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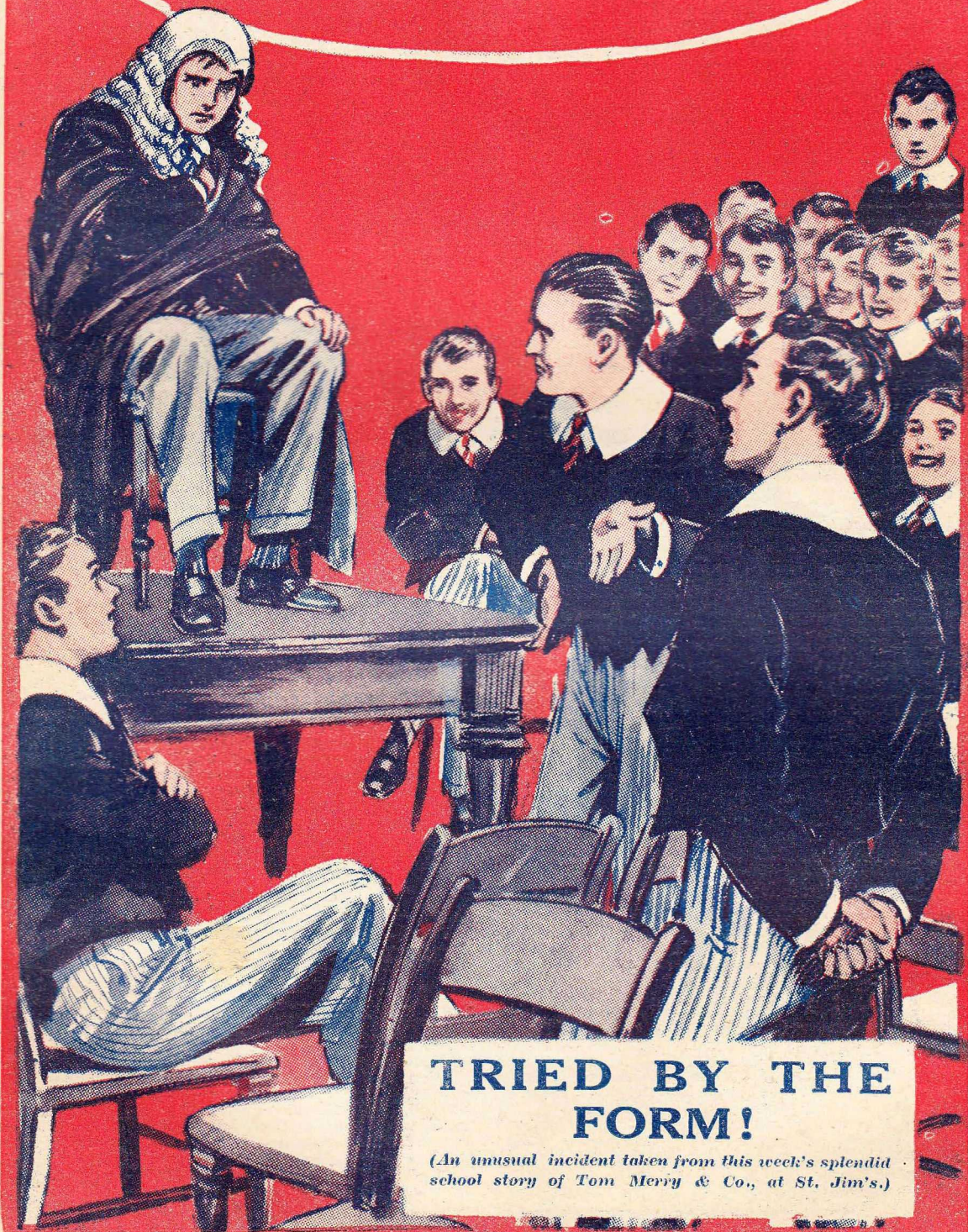
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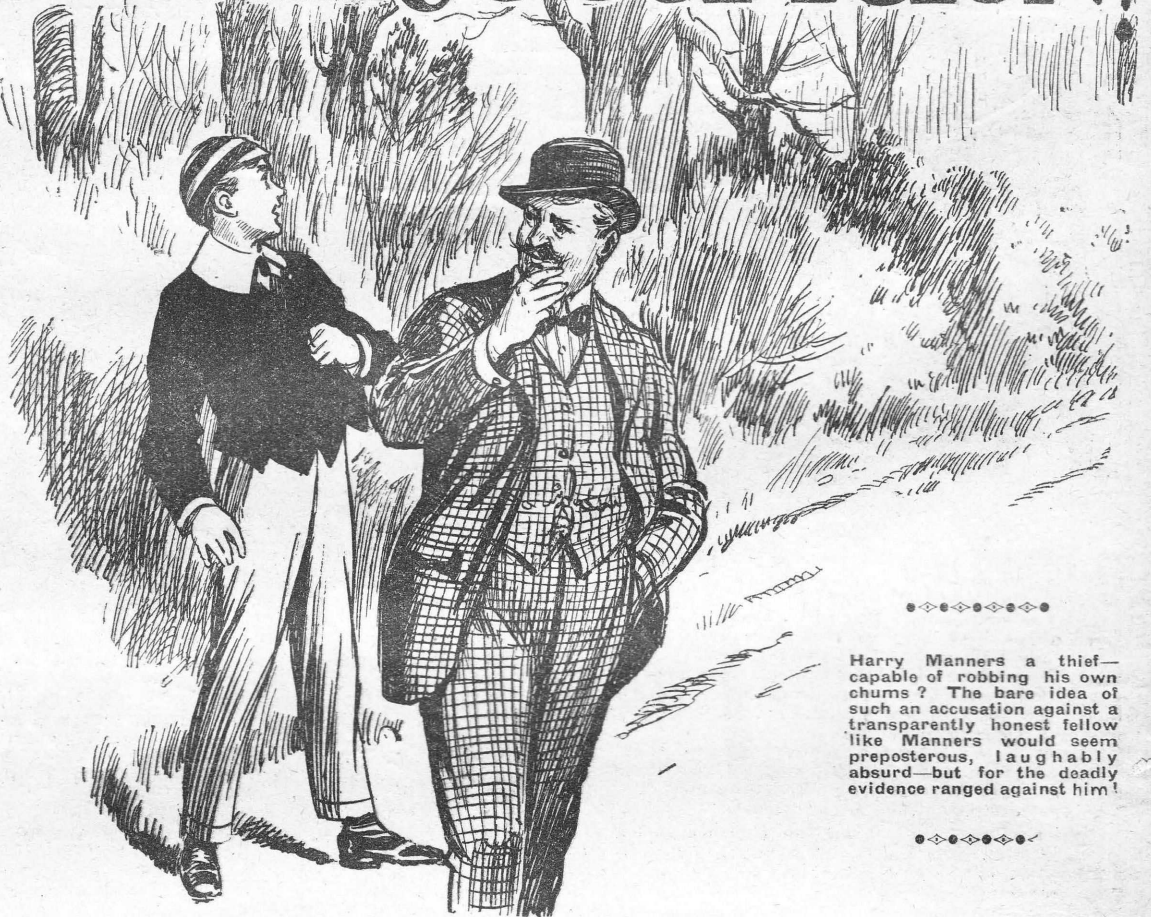


**TRIED BY THE
FORM!**

(An unusual incident taken from this week's splendid school story of Tom Merry & Co., at St. Jim's.)

A DRAMATIC LONG COMPLETE STORY OF—

UNDER SUSPICION!



◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆

Harry Manners a thief—capable of robbing his own chums? The bare idea of such an accusation against a transparently honest fellow like Manners would seem preposterous, laughably absurd—but for the deadly evidence ranged against him!

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CHAPTER 1. Major and Minor!

TAP!

"Bother!"

Apparently the interruption was unwelcome to Manners of the Shell.

It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and fine weather had drawn most of the fellows out of doors. Manners, however, was still in Study No. 10, though his chums, Tom Merry and Lowther, had long since departed.

The explanation of such an unusual state of affairs was simple. Manners was secretary and treasurer of the St. Jim's Junior Football Club, the annual meeting of which was to be held that evening. At half-past eight he would be called upon to read out the financial statement to the members, and it was necessary, therefore, to bring the books up-to-date, and prepare the figures for the meeting. Hence Manners' presence in Study No. 10 at such an unusual hour.

Manners had worked feverishly to finish off the job, and he was just about to balance up. Now, to his annoyance, had come this unexpected interruption from outside the door of the study.

Tap!

"Oh, come in, bother you!" called out Manners crossly.

The door opened, and a scared-looking junior entered. The worried secretary of the football club, looking up, recognised his minor, Reggie Manners of the Third.

"Hope I'm not interfering with what you're doing, Harry," said Manners minor, looking strangely shame-faced.

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"Well, you are, as a matter of fact," Harry Manners admitted candidly. "I'm busy on the balance for the footer meeting."

"I don't want to be a blessed nuisance to you, of course; but it's rather urgent—"

Manners major gave his minor a sharp look. Something in the youngster's tone carried his mind back to occasions in the past when Reggie had been in trouble and come to him for help. He put down his pen, and, with a sigh, temporarily abandoned his work.

"What is it, then?" he asked a little less gruffly. "Sit down and let's hear all about it. I won't bite you!"

Reggie Manners smiled faintly, and sat down at the table.

"I suppose you'll think I never come along here unless there's something wrong—" he began, colouring.

"Oh, rats! Get on with the washing!"

"I'm afraid I'm in a bit of a mess," confessed Manners minor, in a low voice. "It's all my own fault, too—well, mostly, anyway. I suppose it wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been for Cutts."

"Cutts!" echoed Manners of the Shell, with a frown. "How the thump can that shady Fifth Form rotter have anything to do with your troubles?"

"Well, you see, I've been fagging for him—"

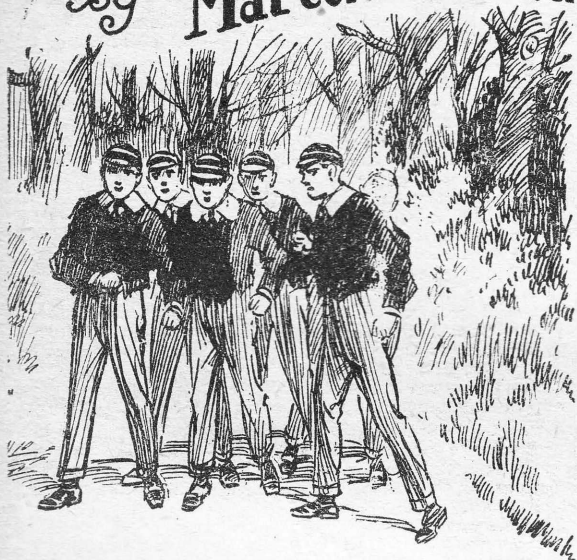
"First time I've heard of a Fifth-Former having a regular fag."

"Well, I wasn't exactly a regular fag. I just took messages for him, and so on. He treated me decently enough, if it comes to that. Always standing me tuck—"

"That blagging bounder treated you decently!" broke in Manners scornfully. "You're about the only one he ever has, then. What did he want from you?"

—CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S, STARRING MANNERS OF THE SHELL!

By **Martin Clifford**



"I suppose that was it," went on the Third-Former miserably. "He wanted me to take messages to a bookmaker—a chap over at Wayland, named Banks."

"And you took them? You silly young idiot!"

"I—I didn't think there was much harm in it."

"You jolly well ought to have known better, then," said Harry Manners sharply. "You know that none of the decent fellows here do it. Apart from that, you don't need telling what would happen if the beaks got to hear of it!"

Manners minor hung his head.

"I know. I was a fathead, anyway. I admit that. But I haven't told you about the fix I'm in. I started backing one or two horses myself when I saw Cutts win."

The elder brother bit his lip and nodded.

"I was a silly ass, for I hadn't much money, and I soon ran out of what little I had. Then Banks offered to take my bets on credit, provided I wrote them out and signed them. And—and—"

"And you did it, of course?" snapped Harry Manners roughly.

"Well, Cutts reckoned he had a dead cert for the Mug-hampton Handicap, so I did it. I thought I'd have a real plunge, and I—I put two pounds on it."

"Two pounds! Good heavens!" Harry Manners stared at his minor in mingled anger and amazement. "How the thump did you imagine that you were going to raise an amount like that if it lost, you utter young idiot?"

"I—I'm afraid I didn't think much about it," admitted the youngster, in a low voice. "You see, Cutts said it was sure to win, and—and I needed a new bike and other things rather badly, so I thought—"

"That it would be very nice if Mr. Banks could be made to pay for them!" finished Manners major sarcastically. "You young fool! What a chance you stood! I wonder how much a chap like that would part up with, even if you really had a bet on a winner?"

Manners minor was silent.

"So what it amounts to is that you owe a blessed bookmaker two pounds, and you want me to raise the money and get you out of your mess—is that it?"

"Well, I didn't expect you to have so much money yourself," answered Reggie Manners awkwardly. "I know you're not overloaded with cash, as a rule, so I thought perhaps you might get a loan from Tom Merry, or Lowther, or some other of your pals—"

"And let myself down in their eyes, all because you've chosen to act the giddy goat!" said Manners of the Shell bitterly. "Thanks; but I'm not in the habit of borrowing money from anyone, so you can consider that idea buried to begin with!"

Reggie Manners' eyes gleamed rebelliously for a moment. Humility was not exactly natural to his proud and somewhat perverse young spirit, and he had not fancied the humble role he had come to play that afternoon. But very

few hard words from his major would be needed to change his mood from one of meek repentance to one of passionate anger. That was Manners minor's way.

"Look here, I didn't come here to get a lot of rotten pi-jaw from you!" he said sullenly. "You're my elder brother, and you know the mater specially asked you when I first came here to help me out of any difficulties."

"No need to remind me; I know all that," said Manners major more quietly. "I'm going to help you somehow, though I still think you're a silly young ass! Now, what's the immediate trouble? Is this chap Banks dunning you for the cash?"

The sullen look died away from Reggie Manners' face again, and a worried look took its place.

"No, he's not really dunning me," he replied. "But it's awkward. I owe the money, and I think he'll be expecting it now. And—and I've got to meet him by arrangement, for Cutts, this afternoon."

"You have, have you?" said Manners grimly. "More rotten betting transactions, I suppose. What's that you've got in your hand? Is that Cutts'?"

Reggie Manners nodded, and after a brief moment of hesitation handed over the little slip of paper he was carrying.

Manners major's lip curled as he read the contents.

"£2 to win Muscatel.—G. C."

"The rotter ought to be jolly well ashamed of himself!" he exclaimed indignantly. "So you've got to meet Banks to hand him this, and you're scared of doing so because you owe Banks a couple of quid. Is that it?"

"That's it, I suppose," admitted Reggie.

"Where have you got to meet the rotter?"

"You mean Banks? Oh, I'm supposed to see him down that cart-track that leads from Rylcombe Lane into Brown's Meadow. Half-past three he'll be there, so Cutts said."

Manners major pushed aside his papers and rose to his feet.

"Half-past three," he said thoughtfully. "And it's now three o'clock. That'll give me just time to get down to Rylcombe, and meet him afterwards."

"You'll meet Banks, instead of me?" asked Reggie, in great relief, which was, however, not unmingled with alarm. "But—but if you're seen jawing with him, there'll be the dickens to pay. You know how jolly serious it would be!"

"I know all right!" answered Manners major grimly. "Pity you didn't think of things like that before!"

"I say, Harry, it's jolly decent of you—"

"Oh, can it! And buzz off now! No time to waste jawing if I'm to catch the old rotter!"

Looking a little abashed, but wearing a decidedly more cheerful expression than when he had entered the study, Manners minor "buzzed off!"

And Manners major, with a somewhat weary shrug, donned his school cap, and prepared to do his best to help his young brother out of his latest scrape.

CHAPTER 2.

An Unlucky Meeting!

"MANNERS, old chap, can you—"

"No, I can't!"

Baggy Trimble of the Fourth looked surprised. "But you haven't heard what I was going to ask you. Can you—"

"I can't!" repeated Manners, more decidedly than before. "Now roll away, and let me get into the bike-shed!"

Baggy Trimble snorted.

"Look here, you rotter, how the dickens can you answer a question you haven't heard? I was going to ask—"

"And I've said 'No!'" interrupted Manners. "So why waste time? Now, what's it going to be? Are you going to buzz off, or would you prefer to be buzzed?"

Evidently Baggy Trimble preferred to buzz off on his own accord, for he hopped out of the way of Manners' upraised foot like a fat frog.

"Beast!" he roared from a safe distance. "I was going to ask you whether you would lend me half-a-crown, but I shan't now! I wouldn't take it if you offered it on bended knees! Yah!"

Manners chuckled, and went into the shed, leaving the fat Fourth-Former to waste his sweetness on the desert air. By the time he came out again, wheeling his bicycle, Trimble, having evidently abandoned hope of "raising the wind" from Manners, had strayed to fresh fields and pastures new. So Manners was able to mount and pedal off without further interruption.

Once outside the gates of St. Jim's, Manners put on speed, for time was precious if he was to keep his minor's appointment with Mr. Banks. The road was fairly clear, and the few pedestrians whom he encountered on the way to Rylcombe, took good care to keep clear of the speeding cyclist.

That was just as well, for at the little village post office, time was not a matter of great importance, and transactions of the kind that had brought Manners there, were treated with considerable thoroughness and caution.

Manners had come to draw out ten pounds from the Junior Football Club's savings-bank account, that sum being needed for the purchase of new equipment. As he had already given the customary notice beforehand, it only remained for him to collect the money and have the savings-bank book appropriately marked.

This simple operation, however, took more than ten minutes to complete at Rylcombe Post Office, and Manners felt very thankful that he had hurried.

Stopping only to transfer the wad of crisp, new Treasury notes to the safety of an inside pocket, the Shell junior mounted his bike again, and started back the way he had come. He was left with barely sufficient time to reach the appointed meeting-place by half-past three.

It was not because he relished his task that Manners was so anxious to keep his young brother's appointment with Mr. Banks. The society of that somewhat shady individual made no appeal whatever to Manners of the Shell, and even if it had, it was highly dangerous for any St. Jim's fellow to be seen talking with such a man. If a master or a prefect happened to witness the meeting, serious trouble would most certainly follow.

His anxiety to see Mr. Banks was simply and solely anxiety to help his minor out of the mess into which he had apparently got.

Manners felt a very keen sense of responsibility towards his younger brother. It was perhaps as well for Reggie Manners that he did, for the Third-Former's wayward nature had more than once landed him in difficulties that would probably have had serious consequences but for his major's help and guidance.

Harry Manners looked on it all as simply a matter of duty, and the burden of his responsibility was made lighter by the very deep affection he had for the youngster. Nevertheless, a burden it was. And Manners felt it particularly so when it involved his having to keep a secret appointment with a character of such ill repute as Mr. Joseph Banks.

It was with uneasiness and misgiving, therefore, that the junior slowed down at the rough cart-track leading from Rylcombe Lane to Brown's Meadow, and looked swiftly along it for a sight of the Wayland bookmaker's ungainly person.

Manners felt a queer sinking sensation as he perceived Mr. Banks pacing up and down beneath a tree, some distance away. Inwardly, he had hoped that Mr. Banks would not turn up. But there was no mistaking the squat, uncouth figure, puffing away at a cigar down the little turning. Mr. Banks had arrived; and judging by his movements, Mr. Banks was already getting a little impatient.

Swallowing his distaste with an effort, Manners dismounted, and wheeled his machine down the cart-track towards Mr. Banks.

The bookmaker looked surprised and rather suspicious at the approach of a St. Jim's junior who was unfamiliar to him.

"Afternoon!" he remarked laconically, as Manners halted in front of him.

Manners nodded curtly.

"You're Mr. Banks, I believe?"

"That's me!" answered Mr. Banks, his beady eyes fixed on the Shell fellow distrustfully. "Wot about it?"

"I understand that you're supposed to meet a youngster named Manners here this afternoon," said Manners, hardly troubling to conceal his dislike of the bloated and shifty-looking bookmaker. "Well, I'm his brother."

Mr. Banks merely raised his eyebrows.

"I've come here to know what you mean by leading that kid into gambling," went on Manners steadily. "Apart from that, I've come to tell you that I'm going to see he has nothing more to do with you as long as I'm at the school."

Mr. Banks' thick lips set tightly.

"Ho!" he remarked grimly. "You are, are you?"

"I jolly well am!"

The bookmaker reflectively blew out a cloud of cigar-smoke, then held out a greasy paw.

"Praps you'll square your brother's debts before you go, then," he said. "Matter of two pun!"

Manners' heart beat a little more rapidly as he answered that demand.

