face.

"You chaps won't lose sight of me if you don't choose," he said, with some trace of feeling in his tone. "St. Jim's isn't the world, you know."

"It's our world," said Clive.

"Well, yes—but there are vacations, you know. No reason why you shouldn't come to my place if you like. My grandfather lets me do as I like at home. You can come and stay with me—the Head can't say anything against that." Cardew smiled sarcastically. "So long as he saves you from my contaminatin' influence at St. Jim's his merry duty is done. You can come home to Reckness Lodge an' be corrupted."

"We'll be glad to come. But—but——"

"But what?"

"I wish you weren't going!"

"Queer how we've got used to one another in this study," said Cardew reflectively. "When I came here I meant to play the giddy ox just as I used to at Wodehouse, an' I wanted to pal with Levison because I'd heard about him, and that was a merry sportsman. Disappointment number one—I found him reformed, an' he's jolly nearly reformed me since. I started with you, Clive, with a row—and you gave me a thumpin' lickin' in the gym—remember?"

"Oh, rot!" said Clive.

"Nothin' like a good scrap to make chaps friends," said Cardew. "I respected you from the minute you knocked me out. After that I made several bad breaks owin' to rotten temper an' swank—delightful to be able to see one's own faults in a proper light, isn't it? I pulled out all right—and now I'm landed because I was a fool once upon a time. Life is a queer bizney. Things you've nearly forgotten get up and hit you nard. You don't get what you deserve ninety-nine times in a hundred; and then you get somethin' you don't deserve, an' it knocks you out. Weighin' one thing with another I haven't got much more than my deserts in bein' booted out. The dashed queer thing is that I've not got it for things I've done here, but for something I didn't do at my last school. Hallo, come in—another merchant goin' to be friendly, I suppose, because he's so glad I'm goin'," added Cardew, as a tap came at the door.

It was Baggy Trimble who opened the door and looked in, looking decidedly nervous.

"Get out, Trimble!" snapped Levison.

"Look here, you know, I've come to speak to Cardew——"

"You needn't trouble," said Cardew coolly. "I'm not goin' to lend you any money before I go, Trimble."

"I—I haven't come for that!" stammered Trimble. "The—the fact is——"

"Buzz off!" growled Clive.

"Yes, but I—I—I've got——. I mean—I——"

Trimble was growing somewhat incoherent.

"Would you mind kickin' that fat fish out, as you're nearest the door, Clive?" drawled Cardew.

Clive jumped up.

Baggy Trimble slammed the door and retreated in hot haste. He did not stop till he reached the landing.

"Oh, dear!" he mumbled. "I—I know the beast will kick me if I tell him I've got the letter. I—I've a jolly good mind to burn it—only—only there would be a fearful row. 'Tain't fair! And—and the Head will be ratty when he knows—after he's sacked Cardew. Oh, dear!"

Baggy's fat fingers fumbled with the letter in his pocket. He felt more like Eugene Aram than ever. The Peeping Tom of St. Jim's was paying dear for his unscrupulous inquisitiveness.

In Study No. 9 the three juniors did not give another thought to the hapless Baggy, however.

"What about your grandfather?" asked Levison. "You'll have to let him know you're coming home."

Cardew nodded.

"Yes. The Head's writin' to him to-night, I understand. But I'm thinkin' of askin' Railton to let me telephone an' break the merry news gently. The old man has the bad taste to be rather fond of me, an' I don't want to give him a shock. I can ring him up at his club a bit later—I know the time he will be there. Lots of time."

"Oh, it's rotten all round!" said Clive restlessly. "That fellow at Wodehouse must be an awful rotter to let you suffer for him."

"Not exactly a rotter—only as weak as water," said Cardew. "What surprises me is that he hasn't been bowled out before this. He was within an ace of it a dozen times while I was there, and he was gettin' more reckless." He took a cigarette from his case, and then, as he caught Clive's glance, laughed and crumpled it in his fingers, and pitched it into the grate. "Let's go down if you've finished tea."

"You're going to show up in the Common-room?" asked Clive.

"Why not?"

"Oh, no reason why not, of course."

"Better play the game out to the finish. What's the good of whinin' when you get it in the neck? It doesn't improve matters. Besides, I shall rather enjoy it—you know I'm fond of the limelight, an' I shall get plenty of the limelight to-night."

And Cardew sauntered out of the study with his chums. They passed Tom Merry in the passage, and the captain of the Shell called to Cardew.

"Just a word, Cardew!"

"What about cheery old Coventry?"

"Oh, rot! That's all over now. I'm sorry you're going," said Tom frankly.

"Thanks awfully. You don't mean to say that you believe the yarn I spun in my study?"

"Wasn't it true, then?"

"Every word. But that's no reason why you should swallow it."

"Well, I don't quite," said Tom straightforwardly. "You can't blame me, Cardew—I'd take it as gospel from a fellow I knew was straight, but you're such a queer beggar. But—I'm trying to believe it, and—and if it was all right, I hope that the truth will come out and you'll come back."

"Really!" said Cardew curiously.

"Honest Injun!" said Tom.

"Well, that's more than I could expect of you," said Cardew. "If I had my time here over again I should play up a bit differently. I'm sorry for that mean trick I played you at Grubb's farm. If ever I have the luck to get back to St. Jim's, I shall steer clear of some things I've done since I came here. But I rather think my luck's out."

