

G HARRIS

The GEM²_{CD} LIBRARY

No. 1,050.
Vol. XXXIII.
March 31st,
1928.

EVERY
WEDNESDAY.



CHUCKED OUT!

G HARRIS

A ROUSING LONG COMPLETE STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO.—

CARDEW THE



CHAPTER 1.

Money to Burn!

LETTER for you, Cardew!" Baggie Trimble, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, made that announcement as Levison & Co. came downstairs in the School House. There was an expression of eager anticipation on Trimble's fat, podgy face.

"A letter for me, eh?" said Ralph Reckness Cardew gravely. "An' you've had the courtesy an' consideration to meet me with the said epistle? I take it, at a random guess, that the letter has a fat, prosperous look about it?"

"As one of your best pals, Cardew—" went on Trimble.

"Eh?"

"As one of your best pals—"

"I heard you the first time, dear man," interrupted Cardew calmly. "We are all subject to our little delusions, an' this is probably yours. Who is this interestin' letter from?"

"I don't know," said Trimble. "I—"

"Well, old bean, what does the letter say?"

"Say?"

"I fear this crisp, spring air has made you somewhat dense this morning," said Cardew. "Perhaps the handwritin' is difficult to read?"

"How should I know what the handwriting's like?"

"But haven't you opened the letter?" asked Cardew, in surprise.

Levison and Clive chuckled, and Trimble gave a snort.

"Of course I haven't opened it!" he said indignantly.

"Wonders will never cease," drawled Cardew. "The age of miracles has not yet passed! You will note, dear men, that Trimble has not opened my letter. Either he is gettin' very careless, or he possesses some

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deep-rooted sense of delicacy which we never suspected. There are still some hopes for you, Trimble."

"But this letter, Cardew—"

"Look here, Trimble, hand that letter over and clear off!" interrupted Levison curtly. "It's like your cheek to touch the thing at all."

"But I thought—"

"I don't care what you thought—hand it over!" snapped Levison. "Hallo, it's registered!" he added, as Trimble brought the letter into sight. "No wonder you were so jolly keen on being near by when Cardew opened it."

Baggie Trimble looked aggrieved.

"I hope you don't think I'm doing this act of kindness because the letter looks as though it might contain some money?" he asked. "Cardew's one of my oldest pals, and I thought— Here, gimme that letter, Clive, you beast!"

"I'll give you a kick if you don't sheer off!" growled Clive.

He handed the registered letter to Cardew, who turned it over with a faint expression of puzzlement on his brow. Trimble hovered near by, and his face dropped when Cardew carelessly tucked the letter into his pocket.

"Ain't you going to open it?" roared Trimble.

"Yes, of course."

"Oh, good! I—I—"

"Dear man, I shall open it when you have gracefully withdrawn," went on Cardew lazily. "It may be a fad of mine, but I'm rather particular about my correspondence. My best thanks for takin' the trouble to deliver the letter by your own fair hand."

And he linked arms with Levison and Clive and strolled out into the quad, the morning being beautifully fine and breezy.

"Thank goodness we've got rid of the worm!" said Clive gruffly.

"I say, Cardew—"

—OF ST. JIM'S, STARRING RALPH CARDEW OF THE FOURTH!

KNIGHT ERRANT!

By Martin Clifford

Cardew has always been a puzzle for St. Jim's; with a nature that is an odd mixture of good and bad, nobody knows what he's likely to do next. And when, suddenly and unexpectedly, the dandy of the Fourth finds himself with money to burn, the good comes to the surface—with amazing results.

"I have frequently warned you against this optimism, Sidney, old scout," said Cardew, as Baggy Trimble rolled up in the rear.

"As a sportsman, Cardew, to say nothing of being my best pal, I think you ought to open that letter," said Trimble breathlessly. "It—it looks valuable, you know. Of course, I don't want to borrow anything—I wouldn't dream of such a thing—"

"Perish the thought!" said Cardew.

"I'm a man of principle, when it comes to borrowing," said Trimble firmly. "Neither a borrower nor a lender be, you know."

"I believe the last bit, but I must confess to a little scepticism regarding the first," said Cardew calmly. "Well, I suppose I'd better see what the letter is, an' get it over. There'll be no peace otherwise."

"If you're referring to Trimble, I'll soon settle his hash!" snapped Levison. "Scoot, Trimble, you cadging worm!"

"Oh, but look here—"

"Scat!"

"As Cardew's best pal— Yaroooooh!"

Baggy broke off with a fiendish howl as Levison planted his foot on the fat junior's rear. He bolted, but came to a halt at a safe distance, and stood looking on.

Cardew took the end of the registered letter between his finger and thumb, and tore it off. Although he hadn't the faintest idea whom the letter was from, or what it contained, and although he was naturally curious, he displayed no outward eagerness. It took a great deal to disturb the equanimity of Ralph Reckness Cardew.

"It can't be from my grandfather, because he tipped me a fiver only two days ago," he remarked, as he shook the open envelope. "Hallo! What the— Great gad! Hold 'em, you fellows!"

But the warning came too late. A sheaf of currency notes had fallen to the ground, and before the chums of Study No. 9 could even bend down, a flurry of wind had swept across the quadrangle and the notes were whisked away.

"You careless ass!" shouted Levison.

"Dear man, I hadn't the faintest idea—"

"Well, don't stand there gassing!" yelled Clive. "Phew! Wealth galore! And it's blowing all over the quad like wastepaper!"

Baggy Trimble came rolling up.

"I'll help, you fellows," he said eagerly. "I'll—"

"You'll scoot, confound you!" roared Levison. "We don't want a fat burglar like you round here! It'll be hard enough to account for all these notes without turning you upside down afterwards."

"Do you think I'd pocket them?" hooted Trimble.

"You won't get the chance, my son!" snapped Levison.

"Clear off while you're safe!"

"Bai Jove!"

That exclamation came from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as he strolled elegantly through the School House doorway, with Blake and Herries and Digby close behind. The chums of Study No. 6 had just come down for an airing.

"Bai Jove!" repeated D'Arcy, screwing his famous eyeglass into his eye and gazing down at his feet. "What a twuly remarkable sight!"

"Glad you've noticed it, old man," said Blake, nodding. "I've always thought your feet were a bit large—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"I think he's just noticed that he's pigeon-toed!" said Herries gravely.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Rats!" said Digby. "He's startled by his own socks!"

"Weally, Dig—"

"Hallo, what are those bits of paper?" asked Blake, staring. "Quid notes, or I'm a Dutchman! What the thump—"

"You fwrightful asses!" interrupted Arthur Augustus coldly. "I've been lookin' at these notes from the vewy first. I wondahed—"

"Well, while you're wondering they'll blow away!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pway wescue them, deah boys. Somebody has evidently been vewy careless."

"Cardew, by the look of it," said Blake, as he salvaged two currency-notes. "Grab that one, Dig! Put your foot on it— Good! Any more flying about?"

"No; I think that's the lot," said Levison. "Thanks, Blake! These notes had better be counted and checked. Just like that ass Cardew to let them blow all over the place. He's as careless as Gussy!"

"Weally, Levison—"

"Twenty!" said Cardew, as he ran through the notes. "Well, it's an even number, anyhow, so I suppose they're all here."

"You suppose?" said Clive. "Hadn't you better make sure?"

"Dear man, you're full of bright ideas," assented Cardew, nodding. "Let us examine the accompanyin' letter, and see what Santa Claus has sent! Twenty quid from the blue skies, by gad! Pound-notes as thick as leaves in Vallambrosa!"

"Do you mean to say you don't know who sent that money?" asked Blake.

"Haven't the faintest idea, old bean," answered Cardew. "But twenty quid, when all is said an' done, is twenty quid. For once we have money to burn—"

"It may not be yours at all," interrupted Levison. "Perhaps it's only been sent to you to hand over to Mr. Railton for something, or—"

"Wouldn't it be a good idea to wead the lettah, an' make certain?" asked D'Arcy mildly.

"Another man with brains!" said Cardew, nodding.

He took a letter from the envelope and scanned it.

"Well, is it right about the twenty?" asked Clive. "For all we know, there might have been twenty-five—and that'll mean up-ending Trimble!"

"I haven't touched one of the rotten notes!" roared Trimble indignantly. "I never got a chance— I—I mean—"

"Peace, children!" interrupted Cardew. "Twenty is the correct number. And they are mine—all mine!"

CHAPTER 2.

Trimble's Share!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY looked doubtful. "I twust this monay is wightfully yours, Cardew?" he asked suspiciously.

"The rightfulness is terrific—as that Indian chap at Greyfriars would say," replied Cardew. "Haven't I just said that it's mine?"

"Yaas; but, without desiwinn' to be in any way pwesumptuous, I am wondahin' if the monay is clean," said Arthur Augustus sternly.

"Spotless!" said Cardew. "They're all new notes!"

"Weally, Cardew—"

"Well, you wanted to know if they were clean, didn't you?"

"I didn't mean clean—that is, I did mean clean—" D'Arcy broke off, and glared at Cardew through his eyeglass. "You fwightful ass, you are puttin' me all in a flustah! You know vewy well—"

"Alas, yes!" interrupted Cardew sadly. "This is what comes of havin' a shady reputation. This is my reward for the indiscretions of the past! You probably assume that I am now in possession of guilty gold? The result, perhaps, of puttin' a modest quid on yesterday's three-thirty at Abbotsford, an' bringin' home a twenty-to-one chance?"

"Don't wot, Cardew—"

"Or you may think it's my share of the sweepstake at the village pub—"

"Weally, Cardew—"

"If so, you're wrong," smiled Cardew. "You may not be aware of the fact, dear man, but you are now gazin' upon a fellow with brains—a fellow who can see into the future with the most astoundin' accuracy."

"You silly ass—"

"In a word, you are gazin' upon a prize-winner!" explained Cardew.

"A what?"

"A which?"

"In a moment of weakness, I went in for one of those football competitions," pursued the dandy of the Fourth. "In a way, I am not greatly surprised. It is largely a matter of perspicacity an' common sense. As you all know, I am famed for those two qualities—"

"Chuck it, Cardew!" said Blake. "Blessed if we know when you're pulling our leg and when you are not! Have you really won a twenty-pound prize in a competition?"

"Absolutely, dear man!"

"Bai Jove," said Arthur Augustus, his expression relaxing. "In that case, Cardew, deah boy, I wetwaet my suspicions. But, weally, you know, you are such a fwightful boundah—"

"Admitted!" said Cardew calmly. "But in this case I am blameless. Even your unsullied code cannot condemn me for winnin' a prize in a competition. Of course, there's been a mistake; but I'm not grumblin'."

"A mistake?" said Levison.

"They've sent me the third prize, instead of the first," explained Cardew.

"You silly chump!"

"Still, a third prize is not to be sneezed at," continued Cardew, with a smile. "An' how thoughtful of them to send it in cash! No bother with changin' cheques, or negotiatin' awkward interviews with the Housemaster. To be perfectly frank, I'd forgotten all about the giddy thing. I only sent my entry in for a lark."

Blake grinned.

"And some chaps try week after week, and month after month, and never win a brass farthing!" he said. "You send an entry in for a lark, and get twenty quid! Lucky beggar!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's just the way of things," said Cardew coolly. "A poor chap who really needs the money goes empty-handed. An' here am I, with an intact fiver still in my pocket, fairly rollin' in quid notes. It seems to me there's somethin' wrong with the order of things."

"We'll help to put them right, if you like," said Herries obligingly. "As it happens, Study No. 6 is stony—"

"Broke to the wide!" said Digby. "Even Gussy has failed us."

"Weally, Dig—"

"Rats!" growled Blake. "We don't want to borrow money!"

"Who said we did?" asked Herries. "But surely we can give Cardew a hint that tea-time will come round at a certain hour this evening?"

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"Bai Jove, that's not a bad ideah, Hewwies," said Arthur Augustus. "Tea in Study No. 6 will pwobably be a wippin' spwead this evenin'. I must remark that I do not entirely appwove of Cardew, but, under the cires—"

"This isn't a time to rake up a fellow's faults!" said Blake firmly.

"What about me?" asked Baggy Trimble, pushing his way forward. "You chaps owe me an apology for suspecting me of pocketing some of Cardew's money. A man doesn't do that sort of thing to his best pal."

"Buzz off, you cadger!"

"I've always stood up for Cardew," said Trimble stoutly. "I've been the first to defend him. And now he's not going to leave me in the lurch. I know my old ehum better than that!"

"Of course you do!" agreed Cardew, slapping Trimble's back. "Dear man, how much? Just say the word, an' you can rely on me! One? Two? Or would you like me to spring three?"

Baggy Trimble jumped.

"You—you mean it?" he gasped breathlessly.

"Honest Injun!"

"Good!" panted Trimble. "I—I think I'll take four, Cardew!"

"Four it is!"

"Or—or five—"

"Right you are!" agreed Cardew calmly. "We'll say five, old bean, an' let it stand at that."

"Look here, Cardew, you ass, you're not going to lend Trimble anything, are you?" demanded Levison. "The fat toad'll never pay you back! Don't be such an idiot—"

"But hasn't he said that he's my pal?" asked Cardew mildly.

"You uttah ass!" said D'Arcy. "Twimble is nothin' but a sponkah!"

"You shut up!" roared Trimble. "Cardew's promised to lend me the money, as one pal to another! He knows me well enough—don't you, Cardew?"

"Too well!" sighed Cardew.

"I—I mean, you know I'll pay you back," said Baggy Trimble hastily. "You'll only have to wait a day or two—until I get my next remittance from Trimble Hall. My people are rolling in money, you know."

"They must make a lot!" said Cardew thoughtfully.

"Rather!" said Baggy. "Heaps and heaps!"

"Down in the cellars, of course?" asked Cardew calmly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The cellars?" gasped Trimble.

"It must want a lot of organisation to pass it all," said Cardew. "Well, I'm glad you told us, Trimble—"

"You—you rotter!" hooted Trimble. "Are you suggesting that my people make bad money? I—I mean—As one pal to another, Cardew, I can always take a joke!" he added hastily. "He, he, he! Jolly good! But—but about that money you're going to lend me—"

"Ah, yes," said Cardew. "Five, wasn't it?"

"I—I meant six—"

"Just as you like," said Cardew obligingly. "After winnin' twenty quid in a football competition, I can afford to be generous. Six it'll be, Trimble. An' you can take it with my blessin'!"

"Weally, Cardew—"

"You ass!" snorted Clive. "If you're going to give Trimble six quid—"

"Eh?" said Cardew, as he took some loose change out of his pocket. "Six quid? Dear man, I said nothin' about six quid. I'm goin' to lend Trimble six—pennies!"

"Wha-a-at!" gasped Trimble.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"As one pal to another, I've got to be generous," said Cardew, as he dropped six coppers into Baggy's podgy hand. "There you are, old scout. You asked for six—an' you've got six! What more in life can a man expect? He asks, an' he receives!"

CHAPTER 3.

A Special Invitation!

BAGGY TRIMBLE fairly goggled at the six coppers.

"But—but you said you'd lend me six quid!" he gasped.

"You're full of delusions this mornin', my poor friend," said Ralph Reckness Cardew sympathetically. "Happily, there are many witnesses. I appeal to you all, old beans. Did I say anythin' about six quid? I told Trimble I'd lend him six, but it's his own fault if he assumes—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sold, Baggy!" grinned Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wegard Cardew's joke as wathah good, bai Jove!"

"What's the excitement about here?" asked a cheery voice.

Tom Merry & Co., of the Shell, joined the throng.

"Cardew promised to lend me six quid, and I've only got sixpence!" hooted Trimble. "I might have expected it. I've always said that Cardew was a trickster and a rotter!"

"As one pal to another, isn't that rather severe?" asked Cardew mildly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Six quid?" said Monty Lowther, rolling his eyes upwards. "Does so much money actually exist?"

"Cardew's got twenty!" said Blake.

"Twenty-five, to be exact," said Cardew. "To say nothin' of a few odd half-crowns, a stray bob or two, an' possibly a lurkin' sixpence—"

"Makes you wild, doesn't it?" interrupted Blake. "Here are we poor chaps broke to the wide, and Cardew gets a twenty-pound prize from a competition."

"Yaas; an' he only entahed for fun!"

"We all seem to be in the same boat!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Study No. 10 is passing through a lean period at the moment."

"We've just been holding a meeting of shareholders," explained Monty Lowther. "Net result—one sixpence, slightly bent; two perfectly sound pennies; a twisted American cent, and two-trousers buttons. In a way of speaking, Study No. 10 is practically on the point of bankruptcy."

"You may mean well, but all this is makin' me beastly uncomfortable," said Cardew solemnly. "You've only got to say the word, dear men, an' I'll whack out a few quids to relieve the general distress."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Thanks all the same, Cardew, but we can hold out," he replied cheerily.

"If only some fellows would have a little common-sense, there'd be no bother at all," said Monty Lowther. "I suggested pawning Manners' camera to raise the wind, but he didn't seem to like the idea."

"No, I jolly well didn't!" snorted Manners.

"You Shell fellows are pretty dull as a rule, but I must say this pawning stunt is a good one," remarked Blake. "As soon as morning classes are over, I'll run over to Wayland with Herries' cornet—"

"Eh?" said Herries.

"I ought to get five bob on it, at a pinch," continued Blake. "That would see us through tea this afternoon, and—"

"Five bob!" roared Herries. "You ass, my cornet's worth quids!"

"Ah, but these pawnbrokers are jolly careful—"

"You hopeless fathcad, I'll jolly well see that my cornet's locked up!" snorted Herries.

"But it would be for the good of the House—"

Herries tried to speak, but failed. And Cardew held up his hand.

"If it's only tea you're worryin' about, let us have peace," he said calmly. "I've received twenty quid from the blue, as it were, an' I feel in a generous mood.

Let me invite you to a special tea—a big feed to celebrate the occasion. I'll spring a tenner on the tuck, but you mustn't expect me to fag about with any of the preparations."

"What's this about a feed?" asked a hungry voice.

"Clear off, you New House rotters!"

"Bunk! This is none of your bizney!"

"Wathah not!"

Figgins & Co. of the New House joined the group.

"Pax!" said Figgins cheerfully. "We heard something about a feed, and as we're rather stony at the moment—"

"Let 'em all come!" chuckled Cardew. "St. Jim's seems to be swarmin' with people with no visible means of support! Figgins, old bean, you're perfectly welcome to the spread—an' bring your friends!"

"Good egg!" ejaculated Fatty Wynn eagerly.

"Is this a joke, or is it genuine?" asked Kerr, with Scottish caution. "We're all large-minded in the New House. We don't mind feeding with you School House men in times of extremity—"

"Exactly," agreed Figgins, a broad grin on his rugged, good-natured features. "There are certain times when the hatchet ought to be buried. Without question, this is one of those times."

"Hear, hear!" agreed David Llewellyn Wynn. "Didn't I hear something about a tenner, Cardew?"

"You did!" agreed Cardew. "As we

shall have such a distinguished rally of guests, I am afraid that Study No. 9 will be rather cramped—unless it happens to have elastic-sided walls. So what about convertin' the gym into a banquetin' hall just for once?"

"That's a good idea!" agreed Blake. "You can leave all that to us, Cardew. We'll club together, and bag all the crockery and silver we can, and make all the necessary preparations."

"Splendid!" said Cardew. "I'll take a stroll down to Mrs. Murphy's, in the village, an' order ten pounds' worth of the best. I rather think we ought to get a decent spread for ten quid."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I suppose this is the real goods, Cardew?" asked Tom Merry pointedly.

"Of course."

"Joking all aside?"

"Absolutely," said Cardew. "Dear man, it's honour bright, an' honest Injun, an' all the rest of it. I'm springin' a tenner for a feed this evenin', an' I leave the rest to you chaps."

"Good man!"