"There's nothing doing," was his reply. "You're not

going to get two pounds—nor two pence, for that matter! You've taken all the money he had, and I'll see you hanged before you get any more!"

Mr. Banks' bloated face took on a rather ugly expression.

"Oho! So that's the game, is it? Trying to swindle a man out of the money that's due to 'im? Praps when you think it over, you'll change your mind, Master Manners!"

"There's no chance of that," answered Manners, though his heart was thumping so painfully that he felt his face must betray the anxiety he inwardly felt.

"Which I think there's every chance of it!" retorted Mr. Banks, with a scowl. "Now, you look here, young covey, if you think you can interfere between me and my sporting clients, you're bloomin' well mistaken—even if it is your brother! That two pun was lost to me—fair and square. I'm blinking well going to see that I get it, or I'll make your brother sit up for it. Savvy?"

"No, I don't," said Manners quickly. "If it comes to that, you yourself can get into trouble for doing betting business with a schoolboy."

Mr. Banks grinned.

"Clever, ain't you?" he sneered. "But I can tell you this—you'll be a blinkin' sight cleverer if you can produce any proof that I've been doing business with boys. I don't sign my name to anything, Mister Manners; I leave that to them. Haw, haw, haw!"

"You rotten cur!" breathed Manners.

"Hard words break no bones!" said Mr. Banks philosophically. "Now, let's get down to brass tacks. I've got your brother's signature to a betting commission for two pun. That little slip of paper is quite sufficient to get him slung out of the school on his neck—without me coming into it at all. See?"

Manners was silent.

"Don't you think the best thing to do is to pay up and look pleasant?" grinned the bookmaker. "I won't be 'ard on you, bless you! That's not Joe Banks' way! If you 'aven't got it, let it stand over till next week. But don't let's 'ear no more about not squaring up, my lad! That won't do at all, I can tell you!"

"But I haven't got two pounds, and I'm not likely to have," said Manners desperately. "Why can't you drop it? You know jolly well that you've got no legal claim. So what good can it do you to get my brother sacked from the school?"

Mr. Banks, however, merely scowled.

"Wot do you know about the lor, young shaver? Allow me to tell you I've got every legal right against your brother. Two pun was the bet he had with me, and two pun I'm goin' to 'ave, or my name's not Joe Banks!"

"Then it's no good talking any longer," said Manners, with a hopeless gesture. "You can't have it, because I haven't got it. That's the beginning and end of it!"

"Then I'll wait for it!" growled Mr. Banks. "I'll give you a couple of days to think it over and see wot you can do. If I don't 'ear from you by that time, then you'll soon 'ear from me. Savvy?"

Manners nodded. He had no heart for further argument. The coarse, threatening aspect of the bookmaker was something new in his experience, and left him with a feeling of helplessness that made decisive action impossible.

Mr. Banks, with a twisted grin, made to turn away; and Manners, utterly wretched at the thought that he had made the position worse instead of better, stepped from the sheltered spot where they had conversed on to the cart-track.

Then he stopped, with a faint cry of mortification he could not possibly suppress.

Coming down the cart-track towards the spot where he stood were several juniors wearing St. Jim's caps. He realised at once that they had noticed him, and were staring at the spectacle of his conference with Mr. Banks in utter astonishment.

Manners groaned. He recognised them at once as his own chums—Tom Merry and Lowther, of the Shell, and Jack Blake & Co., of the Fourth. With them, to make matters worse, was Baggy Trimble, the most inveterate tittle-tattler at St. Jim's. The fat was in the fire now, with a vengeance!

CHAPTER 3. Unfortunate!

"MANNERS!"

"Great pip!"

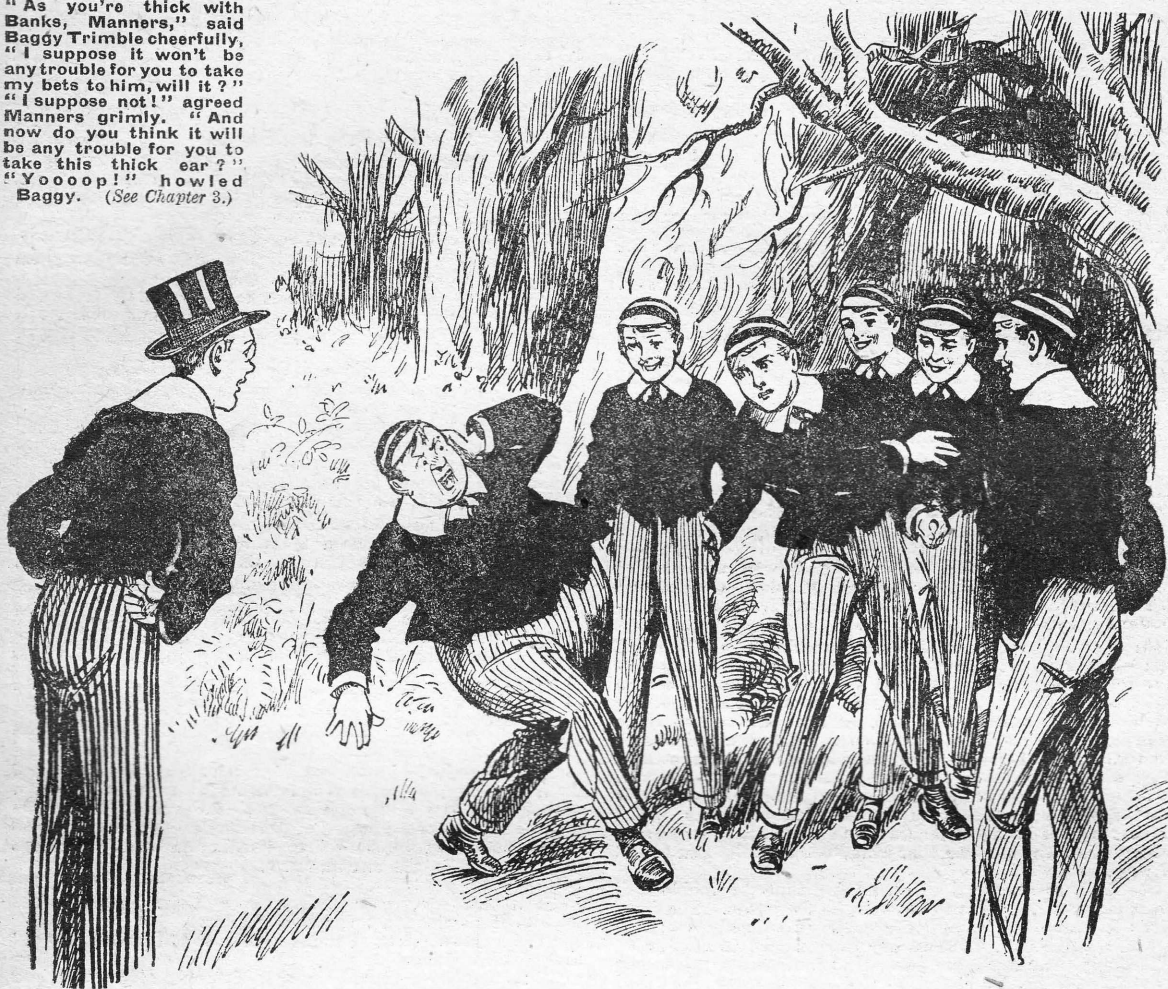
"Bai Jove!"

"What the merry dickens—"

Tom Merry and his chums ceased their animated conversation on the subject of football and stared almost incredulously at the sight of Manners deep in conversation with Mr. Banks.

They had spent the afternoon visiting Rylcombe Grammar

"As you're thick with Banks, Manners," said Baggie Trimble cheerfully, "I suppose it won't be any trouble for you to take my bets to him, will it?" "I suppose not!" agreed Manners grimly. "And now do you think it will be any trouble for you to take this thick ear?" "Yooooop!" howled Baggie. (See Chapter 3.)



School, where they had arranged a football match with their old rivals, Gordon Gay & Co. Coming back they had made a stroll of it by taking a roundabout footpath route leading through the fields to Brown's Meadow, little dreaming that in doing so they were going to encounter Manners in such peculiar circumstances.

Baggie Trimble, still in search of a philanthropist willing to lend him half-a-crown, had spotted them from the lane near the Grammar School, and had promptly attached himself to their little party, hoping to find a victim among them.

To say that Tom Merry & Co. were amazed at finding their chum with Mr. Banks would hardly do justice to their feelings. They could scarcely believe the evidence of their senses.

They all knew Banks by sight. The bookmaker was a familiar figure in the district. But none of the juniors knew him or wanted to know him to speak to. Even Baggie Trimble, who was not very particular, had no wish to cultivate the acquaintance of Mr. Joseph Banks.

Yet here was Harry Manners, one of the Terrible Three, in conversation with him at a lonely spot, which seemed to indicate a pre-arranged meeting. The juniors were staggered.

"Well, this beats the band, and no mistake!" remarked Jack Blake. "Since when has Manners started hobnobbing with bookies, Tommy?"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry, colouring slightly. "There must be an explanation, of course. Manners doesn't go in for that kind of company, as we all know."

"Quite twue, deah boy!" nodded Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Mannahs is as wight as vain, of course. Pewwaps that shady wottah stopped him to inquiah the time."

"Ass!"

"Weally, deah boy——"

"He, he, he!"

"Hallo! What's biting you, Baggie?"

"He, he, he! Caught in the giddy act, what?" sniggered Baggie Trimble. "I always said Manners was deep, you know!"

"Shut up, idiot!"

"Oh, really, Merry! I didn't say there was anything wrong in it, did I? I'm a bit of a gay dog myself, on the quiet, you know. I'd be the last to condemn a fellow for having a flutter on the geegees now and again!"

"You silly ass!" growled Tom Merry. "Who's talking about gee-gees, anyway?"

"Well, it looks as if Manners is, to me!" grinned Trimble. "Perhaps he's having a bit of a gamble with the football club funds—— Yarooooooop! Wharrer you doing, you rotter?"

"Banging your head against this tree!" answered Monty Lowther grimly. "Now, what were you suggesting about Manners?"

"Whooooop! Nothing at all! Leggo, you rotter! What I really meant to say was that Manners wouldn't do anything of the kind! Groooooogh!"

"That's better!" grunted Lowther. "If you want any more of that, just repeat what you were saying about Manners, and you can have it—harder next time, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now we'll get on," said Lowther, as Baggie was apparently not anxious to have the operation repeated. "Looks as if Banks is sheering off now. Manners has spotted us, too."

"Come on, then, deah boys!"

The juniors continued their interrupted course, and joined their chum under the tree where his meeting with Mr. Banks had just terminated.

Manners nodded shortly as they came up.

"Didn't expect to see you chaps here," he remarked uncomfortably.

"Bai Jove! We didn't expect to see you, deah boy!"

"I had to run over to Rylcombe, you know," said Manners. "Did you fix the match up with the Grammar School?"

The juniors, in their turn, looked a little uncomfortable. The unexpectedness of the encounter they had just wit-

nessed had relegated the Grammar School match to quite a second place in their thoughts, and they had fully anticipated that Manners' first consideration would be to clear himself in their eyes. It was evident, however, that he had no intention of doing so; and Tom Merry & Co. were disconcerted in the extreme. It was not that they were suspicious of their chum; but the situation was one that seemed to call for an immediate explanation.

"Yes, we arranged a match all right," Tom Merry answered, with a curious glance at his chum. "Did you manage to balance up the books before you came out?"

"Not quite. I shall have everything in order for the meeting to-night, though."

"Good! Coming back with us now, or will you use your bike?"

"I'll come with you, and wheel it the rest of the way. Ready, you fellows?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors moved off down the cart-track towards the Rylcombe Lane, and this time the cheerful talk which had enlivened the journey so far was absent. The atmosphere became suddenly strained.

As a matter of fact, Manners had been in rather a quandary when his chums came on the scene. Since the disturbing visit of his minor to Study No. 10 that afternoon, his thoughts had dwelt almost entirely on the problem that visit had raised. The more personal problem of what he would do if he were caught talking to Mr. Banks had hardly occurred to him, in his anxiety to put things right for his brother.

When he realised that his chums had been witnesses of his clandestine meeting, the second problem cropped up in an acute form, and Manners was unprepared for it. Consequently, he remained silent.

On the way back to St. Jim's, he wondered how he could best explain it. Manners was a proud and somewhat sensitive fellow, and he shrank from giving his chums the bare facts, which would, he thought, be inviting criticism from them. On the other hand, also, he hesitated to tell them anything which might call forth condemnation of his minor. Tom Merry and Lowther were not unkindly disposed towards Reggie Manners, but they regarded him as a spoilt youngster, and took no pains to conceal their opinion. Their first suggestion, if they were told the state of affairs, would be that Reggie Manners should be well and truly thrashed—a suggestion which his brother would not feel disposed to fall in with.

So Manners remained silent, hoping that the incident of his meeting with Banks would soon be forgotten. The faces of Jack Blake & Co. and the other two members of the Terrible Three were grim as they started back to St. Jim's.

The only member of the party who remained at all happy was Trimble. The fat Fourth-Former, after he had recovered from the forcible application of his head to the tree-trunk by Monty Lowther, took on quite a striking appearance of cheerfulness.

"I say, Manners, ain't you going to tell us anything about meeting that chap Banks?" he asked, with a fat smirk.

Manners glared.

"He's supposed to be in the know in racing circles," went on Baggay fatuously. "As you seem to be pally with him, can't you get him to give me a few tips?"

"Bai Jove, Baggay, don't you think you'd bettah mind your own biznay, for a change?"

"Oh, shut up, Gussy! You're all jaw, you know! Look here, Manners—"

Arthur Augustus fixed his monocle in his eye and bestowed a look on Trimble that should have withered him on the spot. But it had no effect whatever on that fat youth. He rattled on cheerfully:

"I tell you what, Manners, as you seem to be blossoming out as a bit of a gay dog, perhaps you can take my bets and get them on with Banks. I often feel like dabbling, you know; but I don't get the chance to back my fancy as I'd like to."

"You don't, don't you?" asked Manners, his face quite a study for the moment.

"Of course, it would be a bit infra dig for a chap like myself to associate with an outsider like Banks. My people wouldn't like that at all, so I can't very well bet with him direct. But as you're thick with the chap, I suppose it won't be any trouble to you to take my bets to him, will it?"

"I suppose not," agreed Manners grimly. "And now do you think it will be any trouble for you to take this thick ear?"

"Yoooooooop!"

"And this prize nose?"

"Yaroooooh!"

"And this—"

"Whooooop! Stoppit, you ratter! Lemme alone! I've just remembered I promised to meet a fellow!"

Baggy Trimble fled, and the juniors made their way back to the school, grinning. The fat Fourth-Former had provided a little comic relief which had temporarily relieved the strain.

CHAPTER 4.

Plain Speaking!

"SEEN young Manners?" Gerald Cutts, of the Fifth, asked that question of St. Leger as the latter entered their well-appointed study for tea.

St. Leger shook his head.

"Can't say I have. I'm not in the habit of studying the movements of fags, old bean!"

"He ought to have been along before this," muttered Cutts, frowning. "I hope the silly young idiot hasn't run into one of the beaks."

St. Leger grinned.

"More turf transactions, Gerald? Well, if you will employ fags to run messages to bookies, it's your own funeral if anything goes wrong."

"Oh, rats! Manners minor has always been a good enough scout, if it comes to that. But, of course, one never knows. I particularly want to get through to Banks this time, too. Muscatel is practically a cert for the four o'clock, as I told you this morning."

"Well, if it's the same kind of cert as you got me to back for the Mughampton Handicap, you'll be better off if Manners doesn't get the bet through," said St. Leger, with painful frankness.

Cutts grunted.

"That one came unstuck. But this is the goods. You'll see for yourself, when the evening papers come through. And I need the money rather badly just now, as you know."

"Let's hope it romps home, then," said St. Leger cheerily. "And now, what about tea? I'm hungry." "Go ahead, then. I'll have a smoke while you lay the table."

Cutts stretched himself out elegantly in an armchair and lit a cigarette, while St. Leger made preparations for tea. The leader of the "smart set" of the Fifth felt a little uneasy at the long absence of Manners minor, and a smoke seemed more appropriate than assisting in setting out cups and saucers, in the circumstances.

Tap!

Cutts hastily put out his cigarette as a sharp rap sounded on the study door, a few minutes later.

"Open the window. Sounds as if it might be a prefect!" snapped St. Leger.

Cutts nodded, and quietly opened the window to let out the smoke before drawing out:

"Come in!"

The door opened to admit Harry Manners of the Shell.

The two Fifth-Formers looked somewhat surprised and by no means pleased, at sight of the junior. Manners of the Shell was a decidedly infrequent caller at Cutts' study, and though the two black sheep of the Fifth had no particular grudge against him, the fact that he was one of the members of the Lower School, with whom they had had many encounters in the past, made him a far from welcome visitor.

"Made a mistake?" asked Cutts pleasantly. "This is a Fifth Form study, not a fag den, you know."

"I've come to see you, Cutts," said Manners, closing the door deliberately behind him.

Cutts raised his eyebrows, and lit another cigarette.

"Take a good look, then, and buzz off. Don't be too long. I like you fags all right so long as you keep your distance, but you spoil yourselves by being so scrubby and unpleasant when you're near!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared St. Leger, apparently highly amused by his leader's little witticism.

Manners ignored St. Leger, and planted himself directly in front of Cutts.

"It's not exactly a laughing matter I've come about, so perhaps you'll cut out your funny jokes and listen to me," he said steadily.

Cutts looked up sharply.

"What's the idea?" he asked, dropping his languid pose for one.

"First of all, I want to return a slip of paper that belongs to you. Here it is."

Cutts snatched the slip from Manners' hand, and, glancing at it, saw at once that it was the betting paper he had given to Manners minor earlier in the afternoon.

"How the thunder did you get hold of this?" he snarled.

"From my minor, after you, like the outsider you are, had given it him to hand over to Banks," answered Manners. "You don't mind admitting that it's yours, then?"

"Why should I? I haven't descended to answering for my actions to a cheeky fag yet!" said Cutts angrily. "What business is it of yours, anyway, and what are you doing with it?"

"It's no business of mine, if it comes to that," replied Manners calmly. "You can go to the dogs as fast as you like, for all I care. My objection starts when you try to take my minor with you. When that game begins, then I take a hand. That's why I've stepped in to-day."

"Well, hang you, anyway!" cried Cutts furiously. "If this horse wins to-day I shall be nine or ten pounds out, thanks to your rotten, interfering—"

"S-sh! Not so loudly!" warned St. Leger, casting rather an anxious glance towards the door. "You'll have the beaks here if you keep this up. Better buzz off, Manners!"

"Thanks; but I haven't finished yet," said Manners curtly. "Before I go, Cutts, I want to come to an understanding with you."

"Hang you!"

"It's only to-day that I've learned about my minor's recent fagging for you," continued Manners, unperturbed by Cutts' rage. "Apparently he's been acting as a messenger between you and that shady rotter, Banks."

"What of it?" demanded Cutts, a little more sober as he began to realise how grim and determined the Shell junior really was. "I've done your minor no harm—quite the reverse, in fact. He's had tuck galore for the few errands he's run for me."

"But that doesn't make up for his getting into your own shady, rotten ways! You know thundering well that my minor has been betting on horses, and that you've encouraged him to do so!"

Cutts shrugged.

"Nothing of the kind. I'm not his keeper if it comes to that, and I can't say it would blight my young life to know that he'd had a bet or two. But, apart from that, I'm perfectly certain I shouldn't take the trouble to encourage any blessed fag to take up betting, or anything else for that matter."

"Liar!" said Manners deliberately. "You've encouraged him to bet so that he'll be more willing to assist you in your dealings with Banks."

"What did you call me?" roared Cutts, jumping to his feet, and flinging away his half-smoked cigarette.

"Liar!" repeated Manners promptly. "And if you want to know what else you are, I'll call you a smoky cad, and an unprincipled outsider—"

Manners had no time to give Cutts any more descriptive details of his character. The Fifth-Former was upon him without further ado, his face white with passion and his fists clenched as though he meant business. A second later senior and junior were fighting hammer-and-tongs.

Manners did not mind. He was in a mood when a little hard hitting seemed more comforting than all the slanging in the world. He waded in with a right good will, taking a blow with all Cutts' savage force behind it, as though it had been a mere flick, and giving in return a good straight left to the jaw.

Cutts made another furious rush, endeavouring to use his weight to overcome his opponent at once; but he was brought sharply up with another stinging blow on the jaw, and a tap on the nose that drew blood.

"Come on, you rotter!" encouraged Manners. The Shell junior was ordinarily a quiet and inoffensive enough fellow, but now his blood was up, and he wanted the pleasure of knocking the cad of the Fifth right out.

