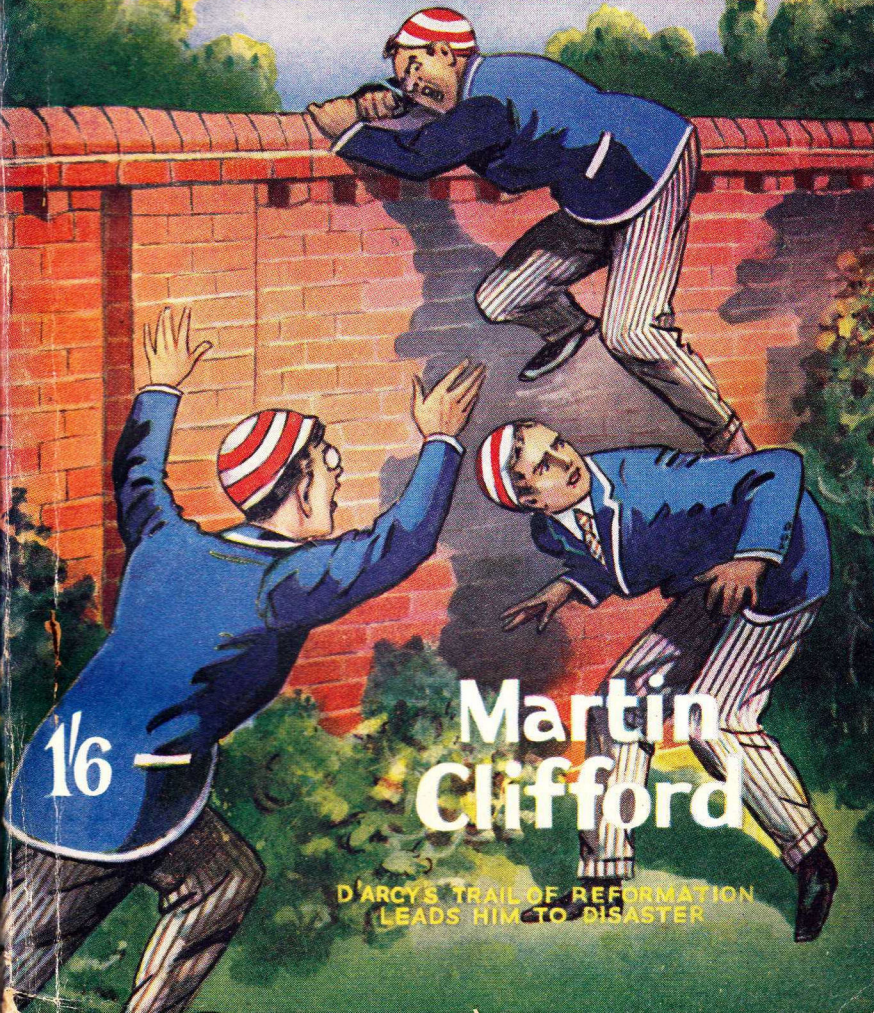




A NEW SERIES FEATURING ARTHUR
AUGUSTUS D'ARCY, THE "SWELL" OF ST. JIM'S.

D'ARCY, THE REFORMER



1/6

Martin
Clifford

D'ARCY'S TRAIL OF REFORMATION
LEADS HIM TO DISASTER

Our Cover Picture

But Cardew was going out of bounds now—not however, if Arthur Augustus could stop him.

He ran forward.

“Cardew, you wottah ! Stop !

“Oh, gad !” Cardew, with his hands on top of the wall, stared down. “You meddlin’ fool, mind your own business,” he snapped.

D'ARCY,
THE REFORMER

Martin Clifford



Hamilton & Co. (Stafford) Ltd.
LONDON

By special arrangement with Frank Richards (Martin Clifford), also creator of Billy Bunter and the Chums of Greyfriars. Other titles in this series are:

No. 1 TOM MERRY'S SECRET

No. 2 TOM MERRY'S RIVAL

No. 3 THE MAN FROM THE PAST

No. 4 WHO RAGGED RAILTON?

No. 5 SKIMPOLE'S SNAPSHOT

No. 6 TROUBLE FOR TRIMBLE

No. 7 D'ARCY IN DANGER

No. 8 D'ARCY ON THE WAR-PATH

No. 9 D'ARCY'S DISAPPEARANCE

Gold Hawk Books are printed in Great Britain and published by Hamilton & Co. (Stafford) Ltd., 1 & 2, Melville Court, Goldhawk Road, London, W.12.



1

Not Guilty!

“YOU clumsy ass!” gasped Tom Merry.

He staggered.

Manners and Lowther stared.

Why Aubrey Racke, of the Shell, suddenly rushed from behind the massive trunk of an old elm and crashed into Tom Merry seemed quite inexplicable.

But that was what Aubrey Racke did.

The “Terrible Three” were sauntering on the path under the elms, thinking of anything but Racke. Tom Merry was talking cricket: and Manners and Lowther were giving ear

to his remarks on that important subject: or at least appearing to do so. In point of fact, Monty Lowther was in the throes of composing a limerick, while Manners was thinking of some films he had to develop. But they were good chums, and did not mind Tom running on about cricket, while they pursued their own thoughts.

But they forgot all about cricket, limericks and films, when Racke happened so suddenly.

He came with a rush from behind an elm. He could easily have passed the chums of the Shell without a collision. But apparently he was in too much of a hurry to see them in his way. At all events, he crashed right into Tom Merry, sending him staggering back.

And that was not all.

Apparently to save himself from falling, Racke threw his arms round Tom, clutching him, and fairly dragged him over.

They went to the ground together with a bump.

Tom Merry, gasping, sprawled helplessly: and Aubrey Racke sprawled over him, panting, and still clutching at him. They rolled over, gasping and panting and spluttering. It was quite a mix-up.

"You clumsy ass—gerroff!" gurgled Tom Merry. He hurled Racke aside, and staggered to his feet.

"Oh!" gasped Racke. "Oh! Sorry—I didn't see you—" He picked himself up breathlessly.

"Blind?" snapped Tom. Tom Merry was a good-tempered fellow, and not liable to get excited over an accident. But it had been so very unnecessary an accident, and he could not help a suspicion that Racke had barged him over intentionally. There was no love lost between the captain of the Shell, and the black sheep of that Form.

"I—I—I—!" stammered Racke.

A sharp voice interrupted.

"Racke! Stop! Stop at once!" It was the voice of Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's.

The next moment, the Sixth-Form man appeared, coming into view from beyond the massive elm round which Racke had rushed. His face was flushed and angry.

Racke gave him a stealthy look.

"Do you want me, Kildare?" he asked.

"You know I do!" snapped Kildare. "Hand me that packet

of cigarettes at once, Racke, and then follow me to my study."

Upon which, Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther guessed the cause of Aubrey Racke's hurry. Evidently, the festive Aubrey had been spotted with "smokes" by the prefect, and had sought to dodge away—no doubt hoping to get rid of them before they could be found on him.

But Aubrey Racke did not look so dismayed as the Terrible Three would have expected. Smokes in a junior's possession meant "whops": and Racke was not the fellow to face up to punishment with equanimity. But instead of dismay in his pasty face, there was only surprise. If it was assumed, it was very well done.

"Cigarettes?" he repeated. "Did you say cigarettes, Kildare?"

"You heard me!" snapped the prefect. "Hand them over at once."

"But I haven't any," protested Racke.

"What?" Kildare gave him a glare. "You young sweep, I saw the packet in your hands, under that tree, and you bolted as I came towards you. I saw it quite plainly, and you have it about you now."

"I haven't," said Racke, sullenly. "I had a packet of toffee in my hand, Kildare—"

"Toffee!" repeated Kildare.

"Yes, a packet of toffee—"

"Do you think I don't know the difference between a toffee-packet and a cigarette-packet?" exclaimed the captain of St. Jim's, angrily. "Turn out your pockets at once, Racke: all of them."

"I'm quite willing!" grunted Racke.

And he proceeded to turn out his pockets, pulling out the lining of each in turn, to show that it contained nothing more.

Various articles came to light: among them a packet of toffee. But there was nothing even remotely resembling a packet of smokes.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther looked on, wondering whether Kildare had made a mistake. They knew Aubrey Racke, and his manners and customs: many fellows in the Lower School knew that Racke, and Crooke, and Cardew of the Fourth, acquired supplies of surreptitious smokes at the back door of the Green Man at Rylcombe. They expected

a packet to appear in sight when Racke turned out his pockets under Kildare's watchful eyes. But it really looked as if the prefect had made a mistake: for there was nothing of the kind to be seen.

Kildare looked puzzled.

"Have you thrown it away?" he snapped.

"I've thrown nothing away," said Racke, sullenly. "It was a packet of toffee you saw—"

"That will do!"

"These fellows would have seen me, if I'd thrown anything away," said Racke. "You can ask them."

Kildare glanced at the Terrible Three.

"Racke threw nothing away here, Kildare," said Tom Merry. "We should have seen him if he had."

And Manners and Lowther nodded.

"Sure?" snapped Kildare.

"Quite!" said all three together. Little as they liked Racke and his ways, they were quite ready to state what they knew. And they knew that Racke had thrown nothing away since he had so suddenly burst upon them on the path under the elms.

Kildare cast a searching look round. Racke ventured on a slight shrug of the shoulders. Obviously, if a packet of cigarettes had been thrown away, it could not be very far off. But the most searching glances failed to discover anything like a packet lying on the ground among the old elms.

Kildare looked more puzzled than ever: and perhaps a little sheepish. He had been quite certain that he had spotted that packet of smokes in Racke's hand, when he came on him under the elms: but it was not in Racke's pockets, and it was not to be seen anywhere.

Monty Lowther closed one eye at his friends, and they smiled. They liked old Kildare: and they did not like Racke; but the situation seemed just a little comic to them. Racke, it seemed, was innocent, for once at least, and the head-prefect of St. Jim's had blundered: apparently having mistaken a harmless packet of toffee for a packet of forbidden smokes.