"Yes, rather!" said Figgins. "I must say this is jolly generous of you, Cardew. When we all happen to be so stony, it's like corn in Egypt. Rely on us to get the gym ready promptly on time. By the way, we haven't fixed the time yet, have we?"

"I suggest a quarter to six," said Monty Lowther. "Let Mrs. Murphy arrange to have everything ready at half-past five in parcels, and we'll collect it then. That'll leave us a quarter of an hour to get to the school."

"It's nearly an hour too late!" protested Fatty Wynn. "My only hat! We can't wait until a quarter to six!"

"But we shall have bigger and better appetites by then!" explained Lowther gravely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It suits me, anyhow!" drawled Cardew. "I'll slip down to the village after morning lessons, an' give the order. I'll tell Mrs. Murphy to have it all ready by five-thirty on the tick. As for the rest, I want to forget it. I'll do the payin', but that's where my obligation ceases. It'll probably be frightfully excitin' makin' all the preparations, but I wouldn't deprive you of that thrill for worlds!"

He strolled off with Levison and Clive.

"Bai Jove, I must remark that Cardew has come

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of

the Cheery Chums of
St. Jim's next week!

out wathah stwong!" said Arthur Augustus generously. "Genewally, I wegard him as a babblin' ass an' a slackin', smokin' wottah! In fact, I feah that Cardew has sometimes brougth discwedit upon me—bein', unfortunately, a distant wrelaton of mine. Howevah, it is not our place to set ourselves up as his judges!"

"When you've done gassing, Gussy, we'll make some plans," said Blake briskly.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Cardew is a sport!" said Blake. "He may have one or two faults, but there are certain times when faults ought to be forgotten. Let's buzz off to the gym, and make a few preliminary surveys."

And while they got busy, Ralph Reckness Cardew, as the donor of the feast, looked on from afar, as it were. Most of the fellows were surprised at Cardew's generous invitation, but Levison and Clive weren't. Levison was a cool, keen junior; Clive was quiet and steady; and Cardew was sardonic, whimsical, and frequently shady. His chums knew him inside and out, so to speak, and although he frequently irritated them beyond measure, and aroused their anger, they were, nevertheless, the firmest of friends.

And this lavish spending of ten pounds on a mere feast was just the sort of thing that might be expected of him. But there's an old proverb which says that "There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip!"

CHAPTER 4.

Nothing for Knox!

JUST a minute, Cardew!"

Second lesson was over, and Ralph Reckness Cardew was enjoying the morning break by lounging against the School House steps, sunning himself. It wasn't particularly warm, but the air was fresh and crisp. The high wind had abated somewhat.

Knox, of the Sixth, strolled up.

"I want you, Cardew," he continued genially.

"Dear man, I'm here, an' here I intend stayin' till the knell sounds for third lesson," replied Cardew. "Rippin' mornin'—what? Sunny, crisp, and all that! Nature in one of her gentle moods."

"Yes, exactly," interrupted Knox. "But the fact is, I want to have a word with you in private!"

"Say on, old bean!"

"I said in private."

"What's the matter with this spot?" drawled Cardew. "Awfully sorry, Knox, but I'm so comfortable that I don't feel inclined to move. Besides, I'm lazy. But you knew that long ago, didn't you?"

Gerald Knox frowned, but only for a moment. This was hardly the occasion to be himself. Considering the nature of his mission, he felt that it would be more helpful if he adopted an amiably agreeable exterior.

Cardew was amused. He knew Knox as well as anybody else—knew him to be a bully and several kinds of a rotter. And Knox's present familiarity and chumminess did not deceive the dandy of the Fourth for a moment. Such a fellow as Knox—a prefect, too—did not condescend to place himself on an equality with a mere junior unless he had an axe to grind.

"You've heard, then?" asked Cardew languidly.

"Heard what?"

"About my merry twenty quid?"

"Hem! Well, yes," admitted Knox carelessly. "I heard some of the juniors babbling about you, Cardew. But I didn't take any notice, of course."

"Not at all."

"I was going to have a word with you in any case," pursued Knox. "The fact is, I thought about borrowing a tenner."

"There's no harm in thinking about it," said Cardew easily. "In any case, that's your affair. Of course, you can think just what you please, Knoxy. It's not my bizney to regulate your thoughts!"

Knox frowned.

"Of course, you'll look upon this as a favour," he said. "There aren't many juniors I'd borrow money from, I can assure you."

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"My dear old bean, that assurance is quite unnecessary!" said Cardew. "I can quite believe you—because there aren't many juniors who would lend you anythin'!"

Knox frowned again.

"I don't want any check!" he growled. "I—I mean, I've always regarded you as a cut above the others, Cardew. I'm not saying that you can't be trusted with a lot of money; but if you let me take care of a tenner, you'll be doing yourself a good turn. You can look upon me as your bank—see?"

"That'll be awfully nice!"

"Whenever you want a quid or two, trot along to my study and I'll whack out," went on Knox. "I'll just take care of that ten pounds for you, so that the other fellows can't sponge on you. Mind you, I wouldn't do it for anybody else—but I'm inclined to favour you!"

"Such thoughtfulness as this, dear man, overwhelms me!" said Cardew gravely. "But let me spare you any further anxiety. I may be a queer sort of chap, but I don't like people doin' me favours, so we'll let it go at that. Thanks, all the same, but I prefer to be my own banker!"

Knox pursed his lips.

"Confound you, Cardew!" he muttered. "As it happens, I need that tenner pretty urgently to-day!"

"Now you're talkin'!" drawled Cardew. "You're not doin' me a favour, but you want me to do you one. Is that it?"

"Certainly not!"

"In that case—"

"Well, yes, in a way—if you put it like that," said Knox hastily. "Of course, your money will be perfectly safe. I'll pay you back whenever you like. I'll—Clear off, Trimble!" he added, with a roar. "You young porpoise! I'll skin you if you creep up, listening!"

"I want to speak to Cardew," said Baggy Trimble, backing away.

"Stand by me, old scout," pleaded Cardew. "When it's a choice of two evils, I choose the lesser."

Gerald Knox's eyes began to glitter. For a moment it seemed that he was about to lose his temper completely, but he managed to hold himself in check. But he turned upon Trimble, and made a move towards him.

"Are you going?" he shouted fiercely.

"But look here, Knox!"

Swish!

The prefect's cane hissed through the air behind Baggy.

"Ow!" howled Trimble. "Yaroooh!"

The cane hadn't come within a yard of him, but Baggy believed in being on the safe side. He rolled away at top speed. Knox turned back to the amused Cardew.

"My warmest gratitude, Knoxy!" said Cardew.

"Well, I can't stand here any longer!" growled Knox. "Let's have that tenner, and I'll get indoors. It's nearly time for third lesson, anyhow!"

"What tenner?" asked Cardew.

"Eh?"

"I said, what tenner?"

"You're going to lend me ten pounds."

"Am I?" asked Cardew, in surprise. "First I've heard of it!"

"You young fool—I mean, chuck it, Cardew!" said Knox hurriedly. "My plan is to hold your ten pounds in custody, as it were."

"And give it a life sentence?" asked Cardew.

"My plan is to pay you back a pound a week—or two pounds a week—just as you please!" snapped Knox. "You juniors can't look after your money properly, so I feel that it's my duty to step in."

"You've got a wonderful sense of duty, old scout!" said Cardew approvingly. "However, the proposition doesn't appeal to me. Sorry, and all that, but a tenner of that twenty is already earmarked, an' I have a rather peculiar fancy to keep the balance in my own pocket. Just a fad of mine, you know, but we all have our peculiarities."

Knox breathed hard.

"Are you trying to tell me that you're not going to lend me a tenner?" he snarled.

"No—I'm tellin' you!"
 "You young idiot!" snarled Knox. "You'd better let me have that money, or I'll make things pretty hot for you! You think you can be clever, do you? You fool! Give me that ten quid, or I'll—"
 "Exactly!" interrupted Cardew placidly. "Havin' failed to wheedle it out of me, you now try the threatenin' stunt. You'll have to do better than this, old bean. Why not strike out on a new line? Black-mail, for instance—"
 "By Jove! I'll skin you alive!"
 "No; blackmail would be a bit difficult," said Cardew. "Fortunately, you don't know anythin' against me, an' as I refuse to take any notice of your friendly little threats, I'm safe!"

Sorry, an' all that, but the office is now closed for business."

He detached himself from the doorway and strolled indoors—just in time for third lesson; and Gerald Knox went his way, empty-handed, and in a temper that closely resembled that of a Prussian Hun.

CHAPTER 5.
 Cardew Thinks Not!

BAGGY TRIMBLE was loitering in the gateway when Cardew walked out, soon after morning classes were over.

"I—I've been waiting for you, Cardew, old man," said Baggy magnanimously. "You're going down to the tuckshop, aren't you, to order ten quids' worth of stuff for this evening's spread?"

"That's the general idea, I believe," admitted Cardew.

"Good!" said Trimble. "I'm coming with you."

"Your mistake!" said Cardew, inspecting the toe of his boot. "I don't like to soil it, but in times of emergency—"

"Here, chuck it, Cardew!" gasped Trimble.

"I—I just wanted to borrow a quid or two until Saturday. I shall be getting a big remittance then, from Trimble Hall. My people are awfully rich—"

"The Cardews have never shirked their duty," said the dandy of the Fourth. "This is going to be a very painful duty, Trimble—very painful for you—but it's got to be done. If you will hold that exact position, I shall be able to get it over swiftly—"



Ralph Reckness Cardew tore the registered envelope open and shook it. "Hallo! What the — Hold 'em, you fellows!" But the warning came too late. A sheet of currency notes had fallen to the ground, and before Levison and Clive could even bend down, a flurry of wind had swept them across the quadrangle. (See Chapter 1.)

The prefect gritted his teeth.

"Look here, Cardew, I've stood about enough!" he panted. "Are you going to lend me that tenner or not?"

"No, I fancy," murmured Cardew.

"You'd better think carefully," breathed Knox. "I've only got to say a word to Mr. Railton, and he'll confiscate the lot! Housemasters don't believe in juniors having a lot of money in their possession."

"Well done!" said Cardew. "So you've taken my tip?"

"What the thump—"

"You're tryin' the blackmail stunt, eh?" smiled Cardew.

"You—you young blockhead!" hissed Knox. "If I breaths a word to Mr. Railton, he'll take your money and dole it out in dribs and drabs!"

"Well, even dribs and drabs would be somethin'," said Cardew, with a yawn. "If I lent it to you, dear man, I doubt whether I should ever see the tiniest drib, to say nothin' of a modest little drab, now an' again.

"Hold on, you rotter!" roared Trimble, in alarm.

He dodged backwards in the nick of time, and Cardew's foot swept harmlessly past. But Trimble came to the conclusion that "his old pal" was not in a mood for companionship, and he rolled disconsolately away, cudgelling his brains to find a method of extracting some of Cardew's prize money. Unfortunately, Ralph Reckness Cardew was not the kind of fellow to "fall" for any of Trimble's subterfuges.

The fat junior tried to console himself with the thought that he would, at least, distinguish himself at the feast. But he even had uneasy fears on this score. Some of the juniors might be beasts enough to bar him!

Cardew, in the meantime, strolled leisurely down Rylcombe Lane. He regarded this walk as a fag and a bore, but he couldn't very well get out of it. He was giving the feast, and he was paying the piper, so he felt that he had some justification for calling the tune.

And Cardew had his own ideas for the menu. He wasn't going to be satisfied with such commonplace fare as buns and cream-horns and jam-tarts. He was going to give very special orders to Mrs. Murphy, and would see that this banquet would consist of something very special. For ten pounds was a large sum to spend on a feed, and Cardew meant to spend it judiciously. It rather took his whimsical fancy to give his guests one or two little surprises.

Cardew's nature was somewhat complex, and even his own study-mates sometimes found it difficult to understand him. Boredom was one of his most frequent complaints, and he welcomed anything out of the common rut. The winning of twenty pounds—unexpected though it had been—had not given him the slightest thrill. But whacking out a tenner for a big feed tickled his fancy, particularly as he was bent upon ordering a few things of a very special nature.

To his satisfaction, he found the tuckshop empty, and he smiled graciously upon Mrs. Murphy as the good dame emerged from the background to attend to him.

"I've got a special order for you, Mrs. Murphy," said Cardew. "I'm givin' a spread to some of the fellows, an' I want you to supply ten pounds' worth of fodder for the feast."

"Go on with you, Master Cardew!" said Mrs. Murphy sceptically.

"Fact!" said Cardew. "And I want one or two special items, half a dozen roast chickens, for example. I'm rather keen on your special rolls, too, so you'd better bake an extra score or two."

"You're joking, Master Cardew!"

"Not at all. I want ten pounds' worth of stuff, an' it's got to be ready by half-past five," said Cardew. "That gives you nearly five hours to have everythin' ready."

And he proceeded to give his order in greater detail, Mrs. Murphy taking numerous notes. She was accustomed to supplying big orders now and again, but a ten-pound one was an exception.

"Everything will be ready, Master Cardew," she promised. "But I'd like to be sure that you're not just having one of your jokes on me."

"Never let it be said that I would spoof a lady!" exclaimed Cardew. "Take a look at these, Mrs. Murphy, an' be convinced."

He extracted his pocket-book and displayed his currency-notes.

"Is it that you're going to pay me now?" asked Mrs. Murphy.

"Hem! No," replied Cardew, putting his pocket-book away. "I don't believe in payin' in advance—on principle. But the money's O.K., an' you can take my word that it'll be spot cash on delivery, Mrs. Murphy. I'll be down here about a quarter-past five to inspect the stuff an' pay the bill. What more could you ask for? Have it all ready, an' the crowd will swoop down at five-thirty an' collect it all—after I've settled up."

And the good lady felt then that everything was safe and above board. Cardew wended his way back up Rylcombe Lane in a contented mood—until he espied the figure of Gerald Knox coming down to meet him.

"I saw you go out, so I came along to have another word with you," said the prefect, when they met. "Look here, Cardew, don't be a young ass. Do the sensible thing and lend me that tenner!"

"Have we got to go over that old argument again?" asked Cardew, with a sigh. "Dear man, there's nothin' doing. I don't want to imply that I distrust you, but—"

"I must have that tenner!" insisted Knox curtly.

"What about your pals in the Fifth?" inquired Cardew. "What about Cutts? What about Poynings of the New House? Have they let you down in your hour of extremity?"

Knox frowned viciously.

"I'm not going to argue with you," he said, between his teeth. "I want that tenner, and unless you choose to lead a life of misery during the next few weeks, you'll lend it to me. I'm a prefect, don't forget—"

"I'm not likely to forget it," interrupted Cardew. "All the same, old bean, while I wish to remain on the friendliest of terms, there's still nothin' doin'. Lovely morning, isn't it?"

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"Hang the morning!" snapped Knox.

"Nature is smilin'—"

"You fool!" broke in Knox harshly. "Can't you realise that your money will be perfectly safe with me?"

"Sorry, but I can't!"

"Do you mean that you don't trust me?"

"Right on the mark, dear man!"

"Why, you young villain, I'll smash you!" roared Knox. "What the deuce do you mean by standing there and saying that you don't trust me?"

Cardew yawned.

"I mean exactly what I say," he replied languidly.

Knox clenched his fists and felt helpless without his ashlant. He had neglected to bring this faithful companion, as it would have been hardly calculated to inspire Cardew with confidence.

"You insulting young scoundrel!" hooted Knox. "I'll teach you to talk to me like that! Hang your ten pounds! I wouldn't borrow it at any price now."

"I can assure you, you won't get the chance—"

"I'll make you pay for this!" snarled Knox. "You'll be sorry you opposed me, Cardew! I'm not the kind of man to be insulted and slandered by a fag!"

The prefect had lost his temper completely, and when Knox lost his temper he made no mistake about it. His eyes were blazing, and he looked really dangerous. At St. Jim's he would never have allowed himself to reveal such violence. As a prefect, he was permitted to cane the juniors if they deserved it; but it was all against the rules to lay hands upon them.

But he laid hands upon Ralph Reckness Cardew.

Before the junior could be aware of his intentions Knox seized him by the scruff of his neck and swung him round.

Crash!

Gerald Knox's heavy hand smacked at Cardew's face, but the junior had had sufficient wit to turn his head in the nick of time, and he received the brunt of the blow on his left ear.

"Great gad!" he muttered. "So that's your game, is it? All right; I'm ready for you, you hulkin' bully! Stand up in a fair fight, an' I'll knock you into the nearest ditch!"

But Knox of the Sixth was in no mood for a fair fight. He had Ralph Reckness Cardew at a disadvantage now, and his vile temper was in full possession.

CHAPTER 6.

An Unexpected Ally!

"HOLD on, there!"

Knox turned, momentarily startled.

Cardew was in his grip, and things were looking very bad for the dandy of the Fourth. Cardew was a waster in many ways, but he knew how to fight, and his worst enemy had never accused him of being a funk. He was no match, however, for the bully of the Sixth.

In the momentary pause he was able to twist his head round and inspect the interrupter. A young man was standing close against the stile, and his expression was not particularly amiable. He was a well-set-up young fellow, quite decently dressed, and he was glaring at Knox with anger.

"Leave that kid alone!" he snapped, striding forward.

"Who the thunder are you?" roared Knox furiously.

"Mind your own confounded business!"

"When I see a bully going for a youngster half his size, it is my business!" retorted the other. "I saw you give that kid a smash on the side of the head just now, and you'd better not give him another!"

Knox saw red.

"I'll do as I like!" he hooted, turning fiercely upon Cardew again.

Crash!

Even Cardew was taken unawares, although he was on the alert for another attack. In Knox's grip he had found it impossible to wriggle free, for Knox had obtained a tenacious hold, and the Fourth-Former was at a disadvantage. That second blow caught him in the neck and he went dizzy.

"So that's it, is it?" shouted the stranger. "All right, young fellow-my-lad! You asked for it!"

He seized Knox with a terrific grip and swung him

round. Knox reeled back, and at the same moment the stranger brought his left into action with deadly effect.

Gerald Knox caught those hard knuckles on the point of his chin, and he staggered back with a fiendish yell, and collapsed in the ditch by the side of the road.

Splash!

Gerald Knox practically vanished.

There had been a good deal of rain recently, and the ditch was full of water. At least, it seemed to be full of water. Actually, the lower part of it was thick, black mud. When Knox reappeared he was unrecognisable.

"Thanks awfully," said Cardew, straightening his tie. "I don't know who the thump you are, but I like that left of yours immensely. Somehow, I don't think Knox appreciates it much, though."

"He'll get some more unless he's careful!" snapped the other.

The bully of the Sixth crawled out of the ditch, and

"Don't mention it," said Cardew, smiling. "It seems that Knox not only chose the wrong moment, but the wrong place, too. It was decent of you to butt in like that. The blighter was just goin' to convert me into mincemeat. One of our prefects, you know."

"You're from St. Jim's, ain't you?" asked Watts.

"Right on the wicket, old bean!"

"And that cad is a prefect?"

"Unfortunately, yes," said Cardew. "The fellows have done their best to tame him, but he's a hard nut to crack. You mustn't think all our prefects are of the same brand. St. Jim's is really a decent place; although, judgin' by Knox, you might reasonably mistake it for a kind of second Borstal."

"I know St. Jim's is all right," said Watts, nodding.

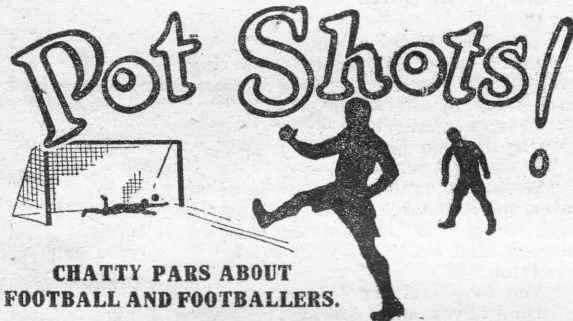
"My sister's there."

Cardew elevated his eyebrows.