But Cutts had already had enough of tackling Manners single-handed.

"Help me to chuck this young hooligan cut on his neck, St. Leger!" he snarled. "I'm not going to upset the study scrapping with a fag!"

St. Leger didn't seem at all keen, but he dutifully came to the rescue.

"Now, then, Manners, out you go!" he snapped, dragging open the door.

His remark was a little premature. Instead of Manners going out, St. Leger himself went out, with such a rush that he straightway measured his length on the floor of the Fifth Form passage. Having thus quickly disposed of Cutts' pal, Manners turned again to Cutts, and gave him a lightning upper-cut that immediately decided the question of whether Manners would be thrown out on his neck or not.

"There!" said Manners, panting from his exertions. "That's just a little reminder that you're to let my minor alone in future, Cutts!"

Cutts, lying winded in the armchair into which he had staggered, made no reply, though if looks could have killed Manners would undoubtedly have perished on the spot.

"Any time I catch you having anything to do with my minor you'll get another dose of this—possibly a good rag-

ging, too, if I bring other fellows into it," went on Manners. "That's all I want now, I think."

And with that he quitted the study.

St. Leger, nursing an injured jaw, scowled as the Shell junior passed him, but made no effort to renew the "scrap." St. Leger was not exactly the stuff that heroes are made of, and he did not feel at all anxious to bite the dust on the floor of the Fifth Form passage again.

So Manners passed on, unmolested, and returned to the Shell quarters, feeling considerably better for his excursion.

CHAPTER 5.

The Accident!

"HALLO, hallo! Been on the warpath?"

Tom Merry asked that question as Manners entered Study No. 10.

Manners coloured. Until that moment it had not occurred to him that he bore rather evident traces of the fight in Cutts' study, and he felt a little uncomfortable at the thought that he had kept his chums in the dark about his intended visit to the cad of the Fifth.

"Well, not exactly on the warpath," he replied, with a faint grin. "I've just given a rotten cad a bit of a lesson—that's all."

And he sat down at the table which had already been laid for tea.

"For further particulars, see small handbills, I suppose?" remarked Monty Lowther sarcastically, as Manners made no further mention of the subject.

"Oh; it was nothing!"

Tom Merry, sensing the same strange air of reserve about his chum as they had experienced earlier in the afternoon, hastily changed the topic, and switched on to the ever-absorbing subject of football, and under the warming influence of a discussion on the best team to play the Grammar School in the approaching match, the temporary estrangement was soon forgotten. Tea in Study No. 10 turned out to be a very enjoyable meal after all.

After tea the Terrible Three hurried through their prep as quickly as possible, for the Junior Football Club meeting was to follow, and Tom Merry and Lowther intended getting down to the Common-room early, while Manners had still to balance up his accounts.

Jack Blake & Co., from Study No. 6 in the Fourth, looked in just as they had finished prep.

"You Shellfish ready yet?" asked Jack Blake. "Must arrange the table and some chairs before the rest turn up, you know."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ready, ay, ready!" answered Tom Merry, with a grin. "Manners has to finish off the figures, but we'll have to leave him to it. Don't be long, old chap!"

"I won't!" promised the honorary secretary. "Buzz off, and leave me in peace, and I'll balance up in less than ten minutes."

"Right-ho, then! Kim on, Monty!"

The whole crowd moved off, leaving Manners to his secretarial duties, and Manners got out the exercise-books which served for lodgers in the Junior Football Club, and sat down again to work.

But this was evidently his unlucky day. No sooner had he picked up his pen than there came a tap at the door.

It was Reggie Manners who looked in, in response to his brother's none too inviting: "Come in!"

"Sorry if I'm disturbing you again, Harry, but I haven't had the chance of catching you alone before."

"That's all right!" said Manners major gruffly. "I suppose you've come to see how I got on this afternoon?"

"Well, I am a bit anxious about it," confessed the Third-Former. "What happened, Harry? Did you meet old Banks?"

Harry Manners nodded grimly.

"I did. But I'm afraid I haven't done much good. I've left things very much as they were, in fact."

Manners minor's face fell.

"Oh! I thought perhaps that you—you might—"

"Get him to let you alone and call your debt off, I suppose?" finished the Shell junior, with a wry smile. "I had some idea like that myself, but there was nothing doing. I suppose I don't know enough about that sort of thing to make a success of such a job. Cardew or some other blessed know-all would probably get the better of Banks in no time, I suppose, but I didn't."

"Then you haven't really helped me a bit," said Manners minor uneasily, with just a hint of a reproach in his voice.

"I'm afraid not. All that I've done is to make my friends suspect that I'm setting up as a third-rate blagger. A whole crowd of them spotted me while I was talking to Banks."

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed the Third-Former, in alarm.

"Look less, Harry, you didn't tell them, did you—about my meeting Banks for ~~the~~ that, I mean?"

"No. I didn't explain anything."

"Oh, good! But, I say, ~~it's rather~~ their thinking you're blagging—"

"They'll soon forget it, I expect," said Manners. "Anyway, you've got nothing to worry about at the moment. Banks is taking no action for a few days, and I may be able to think out something before he becomes nasty."

"I hope you can," muttered the younger brother fretfully. "I'm fed-up with thinking about it. I can tell you."

"Give it a rest, then. And now, buzz off, or I'll never get these accounts ready for the footer meeting."

Manners minor nodded and obediently "buzzed off," while his brother, with a frown of annoyance as he glanced at the clock and saw how short the time was getting, plunged into the accounts.

Even then, he was not ~~able~~ to finish without one other interruption. Just before half-past eight, Baggy Trimble poked his bullet head ~~round~~ the door, and insinuated his podgy person into the room. Manners promptly placed out of sight the ten pound notes ~~belonging~~ to the club, which he had just taken from his pocket.

"I say, Manners, old chap, don't let me interrupt you," began the fat Fourth-former.

"I'm not going to!" said Manners ~~grizzily~~, picking up an ebony ruler as he spoke.

Trimble hastily retreated behind the door again, and from that point of vantage, bestowing a wrathful glare on the fuming football secretary.

"Look here, Manners, it'll pay you to treat me with more civility if you want me to keep mum," he roared.

"Keep mum?" repeated Manners, not understanding the purport of Baggy's remark for a moment. "What the thump—"

"He, he, he! You're a deep bounder, Manners, but you can't pull the wool over my eyes! You know jolly well what I'm talking about. I thought to myself when I saw you talking to Banks this afternoon—"

"Oh, I see!" broke in Manners grimly. "Well, what about Banks, you fat idiot?"

"Oh, really, Manners! Anyone would think I was against you by the way you go on. But I'm not! I'm going to be as mum as an oyster about your meeting Banks this afternoon."

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Manners, inwardly hoping that there was nobody about to hear Trimble.

"As mum as an oyster," repeated Trimble firmly. "I'm going to be a pal to you, Manners, and I want you to be a pal to me. We'll sort of stand up for each other, through thick and thin, you know, and always come to each other for help in an emergency. When you're short of cash, for instance, I'll lend you all I can. And when I'm short, I shall expect you to do the same for me. Now, as it happens, just at the moment—"

"Well?" said Manners, in a dangerously calm voice.

"I'm temporarily stony," continued Trimble, really coming to the point at last. "They've forgotten to send on my usual allowance from Trimble Hall. It'll arrive by any post now, of course, but in the meantime, I'm stony. Do you think you can help me out, old chap?"

"Certainly!" answered Manners, rising immediately.

"Oh, good!"

Baggy extended a podgy palm. Much to his surprise, however, Manners ignored it, and instead of depositing in it his available cash, grabbed the fat junior by the scruff of the neck, and took careful aim with his right foot.

What happened next seemed to Trimble like an earthquake, a cyclone, and a hurricane combined. Next instant he found himself sprawling on the floor of the passage several yards distant from Study No. 10.

"Yooooop! Ow! Beast! Rotter!" roared Trimble furiously.

"Would you like to be helped out of the passage, too?" asked Manners, taking a step forward.

"Yow! Keep off, you rotter!"

Baggy Trimble had apparently been helped out quite sufficiently, for he disappeared out of the Shell passage like a streak of lightning.

Manners returned to his accounts once again. This time there were no interruptions, and he was able to balance up and complete his work in peace.

By the time he had finished it was twenty minutes to nine—ten minutes after the time fixed for the commencement of the meeting. Manners hastily gathered up his books, and after throwing on to the dying fire the waste paper which littered the table, made for the door.

Probably it was his haste that made him careless. Certainly no secretary-treasurer could be excused for committing such a grievous error as that which, the next moment,

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Manners found he had made. But his haste, at all events, supplied the explanation of the accident that had happened.

He had hardly opened the door before he realised that he had not picked up the club's wad of Treasury notes with his books.

Turning swiftly round, he looked at the table and saw at once they were not there.

"What the dickens—" he muttered, a vague alarm beginning to assail him.

The scraps of paper which he had thrown on the fire blazed up at that moment. Then Manners knew.

He had put the notes out of sight when Trimble came in. Inadvertently he must have gathered them up with the waste paper and thrown them on the fire. The notes were burning in the grate!

With a cry of horror, Manners darted across the room, seized the poker, and desperately raked the blazing papers off the fire into the hearth. Swiftly he trod out the flames, then bent over to examine the remains.

He groaned aloud at what he saw. Of the ten crisp Treasury notes which he had last handled, only a few charred and blackened embers remained. Apart from a thin strip of white along one edge where the flames had not reached, there was nothing to show that they had ever been English currency.

"Ten pounds! Oh, heavens!"

Manners staggered to his feet, his brain reeling. A horrible feeling of helplessness took possession of him for a moment. Then the thought came to him that he must tell everybody at once.

His face white and drawn, he rushed out of the study.

CHAPTER 6.

Cutts on the Warpath!

"T HANK goodness that's over!"

Gerald Cutts of the Fifth was referring to his prep, which he had just finished. Most of the fellows at St. Jim's disliked prep. Cutts went further. He detested it.

"What's doin' for the rest of the evening?" inquired St. Leger, displaying as much relief as his leader as he put away his books. "We haven't played cards for ages. Let's have a little flutter for an hour."

"I'm game," drawled Gilmore.

Cutts nodded approval of the suggestion.

"All serene. I'm willing. But I want to dodge downstairs and get hold of an evening paper first. Shan't be long."

"Still wondering how Muscatel had fared?" grinned St. Leger. "What's the use, now you know your bet didn't get through to Banks? I should forget it, if I were you, old man."

"I'm not likely to forget it if the horse has won," said Cutts bitterly. "You know yourself what a hole I'm in for money. A nice win over Muscatel to-day would have put me straight for a while. I feel sure it has won. The tip came straight from the stable."

"Well, get the paper, and make quite sure, before you start moaning," said St. Leger. "We'll stay here until you come back."

St. Leger, having had some previous experience of Cutts' "stable tips," hadn't the same confidence in them as his more credulous leader.

Cutts quitted the study in search of the evening paper, and his two satellites lit cigarettes, and settled themselves down comfortably to rest their overworked brains until his return.

In less than ten minutes Cutts was back, a newspaper under his arm, and an almost fiendish expression on his face that told its own story.

"Well, what happened?" asked Gilmore, though the question was really unnecessary.

Apparently Cutts could not trust himself to speak for a moment, for instead of answering verbally, he spread the newspaper out on the table, and pointed with trembling finger to the stop-press column.

St. Leger and Gilmore rose and bent over the table to read for themselves.

"Phew!" whistled Gilmore.

"Muscatel first, at five to one!" muttered St. Leger.

"Oh, my hat!"

"I told you," said Cutts, "it was bound to win! And all through that interfering young hound, I'm ten pounds down on the day."

"What awful luck!"

"Rotten!"

St. Leger and Gilmore felt genuinely sympathetic. Up till now they had not been particularly concerned over Cutts' grievance against Manners for interfering with his bet. Knowing how regularly their leader's "stable tips" finished last, they had been altogether sceptical about



"What the dickens——" A vague alarm assailed Harry Manners as he saw that the wad of Treasury notes was not on the study table. Then, as the paper he had just thrown on the fire blazed up, he darted across the room with a cry of horror, grabbed up a poker, and raked at the embers. The notes were burning in the grate! (See Chapter 5.)

Muscatel's chances that afternoon. Privately, they had agreed that Manners' action had probably saved Cutts two pounds.

But the unexpected had happened. And now St. Leger and Gilmore immediately felt sympathetic with Cutts and extremely indignant with the interfering junior who had lost him ten pounds.

"Interfering young cad!" remarked Gilmore. "Let's got him up here and lam him till he can't stand."

"Not a bad idea. But he'll need some handling. You weren't here before tea, when he stood up to Cutts and me," said St. Leger, instinctively caressing his jaw on the spot where Manners' fist had painfully landed on that occasion. "What do you think, Gerald?"

"Think? I'd like to scrap the rotter bald-headed! I'd like to smash him!" snarled Cutts. "But what good shall I do that way? If we lam him, we'll have the rest of his hooligan crowd up here for revenge. Anyway, nothing will make up for the ten quid he's lost me. Ten quid! Think of it!"

And Cutts tramped up and down the study, fairly tearing his hair with rage.

"What about demanding compensation from him?" suggested Gilmore. "It's entirely his fault that you're not ten quid better off. The young cad ought to be made to pay!"

"Not much chance of that, if his attitude this afternoon is anything to go by," grunted St. Leger.

"But he was wild about his blessed minor then. Perhaps he's cooler now; and he'll surely feel a bit of a rotter over it when he hears what has happened."

"Rot!" snorted Cutts. "He's one of Merry's crowd, and you know what those little sweeps think about betting, whether you win or lose. But I'm going to see him, right enough. I'm going to tell him that he's done me out of a tenner, and I'm going to warn him that before long I'll make him wish he'd never shoved his interfering nose where it wasn't wanted. Perhaps that'll give him something to think about for a time. Are you fellows coming along with me?"

"H'm!" said Gilmore reflectively.

"Hum!" remarked St. Leger. "I'd like to, of course, but I've just remembered an appointment with a chap downstairs. If you don't mind, Gerald——"

"Hang you!" said Cutts savagely; and so that there could be no mistaking his meaning, he added: "Both of you!"

With that he flung out of the study, his fists clenched vengefully and his face dark with anger. Gerald Cutts was not a pleasant sight at that moment.

With rage in his heart, he strode up the stairs, along the passages until he came to the Shell quarters. The warm reception which he would ordinarily have received did not materialise, for once. The leading lights of the Form were already down in the Common-room for the footer meeting.

Cutts made straight for Study No. 10, his anger displaying none of the caution he would usually have exercised in the enemy's country. Fortunately for him, there was no need for it.

He did not have to enter Study No. 10 to run his quarry to earth. Before he had got within a couple of yards of that celebrated apartment the door suddenly opened.

A dishevelled figure rushed out. The Fifth-Former stopped dead, instantly recognising Manners. The Shell junior would have passed him, but Cutts stood deliberately in the way, and Manners had to stop.

It was rather a strange encounter. Each being completely occupied with his own trouble, neither detected any unusual agitation about the other for a moment.

"Got you, you interfering young hound!" hissed Cutts. "I suppose you can guess what has happened?"

"Eh? Happened? I don't know what you mean," answered Manners, staring at the Fifth-Former with eyes that hardly saw him.

"That bet of mine you prevented getting through to Banks—the horse has won at five to one, and I'm a loser

by ten quid!" said Cutts savagely. "Ten quid! You understand?"

"Oh, I see!"

Manners nodded dully.

"And is that all you've got to say about it?" roared Cutts. "It's your rotten interference that has lost me the money. You can see that, I suppose?"

"Yes. If that's so, I'm sorry," said Manners, only half-comprehending. "But I've got to go now. Something worse has happened to me—or it seems so, anyway."

"What are you talking about? What's the matter with you?" asked Cutts, beginning to realise that Manners' appearance was not altogether normal.

"It's the footer club money; I chucked it on the fire—"

"You what?" ejaculated Cutts, forgetting even his own trouble for a moment.

"Chucked it on the fire. It was an accident, of course. Ten quid, it was; belonging to the club. Ten pound notes, as a matter of fact."

"You've chucked ten quid notes on the fire?" yelled Cutts incredulously.

Manners nodded.

"I tried to take them off, but I've only got the ashes and a few untouched strips on the hearth. I've got to go and tell the fellows about it. Goodness knows what they'll think when they know!"

"You're the treasurer, then, I suppose?"

Manners nodded miserably.

"But I must go!" he broke out, almost wildly. "The club meeting's on now, and I've simply got to get this off my chest!"

With that, Manners pushed past Cutts, and, breaking into a run, made off down the passage.

Cutts stood still, staring after Manners' retreating figure for a minute. All of a sudden his eyes glittered, and an unpleasant grin appeared on his face.

"Ten quid! I wonder!" he murmured softly.

He glanced down the passage to make sure that he was not observed; then, with a swift movement, he crossed to Study No. 10, and let himself in.

Inside the study he dropped on his knees in front of the fire, and, bending over the hearth, eagerly examined the litter of burnt paper which Manners had left behind. For ten minutes after that Cutts was busily engaged in Study No. 10. Then he left, and as he returned to the Fifth Form quarters, he was looking extraordinarily pleased with himself. Evidently something had happened to bring happiness unexpectedly into Cutts' life.

CHAPTER 7.

A Staggering Blow!

"MANNERS!"

"Anybody here seen Manners?"

"Hasn't the silly ass turned up yet?"

Manners was in great demand at the footer meeting. So far, although the meeting had been in progress nearly a quarter of an hour, he had not put in an appearance.

"The frabjous ass!" said Jack Blake wrathfully. "How the dickens does he expect us to run a giddy meeting without a secretary?"

"He told us nearly an hour ago that he'd only take ten minutes to finish," remarked Tom Merry, knitting his brows.

"Well, why isn't he here, then?"

"Ask me another!"

"Hallo, here he comes!" exclaimed Grundy of the Shell, as the door of the Common-room opened.

"Oh, good!"

"Bettah late than nevah, deah boy!"

"Trot in, Manners!"

"Waiting for you old bean!"

Manners walked up to the table where Tom Merry was presiding over the meeting. Few took sufficient notice to detect how pale and worried the secretary looked. Tom Merry, however, saw at once that something was amiss.

"What's wrong, Manners?" he asked, in an undertone, as his chum sat down beside him. "Why have you been so long?"

"Something terrible has happened!" whispered back Manners. "The cash I collected from the post office this afternoon for new kit has gone."

"Gone?"

Manners nodded, and in a few jerky sentences explained what had happened.

Tom Merry whistled softly as Manners finished.

"My hat! This is bad news, and no mistake!"

"Bad isn't the word. It's awful!" groaned Manners.

"The worst of it is, I can't replace it myself! I would if I could, but I haven't ten shillings, let alone ten quid!"

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"Well, don't get too worried about it; keep cool!" said Tom Merry, with a critical glance at Manners' haggard face. "I suppose I'd better tell the fellows at once, hadn't I?"

"The sooner the better!"

Tom Merry nodded, and rose to address the meeting. When silence had been restored, he explained briefly and quickly what Manners had just informed him.

The fellows listened attentively and seriously. The mere thought of ten pounds in cash being burned to ashes was itself sufficient to provoke seriousness. And the thought that it was their own money, paid in the form of voluntary subscriptions, made it infinitely more serious.

Ten pounds seemed a very considerable sum to most juniors at St. Jim's, and it was by no means an insignificant proportion of the total funds of the junior football club. The school authorities at St. Jim's, of course, provided the bare necessities for playing football, but the juniors found it necessary for the better conduct of the game, and for the comfort and convenience of visiting teams, to supplement the school kit in various ways, from time to time. Hence the existence of a junior football fund.

There was quite a buzz of excitement as Tom Merry concluded his remarks and sat down again.

"Well, that's a pretty fine how d'you do!" remarked Jack Blake, with typical candour. "I've heard of chaps having money to burn, but I've never heard of money actually being chucked on the fire before!"

"Ten pounds, you know!" said Digby impressively.

"Ten quid gone completely west!" said Kerruish.

"It's rotten!"

It was rotten. There was complete unanimity on that point.

"Well, what's going to be done about it?" asked Figgins, above the buzz of talk.

"I suggest we appoint a new secretary, to begin with!" growled George Alfred Grundy, rising from his seat in the front of the meeting, and frowning severely at Manners. "If a chap is careless enough to chuck ten quid of the club's money on the fire, he's not fit to be secretary, that's what I say!"

"Rats!" said Monty Lowther and one or two other fellows.

"Sit down, Grundy!"

Grundy glared, but, not being able to think of anything else to say, had no option but to sit down again.

Two or three other juniors then rose simultaneously to address the meeting. Among them was Bagley Trimble of the Fourth, and it was he who got the first word in.