And, with a friendly nod, Cardew walked on.

He quitted his chums in the lower passage.

"I'll join you in the Common-room," he said. "I'm going to ask Railton to let me use the 'phone. The governor will be where I can talk to him now."

"Right-ho!"

Cardew tapped at Mr. Railton's door.

"Come in!" came the deep voice of the Housemaster, and the junior entered the study.

Mr. Railton rose to his feet and regarded the sacked Fourth Former with a somewhat grim expression.

"Well, what is it, Cardew?"

"I'm goin' to ask a favour, sir," said Cardew, more respectfully than usual. "I should like to telephone to my grandfather, and let him know I'm comin' home to-morrow morning. The Head's letter in the mornin' will be a bit of a shock to him, an' he may get it before I arrive." He paused a moment. "He's an old man, sir," he added. "He will take this rather to heart."

Mr. Railton gave the outcast of St. Jim's a very curious look.

"I am glad to see you so considerate of the feelings of others, Cardew. You may certainly use the telephone if you wish."

"Thank you, sir."

Cardew crossed to the telephone and took up the receiver. After giving his number, he turned to the Housemaster.

"I have to wait for a trunk call, sir."

"You may wait, Cardew. "Sit down!"

Mr. Railton turned to his interrupted work. There was silence in the study till the telephone-bell rang at last.

Cardew took the receiver off the hooks again.

"Hallo! Yes, that's right. Good! Hallo, is that you, grand-dad?"

"Yes," came a wheezy voice over the wires. "What the dickens are you telephoning me for, you young rascal? I suppose it's you, Ralph?"

"Yes, grandfather."

"You've interrupted my rubber of whist, you young scamp!"

"I'm sorry, grandfather." Cardew's voice was quiet and strangely tender in tone. The light mockery of its usual tones was quite gone. "I've got some news that's rather bad, I'm sorry to say."

"Huh!"

"I shall be coming home to-morrow, grandfather!"

"What? What?"

"It's come out about what happened at Wodehouse, an' I've got to get out," said Cardew. "I'm sorry."

"What? What? I know all about it! Haven't you had Dr. Tracy's letter?"

Cardew almost dropped the receiver in his astonishment.

"Dr. Tracy! The Head of Wodehouse! Has he written to me?"

"Certainly he has. He wrote the facts to me, and told me that he had written to you by the same post—two days since. I was going to write to you about it myself in a day or two. I was expecting a letter from you on the subject."

"But—but what has Dr. Tracy written about?" gasped Cardew.

"About that fellow—what's his name?—Horseley, being found out, and confessing to the theft!"

"My only hat! I haven't had the letter."

"What? You had better find it, then. Delayed, I suppose. Anyway, it's quite certain. And if that's the reason you're leaving the school, you can tell your Headmaster from me that it is all right, and I will send on Dr. Tracy's letter to him if he wishes."

"Oh, good! Good as gold! What toppin' news!"

"Huh! Good-bye, Ralph. I must get back to my rubber."

"Good-bye, grand-dad!"

Cardew replaced the receiver. He turned, to find Mr. Railton's eyes on him.

"My grandfather's given me some news, sir," said Cardew, his eyes dancing. "He says it's come out at Wodehouse, and I'm cleared!"

"Indeed!"

"There's a letter for me here somewhere, which I haven't had. I think I know where to look for it, though. Would you care to see it, sir, when I get it?"

"I certainly should, Cardew. Bring it to me by all means. If this is correct, I congratulate you!"

"Thank you, sir."

Cardew left the study.

CHAPTER 13.

Light After Shadow!

"HERE he is!"

"Same old Cardew!"

"Cool beggar!"

Ralph Reckness Cardew did indeed look a cool beggar as he sauntered into the junior Common-room, with his hands in his pockets.

Levison and Clive joined him at once. They wanted to show the House generally that their chum was not without friends.

Cardew gave them a cheery smile.

"I've had some good news," he remarked. "Wait a bit." He crossed over to where Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was standing in an elegant attitude, chatting with Blake and the Terrible Three. "D'Arcy!"

Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass a little tighter into his eye, and surveyed Cardew loftily. He had not forgotten the scene on the cricket-ground.

"I want to apologise for my rudeness," said Cardew.

"Wight-ho, deah boy! All sewene!" said Gussy, at once.

"Would you mind tellin' me who has that letter you were speakin' of?"

"Certainly, Cardew, if you agwee not to lick him. You see, the howwid fat beast was askin' my advice when he let out that he had the lettah, so unless you agwee to ovahlook the mattah, I cannot vewy well give you his name."

"All serene. I won't touch Trimble!"

"Bai Jove! How did you know it was Twimble?" asked Arthur Augustus, in astonishment.

"Fathead!" roared Blake. "Trimble's the only horrid fat beast in the school, isn't he?"

"Yaas, wathah. But——"

Cardew was already approaching Trimble. That podgy youth eyed him with alarm. Cardew held out his hand.

"My letter, please," he said laconically.

"I—I say, Cardew, it—it came open by accident, you know," stuttered Trimble. "I—I was bringing it to you, you know—because I'm a good-natured chap——"

"Give it to me, you fat fool!"

"Of course, I haven't read it," said Trimble. "I should scorn to do anything of the kind. I don't know what's in it, or that it's from your old Headmaster, or anything about that fellow Horseley——"

"Give me the letter, and stop your lies!" snapped Cardew.