"Why did you clear off so suddenly, if you had nothing to hide?" snapped Kildare, his eyes on Racke again.

"I didn't know you wanted me," said Racke, meekly.

"Well, I can't quite make it out!" said Kildare, slowly. "I certainly thought—well, never mind! You can cut."

"Thank you," said Racke, demurely: and he walked away into the quad, with a grin on his face as soon as his back was turned to the captain of St. Jim's.

Kildare gave the Terrible Three a rather grim look: perhaps having detected glimmering smiles on their faces. Then, frowning, he walked away. And, the incident being closed—though Tom Merry and Co. had reason to remember it later—the Terrible Three resumed their saunter: Tom Merry talking cricket, Monty Lowther silently getting on with his limerick, and Manners thinking about his films!

2

A Word in Season!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY, of the Fourth Form, raised his eyebrows—with the unintentional result that his eyeglass dropped from his eye.

He fielded it, jammed it into his noble eye again, and fixed it on two fellows standing by the balustrade on the study landing in the School House.

D'Arcy was coming up to tea in his study, when his eyes fell on Racke of the Shell, and Cardew of the Fourth, talking and laughing together on the study landing.

Apparently they were sharing some good joke: for both of them seemed highly amused. And they seemed on quite friendly terms, which was unusual.

Whereat had Arthur Augustus raised his eyebrows.

For Aubrey Racke, the dingy black sheep of the Shell, breaker of bounds and backer of "geegees," Arthur Augustus had only disdainful indifference. But with Cardew, the matter was not quite the same.

Cardew was his relative—a distant one, it was true: still, a relative. He was, like Aubrey, rather a black sheep: for which reason Arthur Augustus, in the goodness of his heart, was somewhat concerned about him: and had, indeed, often pointed out to him the error of his ways. Sad to relate, Cardew did not take kindly to fatherly advice from Gussy: and made no secret of his opinion that his noble relative was the biggest ass at St. Jim's or anywhere else.

But though Cardew of the Fourth, and Racke of the Shell,

had tastes very much in common, they were not often seen together. Racke, loud and blustering, generally jingling money in his pockets, was quite unlike the cool, supercilious dandy of the Fourth, who as a rule kept him at arm's length.

Now, however, they seemed to be enjoying a joke together: which was a surprise, and not an agreeable one, to Arthur Augustus: indicating to his noble mind that his reckless relative was going from bad to worse.

So instead of crossing the study landing to the Fourth-Form passage, Arthur Augustus paused, and looked at them, frowning a little. Cardew was speaking, and laughing as he spoke.

"In his pocket?"

Racke chuckled.

"Yes, and just in time!" he answered.

"And he never spotted it?"

"Never dreamed of it!" grinned Racke.

"And Kildare—"

"Never dreamed of it, either."

"Well, I suppose he wouldn't! But that ass Merry—Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed Racke.

They laughed together.

What their remarks might mean, Arthur Augustus had not the foggiest idea. Neither was he interested. What concerned him was the apparent friendliness between his relative, and that unspeakable "bounder," Aubrey Racke. With a severe expression on his aristocratic face, he came towards them. He had made up his noble mind to speak a word in season as it were!

Ralph Reckness Cardew glanced at him. Then he grinned at Racke.

"Shall we tell him the joke, Racke?" he asked.

Aubrey Racke looked alarmed.

"No, you ass! Keep it dark. I don't want a row about it."

"No, I suppose you don't!" said Cardew, laughing. "Tom Merry would cut up rusty, I imagine—"

"Shut up, will you?" muttered Racke.

"Oh, all right!" Cardew smiled at his relative. "Sorry I can't tell you the jolly old joke, Gussy! It's a good one."

"I have not the slightest desiah to heah anythin' you have

heard fwom Wacke, Cardew," said Arthur Augustus, stiffly. "I am not in the vevy least intewested in anythin' concerned with a boundah like Wacke."

Aubrey Racke flushed. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's politeness generally had a very high polish. But he seemed to have none to waste on Racke.

"Look here—!" growled Aubrey.

"Pway do not address me, Wacke," said Arthur Augustus. "I am speakin' to my welative, not to you. I bar you, Wacke."

"You silly, cheeky ass—"

"Wats! Cardew, I am sowwy to see this!" said Arthur Augustus, fixing his eyes on his relative, and taking no further notice of the angry Racke. "Although you are wathah a wottah in many ways—"

"What?"

"Wathah a wottah in many ways, I am vevy surprised to see you chummin' with a wank outsidersah like Wacke—"

"Look here—!" roared Racke.

"And I twust that you will dwop it," said Arthur Augustus. "You are awah, Cardew, that you have had a vevy nawwow escape of gettin' sacked, and that the House-mastah and the pwefects have an eye on you. I twust, Cardew, that you will wegard a word of warnin', and not allow Wacke to lead you into any of his wotten and disweputable goin's on—"

Cardew chuckled. The expression on Aubrey Racke's face seemed to entertain him. Quite regardless of Racke, the swell of St. Jim's went on:

"Wacke will be sacked soonah or latah, Cardew. I should ve vevy sowwy to see a welative of mine sacked along with him. My advice to you is to pick your fwriends more carefully, and I stwongly wecommand you to keep a boundah like Wacke at a distance."

Aubrey Racke clenched his hands, hard. He would have given much to land his knuckles in Arthur Augustus's aristocratic face, and lay him flat on the study landing. But Aubrey Racke was hardly equal to dealing with the swell of St. Jim's: smoking cigarettes behind an elm, and breaking bounds after lights out, did not make for fitness: while Arthur Augustus,

with all his elegant manners and customs, was as hard as nails. So Racke, though he clenched his hands, kept them where they were: and Arthur Augustus delivered his homily uninterrupted.

Cardew smiled.

"That's your advice, is it?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah," answered Arthur Augustus, with emphasis, "and I twust, Cardew, that you will wegard it."

"What about to-morrow night, Racke?" said Cardew.

"Weally, Cardew—!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"I'm speakin' to Racke, D'Arcy! Don't interrupt! What about to-morrow night at ten o'clock, Racke? Half an hour after lights out will be safe as houses. Are you on?"

"Don't shout it out, you ass," muttered Racke.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders. "Why not? D'Arcy wouldn't give a fellow away. Would you, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus coloured with indignation.

"Certainly I would not give any fellow away, Cardew, but if you are thinkin' of bweakin' bounds to-morrow night in company with Wacke—"

"Like to come?" asked Cardew. "There's quite a jolly sportin' set at the Green Man—!"

"You uttah wottah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, crimson with indignant wrath. "How dare you pwopose anythin' of the kind? I wegard you as an uttah wat, Cardew, and I wegwet vevy much that you are welated to me. I wegard you as bein' as uttah a wottah as Wacke!"

And with that, and with his noble nose in the air, Arthur Augustus walked, or rather stalked, away to Study No. 6.

Cardew smiled, and Racke scowled, after him, as he went. Then Aubrey Racke turned to Cardew with quite an eager expression. Cardew had always kept him at a distance hitherto: and Racke had often tried to traverse that distance. Now it looked as if he had succeeded.

"I say, you mean that, Cardew?" he said. "I'll be jolly glad, old chap. To-morrow night, half an hour after lights out—"

"Not at all!" answered Cardew, coolly.

"But you said—"

Cardew laughed.

"Pulling Gussy's leg," he explained. "What I said was purely for dear old Gussy's benefit, to give him somethin' to think about. He's rather amusin', you know."

"But look here—if you'll come—I'm going myself, anyway, and I'd be jolly glad if you'd come, old fellow," urged Racke.

Cardew looked at him, with cool contempt in his eyes. He had not the slightest intention of "chumming" with the disreputable Racke. They had tastes in common: but nothing else. If Racke was paying a surreptitious visit to the Green Man on Tuesday night, that was a quite sufficient reason for Cardew to refrain from doing so.

Arthur Augustus really need not have been alarmed on that score. Nothing would have induced Cardew to join up with Racke in one of his disreputable expeditions. Even in his shady escapades, he was rather particular about the company he kept. —

"Do come, old chap!" urged Racke.

"Old chap" from Racke made Cardew wince. But his manner was quite urbane as he replied.

"Too jolly risky! What D'Arcy said is true—the pre's have an eye on me: I'm not chancin' it. Hallo, here's jolly old Thomas—think he's still got it in his pocket?"

He glanced over the balustrade at three Shell fellows on the lower staircase. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were coming up.

Racke laughed.

"He's got it all right! He never dreamed why I barged into him. I got hold of him and lugged him over, and slipped the packet into his jacket pocket—he never knew a thing. I had only a second or two, with Kildare at my heels—but I pulled it off all right."

"Goin' to ask him for it?"

Racke stared.

"No, you ass! I don't want a row with him—and he would be pretty wild if he knew that a fellow shoved a packet of cigarettes into his pocket to keep it away from a prefect! Mum's the word."

"Fancy the spotless Thomas walkin' about the House with naughty smokes in his pocket!" murmured Cardew. "What

would Gussy think, if he happened to pull it out under his nose? What?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He could deliver his sixthly and seventhly to Thomas, instead of to me!" said Cardew, with a chuckle. "Rather a lark to hear him warnin' Tom Merry about the error of his ways!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Racke.

The Terrible Three came up to the landing, and glanced at Racke and Cardew as they passed. They went on to Study No. 6 in the Fourth, where they were booked to tea with Arthur Augustus and his friends. Cardew watched them, as they went, with a glimmer in his eyes.

3

Tea in Study No. 6

JACK BLAKE, at the tea-table in Study No. 6, winked at other fellows sitting round that table, and they smiled.

Only Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not smile. He did not see the wink: neither, had he seen it, would he have smiled.