"Your sister?" he repeated.

"My sister Elsie."

"A rippin' name, old bean, no doubt, but I don't



CHATTY PARS ABOUT FOOTBALL AND FOOTBALLERS.

ATTACHED to the Preston North End football ground there is a big car-parking place which has accommodation for over one thousand cars. What a noise there would be if all the owners dashed out to sound the hooters when a goal was scored.

On hard, frosty grounds the players of Tottenham Hotspur wear knee protectors consisting of a "cap" of thick, studded rubber. This is an idea worth copying.

The Corinthians v. Newcastle United Cup-tie of last season produced the largest "gate" of any Tie prior to the Semi-Final. That gives an idea of the popularity of the amateur team.

No club has ever won the Cup two seasons in succession for nearly forty years. Blackburn Rovers were the last to perform the feat—in 1890 and 1891. The effort was evidently too much for them—they have never won the trophy since!

Only five players in big League football were sent off the field during the first half of the present season.

Cresswell, the Everton full-back, is a director of a cinema at Birkenhead.

every atom of his rage had gone. He had been effectually cooled. But there was no mistaking the hatred which burned in his eyes.

"I don't know who you are, but I'll get square!" he panted. "I'll—"

"My name's Watts—Sid Watts, at your service!" said the young man contemptuously. "The new light-weight champion of Wayland, if you'd like to know. If you'll call at my training quarters—"

"Great Scott!" muttered Knox, dazed.

Light dawned upon him, and he now understood why that left had had such a tremendous amount of punch behind it.

Without another word he turned on his heel and hurried off. He was wet to the skin, and the wind was cold. It was highly necessary to change his clothes without any delay.

"I don't know the why and the wherefore of the affair, and I'm not asking you to tell me," said Sid Watts, turning to Cardew. "But that cur was playing foul, and I couldn't help butting in."

The many flooded grounds prevailing this season have resulted in not a few clubs getting into low water. The rising tide of adversity, as we might put it.

During their three and a half seasons in the Second Division Chelsea were only beaten seven times at Stamford Bridge. There's no place like home—for them!

The Cardiff City half-backs, Keenor and Irving, captained the Welsh and Irish teams respectively in the International match this season—a rare happening.

Finch, the West Bromwich Albion full-back, who has played in International trial matches this season, is only 19. It's a cinch that Finch is a "pinch" of a player.

Robert Bruce, Middlesbrough's new inside-right, is now the smallest player in League football; for he stands only 63 ins. Middlesbrough will have to be careful or they will lose this little Aberdonian.

All the Swindon Town players take their washing home, and so save the club a big laundry bill at the end of each season. We have no knowledge of what their wives think of this "economy" idea, but having seen some of the grounds on which matches have been played this season we can guess.

A Mexican football team has challenged a side of Chicago policemen to a "friendly" game. The referee's wife, so it was said, immediately went into mourning.

Mr. Sid. King, the West Ham manager, says that he doubts if he will ever be tempted to go to Scotland for players. But the Scots won't be lonely—there are plenty of managers who never go anywhere else.

No extreme winger now in League football has scored a hundred goals in League games alone, but three First Division touch-line artists are well on the way. They are Fred Tunstall, Sheffield United; William Pease, of Middlesbrough; and William Smith, of Huddersfield Town. They have all passed the 80 mark.

seem to have seen the sweet thing trippin' around," said Cardew.

"Well, she hasn't been there long, and I don't suppose you'd see anything of her, anyhow," said Watts. "She's maid to your headmaster's wife. Mrs. Holmes, isn't it? Well, Elsie's one of the chambermaids there."

"Pardon my obtuseness," said Cardew languidly. "Of course, the Head's private household is quite out of our province. My name's Cardew—Fourth Form, School House. Pleased to make your acquaintance, Watts, old scout. Any time you're visitin' your sister, don't forget to pop into Study No. 9. Always welcome."

The young fellow smiled.

"Thanks all the same, Master Cardew, but I know my place," he replied. "It isn't for the likes of me to come butting into the company of my betters—"

"My dear man, we're not proud," interrupted Cardew, pained. "An' don't hint that we're snobs, for goodness' sake!"

"The masters mightn't like it," said Watts, who seemed to be a thoroughly sensible young fellow. "As a matter of fact, I'm going up to the school this evening, to spend an hour with sis in the kitchen. She's allowed to have a visitor once a week—providing the visitor is approved of."

"Then take a tip from me, old man, and steer clear of Knox," said Cardew solemnly.

"I'm not afraid of—"

"Absolutely not!" interrupted Cardew. "I'm not hintin' for a moment that you're afraid of anythin'. But Knox in Rylcombe Lane, an' Knox within the sacred precincts of St. Jim's, are two different people. You get me?"

"Can't say as I do, exactly," replied Watts, puzzled.

"Well, in the lane, you could knock him into the ditch with impunity," explained Cardew. "But if you happened to come across him in the quad, an' he started some of his funny business, it would be a different thing."

"How would it?"

"In two minutes a master would probably be on the scene, and Knox would accuse you of attackin' him," said Cardew. "In other words, you'd be mixed up in a brawl, the Head would get to hear of it, an' your sister would probably be sacked on the strength of Knox's complaint. So take a tip from one who knows, an' keep your peepers peeled."

Watts nodded.

"Yes, I see what you mean," he replied. "I wouldn't like Elsie to suffer, so I'll be careful. Not that there's much chance of my running against Knox again."

"You never know," said Cardew. "I have generally found that you run against people just when you don't want to—just as you can't run against them when you do want to. One of life's little tricks, dear man."

Watts looked at him curiously.

"Well, thanks for warning me, Master Cardew," he repeated. "I'll be getting along now, if you don't mind. I've been out for a long walk, through Wayland Woods, and I thought I'd come round by Rylcombe. A fine exercise, walking. Best exercise in the world."

"I don't doubt it for a moment," said Cardew, nodding. "At the same time, I must confess that it's not one of my own weaknesses. I never walk unless I'm compelled to. We're built differently, I suppose. It's all to the good, when you come to think of it, that we're not all alike."

He shook hands, and they parted.

Ralph Reckness Cardew believed that he had probably seen Watts for the first and last time, and he hadn't the faintest curiosity regarding the young fellow's sister. He little dreamed that Fate, with Gerald Knox as first assistant, was destined to precipitate an early and dramatic meeting with the young lady!

CHAPTER 7.

Preparing for the Feast!

"**B**AI JOVE!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood in the doorway of the gym, and gazed at the scene before him through his famous eyeglass.

It was close upon five o'clock, and lessons, of course, were over for the day. In the gym all was bright and cheerful. The juniors had been busy, and the place had been converted into a temporary banqueting-hall.

"Bai Jove!" repeated D'Arcy. "Congwats, deah boys—"

"Buzz off, Gussy, and come back later on," said Blake briskly. "You're only one of the ornaments, and ornaments aren't wanted until the last thing."

"Weally, Blake—"

"More knives wanted!" sang out Figgins, from further down the gym. "Who's got all the knives? Hurry up, there!"

"Pewwaps I had better wally wound with my assistance," said Arthur Augustus. "I wathah fancy that my help is wequiahed."

"So it is, Gussy," said Monty Lowther promptly. "You're just the man we need."

"Rats!" said Herries. "He'll only be in the way—"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

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"Yes, you buzz off, Gussy, and come back when you're whistled," said Figgins.

"I disappwove of that wemark, you New House wottah!" said D'Arcy indignantly.

"Go hon!"

"I wegard it as oppwobwious in the extweme," continued Arthur Augustus, surveying Figgins with disdain. "You are implyin', you fwightful ass, that I am a dog!"

"Now, I ask you," said Figgins, "did I call Gussy a dog?"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as a dog!" said Arthur Augustus warmly.

"But, my dear chap—"

"You distinctly said, Figgay, you wottah, that I was to go away, an' only weturn if I'm whistled!" said D'Arcy. "Bai Jove! Wally wound, School House, an' throw this New House boundah—"

"Dry up, Gussy, and do something for your living," interrupted Blake. "I've often told you that you talk too much."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Rats!"

"This New House wottah—"

"Never mind Figgay; he's working like a Trojan," said Monty Lowther. "Buzz indoors and lend a hand with some of the other stuff."

"Yaas, wathah; but—"

"Oh, are you going to dry up?"

"I weally considah—"

"What you really consider is of no account at all," interrupted Blake. "I've got just the job that'll suit you, Gussy. We're short of chairs and forms. Rush indoors, and come out with all the forms you can lay hands on."

"You fwightful ass!"

"Didn't you offer to help?" roared Blake.

"Yaas, but—"

"Then go and get those forms, and don't gas so much!"

"I uttahly wefuse to wuin my clothes by cawwyin' forms!" said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I am perfectly willin' to do my bit, deah boys, but I dwaw the line at cawwyin' forms about. An' I'm still waitin' for Figgay to apologise for callin' me a dog—"

"You'll have to wait a long, long time," said Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Besides, I didn't call you a dog," insisted Figgins. "But you'll be surprised at what I'll call you if you don't buzz off. My hat! It's past five, and we're not ready by long chalks. Are you going, Gussy, or shall we kick you out?"

"I wefuse to be kicked out—"

"Whether you refuse or not, it makes no difference—this is Hobson's choice," said Blake grimly. "For once, Figgay, old man, I'm with you, Gussy, will you have my boot, or Herries'? Herries' is larger!"

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle into his eye and lifted his head.

"I uttahly wefuse to wemain in the company of such wuffians!" he said, disdainfully. "Bai Jove! I am not at all certain that I shall gwace the feast with my pwesence. I wegard you all with aversion."

"Good!" said Blake. "And now you're going?"

"You wottah—"

"He's not going!" said Lowther sadly.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

The swell of St. Jim's marched out in high dudgeon, and bumped into Baggy Trimble, who was hovering just outside.

"Pway stand aside, Twimble," said Arthur Augustus coldly.

"Just the man I wanted to see," said Trimble eagerly.

"You being one of my pals—"

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "Did you say that I'm one of your pals, Twimble?"

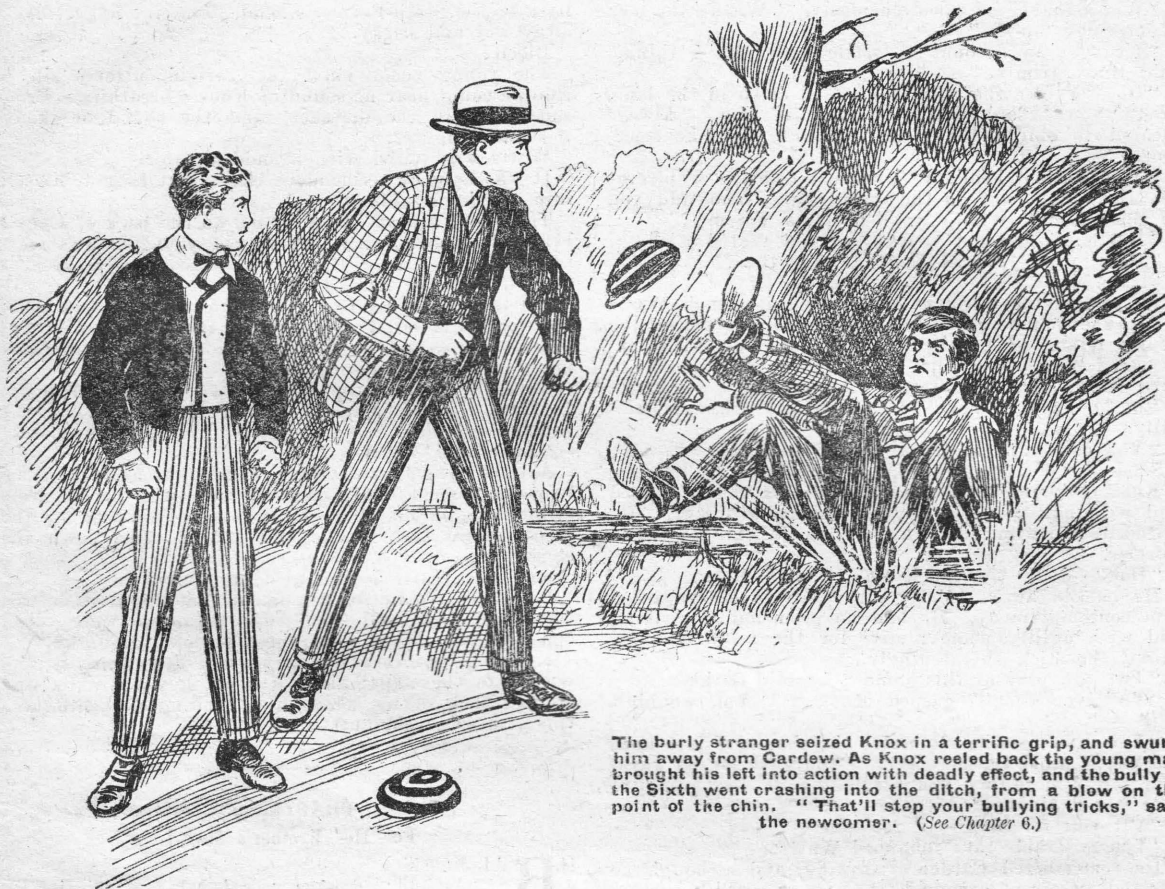
"Yes, Gussy, old man."

"I wepudiate the insinuation, Twimble!" said Arthur Augustus frigidly. "An' pway wefwain fwom callin' me Gussy. I am only Gussy to my fwriends."

"Well, ain't I your fwriend?" asked Baggy.

"Weally, Twimble—"

"Everything ready?" asked Ralph Reckness Cardew, as he lounged up. "Arguing again, Gussy? Dear man, I wonder how many thousands of words you waste



The burly stranger seized Knox in a terrific grip, and swung him away from Cardew. As Knox reeled back the young man brought his left into action with deadly effect, and the bully of the Sixth went crashing into the ditch, from a blow on the point of the chin. "That'll stop your bullying tricks," said the newcomer. (See Chapter 6.)

every day in this unproductive fashion? It fills my heart with sorrow to—"

"I twust you are not goin' to start, Cardew," said D'Arcy stiffly.

"Yes, I am—in about two minutes," replied Cardew. "I am startin' for the village."

"You fwightful chump!"

"It's a bore, of course, but there's no gettin' out of it," went on Cardew resignedly. "My idea is to trot down to Mrs. Murphy's, inspect the fodder, an' pay for it. You can carry it up to the school, Gussy."

"Weally, Cardew—"

"You can use Taggles' wheelbarrow—"

"You uttah ass!"

Cardew strolled into the gym, and looked round with complete approval. The place was certainly looking cheerful and gay. Three tables had been placed end to end, and all the available tablecloths had been raked up, and the festive board was gleaming with many patterns of crockery and all sorts and conditions of knives and forks. There was everything there, in fact, except the food. But the lack of the actual feast worried nobody, since it would be ready at five-thirty—paid for, and waiting to be carried away.

"I just looked in to see how you were getting on," said Cardew. "Pretty well finished, eh? Well, I'm going to the village to settle up with Mrs. Murphy. Half a dozen of you fellows had better come down in about a quarter of an hour. You'll find all the stuff ready to shift."

"We'll do most of the shifting after it gets up here," said Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can rely on us to be down at Mrs. Murphy's almost as soon as you are, Cardew," said Bernard Glyn. "We've only got a few more touches to make, and the table will be perfect."

"Rats!" said Fatty Wynn. "No table's perfect until the grub's on!"

Cardew chuckled, and went out. He set off down Rylcombe Lane in a contented frame of mind. It wasn't often that he played the host in this fashion, and the

novelty of it rather appealed to him. The fact that he was expending a tenner concerned him no more than if he had promised to whack out tenpence. The grandson of Lord Reckness was generally rolling in money, and after his present supply had gone he would soon be in possession of some more.

And to a fellow who was more or less permanently bored, the whole proceedings were a welcome change.

Even now, Cardew didn't guess that the feast was in dire jeopardy.

CHAPTER 8.

Knox Asks for It!

IF Ralph Cardew had glanced across the quadrangle before passing out of gates, the rest of that evening's events might have been very different. For Cardew would have seen a figure, and would have recognised that figure as that of Sid Watts, the young boxer.

But Cardew didn't look, and Fate took its course. Watts had come to St. Jim's, as he had intimated, to spend an hour with his sister. He went past the School House with a jaunty stride, for he was feeling in the best of moods.

But just then Knox of the Sixth came across the quad from the New House.

And Knox took one look and paused. In the bright sunlight he recognised that springy figure. A vicious look came into the prefect's face. He carried an ashplant in his hand, and he gripped it hard.

There was nobody else about in the quad at the moment, and he hastened forward. Here was his chance to get even! He wouldn't let this impudent stranger use his fists again. No, one or two hefty swipes with the ashplant would be good enough! And if any of the other fellows came along, Knox could always claim that he had been attacked.

"Just a minute!" said Knox, in a low voice. Sid Watts halted, and turned.

"Who's that?" he asked curiously. "What's the idea of creeping up—"

"I've got an account to settle with you, I think," said Knox grimly.

"Oh! You're the bully I knocked down in the lane, aren't you?" said Watts, staring at him. "Always pleased to oblige—that's me. Would you like some more?"

"You insolent hooligan!" snarled Knox. "You're at St. Jim's now—not on the open road. Who told you to come here? What's your business, anyhow?"

"It's mine, and not yours!" replied Watts briefly.

"Hang you!" roared Knox. "Try this!"

Slash!

He swung the ashplant round, and it struck Watts across the shoulders with a swipe that nearly threw the young fellow off his balance. It was a totally unexpected blow. For until that moment Watts had not even known that the prefect was carrying a stick.

But he knew it now. His shoulders smarted painfully.

"You coward!" panted the young boxer.

Slash!

Knox delivered another swipe, but his victim dodged and with agility made a dive for the ashplant. He seized it, and wrenched it away from the enraged Sixth-Former.

"Don't—don't you touch me!" panted Knox.

He backed away, utterly startled. Watts regarded him contemptuously. He had no intention of striking and with agility made a dive for the ashplant. He raised the stick threateningly.

"Two can play at this game!" he said darkly.

"You—you fool!" gasped Knox. "You wouldn't dare—"

"You didn't smash me across the shoulders just now, did you?" broke in the other. "You gave me no warning, but I'm telling you straight that I'm going to give you a hiding!"

"I'll yell for help—"

"You miserable rat!" snapped Watts.

He remembered Cardew's warning, and although he affected an air of savage heat, he was really perfectly calm. He would avoid any conflict with this contemptible prefect, and would go his own way. But he couldn't help giving Knox a further scare.

"I'll show you!" he hissed

He whirled the ashplant aloft, and Gerald Knox gave a yelp of fear and leapt backwards. In his alarm he hardly realised where he was, and the next second he tripped on an inequality of the ground, and went over backwards.

Crash!

Knox lay perfectly still.

He was sprawling at the bottom of the School House steps, and Watts stood perfectly still, staring. There was something strange about the prefect's silence. And that crash had been rather dreadful.

"My goodness!" muttered Watts, startled.

The whole thing had happened in a second. It seemed to Watts that the Sixth-Former had caught the back of his head against the edge of the bottom step. And Knox had gone over with terrific force owing to the speed of his backward leap and the violence of his fall.

"My goodness!" said Watts again.

He went down on his knees and pulled at Knox's clothing.

"Hurt?" he asked, huskily.

No answer.

"I say, buck up!" said Watts, a cold, clammy perspiration breaking out on his forehead. "I—I didn't do it! I didn't touch him! Knox! Can't you speak? It's no good pretending—"

He broke off, knowing only too well that he was the one who was pretending. Knox was "out," and perhaps his dreadfully silent condition meant that he was worse than out.

The young boxer told himself again and again that he had done nothing—he hadn't touched the prefect. Knox had simply tripped over something, and—

"Oh!" gasped Watts.