"I say, you chaps, I want to tell you something you ought to know about Manners!" he said, with a fat smirk. "If you want to know the truth—"

"Sit on him, somebody!"

"Oh, really, Hammond! I'm going to speak out, whether you chaps like it or not! Tom Merry and Blake and the rest will bear me out in what I say!"

"What's the fat idiot talking about?"

"Order!" roared Tom Merry. "If you've got anything to say to the meeting, Trimble, say it; otherwise, sit down!"

"Well, I've got something to say, and I'm going to say it!" said Trimble promptly. "Look here, you fellows, it's all very well for Manners to come here and tell us he's thrown our money on the fire—"

"Whose money?" yelled Lowther.

"Ours!"

"How much of it is yours?"

"A French penny, as a matter of fact," said Tom Merry, from the chair. "I remember that was what he put in the hat the last time we had a whip-round!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, you fellows! I decline to answer such a rotten libel! Anyway, I don't believe Manners' yarn about the money being burnt, for one!"

"Biff the fat cad!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Lemme alone! You're not jolly well going to stop me speaking my mind! What proof have we got that Manners really burnt the notes?"

"Manners' word!" snapped Digby. "That's good enough for me!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, it's not good enough for me, anyway!" said Baggy, smirking with pleasure at the unusual sensation of being in the limelight. "It might be all right to take some fellows' words; but when a chap chums up with bookies and racecourse roughs, and goes in for betting, like Manners does—"

"Wha-a-at?"

There was a yell of derision from the meeting.

"Look here, you chaps, it's true!" roared Baggy. "Manners knows jolly well it's true, and so do all his pals, but they're trying to shield him!"

"Rats!"
 "Dry up, Baggy!"
 "Ask him yourselves, then!" hooted the excited, fat Fourth-Former, raising his voice above the derisive chorus.
 "See what he says about it!"
 "Bosh!"
 "Sit down!"
 "Half a minute!" interposed George Alfred Grundy, rising ponderously to his feet again. "We can't treat charges against the secretary by simply dismissing 'em. Unless Trimble's completely off his napper, I suppose he's not saying all this without some reason. I suggest we ask Manners for an explanation."

"I guess there's no harm in clearing the air right here and now," Kit Wildrake joined in, with a nod. "Does the honorary secretary completely deny all that Trimble says?"

"Of course I do!" replied Manners, his face white, as he felt every eye in the room upon him. "Trimble, like the fat idiot he is, is trying to make a mountain out of a molehill. Anyone here who knows anything at all about me will know better than to believe a word he's said."

The buzz of talk died away at that moment. Manners' answer was a denial, as all had expected, but there seemed to be something lacking in it.

"Well, what was the molehill?" growled Grundy, after an awkward silence.

"I'll tell you!" squeaked Baggy excitedly. "We saw him talking to Banks, the bookie, in Brown's Meadow this afternoon. That's what he calls a molehill, you chaps! I reckon it's a bit thick myself!"

"Is that the truth?" demanded Grundy, a deep frown on his rugged face, as he turned to Manners again.

Manners nodded.
 "Quite true. But you can take my word for it. I wasn't betting with him, or doing anything shady like that."

"Then what the thump were you doing talking to such an outsider?"

Manners set his lips.
 "That's my business!"

There was dead silence in the room now. One and all realised that Manners' last reply was as unsatisfactory as it could possibly be. The faces of his friends were grave in the extreme.

In the ordinary way, everybody in the room would have been prepared to accept as true Manners' account of the loss of the club's funds. But the additional circumstance, so suddenly revealed by Trimble, of his meeting with Banks that afternoon unavoidably put a doubt in the minds of them all.

Tom Merry was the first to break the awkward silence.
 "I think we're wandering rather a long way from the subject under discussion," he said diplomatically.

"So far as I can see, the loss of the club funds has no connection whatever with Manners' debatable talks with bookies. Perhaps the meeting will kindly keep to the point."

"That's what we are doing!" growled Grundy. "If it's true that Manners has been meeting a blessed bookie, then I say the loss of these notes looks fishy—jolly fishy indeed, if you ask me!"

"Hear, hear!" murmured one or two of the crowd.

"Does that mean you think I'm lying?" demanded Manners, his eyes flashing as he rose to his feet. "Because if it does—"

"I'm not accusing you one way or the other," Grundy interrupted. "But you must admit yourself, Manners, that you're asking rather a lot when you want me to believe you've burnt ten quid of other people's money—especially after admitting you've had dealings with a rotten bookie. What proof can you give us that the accident really occurred?"

There was a murmur of approval from the crowd, and Manners loosened his clenched hands and nodded.

"Well, perhaps you have a right to doubt me," he admitted. "I'll soon convince you, though. If some of you will come along to Study No. 10 now I'll show you the charred remains of the notes. The watermarking still shows through, though they've almost burnt right up. Perhaps when you see for yourselves you'll believe me."

"That's a good idea," said Tom Merry, with considerable relief. "We'll trot along now and get the rotten bizzney over at once."

"Good egg!"
 The footer meeting broke up in some confusion, and Tom Merry led the way out of the Common-room. It was immediately evident that a tremendous amount of interest had been excited by the affair, for practically the entire crowd followed him.

Grundy began to look less suspicious as he tramped along well to the fore; for Manners looked perfectly calm and confident now, and was beginning to regain some of his colour.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as they reached Study No. 10 in the Shell passage. "And now to satisfy the Doubting Thomases!"

He threw open the door; and Manners entered the study, with the crowd surging at his heels.

Manners went down on his knees in front of the fire-grate at the spot where he had last seen the burnt Treasury notes.

He knew precisely where he had left them, and his eyes went straight to the spot.

But he looked in vain.
 "Well, where are they?" asked Grundy.

"Deliver the goods, Manners!"
 "Shell out!"

Manners looked up, with a haggard face, in which astonishment was depicted as well as dismay.

"I can't!" he muttered. "They've gone!"

CHAPTER 8.

Under Suspicion!

"GONE!"
 The word echoed through the crowd that thronged the study and carried into the passage outside.

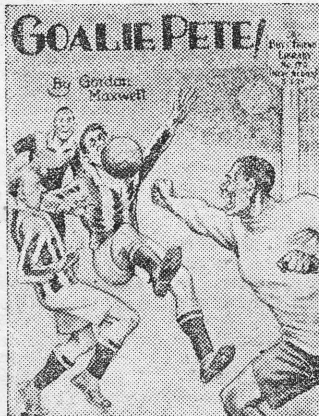
"Are you sure?" asked Tom Merry, himself falling on his knees beside his chum and examining the untidy hearth. "There are a lot of burnt papers here. Aren't they among these?"

Manners shook his head.
 "No. They're the other papers I burnt at the same time. The notes are not here."

"But—but—"
 Tom Merry stared in perplexity at the fireplace, while a buzz of comments went up from the crowd.

"I remember so well where they were," said Manners, rising slowly to his feet again. "I left them apart from all this rubbish, on the left-hand side."
 (Continued on next page.)

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"But where are they now?" asked Tom blankly.

"Goodness knows!"

"I say, you chaps, Manners is spoofing you—that's the truth of the matter!" yelled Baggy Trimble from the study doorway.

"Why not search his pockets?" came a sarcastic suggestion in Aubrey Racke's mocking voice. "You might find them intact, then!"

"Shut up, Racke!" said Tom Merry fiercely. Then, addressing the rest, he continued: "Look here, you men, I suggest we get back to the Common-room and continue the meeting in the ordinary way. The remains of the notes have apparently disappeared, but members will, I think, accept Manners' account of what happened without question. I will, for one."

"And I!" chimed in Lowther promptly.

"Yaas, watah!"

One or two others supported Tom Merry's verdict. Jack Blake of the Fourth, and Figgins of the New House, and their followers, sided with Manners, though they felt perplexed and uneasy about the whole affair. They would doubtless have followed Tom Merry's lead with even less hesitancy, had Manners been more informative about his meeting with Mr. Banks. But at all events, they signified that they accepted Manners' story.

With most of the crowd, however, it was otherwise. Racke and Crooke, who, in spite of the fact that they had not been at the meeting, had quickly learnt what was "on," were loud in expressing disbelief. True, they on their own did not count for much; but a good many fellows of a better type were equally sceptical. And though Wilkins and Gunn and Kerruish and Hammond and Levison and many others did not put their decision in words, their expressions were all the more eloquent. They did not believe that Manners was telling the truth.

"Who's coming back to the Common-room, then?" asked Tom Merry, doing his best to get things back to their normal course. "We've got other business to get through yet, you know."

"Other business can wait!"

It was George Alfred Grundy who spoke. The great man of the Shell had been thinking—probably a somewhat laborious and painful process for him. Now, he had evidently made his decision, and he planted himself in front of Tom Merry with an air of great determination.

"Other business can wait!" he repeated firmly. "This note business wants clearing up first, I think. And we can do that as well here as anywhere else—better, in fact!"

"Hear, hear!" chimed in Racke and Crooke, delighted to see a member of the Terrible Three in trouble.

"I'm not a suspicious chap myself—far from it," said Grundy. "But when the secretary of a footer club admits to meeting a low-down bookie on the quiet, and then pitches a yarn about chucking the club's money on the fire by mistake, then I can't help feeling there's something fishy about it."

Tom Merry turned to Manners, his face troubled and full of misgiving.

"Can't you satisfy Grundy about this meeting with Banks, Manners?" he pleaded. "It will put the whole thing right at once, then."

But Manners shook his head.

"I can't very well tell you why I was talking to Banks. I can only say that there was nothing shady or rotten in it, so far as I'm concerned."

"You're sure you haven't been losing money by betting on horses?" demanded Grundy.

"Absolutely! I'm not such a born idiot as that."

"And you still stick to what you've told us about chucking the money on the fire?"

"Of course I do!"

"Well, I'm sorry. I can't believe you!" said Grundy.

For a moment, Manners' fists clenched, and his eyes gleamed. Then he dropped his hands listlessly, and an expression of dull weariness came into his face. The trouble that had fallen on him with such bewildering suddenness had temporarily taken all the spirit out of him.

"It's true, anyway," he said hoarsely. "Do you think for a moment I'd be such an utter cad as to rob my own friends of their money? Surely you chaps believe me—Levison, Kerruish, Glyn?"

But the fellows Manners had appealed to were already turning away.

"I'll make it good. I'll make every penny good, I tell you!" cried Manners, almost on the verge of tears as he saw his old chums and acquaintances with hostility and suspicion in their eyes. "The club shan't lose by it, though I shall have to go without pocket-money altogether to do it!"

"Promises are easy now you see you've been found out!" grinned Crooke.

"He can't very well say less!" added Racke malevolently.

"I vote we send the rotter to Coventry!"

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"Good egg!" said Trimble gleefully.

"Hold your poisonous tongues!" rapped out Tom Merry angrily. "Let the suspicious rotters who are unwilling to believe Manners get out. The rest of us will go back and finish the meeting."

"Why, both of you?" mocked Racke.

And ~~very~~ only at that moment the gibe was not without point. For a Blake & Co. looked dubious and shaken.

Manners looked round despairingly at the dwindling crowd.

"Better call the meeting off for to-night, I think, Tom," he said, in a low, dull voice. "I'll resign on the spot, anyway!"

"Don't talk rot!"

"It's not rot! I shall insist!"

"Quite right! So shall we!" said Grundy grimly. "Take my advice, Merry, and accept his resignation."

For the first, and probably the last time in his life, Tom Merry took Grundy's advice. Without any further ado, Manners' resignation was accepted.

After that the fellows went off in little groups, discussing the affair quietly or loudly, according to their various attitudes towards it.

The study door closed behind the last of them, and Manners was left alone with Tom Merry and Lowther—the only chums, it seemed just then, that he had left in the school.

CHAPTER 9.

Up to Grundy!

"IT'S up to me!"

George Alfred Grundy made that remark in Study No. 3 after prep the following evening.

"Of course it is!" agreed Wilkins at once, though he had no notion what it was that was "up" to Grundy.

"There's nobody else in the Shell with enough savvy to take on such a job," went on Grundy thoughtfully.

"Nobody is popular or capable enough to take a lead, besides myself."

"Naturally!" yawned Gunn.

"Consequently," concluded Grundy ponderously, "it's up to me. Of course, I can rely on you chaps to back me up?"

"Eh?"

"I say I can rely on you chaps to back me up?"

"Let's hear what you're getting at, Grundy," said Gunn, with a wink at Wilkins. "It's something pretty brainy, I suppose?"

"Of course it is," grunted the great man of the Shell unsuspectingly. "It's about Manners."

"Oh!"

"Since last night, nothing's been done about his losing ten quid of the Football Club's money. One might almost think the whole thing had fizzled out. Well, I'm jolly well not going to let it fizzle out."

"Aren't you?" asked Wilkins, in surprise. "But—but how do you come into it, anyway, old chap?"

Grundy glared.

"If you're insinuating that I'm not one of the leading figures in the footer club, Wilkins—"

"Oh, crumbs! Not at all, old man!" said Wilkins hurriedly. "Carry on, old chap!"

"It's my opinion," resumed Grundy, frowning severely, "that the fellows are simply waiting for a lead. I suppose the lead ought to come in the first place from Tom Merry as he's junior captain. But he's not going to act, that's certain. Consequently, somebody else must. And that's why I say it's up to me!"

"Oh, I see!"

"Manners has disgraced his position, and disgraced the Lower School," went on Grundy, warming to his subject. "I'm surprised at a chap like that turning out to be a bad egg, but facts are facts, and you can't get away from 'em. Embezzlement is the only word that describes what Manners has done. If he were older, he'd go to prison for it. And I don't see why, just because he's at school, he should escape scot-free."

"What's the idea, then? To inform the police?" grinned Wilkins.

"Don't be an idiot, Wilkins! My idea is to bring Manners up before a junior court for trial."

"Oh, my giddy aunt!"

"Well, why not?" asked Grundy argumentatively. "I've thought it out very carefully, and it seems to me that that's the fairest way of dealing with him. Don't you chaps think so?"

"Hum!"

"Ahem!"

"Anyway, it doesn't matter much what you think. You fellows are useful for the donkey work, but I don't expect you to use your brains—can't very well use what you haven't got, can you?"

Wilkins and Gunn glared, while Grundy rattled on cheerfully:

"It seems to me that the whole thing might turn out fortunately from our point of view. It will give me a unique opportunity for showing that I can manage things with a firm hand, and it will make Tom Merry look rather small beer in comparison."

Judging by the expressions on the faces of Wilkins and Gunn, they were not at all keen on backing up Grundy. They, in common with a good many others, were convinced that Manners had gone astray in the matter of the footer funds. But backing up Grundy didn't necessarily follow from that fact.

Grundy's look was quite ferocious as he perceived their hesitancy. His big fists clenched, and he took a step forward.

"By gum! I'll bang your silly heads together——" he began.

"Oh, all right, Grundy!" gasped Gunn, hastily dodging. "We're with you, of course!"

"Naturally, we're backing you up!" said Wilkins.

"That's better! Good job for you! Now for a plan of campaign. Perhaps, in the first place, I'd better get a crowd of fellows to support me, and take 'em along to Merry's study to demand a trial. If you chaps will go and collect a crowd——"

Almost as if in magic response to Grundy's requirements, the study door had opened, to reveal a crowd of juniors, headed by Racke, the cad of the Shell.

"Ah, you're here, Grundy! Good!" exclaimed Racke.

"Am I wanted then?" asked Grundy, rather taken aback for a moment by the size of the deputation.

"You are. That's why we've come!" explained Racke smoothly. "We wanted a leader. So, of course, we immediately thought of you."

"Quite right!" said Grundy, with a nod of approval. "You couldn't have come to a better man, Racke. What can I do for you?"

"It's about Manners," explained the cad of the Shell. "I've been talking things over in the Common-room with these chaps, and we think it's time something was done."

Grundy almost beamed.

"Well, that's funny! Exactly what I've been saying to Wilkins and Gunn, haven't I, you chaps? So you want me to be your leader?"

"We thought you'd be the best man for the job," answered Racke diplomatically.

"Right-ho! I'll take it on, then!" said Grundy generously. "Follow me, everybody!"

"Where are you going?" asked Racke.

"To Tom Merry's study, to demand the public trial of Manners!"

"Oh, crikey!"

"Good old Grundy!"

George Alfred Grundy, wearing an expression that would

(Continued overleaf.)

HEROES OF THE TESTS!

Cricket has its thrills, its hard knocks, and its heroic sacrifices like any other sport. And in the Test Matches between Australia and England some wonderful examples of pluck and the will-to-win spirit have been seen.

Heroes of the Tests!

WHAT is called the Test Match temperament is often talked about. It is very necessary for the fellows who play cricket for England or Australia to possess the Test Match temperament—that is the temperament which enables them to do their abilities full justice amid all the excitement, the tense nervous strain, associated with these big battles.

You want fellows with big hearts for these games; for sometimes they may be asked to do the really heroic thing—to show that they have the pluck which made the Empire what it is.

"England—or Australia—expects that every man this day will do his duty." That, metaphorically, has often been the message run up the mast over the big cricket grounds of the world, and many stories are told of fellows who have not failed to respond in the true British fashion.

The End of a Glorious Career!

During the past few weeks we have had a certain amount of evidence that risks are run by the men who play cricket. In the first Test Match of this series, played at Brisbane, Jack Gregory, the mighty Australian bowler, went into the dressing-room at the end of England's first innings, and said to his many friends in the English camp, "I'm sorry, boys, that I shan't ever be able to bowl any of you out again." In putting forth his mighty effort on behalf of Australia, Gregory had strained himself so badly that his doctors immediately told him that his serious cricketing days must be considered at an end.

Gregory had played the hero's part in that England innings all right. He had tried to pull out that extra bit of pace which might move some of England's stalwart batsmen, and finished his cricket career with the effort. Yes, Jack Gregory went out "fighting" for Australia.

"Hard Luck, Staples!"

I like, too, the courage, the heroism of Sam Staples, the Englishman, though this was of rather a different kind. There was no man more delighted than Staples on being selected to go to

Australia. Alas! no sooner had he arrived there than rheumatism took him in its grip. Tremendously disappointed, Staples might have stayed in Australia, in the hope of recovering in time to play in one or two of the later games. But he played the hero's part. "A sick man in the party is a drag on the wheel," he said; "so, if you don't mind, Mr. Chapman, I'll go home." It takes courage to leave your dreams behind, unfulfilled, doesn't it?

The history of the Tests between England and Australia contain some stirring stories of men who have refused to "give in," though wounded and suffering sorely. It only needs a little stretch of the imagination to decide that the heroism of Australia's wicket-keeper, Bertie Oldfield, won the Ashes for Australia in the 1924-5 series.

Safe Hands!

In the course of the third Test, Oldfield was struck by one of Jack Gregory's fastest deliveries and laid out. When the doctors picked him up and examined him they found that two of his ribs had been fractured.

"Patch them up quickly, and let me go back to keep wicket," said "Bertie." In vain the doctors tried to persuade him to give up all idea of playing any more in that game. The wicket-keeper felt that his duty was out there in the middle, and, being "patched up," he went back, to continue to give a wonderful display of wicket-keeping. In England's second innings, totalling 363, he only allowed 5 byes, and he caught the last man out when England was only 12 runs short of victory. In winning that match Australia gained the Ashes. If Oldfield had not carried on with those broken ribs England might have won the game, and thus given herself a sporting chance of gaining the Ashes.

"Bravo Barnes!"

One of the greatest bowling performances in the whole history of the Tests in Australia was performed by a man who got out of a sick-bed and played against the orders of his doctors. When the English players left their hotel at Melbourne, Sydney Barnes, the star

bowler, was in bed—too ill to rise, so everybody thought. The deputy skipper of the side was at his wits' end, wondering who should play in place of Barnes, when suddenly at the Melbourne ground Barnes appeared. "I think I'm well enough to play now," he said.

"You look as if you would fall down if you tried to bowl a ball," said one of his colleagues.

Eventually Barnes persuaded his captain to allow him to play in the match. Australia won the toss and went in to bat. In a few minutes the sick man, Sydney Barnes, had sent back to the pavilion four of the greatest players who ever batted for Australia—Kelleway, Bardsley, Clem Hill, and Warwick Armstrong. And do you know what the Australian total was when those four men had been dismissed by the "too ill to play" bowler? Exactly 11! From the moment that Barnes started the destruction of Australia in that match the English team never looked back. It makes one's blood run a bit faster to recall that sort of heroism in the Tests, doesn't it?

Saving the Game!

A classic story of heroic batting is associated with the second Test Match played in England in 1921. Everything seemed to be going wrong with the Old Country. Jack Hobbs was in a nursing home with appendicitis; Australia had made 407 in their first innings, and the English wickets were falling like ninepins. Gregory and Macdonald were carrying everything before them. The Hon. Lionel Tennyson, as he then was—he is now Lord Tennyson—had split his left hand open while fielding, and was really not fit to bat at all.