The swell of St. Jim's was deep in thought. There was a wrinkle in his brow which told of deep mental concentration within. He was silent: and so far from joining in the cheery chat of the juniors round the table, did not seem even to hear it. Indeed, he seemed almost to have forgotten that he was teeing at all, for the sardines on his plate were almost untouched, and he had hardly started when the rest had almost finished.

Evidently, some matter of deep import was weighing on the noble mind of the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Not a single topic started at the table seemed to draw his attention. Tom Merry talked in vain of cricket and the coming match with Carcroft. Monty Lowther recited a limerick to deaf ears, so far as D'Arcy was concerned. Manners described a snap he had taken of the School House: Blake and Herries described how they had tipped over Figgins of the New House and left him sitting in the quad: Digby related how Cutts of the Fifth had shoved him on the staircase, and he had had a jolly good mind to hack Cutts' shins: but all these interesting topics passed Arthur Augustus by, like the idle wind which he regarded not: and he remained

plunged deep in thought. Hence the wink which Blake bestowed on the tea-party, and the smiles that surrounded the table.

"Didn't they fit, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry, at last.

"Eh!" Arthur Augustus woke up, as it were. "Did you speak, Tom Mewwy?"

"I did! I asked you if they didn't fit?"

"Didn't what fit?"

"Your new trousers."

"Yaas, wathah," answered Arthur Augustus, innocently: and the tea-party chuckled. "The twousahs are quite all wight, Tom Mewwy."

"Then what are you looking like a boiled owl about?" asked Tom.

"Bai Jove! I was quite unawah that I was bearin' the least wesemblance to a boiled owl, Tom Mewwy. I—I was thinkin'—"

"Are these sudden changes good for you?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Somebody been putting ink in your topper again?" asked Manners.

"It is wathah more sewious than even that, Mannahs," answered Arthur Augustus. "I am wathah wowwied, as a mattah of fact."

"Lines?" asked Tom.

"It is wathah more sewious than lines, deah boy. I am wathah wowwied about that welation of mine," said Arthur Augustus. "Cardew, you know."

"Oh, blow Cardew," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"What the dickens does Cardew matter?" grunted Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Better finish your tea, if you're coming down to the nets after it," said Digby.

"Oh! Yaas! Wathah! All wight!"

Arthur Augustus became conscious of the fact that the sardines were still on his plate. He proceeded with his tea.

But the thoughtful look returned to his noble brow. Evidently he was deeply concerned about that relative of his, Ralph Reckness Cardew of the Fourth Form. Cricket was

resumed as a topic: but Arthur Augustus contributed nothing on the subject of the summer game. Neither did he continue with the sardines. Once more he was sunk in deep meditation.

Monty Lowther, in his turn, winked at the tea-party. He was sitting next to Arthur Augustus, and he helped himself to jam. In doing so, he ladled a spoonful over Gussy's sardines.

That playful action passed quite unnoticed by the swell of St. Jim's. His mind was evidently far away. There was a chuckle in Study No. 6. It was quite an interesting question to six fellows, whether Arthur Augustus would notice the jam before he re-started on the sardines.

"Aren't you going to finish your tea, Gussy?" asked Lowther.

"Eh? Oh! Yaas!" said Arthur Augustus. "The fact is, you know, I am vewy wowwied about Cardew, and I was twyin' to think out what I had bettah do. Bai Jove! Are you fellows finished? I will huwwy up."

Six pairs of eyes were fixed on Arthur Augustus, as he proceeded with the sardines. The next moment there was something like an explosion.

"Gwoooooooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wooooooogh! Oooogh!" spluttered Arthur Augustus.

"Anything the matter, Gussy?" asked Lowther, blandly.

"Wooogh! Yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"The sardines—"

"Anything wrong with them?" asked Blake.

"They seem to have a most extwaordinawy taste! It is quite howwid. I have nevah noticed a sardine taste like waspbewwy jam befoah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the tea-party.

"Weally, you fellows, it is not a laughin' mattah," exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "There must be somethin' feahfully w'ong with those sardines—vewy w'ong indeed. Did you fellows notice it?"

"Seemed to me all right," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Same here," said Blake.

"It is vewy wemarkable," said Arthur Augustus. "I shall certainly not finish them! I twust you fellows will not feel

any ill-effects! I am afraid they must be mouldy, or something—that sardine had a flavour like waspbewwy jam, which is vewy wemarkable in a sardine. Why—!” Arthur Augustus stared at his plate. “It IS waspbewwy jam—”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Some sillay ass has been puttin’ jam on my sardines—”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Weally, you fellows—”

“Ha, ha, ha!” yelled the tea-party.

“If you go to sleep over your meals, these things will happen,” said Monty Lowther, shaking his head.

“I did not go to sleep, Lowthah, you ass. I was thinkin’, and I wegard such a twick as uttably wotten!” said Arthur Augustus, warmly. “I am vewy much wowwied about my welative, Cardew. I weally do not quite know what to do in the mattah. I have to think it out befoah to-mowwow night.”

“Why to-morrow night?” asked Tom.

“Cardew up to his tricks again?” grunted Herries.

“Of course, you fellows will not let it go furthah,” said Arthur Augustus. “I do not want to get Cardew into a wow. Wailton would be down on him like a ton of bwicks if he got wind of it. Pewwaps you fellows could advise a fellow,” went on Arthur Augustus, glancing round. “It weally is wathah a pwoblem. Cardew is goin’ out of bounds to-mowwow night with that uttah wottah Wacke of the Shell—”

“Not likely,” said Tom. “Cardew never pals with Racke. They’re birds of a feather, in a way, but Cardew wouldn’t touch him with a barge-pole.”

“That is what I should have thought, deah boy, Wacke being such an uttah boundah, and Cardew bein’ a welation of mine! But I actually heard them fixin’ it up.”

“Oh!” said Tom.

“They are goin’ out at ten to-mowwow night,” went on Arthur Augustus. “It is no business of mine what that wottah Wacke does, and in fact the soonah he is spotted, and sacked, the bettah—”

“Hear, hear!” said the tea-party.

“But it is a vewy diffewent mattah with Cardew—”

“Is it?” said Dig.

“Yaas, wathah! He is a welation of mine, and a fellow doesn’t want to see a welation sacked. And since the last

wow he was in, old Wailton has an eye on him, and all the House pweffects, too. Apart fwom the wottenness of bweakin' out at night, it is vewy wiskey! I cannot let him cawwy on."

"How are you going to stop him?" asked Blake, with a stare.

"That is what I was twyin' to think out," said Arthur Augustus. "What do you fellows think I had bettah do in the mattah?"

"What about minding your own business?" suggested Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"That's a jolly good idea," said Dig, heartily. "Had you thought of that one, Gussy?"

"Weally, Dig—"

"Let him rip!" grunted Herries. "No business of yours, anyway, Gussy."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther smiled, without proffering advice. Probably had they proffered it, it would have been the same as Blake and Co.'s. Arthur Augustus's sense of duty towards an erring relative was, no doubt, much to his credit: nevertheless, it was not up to one Fourth-former to bring up another in the way he should go. And it was quite certain that Ralph Reckness Cardew would not listen to sage counsel from Arthur Augustus; but would go on his wild and wayward way quite regardless of it.

"What do you think, Tom Mewwy?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"I think we'd better get along to the nets, if we're going to get any cricket before lock-ups," answered Tom, rising from the table.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"And let Cardew go and eat coke," said Blake. "Blow Cardew, anyway: he's a worm."

There was a tap at the door and it opened as Blake was speaking. Ralph Reckness Cardew stepped in.

"Thanks!" he said. Evidently he had heard Blake's remark.

Blake gave him a stare.

"Not at all," he said. "You're welcome to hear what I think of you. Blow you—you're a worm—if you want to hear it again."

"And so say all of us!" said Monty Lowther, affably.

"Hear, hear!" said Manners.

Tom Merry did not speak: and Cardew looked at him.

"So glad to hear your friendly opinions," he remarked.

"Do you say the same, Tom Merry?"

"Well, as you ask me, yes," answered Tom. "You know what I think of you, Cardew, and your ways. You'd be in the eleven for the Carcroft match, if you could keep straight—but you can't. You know what I think of a fellow who likes backing horses and smoking more than cricket."

"Well, I wasn't goin' to ask you that, really," drawled Cardew. "I was goin' to ask if you'd spare me a cigarette—I've run out of smokes."

Tom stared at him blankly. So did every other fellow in Study No. 6.

"Is that a joke?" asked Tom.

"Not at all."

"Then what do you mean?" exclaimed Tom, angrily.

"Only what I say! Will you spare me a cigarette from your packet?"

"You know perfectly well that I have no such thing about me." Tom Merry's eyes glinted. "If you've come here for a row, Cardew—"

"Not in the least! I've run out of smokes, and as you've got a packet, I think you might let me have one. I'd do the same for you," said Cardew, blandly, with an impish glimmer in his eyes. "I hate to mention it before Gussy, but I'm dyin' for a smoke."

"Weally, Cardew—"

"What does the cheeky ass mean?" said Manners, in wonder.

"He means that he wants kicking," growled Lowther.

"And that's what he's going to get!" said Tom Merry, breathing hard. "Do you chaps mind if I kick Cardew out of your study?"

"Go ahead, old boy!" said Blake. "More than welcome."

"Hold on," said Cardew, as Tom came towards him. "If you haven't any smokes about you, you can kick me as hard as you like, and I won't lift a finger. You can all do the same. I dare you to turn out your jacket pockets, Tom Merry, and let these fellows see."

Tom gave an angry laugh.

"I'll turn out my pockets fast enough, and let the fellows see, and then you'll get what's coming to you!" he snapped.

"O.K.," smiled Cardew.

Tom Merry thrust his hands into his jacket pockets. Then a rather startled look came over his face, as he felt something unexpected in one of them. His hand came out—and he stared at what it held! Every fellow in Study No. 6 stared at it. It was a packet of cigarettes!