He stiffened, and his heart seemed to cease beating. In pulling Knox over his fingers had encountered the

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back of the Sixth-Former's head. And the fingers came away wet and sticky.

Blood!

The young boxer knelt there, rigid, utterly silent. And he could hear no sound of Knox's breathing. From somewhere in the distance came the sound of shouting and laughter.

Watts was seized with a sudden panic.

It was only by tremendous effort that he got himself into control again.

There was a nasty, ugly wound on the back of Knox's head. He was so still that all the young boxer's fears returned to him. He stared fascinatedly at the wound, with the matted hair—

Watts rose to his feet rather unsteadily. And there he stood, his mind confused by the tragic nature of this accident, and by the realisation that Gerald Knox might never open his eyes again.

Then the door of the School House opened suddenly. "Hallo!" said Racke, of the Shell. "What the thump—"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came up at the same moment from the direction of the gym, his monocle glimmering in his eye. As he paused, startled by the sight before him, Racke and Crooke came down the steps.

And Sid Watts looked at them dully.

He didn't realise for a moment that his attitude was suspicious—that all the circumstances were dead against him. What were these juniors to think?

Knox of the Sixth was lying face downwards at the bottom of the steps; there was an ugly-looking wound on the back of his head; and bending over him was this stranger, ashplant in hand.

CHAPTER 9.

For Her Brother's Sake!

"B AI Jove!"

Arthur Augustus repeated his ejaculation in a tone of horror. He had just caught sight of Knox of the Sixth.

"What's happened?" asked Racke, staring. "Who the dickens is this chap? And who's that lying—Great Scott! There's been a fight!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said the swell of St. Jim's, gazing at Watts grimly.

"I—I didn't do it!" said Watts, with a violent start.

"Hold him!" shouted Crooke. "Hi, you chaps! Grab this fellow, and hold him! Back up, School House! There's been some dirty work—"

"Gweat Scott!" broke in Arthur Augustus. "You fwightful wottah! Gwab him, Wacke! The uttah wuffian has stwuck down—"

"I didn't!" panted Watts, backing away.

"You liar!" yelled Crooke. "We've caught you fairly and squarely!"

"Wed-handed, bai Jove!"

"He—he tripped!" shouted Watts. "He got scared and jumped backwards and tripped up."

"It's Knox!" interrupted Racke, as he bent down.

"I tell you he tripped—"

"You fwightful wuffian!" broke in Arthur Augustus hotly. "If Knox twipped ovah backwards, why is he now lyin' face downwards?"

"I—I turned him over!"

"That's a good point, Gussy!" interrupted Racke quickly. "Knox was taken unawares."

"You—you don't think I hit him from behind?" asked Watts, horrified.

"You murderous rotter, you've still got the stick in your hands!" shouted Crooke. "It's as clear as daylight. You crept up behind him and smashed him over with that stick!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Watts looked round him in panic. These juniors believed that he had felled Knox from behind. And, for the first time, Watts realised that the fellows had every justification for such a suspicion.

Everything looked black against him.

He had been discovered in circumstances that could only point to one conclusion. Knox was lying face

downwards on the ground, and the young boxer had been bending over him, with that ashplant still grasped in his hand!

"I wathah think——"

The others didn't know what D'Arcy rather thought, for at that moment Watts threw the stick down and spun round on his heel. He fled as if for his life, and a great shout went up.

"Stop him!" roared Crooke.

"Bai Jove! The fwightful wascal!" gasped D'Arcy. "Wescue! I am afwaid that Knox is wathah badly hurt!"

"What's the matter here, Gussy?" asked Blake, hurrying up. "What about those chairs and forms? Hallo! What the thump's this?"

"Somebody's been trying to kill Knox!" yelled Racke. "Didn't you see that chap dodging across the quad? You might have stopped him, Blake!"

"You silly idiot!" roared Blake. "How did I know?"

He stared down at Knox, and then glared at the Shell fellows.

"You—you pair of dummies!" he snapped. "Couldn't you stop the chap, whoever he was? This looks serious!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"It's too late now, anyhow!" went on Jack Blake curtly. "Come on! Lend a hand with Knox. Grab hold, Gussy! Crooke, you rush indoors for Mr. Railton. Great Scott! Knox looks awful!"

And while the unconscious prefect was carried indoors, Sid Watts crouched in the bushes in the Head's garden. He had run there blindly, and was now seeing the position in its true perspective. His heart was thumping with painful intensity, and his mind was in a whirl of terror.

He had killed Knox!

That was the thought that turned his blood to water. And yet it had been an accident! He had threatened Knox, it was true, but only in make-believe. And Knox had tripped over, and his injury had been accidental.

But nothing could alter the fact that Watts had been discovered in the most suspicious circumstances. In spite of his panic, he had his wits about him enough to realise that. Nobody would ever believe that Knox had tripped. He would be arrested! They would accuse him of striking the prefect down and killing him. They would put him on his trial for murder!

These frantic thoughts crowded madly through the young boxer's mind. It seemed to him that an hour must have elapsed since he had arrived at St. Jim's. As a matter of cold fact, barely three minutes had passed. Cardew of the Fourth was still just outside the gates, having paused to give Baggy Trimble a few well-meant words of advice on the subject of following people about.

A silence came over the quad, and Watts knew that the stricken prefect had been carried indoors. As yet, there was no hue and cry. It was his chance to escape. But where could he go?

What was the good of going back home—to Wayland?

He had been seen—probably recognised. The telephone would be at work by now, perhaps, and before he got home he would be arrested. No; his only course would be to get right away.

But how could he escape without money?

"Elsie!" he muttered.

He suddenly remembered his sister. He and she had always been the best of pals. There was only a year between them, and they had grown up together as children. Elsie would understand, and she would help.

It was no time for thinking or making plans, or weighing matters. Almost blindly, Watts made his

way to the servants' door of the Head's house, and his relief was immense when Elsie came out of the doorway before he could even knock.

"I was watching for you, Sid," she began. "You're late!"

"Elsie," he muttered, "I—I——"

"Why, Sid, whatever's the matter?" asked his sister.

He drew her aside. Elsie Watts was a slim girl of about seventeen, with a pretty face and dark, bobbed hair. She looked very neat in her maid's uniform. But her cheery smile of welcome had now vanished, and she clutched at her brother anxiously.

"Has—has something happened, Sid?" she asked fearfully.

"I—I believe I've killed somebody!" muttered the young boxer brokenly.

The girl looked at him with wide, frightened eyes.

"Oh, Sid!" she whispered. "I—I've always been afraid——"

"No, no!" he broke in. "It's nothing to do with boxing! It happened here—not five minutes ago. One of the school prefects—a fellow named Knox—they—they think——"

In short, panic-stricken sentences, Watts blurted out what had happened. Elsie listened with growing horror and alarm.

"I—I didn't do it, sis!" said Watts, in conclusion. "He tripped! I didn't touch him with that stick! I swear it——"

"I believe you, Sid!" she interrupted quietly. "I know you wouldn't do a terrible thing like that! You'll have to explain, Sid——"

"Explain?" he gasped. "To them? To—the police?"

"Police!" she panted, gripping him more tightly.



"They'll be after me in no time!" he said harshly. "Don't you understand, sis? They won't believe me! They won't accept my story! They'll think I knocked him down from behind—that I killed him! There weren't any witnesses, and I was found like that by those boys! And—and there was that other quarrel, too! It's—it's enough to hang me, sis!"


"Oh!" breathed the girl. "You—you'll have to get away—go right off before they tell the police!"

"I can't—I can't!" muttered Watts. "I haven't got any money here—and I daren't go home! I've got sixteen pounds in the savings bank, but it takes days to



(Continued on the next page.)

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get it out! I haven't got ten shillings on me, Elsie!"

"Wait—wait!" panted the girl. "Oh, Sid, you've got to get away! They mustn't catch you—they mustn't—!" She broke off, and caught her breath in. "Wait here!" she added, in a tense whisper. "I'll be back in a minute!"

With a rustle she had gone, and it seemed to Sid Watts that many minutes had elapsed before she was back. The girl had probably taken a minute only, and when she returned she was flushed and breathless.

"Take it, Sid!" she breathed. "Oh, I believe in you; but the police will never let you escape, once they get you! Take this, and get right away!"

The young boxer felt some crisp papers thrust into his hand.

"But—but— I—I—" he stammered.

"My savings!" whispered Elsie. "There's twenty-five pounds there, Sid—enough to get you across to Canada!"

"Why, sis, I—I didn't know you had so much!" he gasped. "It's too much, Elsie! I—I can't take—"

"Oh, don't—don't!" she interrupted feverishly. "They'll be after you, Sid! Please, please go! Your only chance is to escape now, before the hue and cry!"

Watts hardly remembered blurting out his almost incoherent thanks. And the girl certainly did not hear him, for her own mind was in a confused whirl. She suddenly knew that she was alone—that he was gone!

Swaying slightly, she went indoors, and managed to creep upstairs without any of the other domestics seeing her. She got into her own bed-room, and closed the door. Then, placing her back against it, she stood there, staring straight before her with a wild light shining in her eyes. Her cheeks were deathly pale.

"Twenty-five pounds!" she whispered, horrified. "Oh, Sid—Sid! I had to do it—for your sake!"

And Sid Watts, stumbling blindly through the gathering dusk, little dreamed that the money in his pocket had been stolen from Mrs. Holmes' bureau! Elsie had told him that the money was her savings; but, for her brother's sake, she had become a thief!

CHAPTER 10.

Cardew is Puzzled!

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW felt content with all the world.

It was nearly twenty-past five, and, although he was still in Rylcombe Lane, he was approaching the village, and would be at Mrs. Murphy's little shop within another two minutes.

And that would be in plenty of time, since the other juniors would not be along to collect the good things until five-thirty. And Cardew was taking a whimsical interest in the entire affair.

He was rather surprised at himself.

He didn't quite know why he should discover a thrill in the mere giving of a big feed. Perhaps it was because he had never indulged much in this kind of entertainment. Indeed, he had always regarded such occasions with a superior sort of aloofness. But it made things different when he was the host, and he felt that he was in for an enjoyable evening.

He had resisted the temptation to light a cigarette, and he chuckled to himself as he continued his leisurely progress.

"Dear man, you're becomin' a model of propriety and good behaviour!" he murmured to himself. "Good gad! At this rate, I shall soon be unable to stare a cigarette in the face, and the very mention of a pack of playin'-cards or a bookmaker will send me into a dead faint!"

He chuckled again, and noted the glimpse of red roofs ahead, where the village shops were clustered.

A figure came hurrying down the lane, and Cardew glanced round.

It was Sid Watts.

It seemed incredible that the young boxer had passed through such a lot merely while Cardew was strolling to the village. But it was a fact. Cardew had taken things very leisurely, after his usual style; and Watts, on the other hand, had passed through a series of

lightning events. His encounter with Knox—the fall—the discovery—the flight—his talk with his sister! And all this while Cardew had been walking to the village.

"Ah, we meet again, old bean!" said Cardew urbanely. "Well, did you take my advice—"

"Who—who's that?" gasped Watts.

Until that second, the young boxer had not known that he had overtaken anybody, and that there was another human presence in the lane. He had walked on unseeing—blindly. He did not even realise that he might be courting disaster by walking into the village, instead of taking to the woods. The panic in his heart was so great that his wits were more or less deadened.

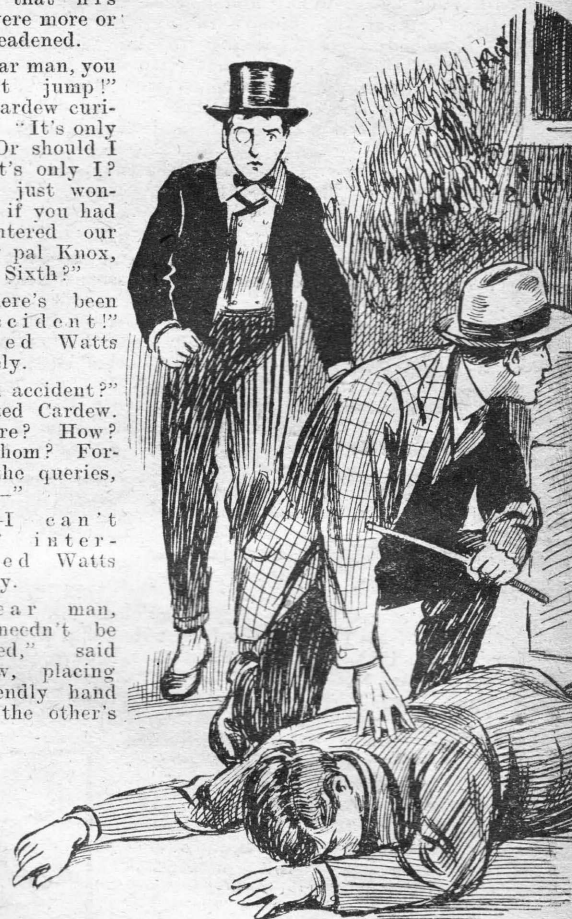
"Dear man, you needn't jump!" said Cardew curiously. "It's only me. Or should I say, it's only I? I was just wonderin' if you had encountered our cheery pal Knox, of the Sixth?"

"There's been an accident!" panted Watts hoarsely.

"An accident?" repeated Cardew. "Where? How? To whom? Forgive the queries, but—"

"I—I can't stop!" interrupted Watts harshly.

"Dear man, you needn't be alarmed," said Cardew, placing a friendly hand upon the other's



arm. "What on earth's the matter? You don't seem to be quite yourself—"

"Let me go!" interrupted Watts, wrenching himself free. "It—it was Knox! I—I didn't mean— Eh? What am I saying? Oh, let me get away! Don't keep me here!"

Without another word, he broke into a run, and left Cardew standing there. The dandy of the Fourth was much too lazy to hurry after him, and the thought of giving chase never occurred to him.

He just stood there, and watched Watts disappear round a bend in the lane.

"Well, that's deuced rummy!" he muttered, frowning. A gate was near by, and Cardew leaned upon it in order to assist the functioning of his brain. He always found it much easier to think if he had something to lounge against.

"He said something about Knox," he murmured. "An accident, too. Now, I wonder? There's something sinister here—some lurkin' mystery that appeals to my vivid imagination. Of course, any kind of accident to Knox is pleasant to ruminate upon. But why should an accident to Knox convert friend Watts from a cool, slashin' boxer into a shiverin' wretch with a cracked voice?"

It was a nice little problem, and Cardew soon gave it up.

"Altogether too much fag," he decided. "For one thing, Knox isn't worth all this brain exercise, an' for another thing, it's time I was at the cash-desk with the ten quid. So Knox will have to wait."

He detached himself from the gate, and continued his stroll into the village. But he was still thoughtful—so thoughtful, indeed, that his steps were very slow. It was nearly half-past five by the time he got to the tuckshop. He paused at the door. The keen evening air was filled with an appetising odour of cooking, which seemed to ooze out of the very shop-front. And behind the window Mrs. Murphy could be seen bustling about amid piles of tempting-looking confections.

"Oh, well!" said Cardew. "Why worry?"

He had his hand on the door-knob, when he heard a quick footstep. He glanced round, and saw a girl hurrying by. He stared. There was nothing particularly remarkable in the spectacle of a hurrying girl.

But this was no ordinary hurrying girl.

She was a neat figure, but there was an air about her which suggested that she had flung her hat and overcoat on hurriedly. And her face was pale—deadly pale. In fact, Ralph Reckness Cardew was startled by the chalk-line pallor.

"P h e w !" he whistled softly.

There seemed to be something familiar about that girl's face, too. In a second he jumped to the

truth. She looked just a little bit like Sid Watts. So this was his sister! He dimly-remembered having seen her once or twice at St. Jim's—from a distance.

But what was she doing here, hurrying through the village street in this fashion? Hadn't Watts said that he was to spend a quiet hour with her at St. Jim's? Not only Watts himself had acted strangely, but his sister was now following his example!

Cardew, for all his languid ways, was a quick thinker.

And he put two and two together in the space of a second. An accident to Knox—the panic-stricken flight of Sid Watts—followed by the flight of Elsie Watts! There was no mistaking that pale face, and the hunted, terrified look in the girl's eyes.

This time Cardew acted swiftly.

He ran after Elsie Watts, and overtook her a few yards farther on.

"Just a minute, Miss Watts," said Cardew gently.

The girl pulled up short and put her hand to her breast.

"Oh!" she breathed. "What—what do you want?"

"Pray pardon the familiarity, but for once I hope you can forgive a fellow for speakin' to you without bein' previously introduced," drawled Cardew. "I think I am addressin' Miss Elsie Watts?"

The girl simply gazed at him in terror.

"Am I right?" asked Cardew softly.

"Yes," she whispered at length.

"Then, Miss Watts, perhaps you'll tell me what the trouble is?" asked the dandy of the Fourth. "What has happened to your brother—an' why are you executin' this boltin' stunt?"

CHAPTER 11.

Cardew to the Rescue!

ELSIE WATTS was too startled to reply.

"Am I right?" asked Cardew. "You are boltin', aren't you?"

Still the girl remained dumb. To tell the truth, she was utterly distracted and half hysterical. She had been on her way to the station, hardly knowing what she would do after she got into the train. She just looked at Cardew with an agony of suspense and terror in her dark eyes.

"I hope you won't think that I'm beastly inquisitive," continued Cardew softly. "But I happen to know your brother, Miss Watts. A sportsman. The dear old bean came to my rescue very nobly to-day. If there's any thin' on your mind, I hope you'll allow me to—"

"Please—please don't stop me!" interrupted Elsie. "There—there's been something dreadful—"

"Exactly," nodded Cardew. "An accident to Knox."

"Then—then you know?" she whispered.

"I met your brother in the lane," explained Cardew.

"Oh!"

The girl's expression changed, and for a second a look of relief came into her eyes. She assumed, of course, that Cardew knew everything. And Cardew made no attempt to explain that he knew practically nothing.

"Thank you for saying that it was an accident," murmured Elsie. "It proves that you believe in Sid."

"Oh, rather!" said Cardew. "One of the best!"

"He didn't do it!" panted the girl.

"Of course he didn't!" said Cardew stoutly. "Perish the thought!"

He was becoming interested. What was it that Sid Watts hadn't done?

"Knox fell over and caught his head on the step, but nobody will believe it!" continued Elsie.

"Rats!" said Cardew. "I believe it, for one."

There was something in his manner which invited the girl's confidence. When he liked, Cardew could be very sympathetic, and he was never at a loss for something to say. His manner was easy, his coolness complete. In some subtle kind of way this coolness of his tended to reduce the girl's terror.

Cardew himself was more interested than ever. So Knox had fallen over and had hurt his head? And there was some danger of people believing that Watts had done the dread deed! Without knowing any of the actual facts, Cardew was quite convinced that Watts was blameless, and his sympathy was genuine.

"There's nothin' to worry about," he said smoothly. "If there's any inquiry, you can rely upon me to give your brother a good word."

"Inquiry!" repeated the girl. "They'll—they'll arrest him!"

"P h e w ! As bad as that, is it?"

"Didn't—didn't Sid tell you that Knox is dead?" sobbed the girl.

Even the cool Cardew jumped.

"Dead!" he gasped. "Oh, draw it mild!"

"Sid wasn't sure, but he's afraid—"

"Nonsense!" laughed Cardew. "It seems to me you're worryin' yourself unnecessarily, Miss Watts. It would take more than a crack on the head to kill a blighter like Knox."

He only said the words in order to quieten her. But he was filled with vague alarm, and the position was now much clearer to him. No wonder Sid Watts had seemed so panic-stricken!

"Oh, I hope you're right!" whispered the girl fervently. "Perhaps Sid made a mistake; perhaps Master Knox will recover!"