Baggy Trimble, much relieved to find that he was not to be kicked, bumped, or punished at all, fumbled in his pocket and produced the letter. It was in a somewhat grubby state when he handed it over.

Cardew took the letter, and turned his back on Trimble. The incident had drawn all eyes on Cardew.

"By gad!" said Cardew. "This is merry news! Clive, Levison, you're not goin' to have the terrific misfortune of losin' my entertainin' company!"

"Cardew!" exclaimed the two juniors in a breath.

Cardew cast a mocking glance at the crowd of faces about him. His words had astonished all the Common-room.

"Gentlemen, I'm sorry that you're going to have a very severe disappointment," he said. "Sad to relate, the truth has come out about that affair at Wodehouse, an' the merry culprit has owned up. I'm more sorry than I can say. But I sha'n't clear out of St. Jim's after all, and you'll have to put up with me. Rotten, ain't it?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, my hat!" said Grundy.

"I'm jolly glad!" said Tom Merry simply.

"Well, I'll say the same, if it's honest Injun!" said Blake.

"Still a doubtin' Thomas?" smiled Cardew. "If the gentlemen present are interested, I'll read out the letter before I take it to the Head. It's from merry old Tracy, the gorgon who's Headmaster at Wodehouse. Anybody like to hear it?"

"Buck up!" said Levison eagerly.

"Go ahead, old scout!" said Tom Merry. "It's only fair the fellows should hear the truth, after what they've believed."

Cardew, with a smile, read out the letter:

"My dear Cardew,—I am writing to you at once to inform you of a very startling discovery that has been made, which was a painful shock to me, but will undoubtedly seem like good news to you. Edwin Horseley, of the Sixth Form, has confessed that he was guilty of the theft which took place the night before you left this school, and that you were guilty of nothing worse than attempting to return the stolen money when he had taken it. Horseley made this confession after he had already been condemned to expulsion from the school, on account of disgraceful gambling transactions which had come to light. His conscience moved him to do this act of tardy justice, and I gather that he has suffered a good deal for his cowardice in allowing you to bear the blame of his wicked action. For the step I took at the time, I cannot blame myself, as I knew nothing of Horseley's guilt or of the promise he had exacted from you. Your own silence was the cause of your condemnation, though I cannot censure you for keeping a promise, however foolishly made. I have learned from Lord Reckness that you have made a fresh start in another school, where I am now addressing you. If, however, you should prefer to return to Wodehouse, your old place is open to you, and you will be assured of a cordial welcome from your schoolfellows and from your Headmaster,

"J. TRACY."

"Well, my only summer bonnet!" said Jack Blake. "That puts the lid on!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard that as wippin' news for you, Cardew. And that feahful wottah, Twimble, had the lettah——"

"And he's been keeping it back!" exclaimed Clive wrathfully.

"I—I—it was an accident," gasped Trimble. "I—I've been trying to give it to Cardew all the time, but he's such a beast! He kicked me out of his study!"

"That's the letter that was in the rack, then?" exclaimed Tom Merry, remembering the incident. "You took it, Trimble, after we'd bumped you for nosing into the letters."

"You see, I—I'm a good-natured chap," stammered Trimble. "I—I was taking it to Cardew. I thought there might be money in it, and—I mean, I never thought anything of the kind——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And before I could give it to him, he kicked me out. You see——"

"And that's about the best thing we can do," remarked Blake. "Now, then, all together, and make it a goal-kick!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yaroooh!" roared Trimble, as he fled. A dozen boots helped him out of the Common-room, and he rolled along the passage.

"I congwatulate you, Cardew, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus cordially.

"Yes, rather," said Tom Merry. "We all do. I'm jolly glad, Cardew!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Thanks!" said Cardew, with a smile.

"And you are let out of Coventry!" added George Alfred Grundy.

"Go hon!"

"You sillay ass, Gwunday, that goes without sayin', undah the circs!"

"Gentlemen," said Cardew, "I thank you all for your congratulations. I have only one request to make—that Grundy will not let me out of Coventry. I can stand a good deal. But there's one thing I can't stand, and that's Grundy!"

And Cardew walked out of the Common-room, with the letter in his hand, bound for the Housemaster's study, leaving the School House juniors laughing, and George Alfred Grundy purple with wrath.

The outcast of St. Jim's—outcast no longer—did not leave. The cloud had lifted, and his good name was regained!

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's —"THE ST. JIM'S COMPETITION SYNDICATE!" by MARTIN CLIFFORD.)

EXTRACTS FROM

"Tom Merry's Weekly" & "The Greyfriars Herald."

A KNOCK FOR KNOX. By Sidney Clive.

I.

IT was the fright of his life for Knox.

Everybody else chortled over it, but it was not a chortling matter for Knox of the Sixth.

All the Shell fellows knew about Buck Finn's bowie-knife. Buck Finn came to St. Jim's from a Wild West state—Arizona or somewhere—and he brought a lot of curious things with him—a lasso, which he called a riata, and a sombrero hat, and that bowie-knife. It was a trick knife, such as conjurers use. When you shoved the blade at anything it slid up into the handle if you pressed the spring. If you didn't press the spring it was just an ordinary knife. Buck Finn had played a good many tricks with that knife, but all the juniors were used to it, and they couldn't be surprised with it any more. But it came quite as a surprise to Knox of the Sixth.