But in England's hour of need Tennyson could not sit back. He took his bat in his sound right hand, stood with a brave face against the expressions of those two demon bowlers, and, literally batting with only one hand, played an heroic innings of 63—an innings which saved England from having to follow on.

That's the sort of stuff of which cricketers are made, and which, to a certain extent, can be said to make cricketers. 'Tis not in the power of the players of either England or Australia to command success, but they are each ready to do everything possible to deserve it.

have done credit to Napoleon on the eve of battle, quitted the study.

Aubrey Racke, with a cynical smile hovering about his thin lips, followed closely upon his heels, and behind him came the entire crowd, reinforced, as they tramped down the passage, by numerous members of the Shell from other studies.

CHAPTER 10. Up Against It!

MANNERS was in Study No. 10 with Tom Merry and Lowther when the crowd arrived.

The first indication the three chums had that anything untoward was happening was a thunderous crash on the study door. After that, the door was flung violently open, and Grundy stalked in, followed, as it seemed for the moment, by half the Lower School.

The Terrible Three jumped to their feet in astonishment.

"What the thump—" began Tom Merry.

"It's all right, Merry. No need for alarm," said Grundy reassuringly. "We've come here to have a straight talk with you, that's all. These chaps have asked me to act as their leader—very wisely, I think—and I'm not going to mince matters. It's about Manners."

"Well, what about Manners?" asked Tom Merry quietly.

"We want to know what's being done about him."

Tom frowned.

"Nothing. I'm prepared to accept Manners' word about what happened to that money, if that's what you're talking about."

"Exactly as I thought," said Grundy, with a nod.

"Just because he's your pal, he's going to be allowed to embezzle the footer club's money with impunity. What do you think of that, you fellows?"

"Shame!" yelled a score of voices from the crowd in the doorway.

Tom Merry flushed.

"If that's all you've come here to say, Grundy, the sooner you get out the better it will be for you!" he said grimly.

"But I've got some more to say yet," went on Grundy.

"Even if you're satisfied to leave things as they are, other people are not. And if you won't act, then we're jolly well going to!"

"And what do you propose to do?" asked Tom Merry curiously.

"We propose to give Manners a proper trial before a judge appointed by the Fourth and the Shell," answered Grundy. "Somebody or other will be given the job of prosecuting, and it will be up to Manners to defend himself if he wants to. That's the plan, Tom Merry. What have you to say about it?"

"Only this: that if anything of the kind is done it will be absolutely without my approval or consent," replied the captain of the Shell sharply. "I think I know Manners better than anybody else here, and, knowing him, I'm jolly certain he's innocent. I'll see you hanged before I consent to a trial!"

"Thanks, Tom!" murmured Manners, who had listened to the swift exchange with increasing distress and dismay.

"And now, get out of the study!" said Tom Merry, with an angry look at the crowd. "I might have anticipated something like this from a silly ass like you, Grundy! And, of course, I should naturally expect rotters like Racke and Crooke to join in. But I must say I'm surprised at some of the rest of you."

The skipper of the Shell was evidently beginning to lose his temper. There was a resentful murmur from the crowd.

"Keep your wool on, Merry!" said Hammond. "We're not all rotters, just because our opinion happens to differ from yours."

"Hear, hear!" said Kerruish and Lumley-Lumley warmly.

"Shure, and it's meself that will lend a hand if there's going to be a trial," said Reilly pugnaciously.

"What about holding it to-night, Grundy?" suggested Crooke. "Let's drag him down to the Common-room now!"

"Good egg!"

"Fetch him out!"

"Strike while the iron's hot!"

Grundy nodded.

"I don't see why not," he agreed. "Plenty of time to finish it before bed-time. Right-ho, then! We'll hold it to-night. Come on, Manners!"

Manners, deathly white now, stood with his back to the wall and shook his head. Evidently he didn't intend to go willingly.

There was an angry murmur from the crowd.

"He won't come!"

"He'll have to!"

"Frog's-march him!"

"Make the rotter stand his trial!"

"Stand back, you cads!" said Tom Merry, between his teeth. "Back up, Monty! Keep 'em off!"

Monty Lowther nodded grimly, and lined up on one side of Manners, while Tom Merry took his stand on the other.

Then the crowd surged forward into the study, and all was pandemonium.

To Manners it was like a nightmare. The sea of hostile faces, the scornful epithets that were hurled at him from all sides, did not seem more than half real.



Harry Manners faced the crowd of juniors in the study with a pal to rob my own friends of their money?" he burst out hoarsely. "Let me have appealed to were already

Was it only a day since he had moved among these fellows as free from care as anyone in the school? It seemed more like a year!

Through a mist Manners saw that Tom Merry and Lowther were hitting out right and left, fighting like Trojans to keep the crowd at bay. Mechanically Manners himself entered the fray and fought side by side with his chums.

"Collar him!"

"Down the rotter!"

"Smash him!"

Hostile cries on every side! In that bitter moment Manners groaned aloud. Little wonder that he had no heart for the fight.

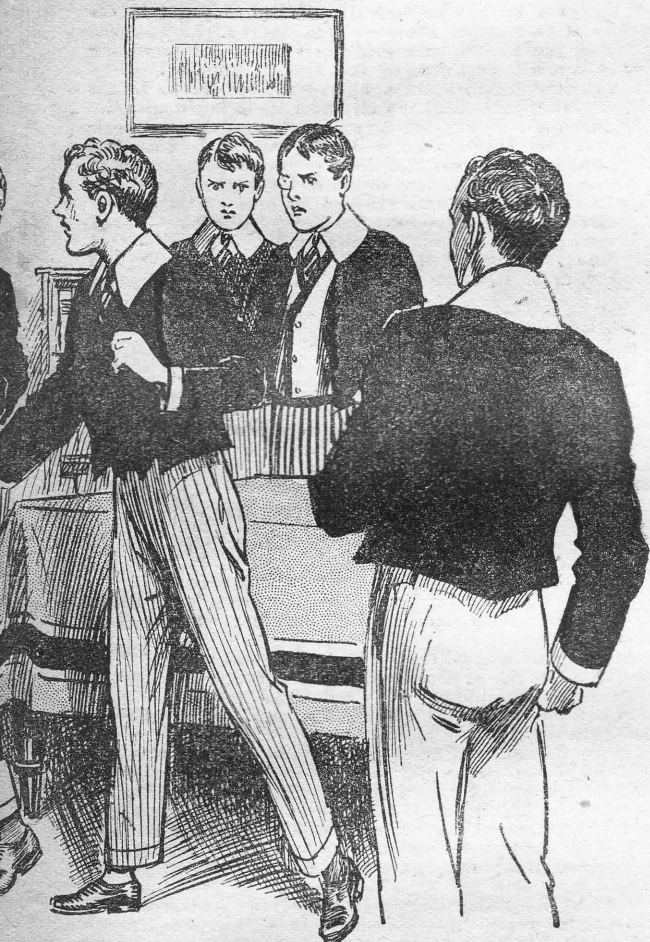
Unless an interruption had occurred there could have been only one end to the encounter in Study No. 10. True, the Terrible Three were redoubtable "scrappers," and their opponents on this occasion numbered a fair sprinkling of non-combatants such as Trimble and Crooke. But the odds were overwhelming, and if the fight had been allowed to finish, Tom Merry and his chums would undoubtedly have been vanquished.

Fortunately for them, the inevitable end was never reached. Long before that the din from the Shell passage had reached the ears of Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, as he sat in his study marking up examination papers.

Mr. Railton was not given to wasting time, and he certainly wasted none on this occasion. With an angry frown on his face, he strode out of the room and went up the stairs towards the Shell passage with the speed of an athlete.

"Boys!"

That one word, uttered in Mr. Railton's deepest voice, was sufficient to quell the worst of the riot. The juniors on the fringe of the crowd scuttled away like scared rabbits, while a dead silence descended on the rest as if by magic.



face. "Do you think for a moment I'd be such an utter cad as Kerruish, Glyn—surely you believe me?" But the fellows Manners turning away. (See Chapter 8.)

"Are you endeavouring to turn the House into a bear garden?" exclaimed the Housemaster angrily. "What are you all doing in this study, pray?"

"Hem!"

"Hum!"

Explanations did not get far beyond those two unsatisfactory monosyllables, and Mr. Railton did not pursue the matter further.

"Very well. Every boy present will write me two hundred lines by the end of the week. Any repetition of this, and I shall detain you all for the next half-holiday!"

"Oh, sir!"

"Remember, no more noise, or you will regret it!" said Mr. Railton sternly. "Return to your studies immediately!"

The juniors hastened to obey, and within a couple of minutes the Shell passage was deserted, and almost painfully quiet.

After that Mr. Railton rustled off, and the Terrible Three were left to clear up the mess, in the rather comforting knowledge that there would be no further attack that night.

There was not much conversation in Study No. 10 for

the rest of that evening, and the faces of the Terrible Three were grim as they put the study to rights. Thanks to Mr. Railton's timely intervention, the plans of Manners' attackers had been frustrated. But the raid had brought home to all three the painful truth that a very large section of the Fourth and Shell now looked upon Manners with deep suspicion and resentment.

For the time being, Manners had been given a breathing space. But by all appearances, his respite would be of brief duration. Without a doubt, Manners of the Shell was up against it!

CHAPTER 11.

Manners Minor Finds An Ally!

DURING the next twenty-four hours the feeling that Manners had been guilty of embezzlement gained widespread belief in the Fourth and the Shell. Manners found that most of his old friends were shunning him. Even Jack Blake & Co. kept away from Study No. 10 on the following day.

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther, of course, still stood by their chum, though their position in so doing was the reverse of comfortable. But even they felt troubled doubts arise in their minds at times. The affair of Manners' meeting with Mr. Banks had never been satisfactorily explained, and Manners' failure to produce the charred remains of the notes was extraordinary and inexplicable. In spite of their loyal adherence to their chum's cause, Tom Merry and Lowther could not help wondering, in their inmost thoughts, whether they were on the side of truth, after all.

Not unnaturally, Racke and Crooke made the most of their opportunity for getting "one back" on the Terrible Three. Never before had the cads of the Shell been given such a chance of scoring against their old enemies. Their malicious sneers were now listened to with respect in quarters where they would have received short shrift only a couple of days before.

Rumours, and somewhat distorted versions of the affair, inevitably reached other Forms, in time.

The Third got the news from Wally D'Arcy, and it was round the fire in the Third Form room, listening with a crowd of others, that Manners minor first learned of his brother's misfortune.

Manners minor did not wait to hear the full story. He quitted the Form-room and went off in search of his major.

He found him pacing moodily up and down under the elms in the quad in the fading light of the winter dusk.

Harry Manners started at the sight of his minor.

"You, Reg? What do you want?"

"I've come to hear what it is the fellows are all talking about—this business of ten pounds of the footer club's money being lost. What's happened, Harry? What does it all mean?"

"I wish I knew, Reg!" Manners major answered bitterly. "There's one thing about it that's as much a mystery to me as to anyone else. I left the remains of some burnt Treasury notes in my study, and half an hour later they'd vanished. That's the real cause of the mess I've landed in."

And then Manners major recounted the incidents of the previous Wednesday evening.

Reggie Manners listened, with a glum face.

"I say, Harry, how rotten!" he exclaimed at the finish.

"Then—then what it amounts to is that your being seen with Banks has put the tin hat on it. They think you've been betting."

"Exactly!"

The fag's eyes gleamed.

"The idiots, to believe that! But they shan't think it much longer. I'll tell them the truth! I'll tell them it was on my account you met Banks—"

"You'll do nothing of the kind, you young ass!" interrupted Manners major. "That won't mend things now. It's the missing money the chaps are mostly concerned about. If I could only prove I burnt those notes, the other bizney would soon be forgotten. To tell them why I met Banks would only mean dragging yourself into it without need, and would make things no better for me."

"But—but can't we do anything, then?" asked Reggie Manners miserably. "It makes me feel such a cad to know they would suspect you of blagging, when I'm the one. Surely they wouldn't have suspected you at all if they hadn't seen you with Banks?"

"Perhaps not. But the harm's done, and it can't be undone now," said Manners major grimly. "You cut off now, Reg, and keep mum for the present. I want to think things out—to try to imagine why and how those notes were taken."

"Then you think they were taken?"

"I'm certain of it. Everything else in the room was as I

left it. But the notes had mysteriously disappeared. Oh, they were taken all right!"

"But—but who would have taken such things? If they were burnt, there couldn't have been any value in them. Surely nobody in his senses would go to the trouble of pinching a few scraps of burnt paper?"

"That's just what everybody else says. And they're right, of course," admitted Harry Manners reluctantly. "It's a mystery, I know, but there it is. They were shifted, of that I'm sure."

Manners minor nodded. "The problem is, then, to find out who shifted them," he said thoughtfully. "I wonder who could help us?"

"If you can find someone who can, you'll help me more than by shouting about why I met Banks," Manners major answered seriously.

"I'll do my best, Harry," promised the fag. And he meant it. As he walked across the quad towards the School House again his young brain was examining the matter to the exclusion of all other things.

It was just as he was climbing the steps leading to the main door of the School House that he thought of Cardew. Immediately that name occurred to him Reggie Manners' face brightened.

Ralph Reckness Cardew of the Fourth was a slacker and a dandy, with a good many peculiar characteristics of a kind that were not highly esteemed at St. Jim's. But Reggie Manners was one of the few who realised that Cardew's lazy, nonchalant exterior was merely a cloak for a singularly alert mind and a particularly generous heart. It struck Manners minor with the force of a sudden brain-wave that Cardew was the one fellow who could help him just then.

He went into the House, and made at once for the Fourth Form passage.

Cardew was at home, in Study No. 9. He usually was. His exasperated chums had sometimes expressed the opinion that nothing short of an earthquake would dislodge Cardew from the comfortable sofa on which he spent most of his spare time.

He nodded lazily as Manners minor entered.

"Thank goodness it's only you!" he yawned. "I was afraid it was one of my frightfully vigorous pals wantin' me to come to the gym, or somethin' equally dreadful. Take a pew, kid! You don't mind if I take it easy while you talk?"

"Not at all!" answered the Third-Former, with a faint smile. "I say, Cardew, I hope you don't mind my coming along here—"

"So long as you haven't come to induce me to box, run, jump, or play football, you're as welcome as the flowers in May, dear lad! Say on!"

"I want your advice, Cardew. On two different things, as a matter of fact."

"Go ahead, then, Manners the Lesser!" said Cardew, eyeing the fag keenly through half-closed eyes. "Advice is easy to give, and it will cost me nothing!"

"The first thing is about myself. I'm afraid I've been rather a silly ass."

"A common complaint, not confined to members of the Third Form at St. Jim's," murmured Cardew reflectively. "What form did your particular silliness take?"

Manners minor told him.

Cardew listened, with a whimsical smile, to the story of Cutts' betting transactions and Reggie Manners' temptation.

"And that's what comes of fagging for dear old Cutts!" he sighed, as the brief recital concluded. "One of these fine days, when I feel energetic enough, I must teach the dear old ben that leading fags astray simply isn't done in these enlightened days!"

Manners minor smiled rather a sickly smile.

"In the meantime, there's Banks to deal with," continued Cardew thoughtfully. "You say you owe him two pounds?"

The fag nodded.

"Did you ever win anything from him?"

"I did one week, Cardew, but Banks didn't settle up. He said he'd carry it over till the next week; and, of course, I lost it all then!"

"Well, we'll carry this two quid over indefinitely, then," said Cardew brightly. "That's the best solution, I think."

"You mean, not pay him? But—but won't he write to the Head and get me into trouble?"

"Leave him to me, old son!" said Cardew lightly. "Dear old Banks is an old pal of mine. I'll soon settle him! I'll see him myself about it!"

"You will? I say, Cardew, that's jolly good of you!"

"A mere trifle, laddie! And now for the second tale of woe! What's it all about?"

"I expect you've heard already. My major's in trouble—"

Cardew nodded.

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"Rumours have reached me. Some brainless idiots are accusin' him of appropriatin' ten quid from the footer funds, I understand."

"You don't believe them, do you?" asked Manners minor eagerly. "You're not one of those who think—"

"That dear old Manners pinched a ha'penny of anybody's money?" finished Cardew. "Not likely! I know him rather better than that I fancy!"

"Thank goodness! Well, that's what I've come about, Cardew. I want to do something to get him out of the mess he's in, for I feel I'm partly to blame. Don't you think you can help me to clear him, somehow or other?"

"Rather a tall order, my young friend!" observed Cardew dryly. "Still, I always did rather fancy myself in the role of Sherlock Holmes. Apart from which, in spite of his energetic habits, I rather like your major. I'll see what I can do for you."

Reggie Manners' eyes danced. "You're a brick, Cardew! If you can only get to the bottom of this rotten affair—"

"Here, not so fast, young Manners! I'm not promising that I can do anything of the kind!" grinned Cardew.

"Let's get down to it, though, and I'll see if any bright ideas occur to me. Tell me all about it, to begin with."

Manners minor very willingly fell to describing the affair of the burnt Treasury notes exactly as his brother had described it to him less than half an hour before.

As he listened, Cardew dropped his languid pose for once, and sat upright and wrinkled his brow in thought, as if the fag's story had aroused his deepest interest.

Manners minor had undoubtedly succeeded in gaining an ally in the cause of saving his brother's honour—and Cardew, as an ally, was a force to be reckoned with!

CHAPTER 12.

Cardew, the Hustler!

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW rose from the sofa in Study No. 9, and put on his cap and overcoat. Since the departure of Manners minor, ten minutes or so before, he had been buried in thought. Now there was a curious gleam in his eyes that seemed to indicate a successful conclusion to his mental efforts.

Levison and Clive, who had just come in, looked surprised.

"Going out?" Levison asked.

"The answer is in the affirmative, old scout!"

"What about tea?"

"It will have to wait, I'm afraid. No really great detective allowed tea to interfere with his work. Cheerio, old beans!"

And Cardew quitted the study, leaving Levison and Clive staring after him in considerable astonishment.

Cardew was smiling urbanely as he departed, but his smile vanished as soon as he got outside, and a look of grim determination took its place.

There was little of the slacker in his movements as he left the School House and made off in the direction of the bike-shed near the school gates. Most of the distance between the House and the bike-shed he covered at a trot, and it took him only a few seconds to get out his machine and pedal down to the gates.

Taggles, the porter, gave him a suspicious look as he passed.

"Which it's rather late to be goin' for a bike ride this time of the year, Master Cardew," he observed.

"Better late than never, Taggles! Catch!"

Taggles caught the shilling and refrained from further comment.

Cardew cycled off down the lane towards Rylcombe. It was not an ideal evening for a ride. Recent rains had made the road muddy and slippery, and low clouds across the sky held the promise of a fresh downpour in the very near future. But Cardew, dandy and slacker though he was reputed to be, could stand a good deal of personal discomfort when it suited his purpose. Evidently it did so now.

His journey ended at the little post office in Rylcombe, where Manners had drawn out the ill-fated ten pounds from the football club's account only two days previously. Here Cardew dismounted, and, leaving his bike standing against the pavement, entered the grocer's shop to which the post office was attached.

There were no customers in the shop, and the St. Jim's junior was, therefore, able to get to business at once.

He raised his cap politely to the young lady behind the counter, whom he knew from previous visits there.

"Good-evening, Miss Plummer! I'm afraid I'm going to be a bit of a nuisance to you."

"Indeed, Master Cardew!"

"Do you remember a chap calling here on Wednesday afternoon to draw out ten pounds from the football club's account?"

Miss Plummer nodded, after an interval.
 "Yes, I remember Master Manners calling here now. He runs the account here for the club."

"Exactly! I wonder if you have any means of finding out the numbers of the Treasury notes you gave him?"

Miss Plummer looked rather surprised; and Cardew, feeling that perhaps some further explanation was called for, added:

"The notes are missing, you see, and we are anxious to find out whether they have been used."

"Oh, I'm so sorry to hear that! Let me see——"

Miss Plummer opened a cashbox and abstracted several old scraps of paper.

"I may be able to tell you," she said, examining them one by one. "I usually jot down the numbers of new batches of notes when I get them, if they happen to be fresh from the bank and in serial order. I believe those I passed over to Master Manners were new."

Cardew watched anxiously as she puzzled over the paper strips.

Miss Plummer looked up at last with a smile.

"I remember now—he had the first ten notes of a new lot. I can tell you the numbers."

"Oh, good!" murmured Cardew, with feeling. "I'll jot them down in my notebook if you'll read them out."

"They started at X 1.7. 395885, and went on by consecutive numbers to X 1.7. 395894," said the girl, reading out the numbers slowly to enable Cardew to write them down.