"He's probably walkin' about again by now," said Cardew confidently. "In any case, Miss Watts, why should you be runnin' away? There's no chance of anybody suspectin' you—"



"Hallo!" "What the thump—" As Racke and Crooke came down the School

House steps, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came along from the direction of the gym. The three juniors stared in amazement at the startling sight before them. Knox of the Sixth was lying face downwards at the bottom of the steps, and bending over him was a stranger, ashpalt in hand. (See Chapter 8.)

"I'm a thief—a thief!" muttered the girl brokenly.

She hardly knew why she said it, and Cardew listened with increasing interest. He could see that the poor girl was so distracted that she was liable to faint. She wasn't much more than a child, anyhow; and although Cardew was younger, he somehow felt ages older. He took hold of her arm and pressed it. There was nothing familiar about that action. It helped to restore the girl's balance.

"A thief?" laughed Cardew. "You? Oh, come!"

"I am—I am!" breathed Elsie. "I had to give Sid enough money to get away, and I stole it from the mistress' bureau! I'm a thief, and I can't stay there! I've got to run away!"

Cardew pursed his lips to whistle, but made no sound. No wonder the girl was so pale and frightened. In her half-hysterical state she had blurted out the truth almost unconsciously. But Cardew's attitude was so friendly, and he was so obviously informed of the whole circumstances, that poor Elsie had told her story almost without realising it.

"So you took the money from Mrs. Holmes' bureau?" said Cardew at last. "How much?"

"Twenty-five pounds!" whispered the girl.

"By gad!" said Cardew. "Sid needed a lot, didn't he?"

"I—I knew the money was there; the mistress put it in her bureau while I was talking to her this afternoon," explained Elsie tearfully. "And—and I thought it would be enough to get Sid out of the country! Perhaps he can escape and get to Canada! It's not fair that he should be arrested for something he didn't do!"

Cardew took a deep breath.

"If it comes to that, it's not fair that you should suffer just because your brother had a scrap with that cad Knox," he said quietly. "Good gad, I don't like it at all! In fact, I'm infernally worried!"

With rather a jolt Cardew realised that he was more or less responsible.

Sid Watts, in the first place, had quarrelled with Knox for his—Cardew's—sake. But for Cardew, the young boxer would never have encountered Knox at all, and there couldn't have been any subsequent quarrel. Following this line of reasoning, Ralph Reckness Cardew came to the conclusion that he was responsible for the girl's distress.

And he could realise what this would mean for her!

She had stolen money from Mrs. Holmes. Not a mere shilling or two, but twenty-five pounds! Her flight, alone, would be sufficient to condemn her, and it would only be a matter of hours before Mrs. Holmes' loss was discovered, even if it had not been discovered already. And what then?

Elsie would be arrested—she couldn't possibly elude capture if the police were informed. And for a theft like that she would be sent to prison, and eternally disgraced. Her life would be utterly ruined.

It wasn't as though she had committed this crime wickedly. In fact, the taking of the money hadn't been a crime at all—except, perhaps, in the eyes of the law. The girl had taken the money in a moment of wild anxiety—had taken it for the sake of her brother.

Cardew was shrewd. He guessed that Elsie's act would go for nothing. For if the police were really after Sid Watts, they would get him. This young girl thought, perhaps, that he would be able to escape because he had that money. But Cardew knew better.

She had sacrificed herself for nothing. If her brother was captured, and the truth came out about that money, it would be too late. She would still be branded as a thief—even if the headmaster's wife refused to prosecute, which was more than likely. Elsie's character would be irredeemably stained. And the thought of this hurt Cardew immensely—for he held himself responsible for all the trouble.

"We shall have to do something," he said firmly. "Twenty-five pounds, eh? It's a pretty big sum——"

He broke off, startled.

Twenty-five pounds! He had five pounds of his own—to say nothing of that twenty pound prize! What an ass! Why couldn't he have thought of that before? Quixotically he made up his mind.

"You can't do anything!" murmured Elsie brokenly.

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"And it's not fair that you should, either. I did it so that Sid should get away——"

"Just a minute!" broke in Cardew. "Does anybody know that you've bolted?"

"No. I—I stole out," said the girl. "They—they won't think anything, even if I'm missed, because it's my evening off——"

"That's all right, then," interrupted Cardew. "But what about the money? Any chance of Mrs. Holmes' discoverin' that it is now conspicuous by its absence? Do you think the money is——"

"Mrs. Holmes is out," said Elsie. "That's—that's why I was able——"

"Enough!" said Cardew genially. "As far as I can see, everythin' is all serene. It's too frightfully bad, Miss Elsie, that you should be disgraced because of an accident to Knox. So look here! Take this money, buzz back to St. Jim's, and put it in Mrs. Holmes' bureau. The dear lady will never know the difference."

And he pressed his twenty-five pounds into the startled girl's hand.

CHAPTER 12.

Trouble Ahead!

"O H!" Elsie Watts stared at the notes through a flood of tears.

"That's all right," said Cardew uncomfortably. "Was the money you took in pound notes? It was, eh? Then there's nothin' to worry about. Put these in Mrs. Holmes' bureau, and everythin' in the garden will be lovely. She'll never know a thing."

Dimly the poor girl began to realise the truth.

"You're—you're giving me twenty-five pounds?" she asked, in wonder.

"Oh, cheese it——"

"I—I can't take it from you!" she muttered. "It's not fair. I've stolen the money! I'm a thief, and——"

"Awfully sorry, Miss Watts, but the sooner you stop talking nonsense, the better!" interrupted Cardew gruffly. "Haven't I told you that it was all my fault to start with? No, not another word! Shove that cash back in its place, and be brave. Don't worry about Sid. He'll be all right."

"Oh, I—I don't know what to say!"

"Then I'm perfectly satisfied, because I don't want you to say anything," murmured Cardew. "Take hold of that cash, and dash back to St. Jim's. Nobody will ever know that you've been out."

sobbing quietly, and attempting to murmur her gratitude, Elsie parted from this schoolboy knight-errant and hurried back in the direction of the school. As for Cardew, he stood in the lane for a moment, and thrust his hands deeply into his pockets. There was a whimsical smile on his face, and he shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, well," he said gently, "plenty more where that came from!"

He turned over a few loose coins in his pocket—all that he had left. He couldn't help feeling intensely satisfied. Suddenly he grew hot as it occurred to him that he was unconsciously preening himself.

"Oh, hang it!" he muttered. "I shall be wearin' a halo next!"

He shook himself rather savagely. Why the dickens should he feel pleased with himself just because he had whacked out a little money? What was money to him, anyhow? A poor chap who really made a sacrifice might reasonably feel a bit proud of himself, but this didn't apply to him.

"I've done nothin'—absolutely nothin'!" Cardew told himself. "In any case, the poor girl only did it because of my rot with Knox. If her brother hadn't sailed in to my rescue, there wouldn't have been any trouble at all."

He swung off, and tried to forget the whole incident. Not for a moment would he admit to himself that he had done a rather noble action. If his thoughts tended to stray in that direction, he pulled himself up, and recalled all his bad qualities. They helped him to adjust his focus.

"Great gad!"

Cardew came to an abrupt halt. He was staring at

Mrs. Murphy's little shop, and there was an expression of consternation on his face. He had just remembered that feed! Until this moment he had forgotten all about it. And here he was, broke! And he had definitely promised the fellows that he would stand treat! He had broken his word!

Not that this worried him in the slightest.

That money had gone to save an innocent girl from disgrace. And he didn't regret it for a second. In fact, the very thought of the feed made him rather impatient. What was a miserable feed compared to the salvation of Elsie Watts' good name?

Besides, all hope wasn't lost. Cardew was a fellow of resource.

He went into the shop, and half expected to be mobbed by Blake & Co. and a gang of other juniors. It was well after half-past-five, and it was almost inconceivable that the fellows hadn't arrived. Yet the shop was empty, except for Mrs. Murphy.

"Lor', Master Cardew, I thought you was never comin'!" said the good lady, with relief.

Cardew smiled. It occurred to him that the chaps had probably been delayed by the Knox sensation. Well, all the better. It gave him the chance he needed. But he was anxious to be off, too—to get back to St. Jim's to find out precisely how the Knox affair stood.

"I'm here, Mrs. Murphy, but I've a piece of sad news for you," said Cardew calmly. "I'm practically broke."

Mrs. Murphy started.

"You mean you haven't got any money?" she asked.

"Isn't that the usual equivalent of being broke?" smiled Cardew. "But never mind; the feed needn't be off. Hand all the stuff to the fellows when they pile in, but don't let on that it isn't paid for. Is that quite clear? I wouldn't like them to know—"

"Just a minute, Master Cardew," said Mrs. Murphy wrathfully. "Are you tellin' me that you haven't got any money?"

"Dear lady, haven't I already made that clear?"

"Then it's wicked!" broke out the dear lady. "That's all I can say, Master Cardew! All special stuff—or mostly all. Baked to your orders! Not a mite of it shall go out until it's paid for!"

"Oh, come!" protested Cardew. "You're not goin' to be so adamant as all that, are you?"

"I don't know nothin' about Adam, but none of this stuff is leavin' my shop until I get the ten pounds!" replied Mrs. Murphy angrily. "Lor', I might have expected it from the likes of you!"

"That's hardly complimentary, Mrs. Murphy—"

"Always up to your games!" said the good dame bitterly. "There's some of the young gentlemen I can trust, but you ain't one of 'em, Master Cardew! I ought to have took the money in advance!"

"But be patient!" said the dandy of the Fourth. "Without explaining how pained I am that you should use such harsh words about me, I give you my assurance that you will have the money—the full ten pounds—within a week. I will make a special point of it."

"You will do no such thing!" said Mrs. Murphy. "None of this stuff—"

"Oh, but look here!" interrupted Cardew, becoming impatient. "Be reasonable, dear lady!"

"Don't you 'dear lady' me, you young rascal!"

"But, dear lady, the fellows mustn't know anythin' about this unfortunate contretemps," said Cardew. "They may be here at any minute, so please be sensible. The fact is, I had a sudden call. Owing to circumstances which were quite beyond my control, the cash has departed. Curiously enough, cash has a habit of departing in unexpected directions. But there's nothin' to worry about, Mrs. Murphy. There is plenty more in the bank, and it is only a question of—"

"I want none of your fairy-tales, Master Cardew!" interrupted the lady hotly. "You haven't got the money, and I don't trust you. It's my opinion it was all a joke!"

"I assure you the order was given in good faith," said Cardew. "If it will have any effect, I will add ten per cent to the bill by way of recompense for the delay. Honestly, Mrs. Murphy, I meant to pay you now, but if you'll only wait for a week—"

"I won't wait an hour!" interrupted Mrs. Murphy coldly. "Not a thing shall leave my shop until the

money's paid over. I've been tricked enough times already. There's that Master Trimble—"

"Oh, I say!" protested Cardew, pained. "You're not puttin' me in the same category as that worm, are you? Hang it! There's surely a difference between us? I'll give you a written promise—"

But it was no good.

Mrs. Murphy was not only angry, but she was obstinate. She point-blank refused to deliver the goods until the bill was paid. And as Cardew had no money to settle the bill, it was a question of mere logic to arrive at the startling truth that not a mouthful of food would be allowed to go across the counter.

Cardew went out of the shop as cool as ever, but resigned.

There was trouble coming, and he felt that the next hour would be very painful.

CHAPTER 13.

Everything but the Grub!

CARDEW dodged nimbly into the hedge.

He hadn't walked more than twenty yards.

And now voices came to him. He could hear the tones of Blake and Herries. A moment later six juniors went by at the double, and Cardew sighed. He felt that this was hardly the moment for explanations. It might be less painful—particularly for himself—to leave matters until the juniors had cooled off a bit.

He was disgusted with Mrs. Murphy. And yet, at the same time, he felt that there was a little justification for her attitude. The order was a big one, and ten pounds' worth of tuck was an exceptionally heavy consignment. Once it left Mrs. Murphy's premises it would be gone for ever. And, afterwards, she couldn't sue the defaulter, he being a junior schoolboy. And if she went to the headmaster, he would only say that she ought not to have allowed credit. It wouldn't give her much satisfaction to know that somebody had received a swishing. She wanted her ten pounds.

And Cardew, after all, was not the sort of fellow that she could trust. One never knew quite how to take him, and when it came to allowing him ten pounds' worth of stuff "on tick," Mrs. Murphy drew the line.

The six messengers piled into the tuckshop with cheery greetings. All their faces were alight with good-humour and expectation. And when it came to a question of hunger, they were ready to declare that they could beat all records.

In addition to Blake and Herries and Digby, there were Bernard Glyn, Figgins, and Fatty Wynn.

"Here we are, Mrs. Murphy!" said Blake brightly. "Everything ready?"

"Everything isn't ready!" replied Mrs. Murphy.

"But it's half-past five!" roared Fatty Wynn, in alarm.

"Everything's all wrapped up," continued Mrs. Murphy. "It's waitin' for you to take it away."

"Then what's the joke?" asked Figgins.

"Ay, you're right about a joke!" said Mrs. Murphy

(Continued on next page.)



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bitterly. "You'd best ask Master Cardew what he means by it!"

The juniors looked at one another in astonishment.

"But what's the trouble?" asked Blake.

"Trouble enough," said the lady. "Master Cardew has got no money!"

"What!"

"Master Cardew's got no money!"

"He's pulled your leg!" said Blake, staring.

"He's done nothing of the kind!" said Mrs. Murphy indignantly.

"He had over twenty quid this morning," said Figgins. "Besides, he promised to stand treat. And even though he is a School House chap, he's not altogether beyond the pale!"

"Look here, you New House rotter!" roared Blake.

"Rats!" grinned Figgins.

"When you asses have done quarrelling, what about the grub?" said Fatty Wynn. "You must have made a mistake, Mrs. Murphy. Cardew's got plenty of money, and he promised to settle this bill before we got here. He'll be here in a minute, sure as a gun!"

"Master Cardew's only just left."

"Eh?" said Herries. "Only just left?"

"He come here and said he couldn't pay," nodded Mrs. Murphy. "And not a thing leaves this shop until the bill's settled!"

"He couldn't have been here," said Blake. "We didn't meet him."

"Then he must have dodged you," said Mrs. Murphy. "I don't wonder at it if he'd promised to pay. It's no good, young gentlemen. You needn't look at me. If you want these things, you'd better find Master Cardew and get him to pay. Either that, or pay for them yourselves."

"We're broke!" said Digby.

"Then you'll get nothing—not a crumb!"

"But we're nearly starving!" groaned Fatty Wynn. "We came here on purpose to collect the stuff. Where's Cardew? My hat! He's a nice chap, isn't he? He particularly invited us—"

"There must be some mistake," interrupted Blake. "Look here, Mrs. Murphy! Hand over the stuff to us, and we'll be responsible for settling up the bill. We'll find Cardew and make him shell out!"

But Mrs. Murphy was as firm as a rock.

And while they continued to argue with her, the temporary banquetting-hall at St. Jim's was looking very cheery and inviting. The fellows were proud of the table. It was complete, even to decorations, and there were places for at least two dozen guests. For, in addition to Study No. 6 and Tom Merry & Co. and the New House trio, sundry other members of the Shell and Fourth had been invited. Baggy Trimble, of course, had plumped himself down in one of the seats, and it was too much trouble to shift him.

Everything was ready for the great spread.

Everything was there except the spread itself. But nobody worried about a detail like this, since six fellows were even then expected with the tuck.

None of the would-be diners had had any tea, and it was now getting on for six o'clock. Appetites, in consequence, were razor-like in their keenness. Some of the fellows were beginning to doubt the satisfying capabilities of even ten pounds' worth of grub.

"They are wathah a long time!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he glanced at his famous ticker. "Bai Jove, nearly six o'clock, deah boys! I'm afraid the boundahs are tawwyin' by the roadside!"

"They'd better not!" said Monty Lowther. "Tarrying by the roadside means more than it implies. For example, if Fatty Wynn carries with a bag of jam-tarts, there'll be an empty bag somewhere!"

"I think we'd better go down to meet 'em," said Redfern, of the New House.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I weally think it was fwightfully unwise to let that gweedy boundah Wynn go!"

"Here they are!"

"Good egg!"

"Bai Jove! The return of the victors with the spoils."

"Huprah!"

There was a general stir, but before anybody could make a move, Blake & Co. came rushing into the gym, and Arthur Augustus did not need his monocle to observe that his chums were empty-handed. And a glance at their faces indicated that all was not as it should have been.

"Where's the grub?" asked Tom Merry, staring.

"Yaas, wathah! Where's—"

"Cardew's dished us!" roared Blake.

"What?"

"The rotter has let us down!"

"Great pip!"

"He's refused to pay for the feed, and Mrs. Murphy won't whack it out!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"So we've returned without a giddy thing!" roared Blake. "Where's Cardew? Who's seen Cardew? Unless he can give a jolly good explanation, I'll—I'll burst him!"

There was a tremendous uproar.

"Hold on!" shouted Tom Merry. "There must be a mistake somewhere!"

"Of course!" broke in Levison. "Cardew wouldn't do a dirty trick like that!"

"Wouldn't he?" roared Figgins. "I never thought much of Cardew—he's a tricky bounder! This invitation of his seemed too good to be true, and now we know it was only spoo! It's just another of his blessed tricks!"

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy. "If this is twue, I shall wefuse to wecognise Cardew as a fwicnd! I wegard him—"

"Don't get so excited," broke in Clive.

"Weally, Clive—"

"Cardew wouldn't play a dirty trick on us like this," went on Clive. "He gave us his word of honour that this was a genuine invite, and that feed was certain. If he's refused to pay for it, there's an explanation, and he'll trot it out."

"What's the good of an explanation?" demanded Fatty Wynn. "I'm starving! Do you think an explanation's going to satisfy me?"

"Wathah not! We're all fwightfully peckish—"

"Do you mean to say I've been swindled?" roared Baggy Trimble indignantly. "Isn't there going to be any feed? This is what comes of mixing with you fellows! I'm rather particular as a rule, but—"

"Shut up, you fat worm!"

"Not likely!" hooted Trimble. "I've been brought here under false pretences!"

"You podgy idiot!" shouted Blake. "Nobody asked you to come here!"

"All the same, I regard it as a slight!" said Trimble indignantly. "I shall think twice before condescending—"

"Squash him, somebody!" said Tom Merry. "We've got to find Cardew—and unless he can explain himself, there's going to be—"

"Dear men, what's all the excitement about?" drawled a voice.

Ralph Reckness Cardew strolled in, urbane and smiling.

CHAPTER 14.

Rough on Cardew!

"GRAB him!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Really, old beans, there's no need for any grabbing," said Cardew, striding into the jaws of danger. "There's somethin' I particularly want to know—"

"Never mind about that!" interrupted Blake grimly. "There's something we particularly want to know, too. What about this feed?"

Cardew looked round coolly. He was in a delicate position. He was surrounded by an array of flushed, excited faces, and he did not fail to observe that many fists were already becoming clenched in readiness for business. But, of course, a true explanation of the position was out of the question. Under no circumstances could Cardew breathe a word about Elsie Watts.

"Just a minute, dear men," he said easily. "Don't all shout at once!"

But they did all shout at once. They shouted loudly.

Cardew was anxious to find out the truth about Gerald Knox—although the attitude of the juniors seemed to indicate that no grim tragedy had occurred. A feed was certainly an important occasion—second, almost to none—but if Knox of the Sixth had been killed, and apparently murdered, the fellows would hardly have been as indifferent as this. So, in a way, Cardew was reassured.

He had only just arrived, having lingered on the way back to the school, trying to think out the position. And he had decided that his only course would be to face his guests and express his honest regrets—without, however, going into any detailed explanation. Cardew knew that there would be trouble, with a capital "T," but he did not shirk the ordeal. He had broken his word, and he was unable to explain why; but he could at least apologise.

"Give a man a chance!" he protested wildly. "I'm awfully sorry about the banquet, but Mrs. Murphy is evidently a heartless woman."

"Never mind about Mrs. Murphy!" said Levison, giving his chum a straight look. "You've got to explain yourself, Cardew. Did you invite all these fellows to a special feed?"