Knox is a prefect, and he often has a down on a fellow for nothing, or next to nothing. Finn was in his black books this time. He had kicked Knox's shins when Knox was cuffing him. A junior mustn't kick a prefect's shins under any circumstances, but Finn did. And for days after that Knox was on his track, always watching for a chance to find fault with him, and give him lines or report him.

"I reckon I'm fed up with Knox," Buck Finn told the fellows in the Common-room one evening. "I guess I'm not taking any more. Three hundred lines now, and a licking if I don't do them. I guess I'm not doing them."

"You'll get licked, then," said Grundy.

"I guess I sha'n't be licked either," said Finn.

"Better get the lines done," said Tom Merry. "We'll all lend you a hand with them."

"That's not good enough for Knox," said Lowther. "Knox goes over the dashed lines with a microscope or something to see whether a chap's helped a chap."

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in D'Arcy of the Fourth. "Knox is a most objectionable and suspicious beast. I weally cannot undahstand how he came to be born outside Pwussia. He accused me the othah day of havin' had half my impot done by the othah chaps in my study—the suspicious wottah!"

"Well, you had, hadn't you?" said Blake.

"Yaas; but it was disgustin'ly suspicious of Knox, all the same."

"Waal, I'm not going to do any lines," said Buck Finn. "I guess he can't come it over a free American citizen. If he comes hyer to look for me, I'm ready for him. I'm his antelope, with the wool on."

"What are you going to do?" asked Manners curiously.

Buck Finn was looking very determined.

"Look hyer!"

Finn whisked out the bowie-knife from under his jacket.

It was a fearsome-looking instrument, keen as a razor, and the fellows jumped back as Finn flourished it in the air.

"You silly ass!" roared Grundy. "Put that away!"

"I guess not!"

"Finn, you duffer," exclaimed Tom Merry, "if you threaten Knox with that you'll be reported to the Head and turned out of St. Jim's. Don't play the goat!"

"I guess I'm not going to threaten Knox."

"Then what's the good of that sticker?" asked Blake.

"I reckon I'm going to commit suicide if Knox wants to lick me!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"I kinder calculate that will give the galoot an awful turn," said Buck Finn complacently.

"I dare say it would!" gasped Tom Merry. "But what about you, you howling ass?"

"Oh, rats! You watch out," said Finn. "I'm expecting Knox any minute. My impot's overdue."

"Talk of angels!" grinned Cardew. "Here he comes!"

"Put that sticker out of sight, you ass!" whispered Tom Merry very hurriedly.

Of course, nobody believed for a moment that Buck Finn was in earnest. He was an ass in some ways, but not such an ass as that.

Knox of the Sixth came striding into the Common-room, scowling, with a cane under his arm.

He looked round him, and crossed over to the American junior.

"Finn!"

"Right here!" said Buck Finn coolly.

"Have you done your lines?"

"Nope."

"I warned you what you would get if you didn't do them by tea-time," said Knox, letting the cane slip down into his hand.

"Yep."

"Then you know what to expect. Hold out your hand! You're going to have four of the best!" said Knox, with his cruel grin.

Knox is the only prefect at St. Jim's who really enjoys caning a chap. But Knox does enjoy it.

Buck Finn put his hands in his pockets.

"You caned me yesterday, Knox," he remarked.

"And I'm going to cane you again now," said Knox.

"And you caned me this morning," continued Finn.

"Hold out your hand!"

"I guess I'm fed up!"

Knox took a hard grip on the cane.

"You can have it on your paws or across your shoulders," he remarked, and he strode towards Finn.

He jumped back fast enough, however, as Buck Finn whipped out the big knife from under his jacket.

He turned quite pale for a moment.

"You—you young ruffian!" he gasped. "Put that away! How dare you threaten me?"

"I calculate I'm not threatening you," said Finn. "I calculate I'm going to commit suicide if you touch me, Knox."

"Finn!" yelled Tom Merry, beginning to be really alarmed.

"You ring off, Merry! This is my funeral," said Buck Finn determinedly. "I warn you, Knox."

He placed the point of his knife on his waistcoat.

Knox glared at him as if he would eat him.

He took it as a theatrical trick to scare him and get Finn out of the licking. But Gerald Knox was not to be fooled quite so easily as that.

"Put that knife down!" he commanded.

"Rats!"

"I'll give you two extra for that!" said Knox savagely.

"Mind! I guess I've warned you," said Finn. "If you want to have blood on your hands, Knox, it's your funeral."

Knox did not answer. He strode straight at the American junior.

Then there was a gasp from all the fellows.

Finn drove the bowie-knife straight and hard at his waistcoat, and the blade disappeared right up to the very hilt.

Knowing the trick of that queer knife, the fellows wouldn't have been alarmed at that, though Knox would have been. But just as they were thinking it was the old trick there was a rush of red over Finn's hand that held the knife, and he fell heavily to the floor.

Knox stopped dead.

He seemed unable to believe his eyes. A shout of consternation came from the whole Common-room.

Buck Finn lay on his back on the floor. His right hand still held the handle of the knife on his breast, which was all of the knife that could be seen. And the red stream was flowing over his waistcoat and making a little dark crimson pool on the floor.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Tom Merry, utterly aghast.

"Bai Jove!"