Whose Smokes ?

“**B**AI Jove!” ejaculated Arthur Augustus D’Arcy.

“Tom!” exclaimed Manners.

“Oh, my hat!” said Blake.

Cardew laughed.

Tom Merry stood staring at the packet in his hand, with bulging eyes. He had never seen it before: and how it had come to be in his pocket was a mystery. All the tea-party in Study No. 6 were astonished: but Tom Merry was the most astonished of all. Never had a fellow been so utterly amazed.

Arthur Augustus D’Arcy screwed his eyeglass a little more firmly into his eye, and gazed at the captain of the Shell, his noble brow growing severe. He was as surprised as any other fellow in No. 6. He was also shocked.

“Bai Jove!” he repeated. “I am surprised at you, Tom Mewwy! I should not be surprised at this sort of thing in a weckless ass like Cardew, or a wotten outsiders like Wacke. But you—weally, Tom Mewwy—!”

Tom looked at him.

“You burbling ass—” he began.

“Weally, Tom Mewwy—”

“Do you think that this rubbish is mine?” hooted Tom.

Arthur Augustus raised his eyebrows.

“I pwesume that it is yours, Tom Mewwy, as you had it in your pocket,” he answered. “Things in a fellow’s pockets genewally belong to him.”

“Tom, old man—!” murmured Lowther.

“Well?” Tom gave him a glare. “Are you as big an

idiot as D'Arcy? Do you think this belongs to me?"

"But what—how—?" stammered Lowther.

"It's a packet of smokes," said Jack Blake, rather dryly. "Whether it's yours or not, you'd better keep it out of sight—if you don't want to land in a row. If a pre saw it—"

"All the pre's in the House can see it, for all I care," snapped Tom. "Do you think I've got anything to hide, you fathead?"

"You'd better hide those smokes, when you go out of this study, anyway," grunted Herries.

Tom Merry drew a deep, deep breath. That packet had been in his pocket—there was no denying that. As he had never seen it before, it was obvious to him that it had been slipped in by someone else—it must have been—but he could not imagine where or how or by whom. He stared round angrily at six faces. Hot words were on his lips: but before he could speak again, Cardew's silky tones interrupted.

"Well, what about it, Tom Merry?"

"What about what?" snapped Tom, savagely.

"I asked you to let me have one of your smokes," drawled Cardew. "Are you goin' to? You seem to have a full packet of them."

Tom's eyes glinted at him.

"You came here knowing that that packet was in my pocket," he said, between his teeth. "Somebody must have slipped it in. Did you?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Blake. "Is this one of your mad tricks, Cardew?"

"Bai Jove! If you have done anythin' of the kind, Cardew—!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Not guilty, my lord!" drawled Cardew.

"How did you know the packet was there?" asked Tom, very quietly. "You must have known when you came here, from what you said."

"Fact is, somethin' made me think so," said Cardew, airily. "And as I'm dyin' for a smoke, I thought I'd ask you. I suppose you can spare one out of a packet, what?"

"You know that this packet isn't mine," said Tom.

"Dear me! Do you carry other fellow's smokes in your pockets?" asked Cardew, with an air of surprise. "First time I've heard of such a thing. Whose are they, then?"

"I don't know—unless they're yours. This packet was slipped into that pocket. Did you do it?"

"You know jolly well that I didn't," answered Cardew, coolly. "Have I been anywhere near you all day?"

Tom Merry did not reply to that. There was a brief silence in Study No. 6. Jack Blake broke it.

"Well, has he?" he asked.

"Not that I know of," said Tom, slowly. "I've passed him two or three times during the day—Let's see—!" He made an effort to remember. "Once in the quad, once in the form-room passage—once on the landing—"

"Near enough for him to touch your pocket?"

There was another pause: and Tom shook his head.

"No!" he answered.

"That washes Cardew out, then," said Blake.

Tom Merry was silent. He realised that Cardew, impish as he was, could not have played that trick on him. Someone, certainly, had done so: but it was not Cardew. Somewhat peculiar expressions were coming over several faces in the study. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's was growing very severe.

Cardew gave a yawn.

"Are you goin' to let me have one of your smokes, or not?" he drawled.

Tom gripped the packet hard.

"You know they're not mine," he said. "If they're not yours, I don't know whose they are. But you can have the lot."

His hand went up, and the packet whizzed across the study like a bullet. It was aimed at Cardew's mocking face.

But the dandy of the Fourth was wary. His hand came up like a flash, and he caught the missile before it landed. It was as neat a catch as he had ever brought off on the cricket-field.

"Thanks," he drawled, imperturbably.

He slipped the packet into his pocket, nodded to the staring juniors, and walked out of Study No. 6. He was heard to laugh as he went down the passage.

He left a dead silence behind him.

It was a silence of great discomfort. Tom Merry's face was red, and growing redder, and his blue eyes glinted. Sel-

dom had he been so intensely angry. He looked round at face after face.

"I've said that that packet was not mind," he said, in a low and very distinct voice. "Does anybody here believe that it was?"

"Not if you say it wasn't," said Blake. "But—"

"I've said that it wasn't."

"How the dickens did it get into your pocket, if it isn't yours?" asked Digby.

"I don't know!"

"Um!" said Herries.

"What do you mean by that exactly, Herries?" asked Tom, setting his lips.

"Well, it's jolly queer," said Herries. "A fellow generally knows what he's got in his pockets."

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus. "It is certainly vewy wemarkable. I wegard it as wemarkably wemarkable."

"Don't be an ass, Gussy," said Manners, quietly.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Have a little sense, you fellows," said Manners. "If Tom had known that that thing was in his pocket, do you think he would have let Cardew rag him into dragging it out for a crowd of fellows to see?"

"Why, of course," exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Cardew jolly well knew that it was there, but Tom didn't."

There was a general nodding of heads. Manners, with his usual perspicacity, had put his finger on the spot, as it were.

"That's so," said Blake. "But how—?"

"And who—?" said Digby.

"And why—?" said Herries.

"I don't know how, or who, or why," said Tom Merry. "Somebody must have planted it on me, for some sort of senseless joke, I suppose—and Cardew got wind of it, and came here to rag me into showing it up, knowing that I never knew it was there. I'm going to find out who it was, if I can, and let him know what I think of him and his jokes. Any fellow here who doesn't take my word about it, needn't take the trouble to speak to me again."

And with that, Tom Merry walked out of Study No. 6, closing the door after him with rather unnecessary emphasis.

Talbot Takes a Hand

TALBOT of the Shell gave a little start.

He stared, and stared again. A very grave look came over his face.

He was looking at two fellows in the quad. One of them was Tom Merry, the junior captain of the School House. The other was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the glass of fashion, and the mould of form in that House.

Generally, when Tom Merry encountered the swell of the Fourth there was cheery friendliness on both sides. But that happy atmosphere seemed rather conspicuous by its absence now. Tom Merry's brows were knitted: and Arthur Augustus's aristocratic countenance was very serious, indeed almost solemn. It looked like a rift in the lute: which was a matter of concern to Talbot, who was very friendly with both.

"He, he, he!"

Talbot glanced round, as that unmusical cachinnation smote his ear. He frowned at the grinning fat face of Baggy Trimble of the Fourth.

The fat Baggy had observed what Talbot had observed: and seemed to be deriving entertainment therefrom. He gave the Shell fellow a fat wink.

"Not so jolly pally as usual, what?" grinned Baggy. "Looks like a row on, what? Lot of rot, I call it—why shouldn't Tom Merry put on a smoke if he likes? Lots of fellows do! I can jolly well tell you I do, when I can get hold of a fag. Why not?"

"You fat ass!" exclaimed Talbot, angrily. "Tom has done nothing of the sort. Do you think he is a frowsy ass like you?"

"Ain't he jolly well?" chuckled Baggy. "I can tell you I

heard those chaps in Study 6 talking about it—”

“Rubbish!” snapped Talbot.

“Well, I heard Blake say, ‘better say nothing about those smokes Tom Merry had in the study’—and D’Arcy said— I say, Talbot, don’t you want to hear about it? I can jolly well tell you—”

Talbot had turned his back on the fat Baggy. Evidently he was not interested to hear the latest news from the chatter-box of the School House. He moved off towards Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus D’Arcy, and their words fell on his ears as he approached.

“Weally, Tom Mewwy—”

“Oh, chuck it!” snapped Tom.

“Pway do not go off on your eah, deah boy,” said Arthur Augustus, patiently. “Nobody is goin’ to say a word about those smokes—”

“You can shout it from the house-tops, if you like,” snapped Tom. “Set it to music, and sing it in the quad, if you like.”

“I think it would be more judicious to say nothin’, Tom Mewwy, in the vevy peculiar circs. We all take your word, of course. But it is vevy wemarkable—vevy wemarkable indeed. If you have been dwoppin’ into weckless ways—”

“Fathead!”

“Pway do not take offence, deah boy, where none is meant. I wepeat that we all take your word on the subject. Nevertheless, if you have been dwoppin’ into weckless ways, it is a mattah of vevy gwave concern for your fwiends.”

Tom Merry burst into an angry laugh.

Arthur Augustus, with his extensive intellectual powers, seemed to be able to hold two opposite opinions at the same time. While he accepted Tom Merry’s word on the subject of those mysterious smokes, he was still deeply concerned at the possibility that Tom might have been their owner after all. Gussy’s noble brain moved in mysterious ways its wonders to perform. As a matter of fact, all the members of Study No. 6 had been left with a faint, lingering doubt.

“If you have anythin’ to tell me, as a fwiend—!” said D’Arcy, encouragingly.

“I have,” said Tom. “Take your face away!”

“Wha-a-t?”

“It worries me,” explained Tom.

Arthur Augustus gave him a look—a very expressive look—and walked away. The next moment, Talbot joined him. The dark expression faded from Tom's face, and he gave Talbot a smile.