"I did, old bean—and it was all in good faith."

"Then why isn't the feed here?"

"Unfortunately, there has been a little hitch—"

"A hitch?" howled Blake. "Do you call it a hitch to wipe out the feed altogether? If a ham hadn't turned up, it might be called a hitch; but when there's no grub at all, it's more like a swindle!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"A giddy hoax!"

"Explain yourself, Cardew!"

"I am tryin' to do it as fast as I can," said Cardew. "I owe you fellows an apology. The feed, dear men, is unhappily off—"

"Off?"

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "I must wemark, Cardew, that you have a fighful nerve to stand there—"

"We all know his nerve, Gussy," interrupted Blake, glaring at Cardew. "We want to know about this feed! What does it mean, Cardew?"

"Mrs. Murphy refused to allow tick," said Cardew regretfully.

"Tick?" yelled a dozen voices. "But you're rolling in money!"

"A delusion, I assure you," said Cardew. "I'm broke!"

"Broke?"

"Absolutely stony!"

"Great Scott!"

Everybody stared at Cardew. Hands grasped him, and he was pushed back against the wall and held there.

"Just a minute!" said Tom Merry grimly. "Let me do the talking, you fellows. You say you're broke, Cardew?"

"Alas, 'tis so!" replied Cardew calmly.

"What about that twenty pounds' prize money?"

"It's gone!"

"Gone?" It was a roar.

"Gone into the Great Beyond!" nodded Cardew.

"I'm awfully sorry, and I hope you'll forgive—"

"Where's that money gone to?" demanded Blake.

"My dear man!" protested Cardew. "Surely that's a personal question?"



Cardew touched Elsie Watts lightly on the elbow. "What's the trouble, Miss Watts?" he asked. "Why are you runnin' away?" The girl pulled up short and gazed at the junior in terror. "I'm a thief—a thief!" she muttered brokenly. (See Chapter 11.)

"It may be personal regarding a tenner, but the other ten quid was booked to all these fellows," said Tom Merry. "You can't just stroll in, Cardew, and coolly say that the money's gone. That won't satisfy us."

"Bai Jove—wathah not!" said D'Arcy. "We're hungwy!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Where's that money, Cardew?"

"Search him!"

"Turn his pockets inside out!"

Cardew shook his head.

"It's no good, dear fellows!" he said sadly. "You'll find some loose silver, but nothing that can be remotely mistaken for a pound note. When I say I'm broke, I mean I'm broke. And when I say that the money's gone I mean it's gone. And when I say that I can't explain where it's gone, I mean that—"

"And when we say that we're going to scrag you, we mean it!" interrupted Monty Lowther indignantly. "I suggest that we give him ten seconds to choke up the truth. If he doesn't explain where that money is, we'll pulverise him!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ten seconds, then!" growled Tom Merry. "Now then, Cardew!"

But Cardew remained quite indifferent.

"Sorry, old tops—nothing doing," he said quietly.

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But there was something doing, as Cardew painfully discovered.

Perhaps it will be as well to draw a veil upon a sad and painful five minutes. It was rough luck on Ralph Reckness Cardew. Under all the circumstances, he had acted in a manner that was both praiseworthy and decent. Without any question, he had saved Elsie Watts from a lifelong disgrace. And his reward was a ragging that left him a feeble and dizzy wreck!

— — —

CHAPTER 15.
Fortune Smiles!

CRASH!

Cardew struck the gravel outside the gym, and the door closed with a slam.

With a dismal groan, the dandy of the Fourth painfully picked himself up. He was as complete a wreck as St. Jim's had ever seen. He was practically in rags and tatters, and he was stiff and sore in every limb. But his never-failing good humour came to the rescue.

"Well, such is life!" he murmured, as he staggered away. "On the whole, what else could I expect! I don't blame the chaps in the least—but it's rough luck, all the same!"

There was a step on the gravel, and a voice spoke.

"Can you tell me where Master Cardew is, young gent?" said the voice.

Cardew smiled—a weak, twisted smile.

"Is the wreckage so frightful as all that?" he asked whimsically. "Dear man, you are now lookin' at the debris of a once handsome—"

"Master Cardew!" said the other. "It's me—Sid Watts!"

"So I gathered," murmured Cardew. "You've come back, then?"

"I—I'm ashamed of myself, sir," muttered the young boxer. "I was a mad fool to run away like that—to bolt—and to take my sister's money! I think it was that money that brought me to my senses, sir. I've come back to face the music!"

"Good man!" said Cardew simply. "I don't know whether it'll be piano or pianissimo, but I should imagine this particular music will be forte. My faith in human nature is restored, dear man."

"I don't know what was the matter with me, Master Cardew," breathed Watts. "I was in a panic—I ran off like a cur! But after I'd gone—after my sister had lent me her money—I sort of realised what a skulking coward I was. I didn't do anything to Knox, and I'm ready to stand the racket."

He looked at Cardew more closely in the gloom.

"Has anything happened to you?" he added, in wonder.

"A great deal has happened," replied Cardew. "To describe the details, dear old scout, would only harrow you. Let us discover somethin' about Knox."

"He's—he's alive, then, Master Cardew?"

"I imagine so," replied the Fourth-Former. "Knox is such a thoroughly out-and-out blackguard that he's bound to be safe. I think you know, Watts, that out-and-out blackguards get the best out of life?" he added cynically. "It's the dear innocents who capture everything that's loose!"

"I'd like to know how the thing stands," said Watts anxiously.

"Then you shall know," replied Cardew. "Come with me, and I'll escort you to the Head. By this time, no doubt, he has heard all. A sportsman, the Head. He'll give you a fair hearing, old bean."

They walked away quickly, and they were nearly up to the Head's door when three figures appeared.

"Well, you ought to be thankful that it isn't worse," one of the figures was saying. "We thought you were half killed at first, Knox—"

"Knox!" shouted Sid Watts, leaping forward.

Gerald Knox certainly looked very much alive. There was a bandage round his head, but otherwise he showed no sign of damage. Perhaps he was a trifle pale, but that was all.

"All is coming right," murmured Cardew contentedly.

"That's the fellow!" ejaculated Knox, pointing. "By gad! The infernal ruffian—"

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"Hold on!" said Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's. "Are you the man who knocked Knox over and injured him?"

"I didn't knock him over," replied Watts.

"You liar!" roared Knox. "You hit me across the head with my own ashplant!"

"You'd better come along to the Head," said Kildare. "If there's going to be any more trouble—"

"There'll be none as far as I'm concerned," interrupted Watts steadily. "I'm only too relieved to see this—this fellow alive and well."

"Who the thunder are you calling a fellow?" raved Knox.

"I wanted to be polite!" retorted the young boxer.

Kildare and Darrell chuckled.

"The fact is, we've just come from the Head," explained Kildare. "He wanted to know what had happened to Knox, and as Knox didn't care to create a scandal, he just said that he had tripped up by accident."

"He spoke the truth," said Watts grimly.

"But he told us, in private, that he was attacked—"

"You can take it from me, dear men, that Knox is a direct descendant of Ananias," grinned Cardew lightly. "I started all the trouble, so I'm speakin' with authority."

He briefly explained what had happened earlier in the day.

"I thought no more of it," said Watts, taking up the tale. "But when I came here this evening, to see my sister, Master Knox lashed at me with his stick, and I thought it better to wrench it away from him."

"You didn't attack him?" asked Kildare.

"I pretended to," admitted Watts. "I wasn't going to hurt him—I don't believe in that sort of dirty business. But he thought I was in earnest, and gave a sudden jump backwards. He stumbled and hit his head on the steps, and I thought he was dead at first—"

"I'm sorry, Knox, but this seems to have a true ring about it," interrupted Kildare, turning to Knox. "Are you sure you didn't trip?"

Knox scowled.

"Well, I might have caught my heel on something," he admitted grudgingly.

"Nuff said!" put in Darrell. "Coming, Kildare?"

"Yes," said the school captain. "I'm perfectly satisfied."

They went off, and Gerald Knox, gritting his teeth, also turned on his heel. Sid Watts took a deep breath—and then laughed from sheer relief. After all his fears—after all this dreadful misgivings! What a fool he had been to run off!

"By Jove!" he murmured. "I'm glad I came back to face the music!"

"I must admit that I'm rather relieved—"

Cardew broke off, for a slim form had come running up. Elsie Watts had obviously been watching from one of the windows—and perhaps she had heard, too.

"Oh, Sid!" she murmured, hugging her brother.

"Forgive me, sis!" he said huskily. "I—I was a cur!"

"No, you weren't" said Elsie quietly. "You were startled, Sid, and you didn't quite know what you were doing. Go into the kitchen, and I'll be with you again in a minute—"

"There's this money, Elsie," interrupted her brother, placing the notes into her hands. "One reason I came back was to let you have it again. I don't know what made me take it—I must have been off my head, I think."

He went off, and Elsie clutched Cardew's hand and pressed the money into it.

"Thanks, thanks more than I can ever say!" she breathed.

"Oh, but really—"

"It's yours, and you've saved me from being a thief!" whispered the girl.

Before Cardew could say another word she had gone, and he stood there for a moment, feeling rather helpless. But then his natural confidence returned to him, and he chuckled as he stuffed the money into his pocket.

"Well, that's that!" he murmured, with a wry chuckle. "Rather a pity I barged into the crowd before I'd met Watts, though. I shall be sore for a fortnight!"

He went towards the School House, and he found himself in the midst of the disappointed guests. Ralph Reckness Cardew bore them no malice, for he had the faculty of looking at things from another's point of view.

"About that feed——" he began.

"Dry up, you rotter!" roared Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard you as a fwightful wuffian——"

"Haven't you had enough, Cardew?" asked Figgins fiercely.

"Dear men, have a little patience——"

"Rats!"

"Go and boil yourself!"

"We've had enough of you, Cardew!"

And the juniors tramped off, highly indignant.

"Life's a queer thing," mused Cardew as he shook his head. "Without the slightest animosity in my heart, I come to them ready to forget and forgive. And I am spurned and cast off! Ah, well, I dare say the poor wretches are so ravenously hungry that they are hardly responsible for their actions."

He grinned to himself, and then felt a hand on his shoulder.

"Just a minute, Cardew," said two voices in unison.

CHAPTER 16. Very Mysterious!

LEVISON and Clive were looking very grim. "Just a minute!" repeated Levison. "You'll notice we didn't join in the ragging, Cardew, but we felt like it."

"We did!" said Clive wrathfully.

"But as you're our study-mate we left it to the others," continued Levison.

"You couldn't have left it in better hands," agreed Cardew, nodding. "After taking complete stock of myself, I have come to the conclusion that the job was very thorough. Quite apart from sixty-four different rents in this excellent suit of clothin', I find that I have eighteen bruises, nine grazes, several bumps, and so many aches that it feels like one enormous——"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Clive. "It was a low-down trick, Cardew. The fellows rather expect trickery from you, but in a case like this——"

"My dear old top, the thing was genuine," interrupted Cardew coolly. "When I invited the customers to gather at the fountain, I fully believed that the bally thing would function. Owin' to an unforeseen circumstance——"

"What circumstance?"

"Alas, my lips are sealed."

"You rotter!" said Levison. "You can't fool us like that, Cardew—and you've disgraced the study. It was a spoof from the very start, and you know it! I suppose you thought it was funny to let Mrs. Murphy get all that special stuff ready, and then leave it on her hands?"

"And I suppose you thought it was funny for everybody to make preparations for nothing?" added Clive. "As far as I'm concerned, I'm fed-up with you, Cardew!"

Ralph Reckness Cardew smiled, his equanimity undamaged.

"These harsh words are justified, perhaps, but they scorch me like hot irons!" he said coolly. "Alack, that one could be so misjudged! I will admit that appearances have been against me, but there is nothin' to worry about now. I am still willin' to act the part of host."

"You—you——"

"A somewhat twisted and contorted host, perhaps, but I am ever ready to do my best," continued Cardew. "Call the gang together, and we will proceed with the festivities as though nothin' had happened. Who am I to quibble at a few bruises?"

Clive and Levison stared at him.

"My hat, you've got a terrific nerve!" said Levison.

"We are all born with certain gifts!" agreed Cardew, nodding.

"You exasperating chump!" roared Clive. "Didn't you tell everybody that you were broke?"

Cardew produced a handful of crisp notes.

"Money!" gasped Clive, staring at it.

"Good sterling currency!" agreed Cardew, nodding.

"Then you weren't broke at all?"

"Yes, I was."

"I'm jiggered if I can make head or tail of it!" said Levison, breathing hard. "First of all you invite a crowd to the feed, then you refuse to pay for it, and after that you say you're stony!"

"So far, you have provided an excellent summary——"

"And now you've got money again!" roared Levison. "Which means that you've had money all the time?"

"Dear men, it looks very suspicious, but I am blameless," said Cardew. "I would like to explain all, but there are certain episodes in our lives which we must keep looked away—even from our nearest an' dearest. So I must cast myself upon your mercy, an' hope that you will be broad-minded. When I said the feed was off, I thought it was off. But now that I say the feed's on again, there is practically no possibility of a hitch."

"And you're not going to explain?"

"I am frightfully sorry, but I am afraid it's impossible."

"Well, it's a blessed mystery!" growled Clive. "I thought from the first that you wouldn't be such a cad as all that, Cardew."

"A kind word is very welcome," murmured Cardew gratefully.

"You ass!" said Levison. "You hopeless fathead! Why the dickens couldn't you say all this before and save yourself from getting ragged?"

Cardew counted out ten of the notes.

"Ah, well, it is too late to talk of that now," he said.

"One cannot easily cancel a choice collection of bruises; one must needs endure them. Now, while I change into respectable raiment, perhaps you fellows will repair to the village an' relieve the distracted Mrs. Murphy of sundry misgivings? At the same time, you will relieve her of a considerable portion of her stock."

"Then the feed's really on?" asked Levison.

"Positively on!"

"No spoof about it, Cardew?"

"Absolutely none."

"Honour bright?" demanded Clive.

"Old chap, honour bright!" smiled Cardew.

"Then we might as well tell all the others, and we'll go down to the village and grab the stuff quickly," said Clive. "I'm glad of this; it'll put everything all right again!"

Cardew nodded.

"Food is a great consoler," he agreed. "But wouldn't it be rather good if we could prepare the spread, in all its glory, unknown to the masses? Then invite them all again, an' take our simple pleasure in watchin' their glad smiles? I would come to the village with you, to help with the parcels, only I have no wish to disgrace the school. Dear men, you'll admit that my appearance is several degrees more deplorable than any common or garden scarecrow."

"Right-ho!" said Levison. "You buzz in and change, and we'll manage the grub. If it comes to that, we can hire a couple of men in the village to help with the parcels. They'll do it for a bob each."

"That's a good idea!" said Clive, nodding.

"Brains always tell," said Cardew. "See to it, dear men."

He walked into the School House and tried to affect his usual stroll, but it was rather difficult. He not only limped, but his very body had a sort of twist in it.

"Well, it's more than I can understand," said Clive, as he and Levison set off.

"A giddy mystery," agreed Levison.

"Do you think he had that money all the time?"

"No, I don't," replied Levison firmly. "He may be a tricky bounder, but he's not a liar. In some rummy way he used that cash for something, and then unexpectedly got it back again. Do you know, I've got half an idea that he did something generous with it?"

"How do you mean—generous?"

"Well, I believe he gave it to somebody, or lent it to help them over a difficulty," said Levison shrewdly. "That's why he was so scary of saying anything. He's a queer fish—you never know what he's going to be up to next. Well, we're certain of the feed, anyhow—we've got the money."

Clive started.

"I say, I hope it's genuine!" he said abruptly.

"The money?" grinned Levison. "Draw it mild, old man!"

"Well, that chap makes you feel like that," said Clive, as they tramped down Rylcombe Lane. "Good! The village at last! Let's hope Mrs. Murphy is still open."

"Of course she's open. It's only about half-past six."

Mrs. Murphy was looking very worried and dejected when the two juniors entered the little shop. She regarded them with a somewhat baleful eye. St. Jim's and all its occupants were not very popular with her just now.

"We've come for the doings," said Levison briskly.

"There's been enough doings to-night!" said Mrs. Murphy darkly. "Rare fine doings, too! After all this special stuff I've baked——"

"Cheer up, Mrs. Murphy! Here's the cash," grinned Levison. "Real, honest currency notes, made in our own factory! Jewelled in every hole, and guaranteed to chime the quarter and half hours!"

Mrs. Murphy regarded the notes eagerly.

"My!" she exclaimed, her normal speech taken from her.

But she soon recovered, and it only took her a moment to satisfy herself that the notes were genuine. She didn't worry about the other interesting qualifications which Levison had attributed to them.

CHAPTER 17. Nothing Doing!

"O W!" Thus Robert Arthur Digby, as he looked up from his prep in Study No. 6. The other three members of the study were sprawled round the table.

"Got a pain?" asked Blake sympathetically.

"It's more than a pain!" groaned Digby. "It's an awful agony!"

"We didn't have any tea," said Herries moodily.

Arthur Augustus looked up, frowning.

"Pway wefwain fwom chattewin' while I'm at work, deah boys!" he said. "It's fwightfully difficult to constwue——"

"You're right!" said Blake, nodding. "It's frightfully difficult to construe Cardew's weird and wonderful methods!"

"I was not wefewwin' to Cardew!" said D'Arcy stiffly. "I wegard Cardew as an uttah wottah!"

"For once, Gussy, we're all agreed," said Digby, holding his waistcoat. "For once, you're talking sense!"

"Weally, Dig——"

"Why talk about Cardew at all?" growled Blake. "It isn't seven o'clock yet, and there's a long while to go before supper."

"Ow! Dry up!" interrupted Herries.

The door opened, and Cardew himself looked in.

"Hallo! All busy?" he asked genially.

Arthur Augustus rose stiffly to his feet.

"Pway cleah out, you wottah!" he said indignantly.

"Gweat Scott! What uttah nerve!"

"Yes, you'd better seat, Cardew!" said Blake, glaring.

"Clear off, you swindling rotter!" roared Digby.

Cardew faced the storm calmly.

"I thought about invitin' you to the feed in the gym," he said mildly.

"What!"

"The feed," said Cardew, "in the gym."

"Bai Jove!"

"Nearly ready," added Cardew complacently.

"Grab him!" yelled Blake, jumping to his feet.

"My hat! This is just above the limit! We're not going to be fooled twice, Cardew, you footling idiot! I suppose you think it's funny to come here and invite us to a feed that's only a frost? We've had enough of it!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, please yourselves, of course," said Cardew. "I take the chair at seven o'clock sharp, an' everybody's welcome!"

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He went out and softly closed the door, leaving Study No. 6 seething.

Cardew was now looking himself again—with the exception of a puffy left ear, a swollen nose, and a slightly discoloured eye. In appearance otherwise, he was spotless. A wash and a complete change had done wonders.

In the Shell passage he nearly met with disaster.

He looked into Study No. 10, and found the Terrible Three just beginning their prep. Three glares were focused upon him.

"Get out!" said three sulphurous voices.

"Impossible!" smiled Cardew. "I'm not in!"

Monty Lowther picked up a large volume.

"I'll count three!" he said. "One—two——"

"Dear man, hastiness is a terrible failing!" exclaimed Cardew, dodging. "I merely came to invite you to the spread in the gym."

"The what?" yelled Tom Merry.

"The feed, you know. I take the chair at seven sharp!"

"You'll take a kick at six-forty-seven sharp, unless you bunk!" interrupted Tom grimly. "Of all the thumping nerve! You've spoofed us once, Cardew, but you can't spoof us twice in the same evening!"

Whizz—thud!

"Missed him!" said Lowther regretfully.

Ralph Reckness Cardew, outside the door, sadly shook his head, and doubted the expediency of visiting any of the other studies. He was gradually being forced to the conclusion that he was not popular. Even Baggy Trimble turned his nose up at him.