"Finn—Finn, old man——"

The fellows rushed round.

Buck Finn moaned feebly.

"G-g-good heavens!" stuttered Knox. At that moment, if never before, the prefect repented of his bullying. "Good heavens!"

"Finn, deah boy——"

"Stand back! Give him air!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Finn——"

Finn groaned deeply.

"I—I forgive you, Knox!" he moaned. "Good-bye, you fellows!"

And his eyes closed.

"I—I—I——" Knox was white as a sheet. "Good heavens! He—he's dead! Of—of course, all you juniors can—can bear witness that I was not to blame?"

"You rotten bully!" shouted Tom Merry fiercely. "You were to blame, and everybody is going to know it, too!"

"Yaas, wathah, you wotten Hun!"

"Shame!"

"Bully!"

Knox's teeth were chattering. He had little to hope from the juniors when they bore witness about what had happened.

"Don't touch him!" he gasped at last. "I—I'll call the Housemaster!"

And Knox fairly crawled out of the room.

II.

"POOR old Finn!" said Arthur Augustus, with tears in his eyes. "It was a wicked and weckless thing to do; but——"

"It was Knox's fault!" exclaimed Cardew.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And he will have to answer for it!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "It will all come out now about his rotten bullying!"

"Poor old Finn!"

"He was a good sort," said Grundy.

"Thanks!" said Buck Finn, sitting up suddenly.

The fellows jumped back as if they had been electrified.

"B-b-bai Jove! You—you're not dead, deah boy?"

"I guess not."

"You spoofing rotter!" roared Grundy, quite forgetting the good opinion he had just expressed of the dear departed.

The juniors looked dazedly at Finn as he picked himself up. He did not seem to be hurt.

"You—you spoofer!" panted Tom Merry, immensely relieved, but a good deal exasperated at the scare for nothing. "You ought to be bumped!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Buck Finn chuckled.

"Oh, come off!" he said. "Knox will be back with Railton in a few minutes!"

"How did you do it?" demanded Lowther.

"You know the trick of that knife!" grinned Finn. "The merry blade slides up into the handle if you touch the spring!"

"Yes, we know that; but the blood——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Finn. "That was red ink in a bladder up my sleeve!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

Buck Finn slid the knife into a drawer out of sight, and rubbed the ink away with his handkerchief.

Julian, who was at the door, called out softly:

"Here comes Knox with Railton!"

Finn sat down at the chess-table, where Lowther and Manners had been playing, and began to move the pieces. Lowther sat down, too, grinning. They looked as if they

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were in the middle of a game of chess when the Housemaster came up the passage with Gerald Knox.

"I assure you that it was not my fault, sir," Knox was saying, in a moaning voice. "The—the unfortunate boy seemed to be under the impression that I was going to punish him—quite a mistake. I was about to speak to him kindly—very kindly. It was unfortunate——"

"I cannot believe that the boy is dead, as you say, Knox!"

"There is the body, sir!" said Knox, shuddering, as he pointed towards where Buck Finn had been lying when he left.

"Where?" rapped out Mr. Railton.

"There, sir! Oh, my hat!"

Knox blinked at the empty space.

Then his eyes fell on Buck Finn, sitting at the chess-table playing with Lowther. Everybody else had risen when the Housemaster came in, but Finn and Lowther seemed too intent on the game to notice that Mr. Railton had come into the room.

"Check!" said Finn. "Your move, Lowther!"

"Finn!" thundered Mr. Railton.

Finn jumped up.

"Oh! Yes, sir! I didn't see you, sir!"—which was true enough, as he had been sitting with his back to the door.

Knox stared at him as if he were mesmerised.

"Are you hurt, Finn?" demanded Mr. Railton, with a very expressive look at the astonished prefect.

Buck Finn looked surprised.

"Hurt?" he repeated. "I guess not, sir!"

"You are not wounded, Finn?"

"Wounded, sir? Oh, no!"

"Knox!" thundered Mr. Railton. "Are you mad? What do you mean by the utterly ridiculous story you told me in my study?"

Knox's jaw dropped.

"What is the cause of this foolish—indeed, insane—trick, Knox? Is it possible that you, a prefect, have been indulging in liquor?" thundered the Housemaster.

Really, that seemed to be the only explanation to Mr. Railton.

Knox felt as if his head were turning round.

"I—I assure you, sir, that—that I saw Finn stab himself with a large knife!" he babbled.

"How can that be the case, Knox, when Finn is not hurt in the smallest degree?"

"I—I don't know, sir! I—I can't understand! He—he was covered with blood; it was simply pouring from the wound!" gurgled Knox.

"Have you been bleeding, Finn?"

"No, sir."

"Have you wounded yourself in any way whatever?"

"Not at all, sir."

"It is evident that the boy is unhurt, and in his usual health!" said Mr. Railton thunderously. "Knox, this calls for an explanation!"

"I—I—I"—Knox seemed not to know whether he was on his head or his heels—"I—I—I assure you, sir, that—that I saw him——"

"Nonsense!"

"These juniors saw him stab himself with a large knife, and the blood flow," stuttered Knox.

"How can they have seen anything of the kind, when it has evidently not occurred at all?" demanded the Housemaster. "How dare you make such a statement, Knox? You have played a foolish trick upon me, your Housemaster—you, a prefect! I shall report this matter to the Head, Knox; and in the meantime, you may consider yourself suspended from your duties as a prefect!"