"Oh, you," he said. "Coming down to the nets, old man?"

"Not just now," said Talbot, quietly. "Is there a spot of trouble on, Tom?"

Tom Merry's brow darkened again.

"Just a spot," he said. "Never mind that."

"But I do mind," said Talbot. "You're both friends of mine, you know—and Gussy always means well, even if he does put his foot into it every time he opens his mouth." He smiled. "Come, old chap, if there's a spot of bother, isn't there anything a friend can do?"

"Nothing," said Tom, shortly. "Let it drop."

Talbot smiled again.

"I'm not a fellow to butt into what doesn't concern me, as a rule, Tom," he said. "You know that! Can't you tell me what the spot of trouble is? We're friends, aren't we?"

"I hope so," said Tom. But— He hesitated. "Well, if fellows can't take a fellow's word, that's that, see?"

"That's rot, old fellow," said Talbot. "There's isn't a man in the House, or in the New House either, who wouldn't take your word."

Tom Merry's lips curled.

"You wouldn't think so, if you'd been in Study 6 half an hour ago," he answered. "There were chaps there who couldn't! Perhaps you wouldn't yourself, if I told you about it."

"Try it on," said Talbot, with a smile.

Tom hesitated again.

"Look here," he said, "it's a dashed queer thing, and I can't begin to understand it myself. Some sort of a silly trick must have been played, but I don't know why or by whom. Look here, Talbot—I'll tell you if you like. But if you want to stay friends with me, I'd better not: for I tell you quite plainly, that if you don't take my word for it, I bar you from now on."

"No risk in that," said Talbot. "Carry on."

"O.K." said Tom. "Here it is!" And in a few brief words, he related what had happened at tea in Study No. 6.

Talbot listened quietly, without interrupting him. His face was very thoughtful, and Tom watched it almost suspiciously.

"Well, there you are!" he concluded. "I haven't the foggiest idea how that packet came in my pocket. Do you believe that or not?"

"Of course I do."

"Oh! You do?" said Tom. "Well, Blake and his friends don't. And—and it wants some believing, I know that. I can't make head or tail of it myself. Some fellow has chucked away four or five shillings to play a senseless trick with no point in it, so far as I can see. Why should he?"

"It sounds a bit of a facer, put like that," admitted Tom. "But we start from the point that the packet did not belong to you, and that you never knew that you had it about you. It follows from that, that it must have been shoved into your pocket by somebody else—"

"But why?" asked Tom.

"We'll come to that later! Work it out from the beginning," said Talbot. "After we've found out who did it, I daresay we shall learn why. The first question is, who could get at that pocket? From what you tell me, Cardew knew that the packet was there."

"He must have, but he never put it there," said Tom. "I've got that clear. That grinning monkey never had a chance to do it."

"Could it have been in your pocket all day? Any fellow could get at it in the dorm over-night—"

"Off-side," said Tom. "I keep a pen-knife in that pocket, and I've used it to-day. If the packet had been there then, I should have found it. The rotten thing wasn't there till after class."

"Well, that narrows it down," said Talbot. "It was put there since we came out of form, then."

Tom Merry laughed. His good-humour was returning, under Talbot's influence. Talbot was taking it, as a matter of course, that what he stated was the fact: strange and puzzling as the affair was. And, angry as he was with his friends, he could not help realising that few fellows would or could have looked at it from that point of view.

"You're a good chap, Talbot," he said. "You've made me feel better already. Sure you haven't a spot of suspicion that

"I'm taking up Racke's ways and Crooke's ways?"

"Quite," said Talbot, smiling. "You're sure it was not Cardew? He's got his good points, but he's full of impish tricks."

"He never had a chance to do it."

"You haven't left your jacket off since class?"

"No!"

"Then it was slipped into your pocket while you were wearing the jacket. That does sound steep!" said Talbot, musingly. "Don't be too shirty with your friends for not being able to get it down all at once, Tom. If it were some other fellow, it would stagger you a bit."

"Oh!" said Tom. "Very likely! It does sound steep, as you say. Why the thump any man should play such a silly trick—and chuck away a packet of smokes that cost four or five shillings for no object—"

"He must have had a reason," said Talbot. "But it boils down to this, Tom—who had a chance of slipping it into your pocket? Have you linked arms with anyone since you came out of form?"

"Only Manners and Lowther!"

"You can wash them out. Nobody else?"

"Nobody."

Talbot looked deeply puzzled, as he felt. If that forbidden packet did not belong to Tom Merry, it really looked as if it must have got into his pocket by black magic. Tom's look grew a little sarcastic.

"Are you beginning to think like the other fellows, now?" he asked: and his tone was not wholly pleasant. "They can't quite get it down. Can you?"

"Don't be an ass, Tom!" said Talbot, quietly. "I'm trying to work this out. The thing was put into your pocket. Whoever it was, must have touched you—you must have contacted the fellow who did it. If you've been in a crowd—"

"But I haven't."

"Anybody shoved against you in the passages—or on the stairs—"

"Not that I know of."

"You've got to think it out, Tom. Now, look here, has any fellow in the school actually contacted you, close enough to touch your pocket, since we came out of class, apart from

Manners and Lowther?"

Tom wrinkled his brows in thought.

"Well, yes, that fellow Racke barged into me, under the elms, just before tea," he answered. "The clumsy ass barged me over."

"Racke!" Talbot's eyes gleamed. "Racke is a fellow who would have a packet of smokes about him, at any rate—and an expensive one, too, as he reeks with money. I can't imagine why he should plant such a thing on you—but the point we're trying to get at is, could he have done it?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Tom. A sudden blaze came into his eyes. "Racke! I remember now—Kildare was after him—"

"Kildare—?"

"Yes!" Tom's face was full of excitement now, as it dawned on him. "Kildare had spotted him with a packet of smokes—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Talbot.

"He cut round one of the elms, so suddenly that he barged into me, and dragged me over. Kildare was after him like a shot, and he made Racke turn out his pockets, but he hadn't any smokes—and he hadn't thrown them away—and Kildare had to think that he'd been mistaken. But—"

"I think we're seeing light now, Tom!" said Talbot.

"I jolly well think we are!" said Tom. "It was Racke! That's how he got rid of the packet Kildare saw in his hand. I thought at the time it was clumsy, the way he barged into me—of course he did it on purpose, to plant that packet on me and keep Kildare from finding it on him. The rotter—!"

Tom Merry clenched his hands. He could see it all now.

"And Cardew knew!" he went on. "I remember seeing the two of them together, on the landing, when we came in to tea. He had it from Racke and he came along to Study No. 6 to pull the leg of every fellow there about it—just one of his monkey tricks. I can see it all now."

"Where are you going, Tom?" exclaimed Talbot, as Tom Merry turned away towards the House.

Tom's eyes blazed.

"I'm going to see Racke!" he answered, over his shoulder: and he strode away, and almost ran into the House.

Rough on Racke!

AUBREY RACKE, in his study, No. 7 in the Shell, grinned over a cigarette. His study-mate, Crooke, grinned over another.

Both seemed very much amused.

On the table was a packet of smokes: the same that Tom Merry had so unexpectedly discovered in his pocket, and which he had flung at Cardew's head in Study No. 6. Cardew had returned it to its owner: and Racke and Crooke were now helping themselves from its contents. The door of the study was locked—it was safer to turn the key when smokes were on. There was a very strict rule on that subject at St. Jim's: and fellows disposed to be "doggish" in that particular way had to be wary.

"And he never knew!" grinned Crooke.

"Never dreamed!" chuckled Racke, "and I haven't lost the smokes after all—Cardew got the packet back for me, pulling the leg of those fellows in No. 6. Fancy their faces when Tom Merry turned the smokes out, under their eyes!"

"If he guessed—!" said Crooke.

Racke shrugged his shoulders.

"He'd never guess! Why should he? He never even dreamed why I barged into him under the elms—I expect he's forgotten all about it long ago. Tom Merry may be a jolly good cricketer—but he's not quite as keen as mustard. He will just wonder—and go on wondering."

Bang!

Racke and Crooke were grinning. But they ceased to grin, quite suddenly, as a sudden, terrific bang came at the door. The handle had turned, and as the door did not open, the

bang followed at once: and it was a resounding bang, ringing and echoing all along the Shell passage. The two black sheep of the Shell stared round at the door in surprise and alarm.

Bang! bang!

"If that's a pre—!" breathed Crooke. His cigarette disappeared into the study chimney.

Racke's followed it, and he clutched up the packet of cigarettes from the table. The mere possibility that it was Kildare at the door, made him look quite sickly. Aubrey Racke felt quite a man of the world when he was smoking cigarettes: but the life of a "man of the world" in a junior form at St. Jim's had its little alarms.

He whipped to the window, dragged it open, and thrust the packet into the old ivy outside. That seemed the safest place for it, on the spur of the moment. Crooke waved a newspaper in the air to clear off the smoke.

Bang bang!

"Who's there?" called out Racke, to gain time.

Bang!

"Look here, who's that—?"

"Open this door, you rat!" came back the voice of Tom Merry. "It's locked, you rotter! Open it."

"Oh!" breathed Crooke. "Only Tom Merry! I—I thought—" He ceased to wave the newspaper. He did not care a straw if Tom Merry detected traces of smoking in the study.

Racke caught his breath. "Only Tom Merry" was no comfort to him. That sudden and excited visit from the captain of the Shell was alarming. It looked as if Tom had, after all, found out something.

"Look here, what do you want?" called out Racke. "What the dickens are you banging on my door for, Tom Merry?"

"Will you open this door?"

"No, I won't."

Bang! bang! bang!

"I say, what's the row?" It was Kangaroo's voice in the passage. "Want to bring the House-master up here, old man?"

"I don't care two straws, if I bring the whole House up! I'm going into that study to see Racke."

Bang! bang! bang!

"Better let him in, Aubrey," whispered Crooke. "We don't want a crowd up here. Railton would want to know too much."