Baggy happened to come down the passage, and he gave Cardew a scornful look.

"Don't talk to me, because I shan't answer!" he said, with a sniff. "I'm a bit particular about my associates! At Trimble Hall we only mix with the finest——"

"Tramps?" asked Cardew smoothly.

He walked on, leaving Trimble bubbling with indignation. And Cardew came to the conclusion that it would be safer to let the fellows find out the good news for themselves. After what had already happened, they simply wouldn't believe him. But when a genuine feed is on the go, the news generally spreads with a rapidity which leaves lightning far in the rear.

Curiously enough, Levison and Clive were just coming through the gateway of St. Jim's at that moment. The curious feature in the circumstance was that Sid Watts was making his exit at the same moment. He practically bumped into the heavily-laden pair.

"Is Master Cardew about?" asked Watts, in a curiously husky voice.

"You'll find him somewhere, I dare say—in the School House, I believe," replied Levison. "We're his study-mates, so if you've got any message——"

"I suppose you know all about it, then?" asked the young boxer.

"We know that Cardew's been acting the giddy ox, if that's what you mean," said Levison. "We don't know what's up with him this evening. First he invites a big crowd to a feed, then he cancels the whole thing because he's broke, and after that he finds he's got the money again."

"Ah, you don't know what a kindness Master Cardew has done, young gents!" said Watts softly. "I want to see him. I want to thank him!"

"Thank him?" said Clive. "What for?"

"You're his friends, aren't you?" asked Watts.

"Well, yes."

"Then I'll tell you, sir," replied the young man.

"It's private, so I hope you won't tell everybody about it. But when Knox tripped over, I thought I'd half-killed him, and I bolted. Master Cardew gave my sister twenty-five pounds, so that she could give it to me as if it was hers. That's why he had no money for the feed."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Levison.

"Cardew," murmured Clive, "it doesn't sound possible!"

"Well, it's a fact!" replied Watts. "A kinder-hearted young gent I never heard of!"

His sister had told him all the facts, but he took great care to say nothing that could reflect upon

Elsie's character. He only wanted to tell Cardew's chums that Cardew was true blue.

"So he gave that money to your sister!" exclaimed Levison, light dawning upon him.

"And I thought it was Elsie's savings," explained Watts. "If I hadn't come back to face the music I should never have known. Of course, I gave the money back to Elsie, and she couldn't keep it then. Naturally, she gave it back to Master Cardew. I must find him. Ah, I believe that's him now!"

He hurried away, and Levison and Clive gazed at one another.

"No wonder he couldn't give the feed!" said Levison, taking a deep breath. "No wonder he couldn't explain things! And those chaps pounced on him and ragged him baldheaded!"

"Poor old Cardew!" said Clive sympathetically. "Not poor old Cardew," murmured Levison. "You mean good old Cardew!"

CHAPTER 18.

All Serene!

"CARDREW, you bounder!"

Levison and Clive grabbed Ralph Reckness Cardew as he made his way across to the gym.

"Whoa! What the merry thump—"

"We know all about it!" interrupted Levison grimly. "Watts has just told us!"

"Great gad!" said Cardew unhappily. "Dear souls, this is altogether too bad! Watts is a blithering chump—"

"He explained that you had lent that money to his sister," added Clive.

Within a minute Cardew knew that the full story of Elsie's danger of disgrace had not been revealed. He was greatly relieved to discover this, but to be praised up for his part in the affair was the last thing the dandy of the Fourth wanted.

"Give it a rest, dear men—give it a rest!" he pleaded. "I'm so accustomed to hearin' myself described as a black sheep an' a waster an' a smoky blackguard that this sort of stuff absolutely pains me. Let's get on with the feast. You have the mangers filled to the brim? Good!"

He refused to listen to any more, and five minutes later the banquet in the gym was ready for the guests. Cardew and his study-mates had the place entirely to themselves; for the gym had become distasteful to the others. They didn't want to go near the place again until their appetites had been satisfied.

"Now we're all ready," drawled Cardew, as he cast an approving eye over the table, "perhaps you heroes will dash round and gather in the customers? I warn you, it's a perilous mission. An' remember—not a word about Watts or his sister. If any of that story gets out, I cease to be on speakin' terms with either of you."

"We understand, old man," said Levison, nodding.

He went to the door, and espied Baggy Trimble hanging about the School House steps, disconsolate and moody. Ernest Levison grinned.

"Hi, Baggy!" he shouted. "Want a feed?"

Trimble rolled across at a speed that was altogether out of proportion to his podgy figure. He seemed to be by Levison's side by magic.

"A feed?" he puffed eagerly.

The arrival of Grundy's movie camera causes quite a sensation at St. Jim's, but the great George Alfred little dreams of the use to which his camera is to be put. When Figgins & Co. get hold of it the fun is fast and furious, and their rivals of the School House are ragged unmercifully. But apart from the fun, Grundy's camera serves a very useful purpose—nothing less than saving him from certain expulsion! Read how this comes about in

"GRUNDY'S MOVIE CAMERA!"

By Martin Clifford

Next week's grand long complete school story.
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"Gaze!" said Levison, pointing within.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Baggy, licking his lips. "Thanks awfully! I—I didn't mean what I said about Cardew! I think he's one of the best chaps breathing! I've always regarded him as one of my special pals—"

"Can't we proceed without this?" asked Cardew, pained.

"You can come to the feed, Baggy, on condition that you go and fetch the other guests first," explained Levison.

Trimble rolled off desperately, and he created such a terrific din in the Fourth passage that Blake & Co. came out to see what it was all about. In the Shell passage, Tom Merry and Manners emerged, too, and heads were appearing at every door. Two or three juniors went across to the gym to have a look at the place for themselves, and within a minute they were back.

"It's true!" yelled Talbot. "The feed's there!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Then—then Cardew was speaking the truth when he invited us just now?" said Blake faintly.

"Looks like it," said Tom Merry, grinning.

"I wegard Cardew as a spoonin' boundah!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "Howevah, undah the cires, it may be an act of gwace on our part to ovahlook his fwightful twicks!"

"I don't think he'll overlook that ragging we gave him!" said Herries. "It's a wonder to me he's invited us at all, after he was nearly slaughtered! Can't get to the bottom of the chap!"

"Who can?" asked Blake. "He's a thingummy—an enigma!"

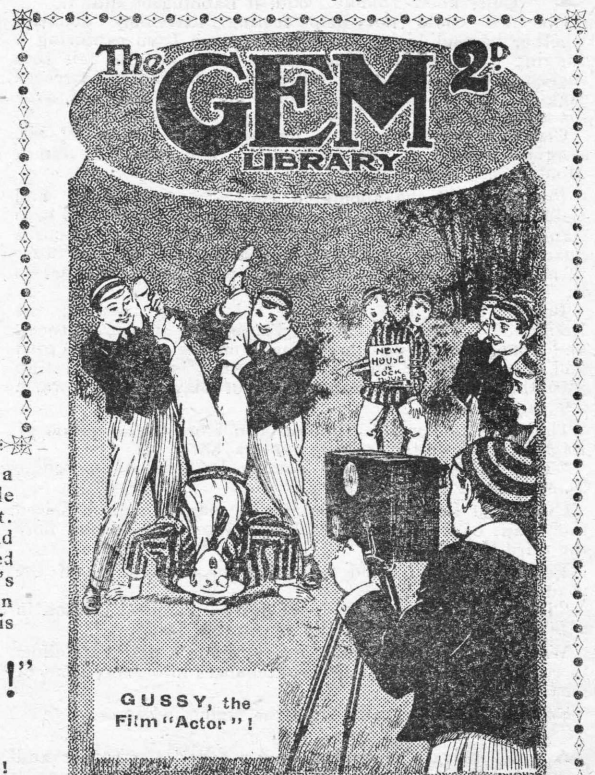
By the time they reached the gym many other guests had arrived, including Figgins & Co. and Redfern & Co. from the New House. Everybody was gazing at the groaning table with awe and admiration.

"Bai Jove! It looks wathah good!" said D'Arcy.

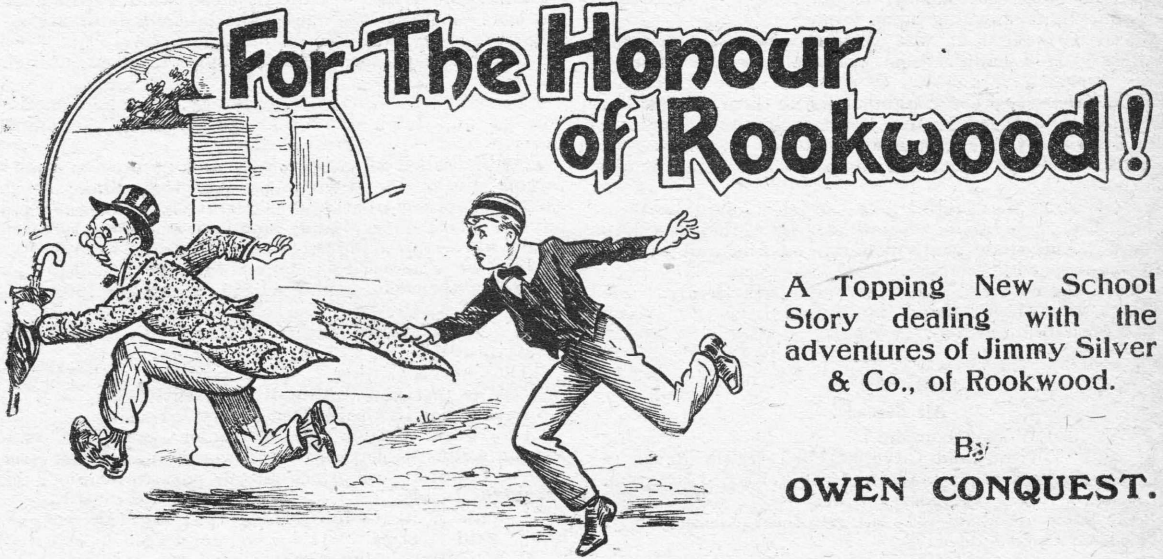
"It tastes better than it looks," said Levison.

"I twust there is no furthah twickewy?" asked Arthur Augustus, gazing suspiciously through his famous eyeglass at a cold chicken. "It would not surpwise me in the least to find that this chicken is nothin' but bwown papah!"

"Rats!" said Clive. "Everything here is hall-marked (Continued on page 28.)"



PUTTING THE KYBOSH ON THE BAGSHOT BOUNDERS! That the honour of Rookwood must be avenged; that Pankley & Co., of Bagshot, must be put in their proper place once and for all, Jimmy Silver & Co. are fully determined. But alack, the best of theories do not necessarily work out well in practice!



For The Honour of Rookwood!

A Topping New School Story dealing with the adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood.

By
OWEN CONQUEST.

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

James Montgomery Babbington, a new boy and a champion duffer, arrives at Rookwood smothered in coal-dust as a result of his encounter with Pankley & Co., the chums of Bagshot, the rival school. Knowing that Pankley & Co. are due to play footer at Lantham, Jimmy Silver & Co. hit upon a bright wheeze to get even with the Bagshot bounders. Accordingly they detail such prize asses as Clarence Cuffy and his cousin Babbington to walk innocently in the middle of the road towards Bagshot, carrying three pails of whitewash, to act as a decoy to lead the enemy into a well prepared trap.

(Now read on.)

The Tables Turned!

TO say that Cuffy and Babbington were in love with their job would be an exaggeration; but Clarence Cuffy knew Tommy Dodd, if Babbington didn't. Clarence could not help feeling extremely doubtful whether he and his cousin would escape from capturing a ragging over this amazing scheme; but he also felt that there was no doubt whatever that he would capture a record ragging from Tommy Dodd should he fail in any way over his allotted task.

Clarence Cuffy, therefore, being a patient sort of ass, resigned himself to the inevitable; and so did James Montgomery Babbington.

Punctually at the appointed time, therefore, Cuffy and Babbington, arrayed in their oldest Etons, were to be seen standing forlornly in the middle of Bagshot Lane about a quarter of a mile from Bagshot School. With them were three huge pails of whitewash, each with several brushes in it.

Behind the hedges on either side of the road lay the Rookwood juniors in ambush. There were sixteen of them, and Tommy Dodd was in command on one side of the road and Jimmy Silver on the other. All was in readiness to give the unsuspecting Bagshot junior eleven a very warm five minutes.

The warning hoot of a motor-horn from the direction of Bagshot, came to the waiting juniors' ears.

"They're coming!" hissed Tommy Dodd from the hedge. "Get a move on, you duffers!"

Cuffy and Babbington, looking thoroughly scared, seized their pails of whitewash. Each had a pail, while they bore the third between them.

Eorlornly they started to trudge up the middle of the road.

"Don't look like a couple of scared rabbits!" came in a ferocious whisper from the inexorable Dodd.

Whereupon the unfortunate decoys made a desperate effort to compose their frightened countenances into expressions of pleased expectation.

Suppressed titters came from the ambushed force.

Toot, toot!

A small private motor-bus swung round the corner and bore straight down upon the hapless twain. There was a sudden grinding of brakes, and a shout in the well-known
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tones of Pankley, the redoubtable leader of the Bagshot juniors.

"Hold on a minute, driver! Here's a lark, you chaps! Two Rookwood duffers taking some whitewash for a walk! We've got time to speak to 'em!"

There was a cheer and a roar of laughter.

"What-ho!"

"Hurrah!"

In a second a swarm of fellows in shorts and football boots sprang from the motor-bus and surrounded the palpitating Cuffy and his no less palpitating-cousin. Rude hands were laid upon them, and in another moment their fate would have been sealed. But suddenly a shout of triumph rang out from each side of the road.

"Rookwood to the rescue!"

"Hurrah!"

"Rookwood for ever!"

In a trice the Rookwood forces had closed in upon the enemy. The Bagshot fellows, utterly unprepared for this development, for the most part were overpowered with hardly a struggle.

Pankley and his staunch chums, Poole and Putter, put up a stout fight, but they were overborne by the weight of numbers, and in almost less time than it takes to tell, the whole of the Bagshot eleven were prisoners.

The eyes of the motor-bus driver grew round with amazement at this extraordinary proceeding.

"Well, my eye!" he ejaculated. "This 'ere is a rum go, blowed if it ain't!"

"It's all right, driver!" sang out Jimmy Silver cheerily. "You can have your passengers back in a minute—when we've used up all the whitewash."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pankley, securely held by two grinning Rookwooders, wriggled apprehensively.

"Look here, Silver!" he said fiercely. "We've got to play a match at Lantham this afternoon. None of your larks, you know!"

"What about the larks you had the other day with poor old Cuffy and his cousin?" grinned Jimmy Silver. "But we won't hurt you, Pankley. Just a dose of whitewash—like that!"

And Jimmy dabbed the raging Bagshot leader under the chin with the dripping whitewash brush.

"You—Gug! Yooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a roar from the Rookwooders.

"Who's top dog now?" sang out Lovell jubilantly.

"You are, for the moment," spluttered Pankley; "but—but—"

"But what?"

"Give him another, Jimmy!"

Splosh!

"Gug, gug! Mummmm!"

The whitewash brush splashed in Pankley's face again, and he gave a choking gurgle. But there was a gleam in his eye, which might have warned the Rookwood juniors of what was to come had they had leisure to notice.

"We'll tie 'em up and give 'em each a good dose of whitewash," said Jimmy Silver. "They're only in footer things, anyway."

"What-ho!"

"The Lantham chaps will be a bit surprised to see 'em," grinned Mornington, "but that doesn't matter a bit."
 "Not at all!" chuckled Jimmy. "We will put a notice in the bus with them. Here it is. I've got it all ready."

And Jimmy displayed a large card on which was written:

"SPECIAL EXHIBIT OF BAGSHOT BOUNDERS!

Rookwood For Ever!"

He held it up for all to see, and there was a cheer from his victorious followers.

But the next moment that cheer died away in their throats as round the corner, with a swirl and a hoot, came a large charabanc crammed to the utmost capacity with juniors wearing the green cap of Bagshot School.

There was a gasp of dismay from the Rookwooders.

Jimmy Silver's jaw dropped.

"G-g-g-great Scott!" he groaned. "Here's the whole blessed lot of 'em!"

There was a roar from Pankley & Co.

"Rescue, Bagshot!"

"Help!"

"Rookwood bounders!"

The charabanc drew up with a screeching of brakes, and the road was instantly a-swarm with sturdy youths, who rushed upon the Rookwood fellows. As the Assyrians came down like wolves on the fold, so did the flood of excited Bagshot fellows engulf and overwhelm the heroes of Rookwood.

Outnumbered by four or five to one, the Rookwood party had no chance, and in a couple of minutes they stood in a woebegone line, prisoners in place of Pankley and his team. The tables were turned with a vengeance!

Under the eyes of the grinning drivers the face of each Rookwooder was liberally splashed with a workmanlike coat of whitewash. Fortunately, the pails were large, and Tommy Dodd had been generous with the whitewash!

A coil of strong cord was discovered in the possession of Arthur Edward Lovell. Obviously it had been intended to secure the Bagshot eleven. Now it was pressed into service to rope the eighteen Rookwood juniors, after each had been well whitewashed, in a long line.

Jimmy Silver was at the head of it, seeing, as Pankley facetiously observed, that he was the leader; Clarence Cuffy, looking more woebegone than ever with his large spectacles gleaming on his ghastly, whitewashed countenance, brought up the rear.

Having made suitable alterations to the large notice which Jimmy Silver had so thoughtfully provided, Pankley & Co. secured it with string to the side of the long line of tightly-ropeed juniors.

It now read:

"SPECIAL EXHIBIT OF ROOKWOOD BOUNDERS!

Bagshot For Ever!"

With shouts of laughter, cheers, and catcalls, the Bagshot team and their supporters piled into their vehicles.

"Hard luck, Jimmy old bean!" sang out Pankley. "You didn't know that our Head had given special permission to the whole junior school to come over and see the match, of course!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a roar from the jubilant Bagshot fellows.

"You have to get up very early in the morning to catch Bagshot out!" cried Pankley. "Better luck next time, old bean!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

And in the thunder of triumphant cheers the Bagshot party rolled away in the direction of Lantham.

"Dished, diddled, and done!" groaned Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, my hat! I never knew—I never thought—"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Oh dear!"

Seventeen whitewashed glares were fixed upon the unfortunate leader of the Rookwood juniors. For some moments the roped-up line wrenched and wriggled at their bonds. But each fellow's hands were tied behind his back, and the Bagshot bounders had done their work too well. The bonds could not be loosened.

Slowly and with much groaning the weird procession started to crawl dimly off down the road to Rookwood.

How they ever reached the school they could hardly tell, but they finally shuffled in at the gates, and Mack, the porter, as he confided afterwards to his wife, thought he was "seeing things."

The unfortunate juniors managed, however, to persuade old Mack to cut them free, whereupon there was a general

rush for the bath-rooms. And naturally the news of the disaster spread through Rookwood like wildfire, and Jimmy Silver & Co., with Tommy Dodd & Co. were glad to seek the sanctuary of their studies, there to hide their diminished heads.

Not yet was the honour of Rookwood avenged!

Great Snakes!

"MY dear Clarence!"

It was after dinner on a fine afternoon at Rookwood School. Most of the fellows were out on the playing fields, but Clarence Cuffy and his cousin, James Montgomery Babbington, had retired to the little study they shared on the Modern Side, with the intention of passing a quiet and peaceful afternoon.

James Montgomery Babbington had only been at Rookwood a few days, and during that time his life had been far from a quiet one.

He was a mild and inoffensive youth, who had been brought up in India, where his parents still were. Rookwood was his first experience of a public school, and he was finding it exciting—rather too exciting, in fact. However, for once there appeared to be a reasonable prospect of a quiet hour for Babbington. He was busy unpacking a large box which was standing in a corner of the room when he looked up and addressed his remark to his cousin.