And Mr. Railton strode away.

All the fellows were very grave until the Housemaster had gone; then they chortled.

Knox came towards Finn with a Hunnish glare.

"You young scoundrel——" he began.

"Back-pedal!" said Buck Finn. "I shall commit suicide again if you bother me, you galoot!"

"You've tricked me somehow!" shrieked Knox.

"I guess I have!" grinned Buck Finn. "And if you touch me, you mugwump, I'll yell out to Railton and bring him back!"

Knox didn't want Railton brought back just then. He glared at Finn, and stamped out of the Common-room.

Knox was chivvied every day of that week, and he paid in seven days for the sins of two or three terms.

THE END

BUNTER AND THE BIKE.

By TOM BROWN.

I.

I DON'T come into this story, and I am not going to shove myself in. When Squiff started to tell the yarn in the last number he came in a good deal, and he never got the yarn finished, which is just as well if the truth is to be told. Bunter is about as bad a hand at telling the truth as Squiff seems to be at getting anywhere on paper. And paper's short nowadays.

The bike stood near the door in the shed, and it saved Bunter trouble to take that one. He did not know whose it was, and he did not care. Trifles like that do not disturb what, for the sake of politeness, we will call Bunter's mind.

He was wearing Tom Dutton's cap, a sweater and blazer that belonged to Bolsover major, who happened to be away for a day or two and had left his box unlocked, and his own trousers. I know they were his own trousers, because he couldn't get anyone else's on.

You may think that what he was wearing is of no consequence. But, as it chances, it is most material to the story. The point to be remembered is that after his—Dutton's, I mean—cap blew off, he looked a good deal less like a schoolboy than like something out of a travelling show.

It was rather a nasty afternoon, blowing hard. But Bunter had a few shillings in his pocket, and an urgent appointment with Uncle Clegg, at Friardale, to keep.

Mrs. Mimble had reminded him of the ration bizney, and had suggested that he should hand over the few shillings as an instalment off his old account. Bunter expected more sympathy—more grub, too—at Uncle Clegg's.

He got down there without a tumble, and he dropped off, stood the bike negligently against the wall, and was just going in, when something made him hesitate.

He recognised a man who was passing on the opposite side of the road. It was not anyone of importance—only a painter fellow who had been doing some work at the school during the last week or two. The fellow was not a local man—he had drifted our way, it seemed, and men were so hard to pick up that Walls, the plumber and painter at Courtfield, had only been too glad to get hold of this one.

But, though he was practically a stranger, Bunter thought he might talk. So Bunter stood with his back to Uncle Clegg's, and looked dreamily across the road. And the man stood on the other side, lighting his pipe. He seemed in no hurry.

Then a bobby appeared. It was not old Tozer. He was laid up. This was a chap from somewhere the other side of Courtfield, whom none of us knew.

The painter chap walked on, whistling. Bunter popped into Uncle Clegg's.

Uncle Clegg was laid up, too, it appeared. A young woman of forty-nine or so, with her hair in curl-papers, served Bunter.

She opened her eyes at his order, I don't doubt. But she fetched out the stuff. It was before the new rule about only plain cakes being sold came into force, and the Owl went in for variety as well as for quantity.

Bunter had not had more than three mouthfuls—say, sixpenn'orth at present prices—when a hand fell on his shoulder.

He looked round, saw a bobby, and gasped.

Even old Tozer could strike awe into Bunter; and this was quite a different sort of chap from that old bluebottle—no end of a stern merchant, with what one might call an arresting manner.

"I must ask you to explain to me how you came by the bicycle you have left outside, young man!" said the bobby.

"Eh? That bike's mine."

"I have reason to believe that it is a stolen machine," the constable said. And his hand felt very heavy and discomforting.

"Oh, rot!" said Bunter uneasily. "I—I—I only borrowed it."

The fat chump ought to have explained that he was a Greyfriars chap. But as that was the truth, I don't suppose he even thought of saying so.

"Where did you borrow it?" asked the policeman.

"I—I—— Oh, look here, you know, I ain't going to be asked all these questions! You're treating me as if I was a thief!"

"Just so," said the man in blue.

"Look here, Uncle Clegg knows me—he can tell you."

"Mr. Clegg is not here," said the elderly young woman severely.

Bunter's heart was somewhere in the neighbourhood of his boots by this time. Both the stern constable and the elderly young woman were frowning upon him. In fact, no one seemed to love him.

And before him loomed the shade of the prison-house.

I suppose that to his fat, obtuse mind it did not seem necessary to mention Greyfriars. And it is likely enough that those two people were about the only folks in Friardale who would not have recognised the porpoise at once as belonging to our show.

I should say that there is only one other fellow in the Remove who would have allowed himself to be walked off by that bobby as Bunter let himself be—all for want of a few words of sensible explanation. But I am not dead sure that even Alonzo would have been such an absolute ass.

Bunter did not say enough, but he said too much all the same. He contradicted himself till he had the elderly young woman looking down her nose in the most shocked way imaginable, and the bobby frowning like a thundercloud.

And then he went; and the bike was wheeled along by the policeman as evidence.

Oh, no, that bobby wasn't making a bloomer! Not a bit of it. The bike was a stolen one, though old Tozer would never have twigged it in a week of Sundays.

II.