Bang bang!

Racke realised that he had better open the door. It was quite certain that if that terrific banging went on, it would reach the ears of authority. Aubrey Racke certainly did not want a master or a prefect on the scene.

With set lips, he turned back the key, and pulled the door open. Tom Merry appeared in the doorway with a flushed face and glinting eyes—Harry Noble staring at him, in amazement, and two or three other fellows coming along the passage, drawn by the uproar.

"Look here, what do you want, Tom Merry?" Racke tried to bluster. "Nobody's asked you into this study—"

He backed away as Tom Merry strode in. Kangaroo, Glyn, Gore, Skimpole, and several other Shell fellows stared in after him, from the passage. It was very unusual to see Tom Merry in such a state of excitement. Evidently there was a spot of unusual trouble on hand.

"You rotter!" panted Tom, his eyes blazing at Aubrey Racke. "I've only just found out what you did! I know now why you barged into me when Kildare was after you this afternoon. You shoved your filthy smokes in my pocket to get rid of them. Do you deny it?"

"I—I—I—" stammered Racke.

"Do you deny it or not?" roared Tom.

"Yes, I do," said Racke, desperately. "I—I never did anything of the kind." He sneered savagely. "I've heard about your friends finding you out, in No. 6. If you think you can shove it off on me—"

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Crook, staring at his friend. As Racke had been telling him about it only a few minutes ago, he could not help wondering at Aubrey's nerve.

"You shoved that packet of smokes in my pocket, when you dragged me over, to keep it away from Kildare—"

"Nothing of the kind."

"You told Cardew, and he came to Study 6 to pull the legs of the fellows there—he knew all about it when he came," panted Tom. "You deny that, do you?"

"Every word!" said Racke, coolly. He was cool again

now. "And if that's all you've got to say—"

"That isn't all," said Tom. "If you deny it—"

"I've said so."

"Look here, Tom Merry," began Crooke, putting in a word for his friend. "You've no right to suppose—"

"You can shut up, Crooke! This is between Racke and me. That packet turned up when I was at tea with my friends, and they all thought it was mine—"

"Wasn't it?" sneered Racke.

"No: it was yours, you rat! You made use of me to keep out of a row with a prefect! And now you're going to own up to it!" roared Tom Merry, and he made a rush at Racke.

Aubrey Racke jumped behind the table. But the next moment Tom Merry's grip was on his collar.

"Let go!" yelled Racke.

"Are you going to own up to what you did?"

"Let me go! I—I—"

Racke struggled. But it was not much use for the weedy slacker of the Shell to struggle in the grasp of the junior captain. He fairly crumpled up in Tom's angry grasp.

Crack!

Aubrey Racke's head came into sudden contact with the study table. The crack rang like a pistol-shot. Louder still rang Racke's frantic yell.

"Whoooo-hooop!"

"Now—!" roared Tom.

"Leggo!" yelled Racke.

Crack!

"Oh, crumbs!" Racke struggled frantically. "Lend me a hand, Crooke—back up, will you? Drag him off."

Crooke made a half-hearted grab at the captain of the Shell. Tom Merry's left arm swung out, forcibly, and sent Crooke staggering. Then he gave his attention to Racke again.

Crack!

For the third time Racke's head banged on the study table. The crowd in the doorway watched rather breathlessly. Crooke backed to the study window, and stayed there. There was no help for the hapless Aubrey.

"Ow! ow! Oh! Stoppit!" shrieked Racke. "I—I own

up, if you like! Leago! I—I own up! Kildare was after me, and I hadn't a chance, so I—"

"You own up that you planted your rotten smokes on me to keep them away from a prefect!" roared Tom.

"Ow! Yes! Now let me go!" howled Racke.

"That's all I wanted," snapped Tom. He let Racke go, with a swing of his arm that sent him spinning across the study, to collapse against the wall. "Now, if you want this to go further, any time you like, with or without gloves."

"Get out of my study," gasped Racke.

"I'll do that fast enough," said Tom, contemptuously. "It's not the study a decent fellow would want to stay in. Next time you want to hide your smokes from a pre, you'd better give me a wide berth, you rotter."

And Tom Merry marched out of the study, slamming the door after him.

Aubrey Racke picked himself up, panting. He rubbed his head tenderly, and, catching a grin on Crooke's face, gave him an evil look.

"Why didn't you help me, you funk?" he muttered.

"Why didn't you help yourself?" said Crooke. "You're a bigger fellow than Merry—why did you let him handle you like that?"

"Oh, shut up!"

Crooke grinned, and left the study. Racke was left rubbing his head. Tom Merry's methods had been a little drastic: and Aubrey Racke was likely to feel the effects for quite a little time to come.

Nothing Doing!

“WELL?”

Tom Merry rapped out that monosyllable like a bullet.

It was the following day.

Twenty-four hours had elapsed since Cardew's impish jest in Study No. 6 in the Fourth. But evidently that space of time had not sufficed to blot it from Tom Merry's mind. His eyes glinted at Cardew, as the dandy of the Fourth lounged into his study.

Tom had a cricket list on the table before him: on which his thoughts had been concentrated. The next day, Wednesday, Carcroft were coming over to play cricket: which was a matter of deep concern to all the junior cricketers of St. Jim's, of both Houses—most of all to the junior captain, who had the selection of the team on his mind.

Certainly, there were plenty of good cricketers in both Houses at St. Jim's. But it was a matter of deep consideration all the same. Carcroft had won last time, against the best team St. Jim's could put into the field. Tom did not want that to happen again, if he could help it. And there was one junior cricketer in the House who, on his day, was as good as the very best. That was Cardew of the Fourth. But he was an unreliable man, good as he was when at his best, and Tom had not included his name in the list. He was not likely to change his mind on that subject, after the episode in Study No. 6 on Monday. His usual feeling towards Cardew was of indifference, tinged with a faint dislike. Just at present the dislike predominated.

He shot that inquiring monosyllable at Cardew, as he lounged in, staring at him grimly. If Cardew had fancied himself welcome in that study, he would have been disabused of the idea at once.

But Tom's grim look only brought a smile to his face. Cardew was not easily disconcerted.

"Don't bite a fellow's head off!" he protested, amicably.

"What do you want?"

"Only a word, dear man," drawled Cardew. "I haven't come here to enjoy your society, charmin' as it is. A word about the cricket."

"Well?" Tom was monosyllabic again.

Cardew nodded towards the paper on the table:

"That's the list for the Carcroft game to-morrow—" he asked.

"Yes."

"My name on it?"

"No!"

"Any reason why not?"

"Plenty," said Tom. "I'll recite them if you want to hear them. You're no good. You're not to be trusted. You can't even be relied on to keep yourself fit for a game. I don't like you, but I'd be jolly glad to play you, if I could trust you. But I can't! That's all."

"Well, that's enough to go on with," assented Cardew. "Look here, if you've got your back up about that little joke yesterday—"

"You call it a joke?" said Tom, savagely. "I jolly nearly had a row with Blake's crowd over it—might have had a row with Manners and Lowther, my own pals—and a lot you would have cared. Those fellows could hardly take my word—and I couldn't blame them, either. I don't know how it would have turned out, if Talbot hadn't spotted the truth, and put me wise. And that's your idea of a joke, is it?"

Cardew laughed.

"Gussy has been sermonizin' me, and it was rather amusin' to turn it on you, for a change," he said. "If you feel sore about it—"

"No 'if' about that!" snapped Tom.

"Well, that has nothin' to do with cricket. You can't keep a man out of a cricket match because he pulled your leg."

"No!" said Tom. "I couldn't and wouldn't! You're out of the cricket because you're the kind of fellow you are."

"And I thought I was rather a nice chap!" sighed Cardew. "How often one has these pleasant delusions."

"If that's all, you can get out," said Tom. "There's nothing doing."

"That's not quite all," said Cardew. "Look here, Tom Merry, believe it or believe it not, I'm turnin' over a new leaf—"

"I'll believe that when it's turned over," said Tom, scornfully.

"Honest injun!" said Cardew. "You see, I've had a warnin'. I've come as near the sack as a fellow could come without takin' the long jump. Railton's got a stony eye on me. Kildare and Darrell and Langton and the rest of the pre's give me a lot of attention. I'm not runnin' any more risks. No breakin' bounds for me—not even a harmless and necessary smoke in the study. The strait and narrow path for me—good little boy in class, good little boy at games—good little boy all round—"

"Oh, chuck it."

"Can't you take a fellow's word?"

"Not yours."

Cardew's eyes gleamed for a moment. But he went on quietly.

"Honest injun, I tell you! I'm not goin' anywhere near the Green Man—I'm chuckin' the acquaintance of Bill Lodgey—and if you ask Levison and Clive, they'll tell you there's never a whiff of smoke in the study. And I tell you I'm keen on cricket, and you jolly well know I should be useful in the Carcroft match. If you leave me out, it's because you've got your back up about that leg-pull in Blake's study yesterday."

"Think so if you like."

"Then you've made up your mind?" asked Cardew, his eyes gleaming again.

"Quite!"

"You don't believe what I've said?"

Tom made an impatient gesture.

"What sort of a fool to you take me for?" he exclaimed. "I daresay you're on your guard, now that the House-master

and the pre's have a special eye on you. But you're the same rotter you have always been. What's the good of telling me you're turning over a new leaf, when I know that you're booked to go out of bounds after lights out to-night!"

Cardew gave a start.

"Nothin' of the kind," he exclaimed.

"Oh, give us a rest," said Tom, contemptuously. "You and Racke—!"

"Oh, that!" Cardew laughed. "I was only pullin' D'Arcy's leg when I let him hear me say that to Racke. The silly ass butted in, and I pulled his leg, that was all. Nothin' in it."

"You're fond of leg-pulling, aren't you?" said Tom, sarcastically. "Pulling mine at the present moment, I've no doubt."