Cardew carefully noted the numbers, then replaced his notebook, with an air of quiet satisfaction. He had made the first move in his mysterious game—and that move had been successful.

He returned to the school with all speed. A crowd of juniors met him in the Hall, prominent among them being George Alfred Grundy of the Shell.

There was a shout as Cardew came in.

"Here he comes!"

"Hurry up, Cardew!"

"You're wanted, old bean!"

Cardew raised his eyebrows in mild surprise.

"Why all the excitement, dear men? Whence comes this sudden popularity?"

Grundy condescended to explain.

"We want you to be the judge, Cardew—or, rather, these fellows do. Speaking for myself, I don't quite see the

sense of giving the job to a lazy slacker like you; but they seem to want you, so I'm letting them have their way."

"Dear old Grundy! Always so frank and to the point!" murmured Cardew, with a whimsical smile. "But I still don't quite follow. You say you want me to act as judge?"

"That's it!"

"What's on, then? Is it a flower-show, or a beauty competition?"

Hammond grinned and volunteered the explanation. "The fact is, Cardew, we've decided to give Manners a public trial for appropriating the funds of the footer club. Grundy was the first to suggest it, but a lot of us feel it's a good idea."

"In spite of that!" nodded Cardew. "Say on, Hammond!"

"As things stand we don't know where we are. Tom Merry is standing by Manners, and won't listen to any talk of a trial; and Manners himself still sticks to that far-fetched yarn about his having chucked the notes on the fire. Unless something's done, it looks as though we shall never get any nearer the truth than we are now."

Cardew nodded, but did not interrupt this time.

"So we think a trial's the best way out," went on Hammond. "If Manners is innocent, he ought to be able to establish it. And if he's guilty, then he ought to sit up for it. That's what we all think, and that's why we want a trial. And after jawing it over, most of us have decided that you'll be the best man to act as judge."

"You flatter me," murmured Cardew.

"Not at all. We know you're a slack sort of bounder, but we also know you've got plenty of savvy when the need arises. Now, what do you say, Cardew—are you willing to be the judge?"

Cardew hesitated for just a second; then he smiled gently.

"Yes, dear man. Quite willing. But I won't trouble to listen to any evidence, either for or against. I happen to know Manners, and what I know of him is quite sufficient for me to judge on. I'll give you my verdict now. Manners is innocent!"

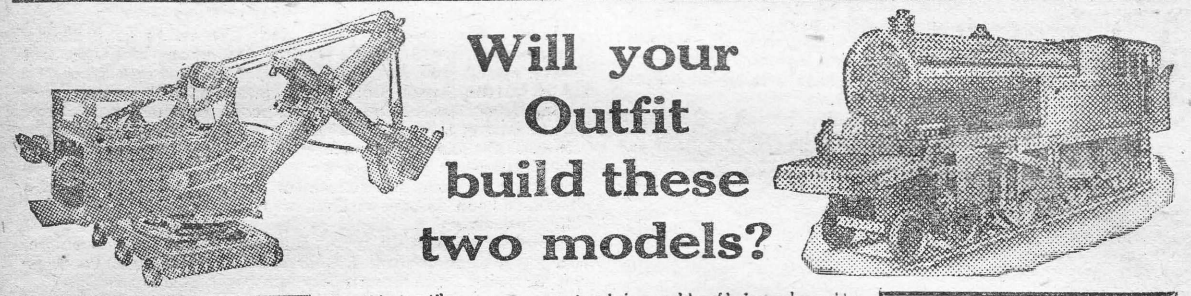
There was a murmur from the crowd.

"Cheese it, Cardew!"

"How do you know?"

"Just as I said!" snorted Grundy. "I told you he'd be no good for the job! We'll find somebody else!"

(Continued on next page.)



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Cardew smiled, quite unperturbed. "Sorry you can't see eye to eye with me. But you will before you're many days older. Cheerio, you men!"

And Cardew strolled serenely away before the crowd had time to take up the argument more vigorously.

On reaching his study in the Fourth Form passage, Cardew did not immediately resume his usual recumbent position on the sofa. He had other work to do before resting that evening.

Instead, he wrote two letters, and afterwards went downstairs again to post them in time to catch the evening collection.

He uttered a sigh of relief as he slipped them into the letter-box. For nearly two hours he had been hustling, and, not unnaturally, the elegant and leisurely Cardew was beginning to feel the strain.

Judging by the whimsical smile on his face as he went upstairs, however, his unaccustomed labours had given him considerable satisfaction, though why they did so was a secret which Cardew kept to himself for the time being. The envelopes which enclosed his two letters gave very little clue. One was addressed to Mr. J. J. Banks, at Wayland, and the other, which was marked "Urgent," to:

"The Postmaster-General,
G. P. O.,
London."

CHAPTER 13.

Cardew on the Track!

"COMING down to footer practice?"

Ernest Levison asked that question of Ralph Reckness Cardew on the following afternoon. Levison and Clive, wearing overcoats over their football garb were just about to quit the study as their leisurely chum sauntered in.

Cardew shook his head.

"Sorry, Ernest. The call of the merry old playing-fields will have to remain unanswered to-day, so far as I'm concerned. Important business is afoot. Great works have to be performed, dear man."

"Slacking on the sofa, I suppose!" grinned Clive.

"Dead wrong. As a matter of fact, I have a most important appointment to keep—an appointment with a bookmaker, to be precise."

"What?" yelled Levison and Clive together.

Cardew looked pained.

"Don't tell me you're not going to approve. He's quite a nice bookmaker, I believe. By name, Joseph Banks."

"You mean to say you're going to start betting on horses again?" asked Levison, frowning.

Cardew put up his hands in pretended horror.

"Ernest, how could you? As if I could even forsake the stern old straight and narrow path, after all the training you've given me?"

"Then what's the idea?"

"In the words of the celebrated politician: Wait and see! The time is rapidly coming when you are going to open your innocent blue eyes wide with astonishment."

"Oh, rats!" grinned Levison. "Anyway, you're not coming down to footer, then?"

"Reluctant as I am to abandon the vigorous delights of Little Side, I'm afraid I'm not! If you'll wait half a minute, though, you can have the pleasure of my society as far as the quad!"

Levison and Clive waited while Cardew put on his overcoat and school cap, and the three went downstairs together.

They parted in the quad, Cardew going off in the direction of the gates, and Levison and Clive making for the playing-fields.

Cardew was whistling blithely as he strolled down Rylcombe Lane. There were not many St. Jim's fellows about at this hour of the day, most of them being engaged at football, and when Cardew struck off from the road down the cart-track leading to Brown's Meadow, nobody wearing a school cap was in sight.

Mr. Banks had not arrived when Cardew reached the clump of trees which were his destination—the same spot where Manners' ill-fated meeting with the bookmaker had taken place only three days before. That gentleman's squat figure appeared down the lane within a few minutes, however, and he hurried up on seeing Cardew already waiting.

"Afternoon, Master Cardew! Fancy you, after all this time! You could 'ave knocked me down with a feather when I got your letter!"

"Yes, it's a long time since we've met, Banks," agreed Cardew reflectively. "You see, I'm not the bold, bad blade I used to be. I'm sticking to the straight and narrow, like a hero. Gee-gees are a thing of the past, old bean!"

"Haw, haw, haw! That's a good 'un! But you always

was a bit of a humorist in the old days, I remember. Well, let's get to business. I suppose you want to have a little flutter—eh?"

"Dear man, I wish you wouldn't jump to conclusions!" sighed Cardew. "I didn't say anything about a little flutter in my letter, did I?"

Mr. Banks' affectionate smile died away.

"Well, you didn't mention it, but I took it for granted. I suppose you 'aven't come 'ere just to waste a man's time, 'ave you?"

"Not at all!" Cardew assured him. "I've sent for you mostly to give you one or two tips about your future business dealings with chaps up at the school, and also to clear up a small matter in which a young friend of mine is involved."

"Ho!" grunted Mr. Banks, and he waited for further explanation before committing himself any further. "So long as you deal only with the merry and reckless old blades of St. Jim's, Banks, I shall never quarrel with you," continued Cardew. "Chaps like Cutts, and Gilmore, and Racke are born like it, and you can't do them much harm. But it's when you start taking money from decent youngsters who are merely following a bad example that I begin to kick. To get down to details, there's young Manners—"

"Ah, I thought you were coming to something!" said Mr. Banks, with a scowl. "Well, wot about young Manners? I suppose 'e's been pitching you some yarn about me?"

"You admit having had dealings with him, then—a mere kid of about thirteen?" murmured Cardew, lifting his eyebrows. "I suppose you're aware that it's an offence against the law of the land to take bets from fellows at school, and that you would get it in the neck with a vengeance for dealing with a client so young as Manners minor?"

Mr. Banks glared.

"So that's it, is it? Trying to threaten a bloke—eh? I always thought you were a sportsman, Master Cardew."

"So I am. But a sportsman expects sportsmanlike treatment in return, old bean, and—blackmailing rather spoils things."

"Blackmailing?" repeated Mr. Banks, with a heavy frown. "Wot the thunder do you mean?"

"Precisely what I say, dear old bean! If threatening a chap with exposure to his headmaster unless he pays up isn't blackmail, I don't know what is!"

"But that two pun is a debt!" snarled Mr. Banks. "The boy lost it to me fair and square. Why can't a man 'ave 'is just dues?"

Cardew smiled faintly.

"If you got your just dues, dear Banks, you'd probably be a guest of his Majesty's Government at the moment! But joking apart, you know jolly well that you've rooked the kid of all he's got. You never intended to pay him anything, win or lose. Why not rest content with what you've got, and drop the rest?"

Mr. Banks shook his head.

"Not likely! That kid owes me two pun, and two pun I'm going to have out of him, or his 'eadmaster shall know what he's been doing—without me coming into it, either!"

Cardew sighed.

"What a frightfully tryin' fellow you are this afternoon, Banks! I didn't think I'd have so much trouble to make you see sense. But apparently you can't, so I'll just tell you plainly what I'm going to do."

"Well, wot is it?"

"The moment I hear that the Head has got to know about young Manners' transactions with you, Banks, I'm going straight to Wayland Police Station to lodge a complaint about you. I shall simply tell them about the Manners business, that will be quite sufficient to earn you a fine that will cripple your activities in this district for some time."

Mr. Banks' bloated face went a shade redder than usual. "Don't forget that if you do that you won't be doing your young friend Manners any good!" he snarled. "If it went as far as a perlice court, it would mean the sack for 'im, anyway."

"Dear man, don't get excited! If the Head even hears about it at all it will mean the sack for Manners. I'm not proposing to breathe a word to a soul, unless you force me to it by speaking first."

Mr. Banks muttered an oath under his breath. He was beaten, and he knew it. Cardew had won all along the line. The cool, deliberate arguments of the slacker of the Fourth had succeeded in showing the cunning but ignorant bookmaker that the time had come in his conflict with Manners minor when the wisest course was to throw up the sponge.

"Well, what's the verdict, old bean?" asked Cardew, after a pause.

Mr. Banks scowled, and shrugged.

"All right, Master Cardew. I give you best. 'Course, I never intended to squeak on the kid really, you know, I'm too good a sport to do that sort of thing, I 'ope, and

trust there ain't goin' to be no ill-feeling between us over this little incident."

Cardew had been a source of profit to Mr. Banks in the past, and the bookmaker, with his eye to the future, did not wish this encounter to close on an unpleasant note.

"Then you're willing to consider the matter ended?" asked Cardew.

Mr. Banks nodded.

"As far as I'm concerned, the whole thing's finished," he growled. "Wot's more, I'll take good care not to waste my time again on kids like young Manners."

"Excellent! That's exactly what I wanted!" smiled Cardew. "And now, dear old bean, I won't detain you any longer."

"You're not 'aving a little flutter on the Swindleton Stakes this afternoon, I suppose, sir?" asked Mr. Banks, as Cardew made to go.

"Quite right; I'm not! Cheerio, Banks!"

"Good-day, Master Cardew!" returned the bookmaker,

"Stand back, you cads!" snapped Tom Merry, between his teeth. "Back up, Monty! Keep 'em off!" Monty Lowther nodded, and lined up on the other side of Harry Manners. Side by side the Terrible Three hit out right and left, fighting like Trojans to keep the crowd at bay.

(See Chapter 10.)



extending a meaty paw for a parting handshake. "Any time you want a little commission executed, or you feel like a game of cards, you know where to find me."

Cardew smiled and nodded; then, with a wave of his hand, parted from Mr. Banks and strolled away.

Mr. Banks followed him after a suitable interval, and returned to Wayland with rather mixed feelings. Naturally enough, he was pleased at having renewed acquaintanceship with the elegant and well-to-do Cardew, but his pleasure was considerably diluted at the thought that he could now whistle, so to speak, for Manners minor's money.

Cardew returned to St. Jim's and spent the remainder of the afternoon at his favourite recreation—resting on the sofa in Study No. 9.

He bestirred himself again just before tea-time, and sauntered downstairs and out into the quad. Outwardly calm, Cardew was feeling unusually excited beneath his placid exterior. Probably for the first time in his life the slacker of the Fourth had been stirred out of his usual nonchalance to the extent of going to meet the postman.

He was prepared for a disappointment, and he told himself again and again that he could hardly expect a reply from the Postmaster-General so soon. Nevertheless, he hoped against hope, and his hopes were not disappointed. Bloggs, the Rylcombe postman, had an express letter for Cardew among the pile he brought in with his evening delivery, and, to Cardew's delight, it was from the Postmaster-General.

A low whistle escaped the slacker of the Fourth as he read its contents, then his eyes danced with pleasure. He transferred the letter to his pocket, and returned to the school in a state of the utmost cheerfulness.

"Hallo, hallo!" called out Levison, meeting him on the steps of the School House. "Wherefore the cheery smile, Cardew?"

"Dear Ernest, if you'll keep your peepers open, you'll soon find out!" was Cardew's rather cryptic reply. "Let's get in to tea!"

CHAPTER 14.

Counsel for the Defence!

CARDEW looked in at Study No. 10 in the Shell passage that evening. The Terrible Three were just finishing prep. They looked up in some surprise, for Cardew was not a frequent visitor to the study.

"Busy, you men?" asked Cardew, closing the door quietly behind him and taking a seat on the edge of the table.

"No; we've nearly finished," answered Tom Merry. "What can we do for you, Cardew?"

"I really came to speak to Manners, but there's nothing you men shouldn't hear, I suppose. It's about this bizney of the Footer Club money."

Tom Merry looked rather grim.

"Well?"

"Possibly you haven't heard. In case you haven't, I'll

first of all give you the news free, gratis, and for nothing. The fellows have decided that Manners has got to stand his trial in the Common-room to-night."

Tom Merry nodded

"Thanks for the tip, Cardew. I'd already guessed there was something like that afoot."

"Looks like trouble again, then," remarked Lowther. "Better lock the door and keep 'em out."

"And make a jolly old heroic stand against overwhelming odds, what?" smiled Cardew. "I thought you had some such notion in your noddles. That's why I called."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, dear man, that I've come to tender a bit of advice. I want you to give in and let the trial take place to-night. Now, what about it, Manners?"

"Don't ask me. I don't know what to say, or what to do. What's the good of my facing the chaps when I haven't a shred of evidence to support my case? I can only tell them what I've already told them a dozen times—that I'm innocent. But what's the good of that?"

"A great deal of good, if you tell them in the right way," answered Cardew. "I accept it, for one."

"Thank you, Cardew."

"But Manners is right, nevertheless," put in Tom Merry, frowning. "Some of the fellows behind this movement for a trial are acting out of sheer spite. Racke, and Crooke, and one or two others I need not mention, want the trial simply because they're convinced that Manners will be found guilty."

"Exactly," agreed Cardew, urbanely. "That's all the more reason for agreeing to it. If Manners is found not guilty, his triumph will be all the greater."

"But he won't be," said Lowther gloomily. "If you know anything about the evidence, Cardew—"

"I do," interrupted Cardew. "I know quite a lot about the evidence. More, in fact, than Manners himself!"

"What?"

"Dear man, don't shout! It unnerves me!"

"You say you know more than I do myself?" asked Manners, trembling with excitement. "Look here, Cardew, this is no time for rotting. Does that mean—"

"That I have been inquisitive enough to look into the matter and find out one or two peculiar facts?" finished Cardew. "Yes, it does!"

"Tell me what you've found out, then! Does it bear out all I've said? For goodness' sake—"

"Peace, peace! All in good time!"

"Oh, do out the cackle, Cardew!" cried Tom Merry impatiently. "If you've got something up your sleeve, let's have it!"

"You can have it, dear man, but only on my terms, and even then, only at the time I choose to reveal it. To put the whole thing in a nutshell, I want Manners to stand his trial without asking further questions. After that, you can leave it to your Uncle Cardew."

"You hopeless ass!"

"Merely your opinion, Lowther! Others think I'm an exceptionally brainy sort of chap. I think that myself, as a matter of fact!"

Manners put away his books and rose from the table, his face flushed with excitement.

"Then you won't tell me, Cardew?"

"For the moment, no. But if you'll be good enough to trot down to the Common-room when Grundy and his army roll up—"

"Right-ho, then! I will!" broke in Manners. "Goodness knows what you're driving at, Cardew. But I'll take you on trust. I'll come!"

"Nobly spoken! And I don't think you'll regret it. Hallo! Here they come!"

The decision had been arrived at just in time, for as Cardew spoke, the study door was flung open, and Grundy of the Shell, looking grim and determined, walked in, followed by an excited crowd of Shellites and Fourth-Formers.

"We've come for you, Manners," Grundy growled, ignoring the rest. "There's going to be no dodging it this time, either. You've got to stand your trial. Savvy?"

"Dear old Grundy!" murmured Cardew affectionately. "Always rushing in where angels fear to tread!"

"You can dry up, Cardew! I'm not in the mood to stand any rot from you!" said Grundy darkly. "Now, what's it to be, Manners? Coming quietly, or would you prefer to be frog's-marched?"

And Grundy squared himself, ready to use force immediately it was needed. He was rather taken aback when Manners answered quietly:

"I'm coming. Not because I'm funky, Grundy, but because I choose to."

"Oh, well, that's all right, then. Buck up!"

The crowd were obviously surprised at Manners' quiet acquiescence to the proposed trial. Racke and Crooke and

one or two of the meaner spirits were even disappointed; they had rather looked forward to "ragging" the prisoner on the way to the Common-room.

Manners strode out of the study, with Tom Merry and Lowther and Cardew in close attendance, and the whole crowd then surged forward in the direction of the Common-room.

Nearly all the rest of the School House Fourth and Shell were waiting in the Common-room. Jack Blake & Co., of the Fourth, Bernard Glyn, and Talbot of the Shell, and a host of other fellows who had hesitated to associate themselves with the demand for a trial, were there in force. Figgins & Co. and a strong contingent of New House fellows had also turned up, the matter being one in which both Houses had an equal interest.

There was a buzz as Manners walked in.

"Here he comes!"

"Tom Merry, too!"

"Clear the decks!"

"Make way there, you men!"

Grundy pushed his way through to the front.

"Stand back, you idiots!" he roared, above the din. "Clear the space for the court! Let's have some chairs!"

In spite of the dimensions of the crowd, some semblance of order was soon obtained.

A rough sort of prisoner's dock was improvised with the aid of a few chairs, and a table was dragged round to a position opposite the "dock" to serve as the judge's seat.

Since Cardew's refusal to accept the responsibility of acting as judge, nobody else had been approached. Most of Manners' old friends would, of course, have declined the honour, and his enemies were naturally unfitted for the position.

Grundy now solved the difficulty by appointing himself judge. There was some demur at first, but it soon died down. The fellows, on reflection, realised that even though Grundy's mental powers were not of the highest order, he could at least be relied upon to use common sense and apply justice. So Grundy sat in the seat of judgment.

The burly Shell junior wore a wig taken from the amateur theatrical property-box, and was garbed in a master's gown which had been "borrowed" for the occasion.

The buzz of excitement died down as he sat squarely on the edge of the table and held up his hand for silence.

"I don't propose to waste a lot of time gassing," he said in his usual blunt way. "You all know what we're here for, so we'll get on with the business straight away. Racke is going to act as counsel for the prosecution. What about you, Manners? Do you want a counsel for the defence?"

Before Manners could answer that question himself, Cardew had stepped forward and answered it for him.

"Manners has instructed me to act for him, my lord," he said, with a low bow.

A murmur of interest ran round the room at that announcement. Grundy quietened it by yelling in a manner that hardly supported the best traditions of his distinguished position:

"Silence, you silly asses! Counsel for the prosecution: get on with the washing!"

The trial began.

CHAPTER 15.

An Amazing Revelation!