BUNTER'S heart rose a bit when he was conducted to the little cottage, marked "Police Station," which Tozer inhabited. It seems that the man temporarily in charge was lodging there.

"Look here, you know, Mr. Tozer knows me," said the porpoise hopefully.

The constable took out his notebook.

"That's an admission that you are known to the police," he said. "I'm not at all surprised. But I must take it down, and I warn you now that anything else you say may be used as evidence against you."

"But if only you'd let me see Tozer——"

"Can't be done. He's ill in bed."

"Mrs. Tozer, then! I don't know her, but I dare say she knows me."

"I dare say she does. You're a notorious character, no doubt. But Mrs. Tozer ain't at home."

Bunter gave it up. He was wondering what would be done with him.

But he had not to wonder long.

In less than ninety seconds he found himself inside the shed in Tozer's backyard that was dignified with the name of lock-up.

The key grated in the lock. Bunter stared wildly around him.

There wasn't much to see. The place was about six feet by five, and all the furniture it had was a bench with a horse-rug on it.

Bunter yelled. Bunter kicked at the door.

No one paid any heed. As a matter of fact, there was no one there to pay any heed after the first few minutes. The constable was called away on urgent business, and it was some hours before he returned.

I don't suppose he forgot about Bunter. That bobby was not the forgetting sort. But he took it that Bunter was all right where he was.

Bunter did not take it that way, however.

He yelled, and kicked at the door until he had tired himself out. Then he threw himself down on the bench.

"They'll be sure to miss me at Greyfriars. That's one comfort," he told himself. And it comforted him so much to think of us all worrying about him that he slipped into a doze.

It was some time before we missed him, so that we did not worry much. But that part is of no consequence. I am not going to tell the story of our search for him. It is only what happened to Bunter that matters. That's always Bunter's view, anyway.

He woke up. It was not really dark. But Tozer's backyard is a gloomy place, and the

window of the lock-up measures about twelve inches by six.

Bunter thought it must be the middle of the night; and the pangs of hunger seized upon him at once. He remembered the grub left behind in Uncle Clegg's shop, and I have no doubt he said all sorts of things about the elderly young woman.

He told Peter Todd afterwards that he was sure she and the bobby were in collision—he meant "collusion"—to do him down, and he supposed they shared the stuff he had paid for and been forced to leave behind. But I think not.

He sat up now and shivered. He was just going to yell at the top of his voice, when something made him think better of it.

That something was a smell—a savoury smell—the smell of a pie just taken from the oven—the smell of a rabbit-pie!

Then it could not be the middle of the night. Only Bunters eat rabbit-pie—when obtainable—in the middle of the night. And now the prisoner saw that although the sky was clear only a star or two could be discerned. It was still evening.

It may seem difficult to believe, but the smell of that pie made lots of difference to Bunter's outlook.

He no longer yearned to be released at once. Before he was set free he wanted rabbit-pie—a large helping, with plenty of gravy and vegetables—several large helpings!

And he thought he was going to get what he wanted, too. It is a sore point with him even now that he didn't. I believe that he imagined that pie was being cooked especially for his benefit.

It was being cooked for the bobby and Mrs. Tozer, whose relative he was, and Mrs. Tozer, home now from Courtfield, was cooking it. Tozer himself was not well enough to partake.

Mrs. Tozer, by the way, is just a trifle deafer than Tom Dutton.

Bunter waited—not very patiently, you bet. He says that the pangs he endured were awful—simply awful!

But he waited—and waited—and waited.

More stars were twinkling out now. Heavy footsteps sounded in Tozer's backyard.

"I say!" yelled Bunter.

"Well, what do you say?" snapped the constable.

"Ain't you going to let me out?"

"You'll stay there till morning! I've been busy on more important matters, and have had no time to make inquiries about you."

It was quite true. In between going and returning that bobby had arrested a deserter. He was no end smart, I can tell you; and even the Head, who was a good deal annoyed at his having locked up a Greyfriars boy, could find no fault with him when he knew the whole story.

"Well, then, you'd better bring me some rabbit-pie," said the Owl, with his whole heart in the eager words.

The constable gave a short, dry laugh. His footsteps sounded again.

Somehow it dawned upon Bunter that the rabbit-pie might turn out to be no more than a beautiful dream—as far as he was concerned.

III.

FIVE minutes later the door opened, and the constable appeared with a plate in his hand.

But no savoury steam arose from that plate. There was nothing but bread and cheese upon it—"and not much of that," as Bunter said dolefully.

"I—— Oh, I say, you've got rabbit-pie in there! I can smell it. I want some of that."

"You'd have had a better chance of gettin' it if you'd kept out of this place," said the constable—meaning, as I take it, that Bunter might have boned the pie. "And I don't know that the suspicion went too far.

He departed. The key grated again. Bunter lifted up his voice and wept bitterly.

Then he kicked at the door until he stubbed one of his big toes, and, after nursing that for a while, he ate his bread and cheese.

It was quite dark now, except for a ray of light that came into the lock-up from the Tozer scullery.

Presently that disappeared. Then Bunter began to worry about everybody at Greyfriars, and their awful anxiety about him.

I suppose he came to the conclusion at length that our worry was our own trouble, and snoozed off. He says not. He denies having slept a wink. He says it was a night of the most terrible agony of mind and body for him, and that the rats nearly drove him out of his senses.