"I tell you—"

"You can tell me what you like, and I shall not believe a word of it," said Tom, coolly. "A fellow who wants to be believed had better start by telling the truth now and then." His lip curled. "You'd be fit to play a tough game to-morrow, wouldn't you, after going out on the tiles while other fellows are asleep in bed? Chuck it."

"I'm not goin', I tell you!" snapped Cardew. "That ass D'Arcy can't mind his own business, and I pulled his leg—"

"That will do."

"So you don't believe me?"

"Why should I?"

Cardew breathed very hard. His peculiar sense of humour was coming home to roost, as it were.

"So it's settled?" he said.

"Quite."

Cardew gave him a dark look and walked out of the study. Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders, and gave his attention to the cricket list again, dismissing Ralph Reckness Cardew from his mind. He was fed up with him, and wanted nothing whatever to do with him: which really was not surprising, after the recent happenings. Even Cardew, probably, was not surprised, but he was undoubtedly deeply annoyed and exasperated. The usual insouciant expression was absent from his face, as he tramped along to his own study, No. 9 in the Fourth, kicked the door open, and tramped in.

Levison and Clive were there, and they stared at his angry face.

"Anything up?" asked Ernest Levison.

Cardew grunted angrily.

"That rotter Tom Merry—!" he began.

"Wash that out," interrupted Sidney Clive. "Tom Merry's not a rotter, and you know it. What's the trouble?"

"I'm out of the cricket to-morrow! The rotter knows I'm wanted in the team, and he's leaving me out because he's got his silly back up over a leg-pull," growled Cardew.

"Rot!" said Levison.

"Rot!" said Clive, like an echo.

Cardew gave his friends a black look, and tramped out of the study again. He found no comfort in the remarks of his study-mates in No. 9! With a moody brow, he crossed the study landing to the stairs.

Aubrey Racke was on the landing, and he glanced at the dandy of the Fourth very amicably. Cardew paused for a moment. In his angry and disgruntled state, he was tempted to throw his new resolutions, such as they were, to the winds, and join up with the black sheep of the Shell. But it was only for a moment. He went on, and went down the stairs, and Aubrey bestowed a scowl upon his back as he went.

Tea in Tom Merry's Study

"GOOD!" said Monty Lowther.

Monty made that remark as he came into No. 10 Study with Manners. It was evoked by the sight of a large parcel on the study table, which Tom Merry was unpacking.

Tom glanced round with a smile.

"O.K.," he said. "It's a parcel from Miss Priscilla—lots for tea! Might ask one or two fellows."

"Just what I was thinking," said Monty. "What about four?"

"Four if you like," said Tom.

"Then I'll hike along to No. 6 in the Fourth, and tell them."

"Oh!" said Tom. The smile faded from his face. "Hold on! I don't know that we want Study No. 6 here."

"My dear chap—!" said Manners.

Tom's brow had darkened a little. Evidently that disconcerting scene in Study No. 6 the previous day was in his mind.

"They stood us a jolly good feed yesterday," said Lowther.

"I know! But—"

"Opportunity to return their jolly old hospitality," urged Lowther.

"Yes! But—"

Tom hesitated. That parcel, from his old guardian, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, was well and truly packed. Whenever a parcel came for Tom Merry from Laurel Villa, at Huckleberry Heath, there was a well-spread table in No. 10. In normal circumstances, Tom would have assented at once, and Study No. 6 would have been bidden to the feast.

But he did not feel that the circumstances were quite normal. He remembered four puzzled and dubious faces: and still more, perhaps, the well-meant but somewhat tactless remarks of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Cardew, certainly, had not intended to sow trouble among friends in playing that impish trick. He had simply amused himself, without giving a single thought to possible consequences. He had neither thought nor cared. But the incident had left a spot of soreness behind. It appeared that Tom Merry's back was still a little up.

"My dear chap—!" repeated Manners.

"No good making a row of it, Tom," said Monty Lowther.

"I don't want to. But—"

"No good feeling sore, either," said Manners. "My dear chap, wash it all out. We were all flabbergasted when you turned that packet of smokes out of your pocket in Blake's study yesterday, but every fellow there believed what you said about it—"

"More or less, I suppose," grunted Tom. "I had a lecture from that ass Gussy all the same—"

"Gussy can't help being an ass," said Lowther. "Asses are like poets—born, not made. Anyhow, it's all right now, now that it's come out about Racke shoving it into your pocket."

"Yes. But—"

"Wash out the butts," said Manners. "Look here, Tom, you're not going to let Cardew's mad tricks make any difference. We've always been pally with Blake's crowd. That tick Cardew would grin if he saw us giving one another the marble eye because of his monkey-tricks."

"Oh!" said Tom. His brow cleared. "You're right, old man! It would amuse that worm to see us quarrel over it, I've no doubt. All right—go and trot them along, Monty, and we'll forget all about it."

"That's the tune!" agreed Lowther, and he left the study, to go along to No. 6 in the Fourth.

Tom Merry and Manners finished unpacking the parcel, and laid out the good things on the table. Miss Priscilla had undoubtedly despatched an adequate supply from Laurel Villa: there was more than ample for seven fellows: and the study table presented a very attractive appearance when

Monty Lowther returned with the expected guests.

"Here we are, here we are, here we are again!" sang Lowther, more or less tunefully, as he shepherded them into the study.

"Trot in, old chaps," said Manners.

"Bai Jove! That looks wathah a wippin' spwead, deah boys," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Parcel from home," explained Tom Merry. "Lug out that box, Monty—not enough chairs to go round. Shove the kettle on the spirit-stove, Manners, old man. Sit down, you fellows."

Tom Merry's manner was cheery and friendly. He had made up his mind to forget that discordant incident of the day before, and carry on as if it had never occurred. Blake and Co. were glad enough to take their cue from him, and in a few minutes seven fellows were chatting cheerily round the table, and disposing of the good things that had arrived from Hampshire.

As the Carcroft match was due on the morrow, that was a topic in which all were interested. Tom Merry produced the cricket list, which was to be posted that evening.

"Too many New House men in it," remarked Blake, with a shake of the head.

Tom Merry laughed.

"I've heard from Figgins that there are too many School House men in it," he said.

"That's rot!" said Digby.

"Utter rot!" agreed Herries.

"Yaas, wathah."

"Three's enough, if not too many, from that House," said Blake.

"Well, we couldn't spare Figgins, or Kerr, or Wynn," said Tom. "Redfern's a good man, too—Figgy wanted to see him in the eleven. But—"

"Merry, Lowther, Blake, Talbot, Noble, Levison, D'Arcy, Clive!" said Blake, reading out the School House names in the list. "That's a good crowd. Might shove in old Dig instead of Kerr."

"Topping idea!" grinned Dig.

"I am wathah sowwy to see that my wrelative's name is not there," remarked Arthur Augustus. "Cardew is a vewy good

man, Tom Mewwy."

Tom's brow clouded for a moment. Cardew's name was not very welcome to his ears just then.

"Too jolly unreliable," he said, shortly.

"Yaas, I admit that he is wathah unweliable. But weally and twuly, he can play some of the fellows' heads off—Clive, for instance."

"Clive's a man to be trusted," said Tom. "He won't be going out of bounds to-night, anyhow, and feeling too seedy to hit a ball to-morrow."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I'd as soon play Racke," said Tom. "Forget it, Gussy."

"Cardew will not be goin' out of bounds to-night, Tom Mewwy."

"You said that he was."

"Yaas: but I am goin' to take measures to stop him! I have thought the mattah ovah vewy sewiously, and I have made up my mind that I will not allow him to cawwy on, and get sacked fwom the school," said Arthur Augustus, firmly.

Tom Merry stared.

"And how are you going to stop him?" he asked.

"I have thought that out, Tom Mewwy. I am goin' to wemain awake to-night in the dorm, and when Cardew turns out at ten o'clock, I am goin' to turn out, too, and butt in."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I shall give Cardew the choice of goin' back to bed, or takin' a feahful thwashin'," said Arthur Augustus. "I wathah think that that will settle the mattah."

"Fathead!" said Tom, politely.

"Weally, you know—"

"Ass!" said Manners. "If you kick up a row in the dorm after lights out, you'll have Railton up, or some of the pre's."

"I shall wisk that!" said Arthur Augustus. "You can wely on it, Tom Mewwy, that I shall not allow my welative to go out of bounds to-night. I am quite wesolved on that. And I stwongly advise you to do the same with Wacke, as he is goin' to bweak bounds."

"I'm not a pre," said Tom. "And you're not, Gussy! There's such a thing as minding one's own business, you know."

"Gussy doesn't know!" sighed Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"It's all right," said Herries. "Gussy will be fast asleep when Cardew goes on the razzle. Cardew won't hear anything from him, unless it's a snore."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Better give it a miss, Gussy," said Monty Lowther. "You won't be fit for cricket to-morrow, if you spend the night sitting up in bed, or scrapping with your relations."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Pass the jam, Gussy," said Blake. "Make yourself useful, old top, and give your chin a rest."

"Wats! I am certainly goin' to westwain that ass Cardew fwom bweakin' out to-night," said Arthur Augustus. "I wegard it as a dutay. So pewwaps you will put him in the list aftah all, Tom Mewwy."

"Perhaps!" said Tom. "But as that Indian chap at Greyfriars says, the perhapsfulness is terrific! Forget about it, Gussy! I tell you I'd as soon play Racke or Crooke, or Baggy Trimble."

And that was that!

When the spread was over, and Study No. 6 had taken their leave, Monty Lowther seemed to be in a rather thoughtful mood. While Tom Merry and Manners cleared the table, and put away crocks, Monty sat in the armchair, with a thoughtful wrinkle in his brow, and a glimmer in his eyes. Finally he spoke:

"Not a bad idea of Gussy's, what?"

Tom glanced at him.