"MY lord, it is my unpleasant duty to bring to your notice certain facts which make it quite clear that the prisoner at the bar is guilty of embezzlement."

Aubrey Racke did not look as if it was exactly an unpleasant duty as he spoke. On the contrary, his cynical smile and glittering eyes seemed to indicate that he was enjoying himself.

"I will briefly reiterate the circumstances leading up to the charge being brought against the prisoner—"

"Here, draw it mild, Racke!" protested Grundy, from the seat of judgment. "This isn't Speech Day, you know!"

"I was only saying—"

"Well, don't say too much. Get on with the giddy washing!"

Counsel for the prosecution shrugged, but abandoned his high-sounding phrases from then on.

"The first intimation we had that something was wrong with the footer club funds was when Merry announced at the meeting that Manners had accidentally burnt ten pound notes," he began. "It was a strange story that Manners so strange, in fact, that the majority formed the opinion immediately that it wasn't true."

"That's wrong!" growled Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah. Utthahy w'ong!"

Racke merely smiled sarcastically.

"Naturally, my lord," he continued, "the least that could have been expected was that Manners should bring

forward some proof in support of his yarn that the notes had been burnt. Even a few ashes might have shown water-markings that would have been sufficient for the purpose. But no! Evidence of even the flimsiest kind was completely lacking. Manners gave us nothing, with the exception of his word. And I'm going to submit that, in view of certain facts that have come to light, Manners' word is not good enough—not by a long, long chalk!"

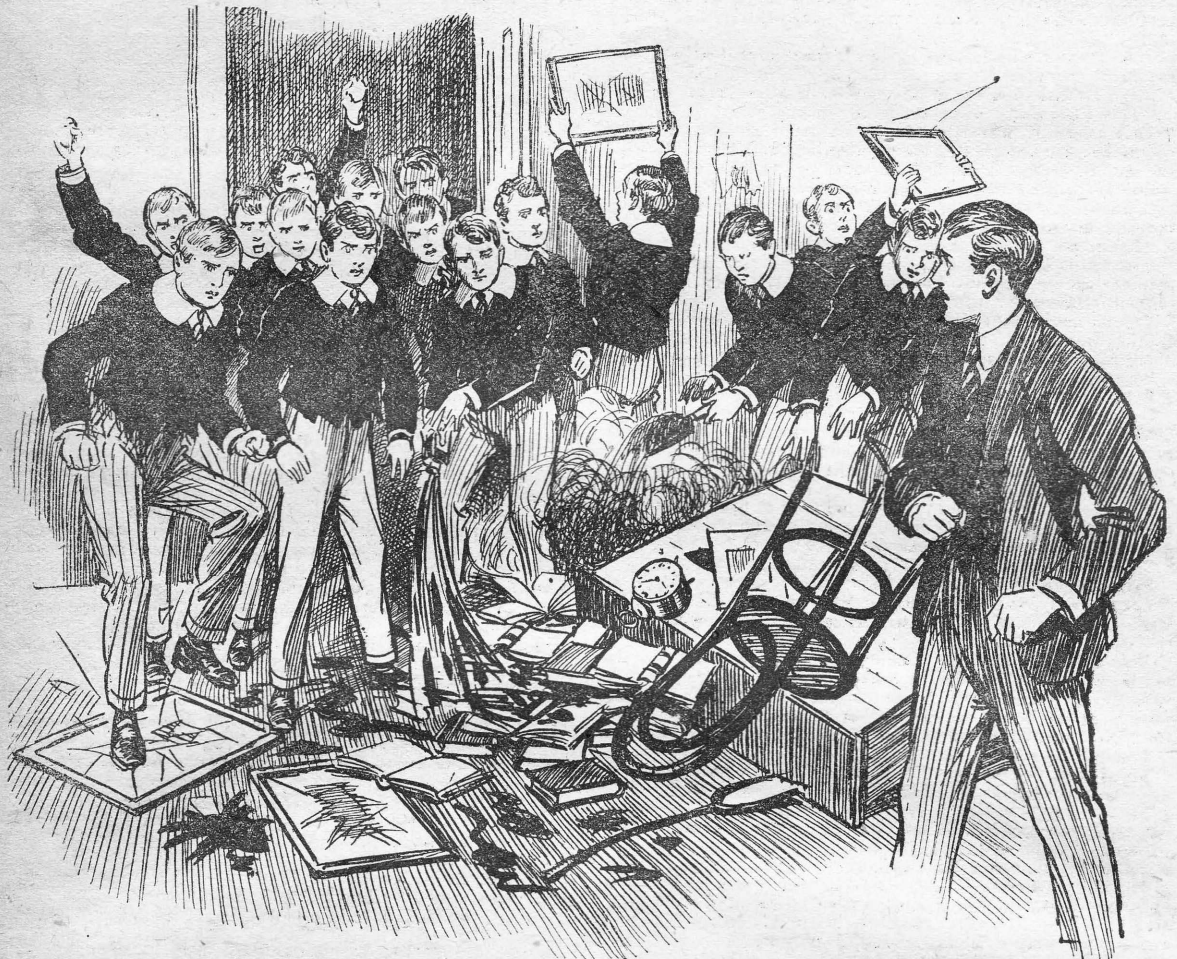
"Cheery old Aubrey! Isn't he enjoying himself?" murmured Cardew; and there was a chuckle from one or two of the crowd.

"My chief reason for doubting Manners' word over a matter of ten quid," went on Racke, "is that Manners, to the knowledge of a number of fellows present to-night, had been associating with a local bookmaker only a few hours

too much. It's incredible—it's impossible, and to accept it is to fly in the face of all the evidence, and to reject the common-sense of the thing altogether."

"Hear, hear!" murmured a good many juniors. "I suggest, therefore, that the only possible verdict in the case is 'guilty'! And, as the offence is a particularly rotten one, committed by a chap whom the club entrusted with their money, I submit that the prisoner should be made to suffer for it!"

That concluded Racke's speech for the prosecution, and the cad of the Shell stepped back into the crowd with a malicious smile of satisfaction. Without making the mistake of introducing too much of a personal note, he had stated the case against Manners briefly and effectively, and he flattered himself that he had convinced his listeners.



"Scrag the rotter!" "Smash up his study!" Into Gerald Cutts' study surged the crowd of juniors, destroying as they went. Within a couple of minutes the Fifth-Former's study was a scene of desolation and ruin, while Cutts himself stood by, not daring to utter a word of protest. (See Chapter 16.)

before the meeting. Now a bookmaker doesn't meet a fellow in the Shell at St. Jim's just for conversational purposes. When such a meeting takes place, you can rely on it that money is going to change hands—and it usually goes from the Shell fellow to the bookie."

"Experience teaches!" grinned Herries of the Fourth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I venture to submit, then, that it's more than probable that Manners paid money to Banks on that afternoon. He won't admit it, of course. But, on the other hand, he offers us no explanation, so what are we to conclude?"

"That Banks had the footer club money, of course!" answered Crooke, from the back of the crowd.

"Precisely. That's my own opinion. Now, Manners makes a lot of fuss about its being easy to prove that he drew the notes from the post office. I'm perfectly willing to take his word on that point. Probably he did. That only shows that he had the notes on him when he met Banks, and, in a way, strengthens the case against him. But when Manners asked us to go farther, and swallow that weird yarn about the notes being burnt and the ashes disappearing into thin air, then all I can say is, he's asking

Cardew lounged forward into Racke's place, hands in pockets, and smiled serenely at the crowd.

"My turn now, judge?" he asked.

Grundy nodded.

"I suppose so. There are no questions you want to put to the prosecuting counsel, Manners, is there?"

Manners shook his head.

"Go ahead, then, Cardew! Silence for the defending counsel!"

The voices died down, and the crowd closed in a little as Cardew began to speak. Cardew was not particularly popular in the Lower School at St. Jim's; he was too-difficult and complex a character for many of the fellows to take to. But he was generally recognised to be a good judge of character and a shrewd observer of school affairs, and the fact that he had taken up the cudgels on behalf of Manners excited a good deal of interest.

Cardew did not bother about formalities. He spoke in just the same, unconcerned tones as he would have used in his study. But what he said quickly riveted the attention of everyone in the room.

"I'm not going to take up your time for long, dear

men," he began quietly. "But when I've finished there won't be any doubt in your minds as to whether Manners is innocent or not. Racke's address was awfully interestin', and I congratulate him on it. The only drawback about it was that he didn't know anythin' about the matter. That, as it happens, is just where I score. I know the facts from A to Z—more so than the perfectly innocent fellow who stands on trial here to-night!"

There was a buzz as Cardew paused. Up to this point the verdict had seemed almost a foregone conclusion. Practically everybody in the room had felt that nothing short of a miracle could turn the case in Manners' favour. Now, as they heard Cardew's easy, confident tones, they began to wonder whether the miracle was at hand.

"I'll tell you just what I've found out, and how I found it out," continued Cardew. "Possibly some of you may take from the yarn a moral not to judge things too hastily in future."

One or two of the fellows looked rather uncomfortable, and began to wonder whether, after all, they had been too hasty. It was in a dead silence that Cardew went on:

"The first thing that occurred to me when I thought over this affair was that the remains of the burnt notes might be just as valuable as the original articles. Provided the numbers were still decipherable, the G.P.O. in London would be willing to pay compensation in full. Ergo—"

"Meaning 'therefore,'" put in Grundy, displaying unusual learning.

"Ergo, on consideration, the complete disappearance of the remains of the notes, which most of you have pooh-poohed as impossible, becomes suddenly very feasible indeed. Savvy?"

"You mean that it's easy to understand some rotter taking the ashes if those ashes are worth ten quid?" asked Tom Merry, his eyes gleaming.

"Exactly!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"That was the first thing I saw about it, anyway," said Cardew. "On the strength of that brilliant thought, I buzzed down to Rylcombe Post Office, to see if I could find out the numbers of the notes they had given to Manners."

"And could they tell you?"

"Dear man, they could! And with that information in my pocket I was emboldened to write off to the Postmaster-General without delay."

"What did you say?" asked Grundy.

He, like everyone else in the room, was in a fever of excitement by this time, for it was obvious that Cardew was leading up to a point where he would throw a bomb-shell into their midst.

"I didn't say much. Guessing that someone in the school had taken the burnt notes, I didn't want to implicate anyone I knew with the powers that be in London. So I just wrote and asked whether it was possible to claim for ten one-pound notes destroyed by fire, giving the numbers."

"And you got a reply?"

Cardew smiled and nodded.

"I did. But before I read the reply I must digress a little. There has been a lot of gas about Manners meeting with one Banks, a bookie. I want you to know the facts about that. In the Fifth Form there exists a merry blade, by name Cutts. Cutts has been in the habit of getting Manners minor of the Third to see Banks on his account. Hence Harry Manners' meeting with Banks. Manners major was simply warning Banks off—see?"

"Oh!"

"Just as luck would have it. Manners in so doing prevented Cutts from winning ten pounds on a gee-gee called Muscatel. Rather naturally, Cutts wasn't exactly pleased."

"Aren't you rather getting away from the point?" asked Grundy, with a frown.

"Not at all, old bean! I'm going to read the Postmaster-General's reply now, and you'll see just how things fit in."

"Go on, then!"

"Get it off your chest!"

The crowd, in their excitement, fairly swarmed round Cardew now, invading the space that had been kept clear for the holding of the court, and leaving the judge somewhat out of the picture.

Cardew, without undue haste, drew out an official-looking envelope from his pocket and abstracted a letter from it.

A pin could have been heard to drop as he read the letter. The atmosphere was electric. But Cardew was not affected by his surroundings, and his tones were as nonchalant as ever as he read the letter aloud:

"Mr. R. R. Cardew,

"St. James' College, Rylcombe.

"Dear Sir,—I duly received your letter of yesterday's date, and note that it is desired to claim in respect of Treasury notes numbered X1/7,395,885/94. I can only

assume that your claim is being made under a misapprehension, as a claim for these notes has already been admitted, and a remittance for £10 sent to Mr. G. Cutts, also residing at St. James' College, Rylcombe,—Yours faithfully,

"A. SCRIVENER (For the Postmaster-General)."

CHAPTER 18.

Manners' Triumph!

FOR a few seconds, the silence in the Common-room was unbroken. The amazing implications of Cardew's letter from the Postmaster-General could hardly be altogether understood in an instant.

Then there was a murmur among the juniors, quickly gaining in strength until it was an angry roar.

"So it was Cutts!"

"Cutts of the Fifth!"

"That rotter!"

"That cad!"

"That rank outsider!"

"And we've suspected Manners all the time!"

The emotions of the crowd underwent a sudden and violent transformation. The realisation that they had been ill-using the wrong man—that Cutts of the Fifth had actually been profiting from the loss of the notes for which Manners had been accused—turned the existing anger of the juniors into a new channel, and fanned it into a veritable white-heat of fury.

Faces the picture of mortification and regret turned to Manners from all sides. Muttered apologies were tendered. But Manners, in his excitement, scarcely heeded them. Pushing through the crowd, he went straight to Cardew, and held out a hand that trembled for the letter which Cardew was still holding.

"Let me see it with my own eyes. I can hardly believe it!" he said huskily.

Cardew gave him the letter, and Manners read it. His face had gone white under the first shock of Cardew's revelation. Now, as he read, the colour came back to his cheeks, and the eyes which had been dull gleamed with the light of sudden and complete understanding.

"Now I see; now I understand," he muttered. "Cutts was the one who took the remains of the notes. I might have known. But who would have guessed—"

"That any St. Jim's man would sink so low! Exactly!" finished Tom Merry, his face flushed with anger. "We know Cutts of old. We know he's a cad of the first water. But even Cutts couldn't have been suspected of such a blackguardly trick as this, unless proof like we've got now had come along."

"It's as plain as a pikestaff now," said Manners. "I remember clearly what happened. I met Cutts. Soon after the accident happened, it was. I ran into him outside the study. I was too worried to heed it at the time, but now I remember he was raging because that horse which I stopped him from betting on had won."

"And you told him about your burning the notes?" asked Grundy, who had by now come down from his perch and joined the crowd.

"Yes. I was in an awful state of panic at what had happened, and I had to tell somebody."

"And you left him there—outside your study?" asked Jack Blake.

Manners nodded.

"He wanted to detain me to talk about his rotten bet, but I pushed past him. He must have gone straight into the study after I'd left, and taken the remains of the notes, for it wasn't long before we all went back there from the meeting."

"That's so."

"Then—then what it amounts to is that Cutts is a thief," murmured Manners slowly.

"Thief! He's worse than that!" exclaimed Tom Merry hotly. "Not only has he robbed the club: he's also allowed your name to be dragged into the mud for it."

"It looks even worse than that to me," said Jack Blake. "As I judge it, Cutts must have seen clearly before he started that suspicion would fall on Manners. It's not only a matter of allowing Manners to take the blame after the thing was done; it's a matter of knowing full well that merely to take the notes would be to put Manners in the soup."

"Bai Jove. The feahful wottah!"

"The blackguard!"

"He ought to go to prison!"

"It would serve him right if it did come to that," remarked Lowther seriously. "But I suppose it can't very well."

"We can take the law into our own hands, though!" said Tom Merry grimly. "I suggest we go and see Cutts at once."

Instantly there was a roar of approval.

"That's the idea!"

"Wreck his study!"

"Tar and feather the cad!"

There was a general movement for the door. Tom Merry, once again undisputed leader now that the charge against Manners had so startlingly collapsed, led the way. Manners, his eyes bright again, and walking with a confident swing that had been absent since the beginning of the trouble, was on one side of him, and on the other was Ralph Reckness Cardew, looking rather out of place in all the haste and confusion. After them followed the best part of the Shell and the Fourth, lips set and faces grim.

Cutts was smoking a cigarette, and reading a pink sporting paper, when the crowd burst into the study.

"Good gad! What the thunder—" he gasped, instinctively throwing the half-smoked cigarette on to the fire.

His jaw dropped as he saw the dimensions of the crowd. For the moment he could only think that it was some gigantic "rag." He did not immediately associate this truculent-looking mob with the business of the Treasury notes. But he soon knew better.

"You're here, then. Good!" remarked Tom Merry, with satisfaction. "Put that poker down, Cutts—that won't help you. When you've heard why we've come, you'll probably want to keep things as quiet as possible, and a poker won't do that!"

"What do you mean?"

Cutts dropped the poker, and stared at the skipper of the Shell with sudden uneasiness.

"Do you know anything about the Treasury notes which Manners burnt the other night?" rapped out Tom Merry, fixing his eyes keenly on the Fifth-Former.

Cutts involuntarily fell back a pace at the unexpectedness of the question.

"I—I— Of course not. What the dickens are you getting at?" he managed to blurt out. "I've heard some yarns—"

"Be careful, Cutts!" interrupted Tom Merry sternly. "If I were you I wouldn't tell too many lies. They'll only make confusion all the more difficult afterwards!"

"You cheeky young hound—"

"Oh, shut up, and listen!" snapped the captain of the Shell. "You've obtained ten pounds from the General Post Office for some burnt Treasury notes, haven't you?"

"Certainly not! I—"

"Liar! We have heard from the postal authorities, saying that you have!"

"What?"

A look of terror flashed across Cutts' face as his lips formed the incredulous monosyllable.

"Show him the letter, Cardew!" commanded the junior skipper.

Cardew obeyed, and Cutts, with a tense, drawn face, read it.

"Now do you still deny it, old bean?" asked Cardew.

"Of course I do! It's a mistake—a ghastly coincidence—"

Tom Merry's lip curled.

"You insist on bluffing it out, then? Very well. You leave us no option but to take the matter to the Head, and ask whether he'll call in the police."

Cutts shook with fear. The mention of the police was just the last straw in this sudden overwhelming reversal of his fortunes. He laid a restraining hand on Tom Merry.

"No, no; don't take it to the Head!" he muttered. "For mercy's sake—"

"You'll admit the truth, then?"

Cutts licked his dry lips, and cast a wild, hunted look over the sea of faces around him. Then he nodded.

"I'll admit it. I'll admit anything, so long as you keep the Head out of it!"

"Then you took the remains of those notes from the fireplace in our study?"

"Yes, but not without reason. I was already ten quid down myself, all because of the interference of—"

"No time for reasons!" cut in Tom Merry curtly. "You admit that you sent them up to the G.P.O. and got reimbursement for them?"

"Yes, yes! I admit it—everything! But, for Heaven's sake, send this crowd away! If a master or a prefect came along—"

"You should have thought of that before! Where is the money you got from the Post Office?"

"I'll give it to you—you can have it now!" muttered the cad of the Fifth, eager to get rid of the proceeds of his trickery now that he saw the game was up.

With almost ludicrous haste he produced a wad of notes, and tremblingly handed them over to the Shell junior.

Tom Merry counted them, and transferred them to his own pocket. Then he turned to the crowd.

"Well, chaps, you have heard what's happened," he said quietly. "Cutts has confessed to everything. Out of his own mouth he's admitted to committing as dirty and blackguardly a trick as it's possible to imagine. I take it we're not going to let it rest at that?"

There was a deep, angry growl from the crowd.

"No fear!"

"Scrag the rotter!"

"Smash up his study!"

"Tar and feather him!"

One or two of the Fifth, who had joined the crowd, attracted by the unusual commotion, looked quite startled at the truculence of the juniors, and even attempted to edge their way to the front, with a view to seeing whether their assistance was needed in defending a member of their own Form. But they were too small in number to interfere to any extent, and the juniors hardly heeded them.

Into the study surged the crowd, destroying as they went. A bookcase was overturned with a crash, and a bottle of ink upset over the contents. The mirror over the mantelpiece was smashed, pictures were torn down and jumped on, and the carpet was liberally sprinkled with soot from the chimney. Within a couple of minutes Cutts' study was a scene of desolation and ruin.

(Continued on page 28.)

THE "TOFF" ONCE MORE!

Gemites will remember the time when Reginald Talbot was the star cracksman of a gang: how he could open the most difficult of safes with consummate ease. Those dark days of lawlessness the "Toff" has lived down; even his nickname would appear to be a thing of the past. And then, unexpectedly, a glimpse of the old Talbot is seen once more by the fellows at St. Jim's. . . . The "Toff" reappears. In

"TALBOT'S SACRIFICE!"

Mr. Martin Clifford has given you a tip-top treat. Don't miss it next week, whatever you do, boys!

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CAUGHT IN THE ACT!

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THE NEVER-SAY-DIE BOYS!

What chance does a band of schoolboys stand against a gang of notorious Chinese pirates? Precious little! But the Chums of the floating school ship are not daunted by the overwhelming odds against them—not a bit of it! They're after those pirates hot and strong!