The bobby deposes that Bunter began to snore at about 10.30 p.m.—you know the way bobbies talk—and continued to snore all through the night, preventing him getting a wink of sleep. I can believe that. Bunter's trumpeting must be fearful and wonderful to anyone unused to it.

As for rats, the cell was concreted—I have seen it—and no rat could possibly creep in. So it's "Rats!" to the rat yarn.

I hope no one has been expecting a thrilling finish to this narrative. If I were making it up myself I could give it one, but I am not; just telling the thing as it occurred, that's all.

The ending was quite tame. Old Tozer, who had been pretty queer, was ever so much better next morning, and his locum tenens went in to see him about something, and told him of the arrest.

"The fattest boy as ever you see, d'ye say, Daniel?" asked Tozer. "Blessed if you ain't been an' gone an' done it, then! That's Master Bunter from Greyfriars!"

"Well, what about it?" asked Daniel, who seems to have been one of those fellows who are built too solid to be tumbled over. "If Master Bunter steals bicycles, or is found in possession of stolen bicycles, my duty is to take him in charge if he was twice as fat as the Peckham kid."

"Well, I'm glad it didn't 'appen to me!" said old Tozer.

Daniel marched Bunter up to Greyfriars before breakfast, and asked him lots of things on the way. Bunter says he put Daniel on the track of the thief, and there is no doubt that he did, in a way. But he did it quite ignorantly, and deserves about as much credit for it as the man in the moon did for the rabbit-pie the porpoise sighed for in vain.

Daniel caught the thief. It was the stranger painter-man—the one who had stopped opposite Bunter in Friardale. Perhaps he had intended to have a cut at the bike if Bunter had left it outside and there had been no one to see. But the sight of the constable set him on the move.

He had stolen a dozen or more bikes, and had had the confounded impudence to use our bike-shed as a storehouse for the stolen goods till he had a chance to get them away. It was dead easy. No one was likely to notice a strange bike in a shed where there were scores, and he had never had more than two or three there at a time. I guess he would have walked off with a few of ours during his last day or two at his job. But Daniel nabbed him.

What did the Head say to Bunter?

Only Bunter knows.

But Bunter is certain of one thing—that imprisonment was the most terrible experience of his life; even worse than the time when he and Courtenay and the Caterpillar were prisoners to that Hun chap in the house on the heath.

He could not smell rabbit-pie that he was doomed never to taste that time, you see!

To Mr....., Newsagent.

Please keep for me a copy of the GEM LIBRARY each week until further notice.

(Signed),

IN THE KING'S NAVEE!

(Written up from a letter.)

By MONTY LOWTHER.

Work in a destroyer,
Almost every day,
Ain't the sort of life to
Keep you bright and gay.
But there's heaps of that, boys,
Take the tip from me,
When you're out patrollin'
In the King's Navee!

When the weather's foul, and
You're soaking to the skin,
Grin and thank your stars it
Ain't no further in!
Don't let trifles vex us,
Take that tip from me;
Never was a picnic
In the King's Navee!

Lucky to discover
"Comfort" anywhere;
Only place I know's the
Dick—sure to be there
'Tain't all beer and skittles,
As you will agree,
How you earn your money
In the King's Navee!

Spells we get off duty—
They're just what we need;
Then you get a rest, with
Something good to read.
Funny thing you find some
People think that we
Don't know how to read things
In the King's Navee!

Boys, it's pretty galling,
And I've often strafed,
Not a single novel
When you've done your graft!
When you're loafing idly,
Time hangs heavily;
Fiction's always wanted
In the King's Navee!

Send us out your "Magnets"
When you've done with them;
Send the "Penny Pop," and
Don't forget the "Gem."
All of 'em are welcome,
Be assured by me:
Many hearts they'll brighten
In the King's Navee!

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"THE ST. JIM'S COMPETITION SYNDICATE!"

By Martin Clifford.

Next week's story is full of incident, telling as it does of how a number of the School House juniors—Tom Merry, Lowther, Manners, Talbot, Blake, D'Arcy, Herries, Digby, Levison, Clive, and the brainy Skimpole—formed a syndicate to compete in one of the phrase-making contests which have so long been popular—how Cardew stood out—how the great Grundy and many others also entered—how an emissary of the paper came down to the school to say that D'Arcy was winner of the first prize—and what happened afterwards. The cover illustration to "Sticking It Out" last week seemed to me quite one of the best we have ever had. That of next week rivals, if it does not surpass it. Look out for it! It is a scene on the railroad, and the trains seems actually moving and the human figures running!

ARGUING THE CASE!

I want to thank the reader, signing himself "B.A.C.," who writes thus: "A fortnight ago I happened to be in a shop, when a boy came in reading the 'Gem.' The shopman said, 'What is the use of wasting time reading that rot?' And a soldier who was there said, 'Silly young ass! You'd much better be reading the newspapers.' I am an old reader myself, and I chipped in, and the boy backed me up. We talked them round at last, and the soldier said, 'I'll get a copy and read it.' I handed him my own copy, forgetting that I had filled up the order-form inside, with my address as well as my name. And a few days ago I had a letter from him to tell me that a couple of days after returning to camp he had to go into the isolation ward, and, to cheer the boys up, he gave them the 'Gem' I had given him. And now he says not only he, but several more, have ordered the paper regularly."