"My dear Clarence, do you by any chance object to snakes?"

Clarence Cuffy gave a jump.

"Snakes!" he repeated. "My dear James, did you really say snakes?"

"Certainly, my dear Clarence! I have here a large basket," said Babbington seriously, lifting out a big, round, rush basket, curiously constructed, and evidently of Indian manufacture. "It contains a number of snakes."

This time Clarence Cuffy jumped clear off the floor.

"Goodness gracious!" he ejaculated. "Snakes! Where? What?"

"Yes, snakes," said Babbington—"pet snakes, you know. I am very fond of snakes."

"Goodness gracious!"

"Are you not fond of snakes, my dear Clarence?" continued Babbington seriously, blinking at his startled cousin.

"Certainly not!" said Cuffy promptly. "I—I—my dear James, I know nothing about snakes. Surely—in a study, you know—really, my dear James!"

"There is nothing to be afraid of," said Babbington calmly, lifting the lid of the basket. "Look here!"

He plunged his hand in and brought out a wriggling reptile, which he placed on the table. Fully five feet long and beautifully marked, the snake curled and hissed along the table, while Clarence Cuffy gazed at it through his big spectacles with eyes that positively bulged with alarm.

"Goodness gracious!" he gasped. "How dreadful!"

Babbington laughed.

"Not at all!" he said. "That's Rajah. I've had him for years. Look here!"

Babbington picked up the big snake and coiled it round his neck. The reptile hung motionless, and seemed perfectly docile when handled by his master.

"My dear James!" gasped Clarence in horror. "Surely that is very dangerous!"

"Not a bit! I have some more here."

James plunged his hand into the basket again, and took out several more snakes almost as large as the first.

"I learned how to charm snakes in India. An old fakir showed me. Just you watch."

He uncoiled the snake which was round his neck, and replaced it on the table with the others. Then from an inner pocket he took a short reed pipe only a few inches in length. Putting it to his lips he began to play. A low wailing sound came from the pipe.

Clarence Cuffy watched, transfixed. At the first notes of the pipe the reptiles on the table raised their heads and swayed backwards and forwards to the music of the pipe, almost as though they were dancing to its tune. The low wailing notes sounded through the study, and the snakes writhed and swayed in rhythm. The peculiarity of the sight simply fascinated Clarence. Here was his cousin Babbington in a new light. Clarence did not know what to make of it. He could only gasp.

Suddenly Babbington stopped and replaced the pipe in his pocket.

"There!" he beamed. "They simply love music. I can do what I like with them."

Catching his pets dexterously behind the head, he swung them back into the basket and replaced the lid, much to Clarence's relief.

"You don't mind my keeping Rajah and the others here in the study, do you, Clarence?"

Clarence looked dubious.

"Really, my dear James, suppose they should escape?"

"They won't escape," said Babbington. "I shall keep the basket in my big box."

"Suppose Mr. Manders knew?"

"The less said about them the better," said Babbington. "I did not tell the headmaster, in case he should object." Babbington broke off and looked at his cousin inquiringly as the heavy tramp of feet sounded in the passage outside.

Most of the fellows on the Modern Side were out of doors, but as the trampling feet came nearer to the study Babbington's hopes of a quiet afternoon began to fade.

Crash!

The door was flung open suddenly, and the burly form of Higgs of the Classical Fourth burst into the study, followed by two other Classical juniors whom Cuffy recognised as Peele and Gower.

"Hallo!" roared Higgs in a powerful voice. "So here you are! Good!"

Clarence Cuffy and James Montgomery Babbington blinked at him mildly through their spectacles.

"D-d-did you want anything, Higgs?" stammered Cuffy, somewhat apprehensively.

Cuffy knew Alfred Higgs, and was no stranger to his high-handed methods. Higgs was, in short, a bit of a bully, and on that account had often come up against Jimmy Silver & Co. But the Co. were out on the footer field, in the middle of a practice match with Tommy Dodd & Co., and Higgs felt pretty safe from any interruption from them.

"We want young Babbington," said Higgs. "We've come to put you two Modern freaks through it, haven't we, chaps?"

There was a snigger from Peele and Gower.

"We have," said Peele. "Just to teach them to respect their betters on the Classical Side."

"Ha, ha, ha! That's it!" chuckled Higgs. "Shut the door, Gower. We don't want any interruption for a bit. Hallo! What's that?" he broke off, looking at the big rush basket on the table.

"Oh, never mind that!" said Peele. "Let's get on with the job."

"Now, listen!" said Higgs threateningly, as Babbington and Cuffy retreated round the table and eyed him apprehensively. "First of all, you two freaks have got to go down on your bended knees and apologise!"

"What for?" quavered Cuffy.

Babbington said nothing.

"What for?" roared Higgs. "For being at Rookwood!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Peele and Gower.

"But surely that requires no apology? We were sent here," said Babbington mildly.

"I say it does!" bellowed Higgs. "I've told all the chaps that I'd make you apologise, and I'm going to do it—see?"

And Higgs shook a large fist closely resembling a leg of mutton almost under the nose of Babbington.

James Montgomery recoiled from the fist as if he had been stung. At the same time, he reached for the rush-basket on the table and pulled it out of Higgs' way. With a quick movement Higgs reached over the table and caught Babbington's arm.

"Hold on, young Babbington!" he cried. "What's in that basket?"

"Er—n-n-nothing much," said Babbington.

"Oh, isn't it? Grub, I suppose? Let's have a look."

Babbington's reply was to push the basket still farther out of Higgs' reach. Alfred Higgs grew red with rage.

"You cheeky young rotter!" he roared. "Hand over that basket at once!"

"But—but—" quavered Babbington.

"Hand it over!" bellowed Higgs.

He made a clutch at the basket and dragged at it. Babbington's arm closed round it, and for a moment there was a tug-of-war between the two.

"Here, Peele—Gower—catch hold!" yelled Higgs.

Peele and Gower went to their leader's aid, and the combined grasp of the three was too much for Babbington. He let go of the basket suddenly, and Higgs and his two helpers flew back with the basket in their grasp so suddenly that all three of them sat on the floor with a bump. The basket shot into the air, and a shower of wriggling snakes flew from the rush receptacle and descended full upon their heads.

The Biter Bit!

TO say that Higgs & Co. were surprised by this sudden clammy shower would be to put it mildly. Their howls of utter astonishment and terror might almost have been heard on the playing fields where Tommy Dodd & Co. and Jimmy Silver & Co. were engaged in deadly rivalry.

Gower, indeed, who was not the stuff from which heroes are made, almost fainted with terror. He lay perfectly still on his back, frozen with horror while a large snake crawled across his waistcoat. Peele, frantically dashing one of the snakes from him, rushed for the door and fled howling down the passage.

Alfred Higgs was as white as a sheet. One of the snakes had dropped right on his face and was now coiling itself round his neck. He fairly panted with terror, and fixed James Montgomery Babbington with glassy eyes as he ran round the table.

Clarence Cuffy, from a corner of the room, could only wring his hands and ejaculate: "Goodness gracious! This is terrible!"

Babbington, however, was quite calm.

"Keep still, Higgs!" he said sharply.

Stooping, he picked the snake from the trembling Gower's chest and held it, writhing, in his hand.

"You had better clear," he said curtly. And Gower, shaking so much that he could scarcely crawl, scrambled to the door and disappeared.

Higgs sat immovable. All the bluster had departed from the bully of the Fourth, and he now looked in his terror a pitiful object indeed.

"Keep quite still!" said Babbington again sharply.

He moved his hand gently along Higgs' shoulders until he touched almost caressingly the silky folds of the snake that was coiled about the bully's neck, while Higgs' eyes almost started from his head.

Babbington, softly crooning to himself, gently unwound the reptile and placed it on the floor.

"Out of the way—quick!" he jerked out.

Babbington was by this time between Higgs and the door. Higgs jumped at the other's words, darted across the room and took refuge in the opposite corner.

At once the big snake which Babbington had called Rajah, writhed rapidly across the floor with a soft hissing sound straight in the direction of Alfred Higgs. The latter covered in terror in the corner.

"Look out!" he screamed. "That big one! He's after me!"

"All right!" said Babbington, swiftly whipping the snake he had in his hand back into the rush-basket. "There's one back—and another—and another!"

"Help!" screamed Higgs. "He's coming after me!"

"Well," said Babbington mildly, clapping down the lid on the other snakes which he had now got safely housed in their basket, "I told you not to meddle with my basket, Higgs!"

The big snake, Rajah, had now got to within a couple of feet of Higgs in the corner, and was swaying its head backwards and forwards, hissing at the bully for all the world like a terrier which had cornered a cat.

"I know you did!" moaned Higgs. "I'm sorry—I'm sorry, Babbington! Take it away!"

"I think this should be a lesson to you, my dear Higgs," observed Clarence, coming out of his corner now that the redoubtable Higgs was reduced to complete helplessness. "It is rude in the extreme to burst into other fellows' studies, is it not, my dear James?"

Higgs scowled at Clarence's gently chiding words, but he kept his eyes on the swaying reptile.

"Take it away, Babbington—take it away, for goodness' sake!" he groaned. "I'm sorry! I apologise! I'll do anything if you'll let me out!"

Babbington blinked mildly at Higgs, but he did not make any movement to recapture Rajah.

"I understand, Higgs," he said gently, "that you're from the Classical Side?"

"Yes—yes!" panted Higgs.

"It appears," continued Babbington, "that you came over here for the express purpose of making my cousin, Clarence, and me apologise. Is that not so?"

"Yes," mumbled Higgs, with a hunted look.

"That was very wrong, Higgs," broke in Clarence once again—"very wrong and very inconsiderate, my dear Higgs."

"Quite so," said Babbington. "You are quite right, my dear Clarence. I was about to observe, however, that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander."

"Quite true, my dear James; but I do not quite see—"

"What I mean," pursued Babbington, "is this. The object of Higgs' visit was apparently to make us apologise for being at Rookwood. Do you not think, my dear Clarence, that it would be only just if Higgs were made to apologise to us?"

A gleam came into Higgs' eye, and his rugged countenance was suffused with colour.

"You—you—little rotter!" he hissed. "I'll—I'll——" He broke off with a yelp as Rajah swayed towards him, and a glimmer of a smile showed in Babbington's face for a moment.

Half the junior school was clustered round the open door of Cuffy's study, and there was a gasp of amazement at the astounding scene that was revealed.

Alfred Higgs, the most powerful fellow in the Fourth, was down on his knees in a corner, while in front of him, poised apparently ready to strike, was a big snake. Behind it stood Babbington, calm and self-possessed, fingering his reed pipe. Clarence Cuffy looked on with a benevolent blink.

"Great Scott!"

"My hat!"

"Well, did you ever?"

"Higgs!"

"Look at him!"

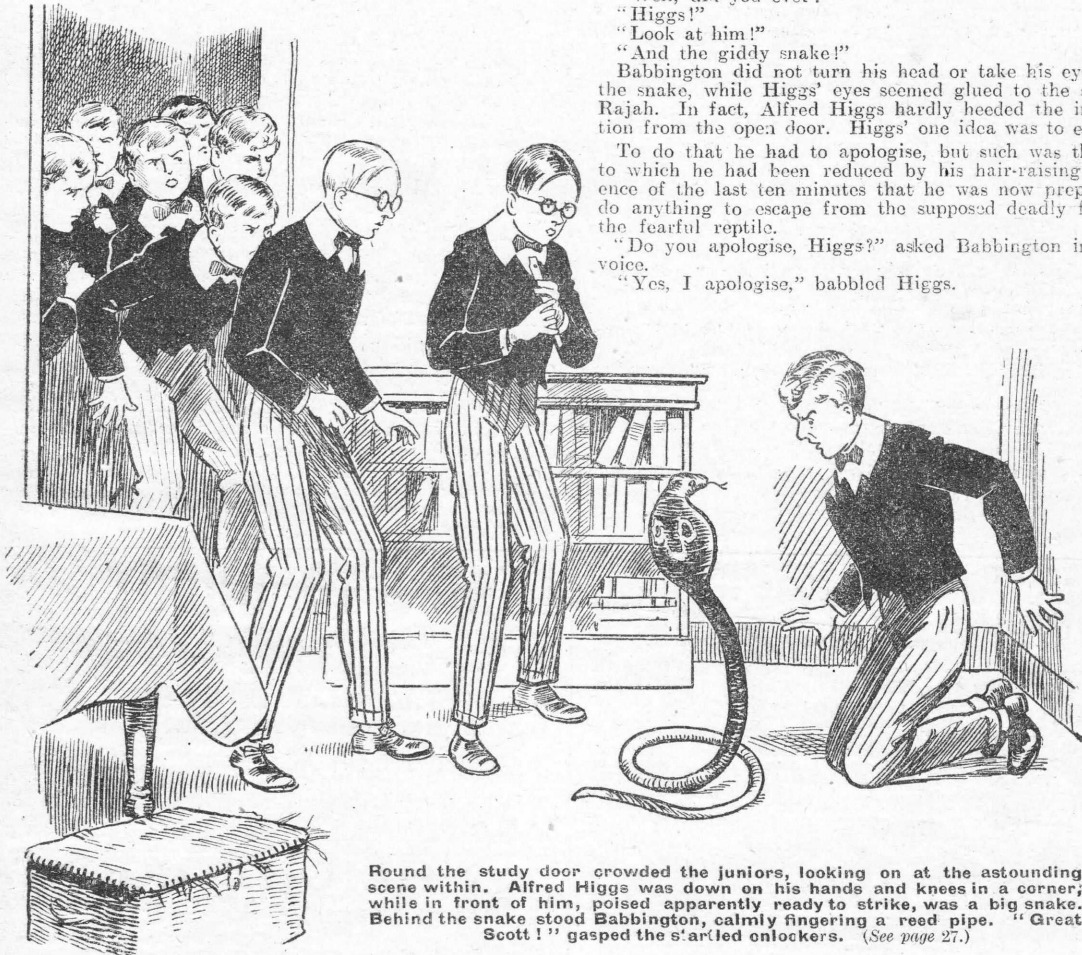
"And the giddy snake!"

Babbington did not turn his head or take his eyes from the snake, while Higgs' eyes seemed glued to the swaying Rajah. In fact, Alfred Higgs hardly heeded the interruption from the open door. Higgs' one idea was to escape.

To do that he had to apologise, but such was the state to which he had been reduced by his hair-raising experience of the last ten minutes that he was now prepared to do anything to escape from the supposed deadly fangs of the fearful reptile.

"Do you apologise, Higgs?" asked Babbington in a low voice.

"Yes, I apologise," babbled Higgs.



Round the study door crowded the juniors, looking on at the astounding scene within. Alfred Higgs was down on his hands and knees in a corner, while in front of him, poised apparently ready to strike, was a big snake. Behind the snake stood Babbington, calmly fingering a reed pipe. "Great Scott!" gasped the startled onlookers. (See page 27.)

"Rajah has got you cornered, you see, Higgs," said the new junior pleasantly. "I could call him off in a moment if I liked."

"Then call him off!" shrieked Higgs. "I can't stand this much longer!"

"What about apologising, then?" said Babbington almost sweetly.

Higgs gave Babbington and his cousin a deadly glare, and he appeared to be swallowing something with difficulty, but there was no help for it. The bully of the Fourth knew he was in a corner, and there was no way of escape.

"Will you call it off?" he hissed.

"I will when you have apologised," said Babbington gently. "We did not ask you here, you know, Higgs."

"I—I'll apologise!" gasped Higgs thickly. "Don't let that brute come any nearer."

"All right; but hurry up!" said Babbington warningly, as the snake swayed backwards and forwards with a more rapid rhythm and its hiss became louder.

Higgs slipped to his knees without taking his eyes off the hooded head of the snake for a moment.

There was a rush of feet in the passage, and Peele's voice was heard excitedly:

"In there! Snakes! Lots of 'em! You look, you fellows!"

The door was opened cautiously, and then more widely, and in a moment it was crowded with heads.

Peele, dashing from the study in terror, had gasped out his story right and left, and even the junior practice match had been suspended while investigations were made.

"What for?" said Babbington sweetly.

"I apologise for being at Rookwood," said Higgs. There was a gasp of amazement from the doorway. Higgs apologising—and to those Modern freaks!

"I apologise," went on Higgs, gasping the words out with frantic haste. "I'm sorry, Babbington. I'm sorry I came to your study. I apologise for being at Rookwood. I apologise for being a Classical. I apologise for everything!" screamed Higgs desperately.

From the doorway came an uncontrollable roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's the giddy limit!" said Tommy Dodd, weeping on the shoulder of Tommy Doyle.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Babbington raised the reed pipe, pressed his lips to it, and a few low, clear notes sounded in the study. At once the big snake turned from the cowering Higgs and glided towards its master. Babbington, still playing the pipe, backed across the study towards the basket, followed by the big snake.

Still playing, he bent down and with one hand fondled the reptile. Then he caught it gently behind the head, and it coiled and writhed about his arm.

"Got you!" said Babbington quietly. "Good old Rajah!" He opened the lid of the basket and popped the big snake in.

"You see, Higgs——" he remarked, turning round.

But Higgs was gone. With a bellow like an enraged bull he had rushed across the study and charged out of the door, scattering the shrieking crowd right and left as he went.

Back to his own study fled Alfred Higgs, sadder and wiser, and bitterly regretting that he had chosen James Montgomery Babbington to rag that fine afternoon. Behind him he left a crowd that almost filled the passage outside Cuffy's study.

They laughed and cheered and laughed again, and on all sides was exhibited a plentiful lack of sympathy for Alfred Higgs and his plight.

He had come to make Cuffy and Babbington apologise and he had made them an abject apology! The bitter had been bitten with a vengeance.

Tommy Dodd & Co. almost embraced the smiling Babbington.

"Jolly good, Babby!" chuckled Tommy Dodd, slapping him on the back. "Blessed if I thought a freak like you had it in him! You'd better look after those snakes, though. Are they dangerous?"

"Not a bit," said Babbington. "They are quite harmless. Their fangs have been removed. They're my pets, you know."

"Good for you!" said Tommy.
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Higgs!"
"What a come down for the Classics, too!"

"You've put the Moderns one up, Babbington, my lad! Good for you!"

"Thru, and it's a broth of a boy you are!" said Tommy Doyle. "I can see Higgs' face now as he apologised!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Tommy Cook. "It was worth a guinea a box!"

Gradually the crowd drifted away, still laughing and talking excitedly, but not before they had given three rousing cheers for James Montgomery Babbington.

(There will be another rousing long instalment of this popular Rookwood serial in next week's GEM, chums. Avoid missing it by ordering your copy WELL IN ADVANCE.)

CARDEW, THE KNIGHT-ERRANT!

(Continued from page 23.)

—and prepared by Mrs. Murphy's own fair hands. Gentlemen, the chair!"

Cardew, at the head of the table, bowed. "I'm not much of a bird for formalities," he said leisurely. "My speech, dear men, will consist of two words: File in!"

"Hurrah!"
"Good old Cardew!"

And the guests proceeded to pile in eagerly and hungrily. Nobody thought of referring to that painful episode when Cardew had been "put through the mill." He was in popular favour again. He had come up to the scratch, and the juniors regarded him as a sportsman.

"But how did you work it, Cardew?" asked Tom Merry, after the first keen edge had been removed from his appetite.

"Little boys," said Cardew, "should be seen and not heard. Fortune is a fickle jade. She smiles one minute, frowns the next, and then a further smile enlightens her countenance."

But any sort of explanation was not forthcoming.

Nobody could possibly understand Cardew, with the exception of Levison and Clive. And even they did not know the whole truth. Only Sid Watts and his sister Elsie were aware that Ralph Reckness Cardew had acted the part of knight-errant to a damsel in distress.

THE END.

(Now turn back to page 23 and read the particulars of next week's grand 30,000-word story of Tom Merry & Co.)

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