CHUMS of the BOMBAY CASTLE

by **DUNCAN STORM**



OUR ROLLICKING SERIAL OF THRILLING ADVENTURE, DEALING WITH THE EXPLOITS OF DICK DORRINGTON & CO., HORACE, GUS AND LAL TATA, OF THE SCHOOL SHIP BOMBAY CASTLE.

The Pirate Ship!

NOW you are talking!" said Mr. Pugsley encouragingly. "That's about the first thing you've told me that informs me that your ship's turned pirate. Who's the skipper?"

"A Chinaman from Canton, a beastly fellow, called Wu Sin," said Mr. Love, the actor, eagerly. "He kicked me, the brute—me, Lionel Love! My word, if I only had the fellow at Hollywood, I'd—"

"You'd throw a piece of paper at 'im!" said Mr. Pugsley. "So Mr Sin is the new skipper of the Star of the East! Very good name for a pirate skipper, too! But how was it, when the crew mutined, that you was not put ashore on this atoll along of the rest of the white parties and the Europeans of the ship's crew?"

"I was down below!" said Mr. Love, looking slightly uncomfortable.

"In your cabin?" asked Mr. Pugsley.

"No," said Mr. Love. "When the struggle commenced I went down below under the engine-room!"

"In the bilges?" asked Mr. Pugsley mercilessly.

The boys were grinning.

Mr. Love turned on them angrily.

"What are all these kids grinning about?" he demanded. "I think a beastly boys' school is worse than a pirate ship!" he added. "No manners. I was a public schoolboy myself once," he added, with some dignity.

"Don't you worry about the boys," said Mr. Pugsley. "They are all right—a bit rough, you know. We takes 'em for the Bombay Castle from Eton an' 'Arrow an' Borstal and everywhere. But they are all right, and you are the first real cinema star they've ever seen. But what did they give you to do on the ship when she turned pirate?"

"Why, I had to read all the letters and papers to this brute, Ah Sin," said Mr. Love. "I was his private secretary. And when he had learned everything that he wanted to know, he wanted to put me down in the engine-room amongst a lot of beastly coolies, as a greaser. Of course, I kicked up a row, and then he chucked me overboard last night."

"You've been repainting the ship, I see," said Mr. Pugsley, looking at the skin of the unwilling pirate, which was splotted here and there with touches of red and black paint.

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"Yaas!" replied Mr. Love. "That's how I got foul of Wu Sin. He set me to painting the funnel red instead of yellow. And I did not like it. It was beastly hot up there. That's why he wanted to put me in the engine-room."

"And you went into Canjee Island to get a couple of boat chocks from the old wreck of the Siamese steamer there," said Mr. Pugsley. "When was that?"

"Yesterday afternoon!" said Mr. Love.

"Now I begin to see things," said Mr. Pugsley. "When you looted the Chinese junks, what did you take out of them?"

"Rice and tea, mostly," said Mr. Love.

"What did they do when they'd looted 'em?" asked Mr. Pugsley mercilessly.

"Burned them!" replied the actor.

"Did they murder the crews?" asked Mr. Pugsley.

"No," rejoined Mr. Love. "The brutes on board the junks were only too glad to join in with the pirates. They showed them which was the right stuff in the cargo, and, where there was cheap rice or damaged stuff on board, they just burned it with the junks!"

"Natural enough," said Mr. Pugsley. "Most Chink sailors are sailors by obligation, and pirates by inclination. But I want to know a bit about what happened to Mr. Ike Goldberg when the mutiny took place. What became of him? It seems that only him and you were not put on the island—marooned. Was 'e murdered?"

"All I know about Mr. Goldberg is that, when the mutiny broke out on board at night, I heard him shouting: 'Save the reels! Save the reels!'"

"Cotton reels?" asked Mr. Pugsley.

"No!" explained Mr. Love. "We had our great pirate film taken and finished. A stupendous six-reeler which had cost a hundred thousand pounds, and was worth a million. Fancy! A six-reeler with Claude Fairbrother and Jane Paterson and me! Why, these films were worth anything!"

"Quite!" agreed Mr. Pugsley. "Where were they kept?"

"In the ship's safe," replied Mr. Love. "Mr. Goldberg had one key and the captain had the other."

"So when the mutiny broke out and they was busting the boats to put 'em ashore, Mr. Goldberg was shouting 'Save the reels!'" said Mr. Pugsley.

"Exactly!" agreed Mr. Love.

"And what more did you hear?"

"I heard Mr. Goldberg give a cry," said Mr. Love. "And I heard him fall into the water alongside the ship. I looked out and saw his head bobbing in the water. Then I rushed from my cabin—"

"That's all right!" said Mr. Pugsley diplomatically. "Did Mr. Goldberg shout for help when 'e was in the water? Could 'e swim?"

"He was paddling about!" said Mr. Love.

"Ah!" said Mr. Pugsley thoughtfully. "Paddling about, was 'e? Now, to get to the milk in the coconut, can you remember anything besides coral and land-crabs and a lagoon, about this island where you went to fill out time and take your little one-reeler feature stories?"

Mr. Love looked thoughtful for a moment or two.

"There was—yes, I remember—there were three tall palms at the entrance to the lagoon," said he at last.

"They stand in a straight line, and if you keep the three palms in one you go through the entrance channel to the lagoon. And if you don't keep them in one, you go to the beastly rocks. The captain explained it all to me. It is a beastly dangerous island, all surrounded by coral reefs for miles and miles. I believe that's why they chose it, though I warned Claude Fairbrother against going there. 'Claudie, my dear boy,' I said to him, 'don't go near that beastly island. If you want to take coral islands they can be taken just as well at Margate or Yarmouth if you stick some paper palm-trees in the sand.' But Claude thinks only of production—he is an awful stick on exact settings; but he's no actor at all—the dear old boy is no actor! I wish, Mr. Dubsley—if that is your name—that you could have seen me in 'Heart Throbs,'" he added. "It was an exquisite show! I think really that I excelled myself, and that Heart Throbs was the greatest film ever taken. Ivor Novello! Pooh! Who is Ivor Novello?"

Mr. Pugsley laughed.

"Well, Percy," he said, "you've told me all I want to know at last. They've marooned your click on Three Palm Island. And I expect that, by this time, they'll be pretty tired of living on coconuts. Now, what will you have to drink? We've got a nice brew of lemonade, and there's ginger-beer and soda-water, and a few o' those fancy minerals the boys are so fond of—muck, I call 'em. They blow you out so!"

"Haven't you a bottle of champagne on board, my good man?" demanded Lionel Love, sticking his glass in his eye. "I never drink anything but champagne."

"Oh, come off it!" said Mr. Pugsley wearily. "We are a school ship—the Bombay Castle—not the Ritz—Carlton 'Otel. 'Ere, Skeleton, give this actor chap a quart of lemonade. Then look 'im out some clothes."

And Mr. Pugsley gave Skeleton a wink that was not to be misunderstood.

Although he was only used to drinking champagne, Mr. Love eagerly drank four glasses of Skeleton's lemonade. All the time he kept aloof from the boys, and looked down on them as if they were reptiles of the mud. This attitude annoyed the chums.

"He's a saucy dog, isn't he, Dick?" said Pongo. "I'd like to buy him at my price and sell him at his. Did you ever meet such a conceited beggar in your life?"

Dick laughed.

"We'll soon cure him!" said he. "Wait a minute; Skeleton is looking him out some clothes!"

The castaway had followed Skeleton down into the cabin.

A few minutes passed, and then from the companion hatch there came an angry, protesting voice.

"I can't wear those beastly clothes!" cried the movie star.

"They are all we've got, and I've seen Charlie Chaplin wear worse!" said Skeleton's voice soothingly.

"I am not Charlie Chaplin!" snapped Lionel Love.

"I bet you are not!" replied Skeleton, getting the spike from his guest's cast-iron conceit. "Anyway, those are all we've got!"

And a few minutes later yells of laughter went up from the boys as Mr. Lionel Love appeared in Cecil's old, torn Eton jacket, and his trousers patched across the seat with a bit of gunny sack.

He had to join in the laughter himself, and once it was realised all round that he was the Perfect Ass, he began to shake down with the boys and they began to get accustomed to his enormous conceit.

The noon and afternoon passed merrily away. Mr. Pugsley had altered course slightly and was making straight for Three Palms Island.

There were slight banks of haze on the sea, and popping out of one of these they had a glimpse of a red-funnelled steamer about a mile from them.

Mr. Pugsley took his glasses and brought them to bear on the stranger.

He had hardly got her in the field of view when there was a flash from the well deck of the steamer, followed by the boom of a gun.

"That's done it," said Mr. Pugsley. "We're chased by pirates!"

Away across the water came the sinister-looking steamer, red-funnelled and deep in the water, as she ploughed through the oily sea towards the D.S.B.

Her captain was apparently driving her all he knew, for volumes of a deep brown greasy smoke were pouring from her funnel.

"That's Chineese coal," said Mr. Pugsley, "and he's loo-tooted it out o' some junkerino!"

The gun which had flashed from the fore well deck of the steamer sent no shot towards them. A puff of blueish smoke and a large smoke ring floated away from the steamer as she drove through the bank of sea haze, keeping a course that would, sooner or later, bring her into Mr. Pugsley's sea road.

"That was a blank shot!" said Mr. Pugsley. "Signal to heave-to!"

He turned to Mr. Love, who was seated disconsolately on the cabin top.

"What d'you make of 'er, Doug?" he asked. "Is she the Star of the East?"

"Of course she is!" replied Mr. Lionel Love. "I ought to know! I painted her beastly funnel!"

"What sort of a gun is that which fires black powder?" asked Mr. Pugsley.

"Why," replied Mr. Love, "it's a long brass thing with dragons on it."

"How do they load it?" asked Mr. Pugsley.

"Why, they shove a bag of stuff down the mouth with a rammer, a silk bag. Then they put in a round shot made of cast iron," replied Mr. Love gloomily. "I know, because they made me blacklead their beastly cannon balls!"

"How big?" asked Mr. Pugsley.

"About the size of a cricket ball!" answered the Flappers' Pet.

"Right-ho!" said Mr. Pugsley. "I'm not 'clavving-to for any Chinese pirate armed with a muzzle-loader what can't sling anything larger than a cricket ball at us. We will give him a run for it."

"Is he faster than we are?" asked Dick Dorrington.

"He's heavy laden with loot!" said Mr. Pugsley, regarding their pursuer through his glasses. "If that

was a skipper in a regular way of business, as you might say, 'e'd get pulled for dipping 'is Plimsoll mark. We can do as good as 'e can, and maybe a bit better!"

Mr. Pugsley took another squint at the pirate. "You see, Master Dick," he added, "the rascal is down by the 'ead. That's proper pirate stovedoring. He's been pinching whatever came along and 'e's all up at Harwich with his loading. She's drawing

INTRODUCTION.

Dick Dorrington & Co., of the school ship Bombay Castle, together with their master, Mr. Lal Tata, are detailed to search for a shipload of movie actors who have mysteriously disappeared somewhere within the vicinity of the pirate-infested waters of the Archipelagoes of Pahang. In addition to the crew are the ship's pets—Horace, the goat, Gus, the crocodile, and Cecil, the ape. On nearing Bungaloo the boys are captured by pirates and taken before the Sultan, who falsely accuses them of smuggling. They are rescued from their perilous position by the ship's pets and succeed in reaching their boat in safety. Racing away from the Island of Bungaloo they come across a deserted liner which bears evidence of having been looted. The boys are driven off the anchored wreck by a strong contingent of pirates who put out from Canjee Island.

Speeding out to sea Dick & Co. sight a man afloat in a barrel, frantically waving for help. The castaway proves to be none other than Mr. Love, of the Star of the East, who informs Mr. Pugsley that the native actors, having taken charge of the ship had had the audacity to throw him—the greatest film star in the world—overboard, and put the rest of the ship's company ashore!

(Now read on.)

"Is there any objection to my playing a wee bit tune on my bagpipes to gi'e the pirates oor defiance?" asked MacCosh. "Not a bit!" replied Mr. Pugsley. Hamish tuned up, and commenced to play the "Defiance of the Clan MacCosh." (See this page.)



three feet more foward than she's drawing aft. That is why she is pushing up the water like a plough."

The gun flashed again.

This time it was loaded, and a ball hopped across the calm sea, kicking up a ricochet of white water fountains till it fell just short of the D.S.B.

"That wasn't a bad shot," said Mr. Pugsley approvingly. "Considering the material that gunner's got to work with, that shot brings considerable credit to all concerned. Now, young gents," he added, "will you all lie down flat on deck or get down in the cabin?"

Mr. Love hesitated.

"I should lie down if I was you, Bertie," said Mr. Pugsley encouragingly. "You can't spoil them clo'es! They used to be ole Cecil's Sunday suit—once!"

Mr. Love lay down with the rest, and the wisdom of Mr. Pugsley's advice was soon manifest, for a number of black figures lined up on the fo'c'sle head of their pursuer and bullets started to whine overhead.

"Just as I thought!" remarked Mr. Pugsley calmly. "We'll push 'er along a bit faster. But I don't want to run away from this chap altogether!"

"What's your game, Puggo?" asked Dick, who was lying flat on the deck close by the steersman.

"I'm going to show 'im a bit of navigation that 'e don't know 'imself, Master Dick," answered Mr. Pugsley. "At eight o'clock to-night, if I can persuade 'im to keep on follerin' us up, I think I can land 'im on Crippen's Corner!"

"Goodness!" exclaimed Dick. "Where's that?"

"Why," said Mr. Pugsley, "it's one of those queer spikes of rock that stick up from the bottom of the sea and for which there's no accountin'. We discovered it when I was a young man in an Admiralty survey ship—a very 'appy ship she was, too, under the command of Commander Lawless. Dropped on it when we was fishing, and charted it in the Admiralty charts."

"But why Crippen's Corner?" asked Dick, laughing.

"Well, you see, we found it jus' about the time that the Sunday papers reached us full of the story of the arrest of that there Crippen, the famous murderer, on

the high seas. It was one of the first uses of the wireless to detect crime, and we, being Navy chaps, was just getting interested in wireless ourselves. You remember ole Crippen—'im that was in the Chamber of 'Orrors at Madame Tussaud's. I paid sixpence to go and see 'im when I got 'ome again," added Mr. Pugsley. "Well, to cut a long story short—keep your 'ead down, Master Dick, that bullet was a close one—to cut a long story short, we called that rock after Crippen—and a nice, murderin' corner it is, if I can only coax our friend after us long enough."

Mr. Pugsley carefully increased his distance from the Star of the East yard by yard.

The sun was beginning to drop to the sea, and Mr. Pugsley shifted his course slightly so that he was soon steering straight into the eye of it.

"That'll dazzle their eyes," said he. "But I haven't heard a bullet for the last few minutes, though they still keep on popping. I expect they are falling short. I know the sort of rifles they got, all pitted in the barrel. Stands to reason—they never clean 'em!"

"You can keep a-lying down, young gents, till you see the green flash when the sun sets!" said Mr. Pugsley. "And it'll be sun down, moon up, to-night, which is just what I want."

"Is there any objection to my playing a wee bit tune on my bagpipes to gi'e the beggars oor defiance?" asked the voice of Hamish MacCosh from the forecassle of the little vessel.

"Not a bit," replied Mr. Pugsley. "They'll only think it's our wireless whooping!"

Hamish tuned up and played the "Defiance of the Clan MacCosh." And Cecil lay alongside him listening to the music and staring into the tropic sunset.

By long custom Cecil had got to like bagpipe music. At first it had made him cry. But now he kept close to Hamish, thoroughly enjoying it as the two vessels ploughed along.

(For the conclusion of this thrilling adventure serial see next week's GEM.)

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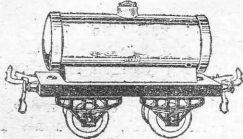
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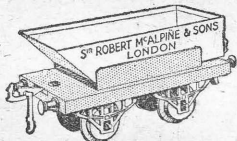
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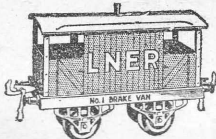
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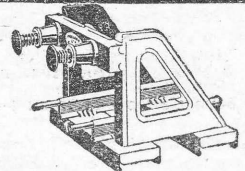


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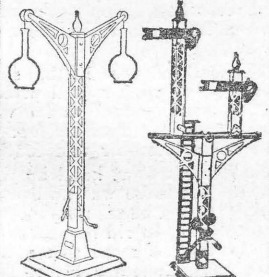


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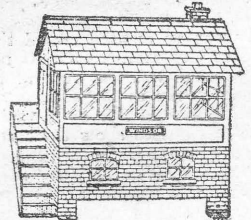


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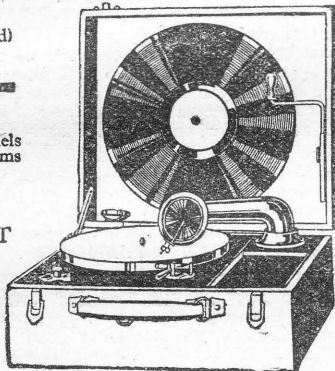
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"Under Suspicion!"

(Continued from page 23.)

Gerald Cutts himself stood by, cowed and beaten, not daring to utter a word of protest, simply praying for the speedy completion of their work. But the juniors were not satisfied with wrecking the study. Having done that, they laid violent hands on Cutts himself, and there was a general exodus from the Fifth Form quarters with Cutts in their midst.

The cad of the Fifth, still terrified of attracting the attention of masters and prefects, dared not struggle. But he felt genuine fear as he was rushed along to the junior Common-room. And his fear was well-founded. The crowd had decided to tar and feather him.

Bed-time was at hand by the time they had finished with Cutts. But there was no bed for Cutts for some hours after that. Long after midnight Cutts was still in a bathroom, trying to rid himself of his shameful covering. Never had Cutts felt more sick at heart than he felt that night. Like many another before him, he was finding that the way of the transgressor is hard!

It was an excited crowd that trooped up to bed from the Junior Common-room that night.

Manners was the hero of the hour. Fellows to whom he hardly spoke in the ordinary way came up and shook hands with him. Old friends, ashamed of their former doubts and anxious to show their repentance, flocked round him.

To Manners, for a time, it seemed all like some weird dream. The suddenness with which his trouble had come to him was as nothing to the suddenness with which it had departed. The whole thing seemed fantastic. Yet there was no question about its reality. By the strangest combination of circumstances, he had become involved in a difficulty from which there had seemed no escape. And only the clear, logical reasoning and sound common sense of Ralph Rockness Cardew had got him out of the wood.

At the passage at the top of the School House building where the Fourth separated from the Shell to go to their respective dormitories, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy called a halt that night.

"Gentlemen!" he said. "I suggest that it would be highly impopular if we parted on this remarkable occasion without giving some outward expression of the esteem in which we hold our friend and comrade, Hawwy Mannahs!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Gussy!"

"He has been through a vewy twyin' time. Speakin' for myself, I must say I nevah had the slightest doubt as to his integrity, but pewwaps in the extawordinawy circs, one can hardly blame the fellows who entertained doubts on the subject. Howevah, all's well that ends well, and the doubtahs will know bettah in the future!"

"Hear, hear!"

"And now, deah boys, let's give thwee hearty cheecahs for Mannahs! Let it wip now! Hip, hip, hip—"

And the juniors "let it wip," much to the astonishment

of Kildare, who came up the stairs to shepherd them to bed at that moment.

Manners halted for a minute to have a word with Cardew before going to his own dormitory.

"Cardew, I haven't thanked you yet," he said quietly. "Goodness knows what made you do all you've done for me. I've never had a lot to do with you in the past—"

"Dear man, don't mention it!" broke in Cardew lightly. "If an opportunity had presented itself of doing me a good turn, I expect you'd have done it. Well, that's all I did for you."

Manners smiled.

"You're belittling it, Cardew. But you've been a real brick—a pal, if ever there was one! I'm no hand at giving thanks—"

"And I'm no hand at receiving them, old bean!" said Cardew, with a grimace. "So we'll call it quits—what? Here's my hand on it!"

Two hands met in a firm grip, and for an instant two

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LARWOOD
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pairs of eyes met frankly in friendship. That was all. But both to Manners and to Cardew it meant much.

Manners' head rested on the pillow that night in a contentment he had not known since the beginning of his dark trouble. The clouds had rolled away now. No worries were left to make sleep fitful and uneasy. As consciousness merged into the oblivion of sleep, Manners felt his heart go out in friendship to friends and enemies alike—and, above all, to Ralph Rockness Cardew, slacker and dandy, who in his own whimsical way had worked to establish his innocence when he was Under Suspicion!

THE END.

(Look out for another grand long story of Tom Merry & Co. in next week's GEM, entitled: "TALBOT'S SACRIFICE!" It's the type of yarn you've all been waiting for, so make sure of reading it by ordering your copy WELL IN ADVANCE!)

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