"About Cardew?" he said. "Rot! I expect Gussy will be fast asleep, if not snoring, when Cardew goes out—if he goes."

"I mean about Racke."

"Racke?" repeated Tom. "What about him?"

"Didn't Gussy say he strongly advised us to do the same with Racke?" said Monty. "We know in advance that he's going at ten. What about putting paid to him?"

"Want a row in the dorm, and a beak coming up?" asked Manners.

"Not at all! I was thinking that Racke might run into a beak when he goes out of the dorm."

"Rubbish!" said Manners. "You can't give a man away

—even a rat like Racke. What do you mean?”

“I mean that if Racke saw somebody in the corridor in a beak’s cap and gown, he would have the scare of his life, and bolt back to bed like a rabbit.”

“But he won’t,” said Tom, puzzled.

“Why not?” said Lowther. “We’ve got that old cap and gown in the property-box, that we use in the theatricals. You can bet that Racke won’t stop to look too closely at the man that’s wearing it—and there will be only a glimmer of moonlight in the corridor, anyway.”

“Oh!” said Tom, laughing. “A jape?”

“Just that!”

“You and your japes!” grunted Manners.

“The jape of the term,” said Monty. “If we didn’t happen to know that Racke was going, we couldn’t work it, but we’ve got the news in advance, and I tell you it will work like a charm. What do you fellows think of the idea?”

“Bosh!” said Tom.

“Rot!” said Manners.

Both these opinions glided off Monty Lowther like water off a duck. When the funny man of the Shell was on the track of a jape, he was not to be deterred by adverse criticism. Before prep, Monty Lowther had surreptitiously conveyed a bundle to the Shell dormitory, which he concealed under his bed there. It contained an ancient mortar-board, and a shabby old Master of Arts gown, which were the property of the junior Dramatic Society. It seemed likely that there would be unexpected happenings in both the Shell and the Fourth-form dormitories after lights out that night.

After Lights Out!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY yawned.

It was a long, deep yawn.

Kildare of the Sixth had seen lights out for the Fourth, and left that form to repose: certainly without any suspicion that anything of an unusual nature was scheduled to occur there later. The Fourth, after the usual desultory chat from bed to bed, had settled down to slumber. Deep and regular breathing on all sides revealed that the juniors were safe in the embrace of Morpheus. But there was at least one exception—perhaps two. Whether Cardew was asleep or not, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was awake.

He was determinedly, resolutely, awake: but he found it rather hard work, after the other fellows had gone to sleep.

Arthur Augustus had made up his noble mind. Cardew, under suspicion by masters and prefects, was apparently determined to carry on as recklessly as ever, heading for the "sack." Arthur Augustus was going to pull him up in time. As arguments and espostulations had no effect on him, Arthur Augustus was going to take drastic measures: at the risk of a "row" in the dormitory and a master coming up. His resolution was as fixed and unchangeable as the Medic and Persian laws. Nothing would have deterred him from his purpose—unless Morpheus did! He found the god of sleep hard to resist.

It was much easier to plan these things in the daytime, when a fellow was not sleepy, than to carry them out at night, when a fellow was!

Several times, Arthur Augustus almost nodded off. He jerked himself awake again. He had almost to prop his eyelids open. In spite of himself they persisted in drooping.

He longed to hear the muffled boom of ten from the distant clock-tower, in the silent night. Ten was the appointed time.

He expected to hear Cardew stir at ten. But ten seemed an unimaginably long time in coming. The minutes seemed to crawl by on leaden feet, and Arthur Augustus grew sleepier and sleepier. He wondered whether Cardew was feeling equally drowsy. But the scapegrace of the Fourth was more used to these nocturnal activities than his relative. Arthur Augustus, undoubtedly, was frightfully sleepy: almost tempted to give up his plans. But he resisted that temptation manfully. He was going to keep awake: and he was going to butt in, forcefully, as soon as Cardew stirred. But it really did seem as if ten o'clock would never come.

It came at last! Faintly through the silence of the summer night, the boom came from the clock-tower.

It was ten!

Arthur Augustus sat up in bed, rubbed his eyes, and blinked into the gloom.

It was a light summer night. But the dormitory was dark, and Arthur Augustus strained his eyes in vain in the direction of Cardew's bed. He could not hear the scapegrace getting out.

He whispered at last.

"Are you awake, Cardew?"

He would have been rather glad and relieved, had Cardew fallen asleep, and forgotten all about that nocturnal expedition. He would so willingly have gone to sleep himself!

But Cardew was not asleep. A chuckle came back from the direction of his bed.

"That you, Gussy?"

"So you are awake, Cardew?" said Arthur Augustus, sternly.

"Sort of."

"Vewy well! I warn you not to get out of bed, Cardew. I have already warned you that I shall not permit you to leave the dorm to-night. I now wepeat that warnin'. I twust you will have sense enough, Cardew, to wemain in bed, and go to sleep, like a decent fellow."

Cardew chuckled again.

"Is that the lot?" he asked.

"That is all, Cardew, only if you get up, I shall get up, too, and if you want a feahful thwashin', you have only to ask for it."

"Dear me!" said Cardew.

"Who's that jawing?" came a sleepy voice from Blake's bed. "Is that you turning on your chin, Gussy?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"What's the row?" came a yawn from George Herries.

"There is no wow at pwesent, Hewwies. But there is goin' to be a wow if Cardew twies to get out of this dorm."

"Go to sleep, fathead!" came from Dig's bed.

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort, Dig."

"Hallo, who's that getting up?" called out Levison, as there was a creak of a bed in the gloom.

"Only little me!" came back Cardew's voice.

"Look here, Cardew—!" came from Sidney Clive.

"My dear chap, Gussy's jawing me—don't you join in!" drawled Cardew. "Gussy can do all the jawing required, and then some. And a little over."

Arthur Augustus breathed wrath.

"Will you go back to bed, Cardew?" he demanded.

"Will I?" yawned Cardew. "At present, my beloved relative, the answer is in the negative."

"I shall stop you, Cardew, and if you get out, I shall come aftah you."

"Good-bye, Gussy!"

There was a sound of the door opening, and shutting again. Arthur Augustus gave quite a bound.

He had not expected that. He had supposed that Cardew was dressing in the dark.

"Bai Jove! Is he gone?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove! He must have been dwessed alweady—I thought he was goin' to dwess—but he must have dwessed alweady and I nevah heard him—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from a dozen beds.

"Chuck it, Gussy," chuckled Blake. "Cardew didn't want a row at this time of night: and he's gone. Go to sleep."

"And let other fellows go to sleep!" said Ridd.

"Wats!" snapped Arthur Augustus. And he jumped out of bed. He snatched up a flash-lamp he had placed in readiness on the chair beside his bed, and flashed on the light. He flashed it on Cardew's bed. All the juniors were awake now, sitting up, and they all stared at Cardew's bed, revealed in the light. It was empty: the bedclothes turned back,

just as Cardew had left them. And Cardew's clothes, which had been neatly folded on the chair beside his bed, were gone. Arthur Augustus gazed at that empty bed with feelings almost too deep for words.

"The uttah wottah!" he gasped.

"Gone!" said Blake.

"The fwightfully sly wottah! He must have got all weady to go, and I nevah heard him, you know—"

"Ha ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I am goin' aftah him, and I will make him come back, if I have to dwag him by the yahs!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, and he plunged into his trousers in wild haste.

"You howling ass!" exclaimed Dig. "You'll run into a pre—"

"Gussy, you fathead—!" exclaimed Dig.

"Go back to bed, you silly cuckoo!" hooted Herries.

Unheeding his chums, Arthur Augustus, without waiting to add further garments, cut across to the door. Never had the swell of St. Jim's been so wrathful. Cardew was not beating him so easily! He was going after him. Half a dozen fellows called to him at once as he rushed for the door.

"Gussy, you ass—"

"Come back—"

"You'll get into a row—"

"Chuck it!"

Unheeding, even if he heard, Arthur Augustus tore out of the dormitory. He shut the door after him, and tore away down the corridor. The Fourth-form dormitory was left in an excited buzz.

"Oh, the ass!" said Blake.

"The beaks aren't gone to roost yet!" said Herries. "He may run into Railton—!"

"Oh, the fathead!" said Dig.

There was a chuckle in the dark. It was followed by an unexpected voice: very unexpected.

"What a jolly old spot of excitement!" It was the drawling voice of Ralph Reckness Cardew. "Dear old Gussy! Is he funny?"

Every fellow in the dormitory jumped.

"Cardew!" gasped Blake. "Is—is—is that you, Cardew?"

"I fancy so."

"Then—then—then you haven't gone out?" stuttered Blake. "Where are you, you leg-pulling rotter?"

He struck a match and held it up. He stared at a grinning face that looked out from under Cardew's bed. Evidently the scapegrace of the Fourth had not gone out of the dormitory.

"Cardew!" exclaimed Levison. "What—?"

"Did you think I'd gone out?" drawled Cardew. "Gussy seems to have!"

"We heard the door shut—!" exclaimed Clive.

Cardew chuckled again.

"Easy enough to open and shut a door, without goin' out," he explained. "Quite a simple trick, my beloved 'earers! I rather thought that Gussy would jump to conclusions. I had just time to dodge under my bed before he flashed on the light! I'd put my clothes there already! What a fellow Gussy is for jumping to conclusions, what?"

Cardew crawled out from under the bed, grinning. Evidently he was enjoying that jest on the unsuspecting Gussy.

"Well, my hat!" said Blake. "Gussy's gone chasing after him, and he's here all the time—!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If he runs into a pre—!"

"Or into the House-master—"

Another chuckle from Cardew.

"Might be a warnin' to him to mind his own business," he suggested. "I'm goin' back to bed. If you fellows are awake when D'Arcy comes back, tell him not to make a row and wake a fellow up—I don't want to lose my beauty sleep."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Most of the fellows in the dormitory were laughing. Even Blake and Co. could not help grinning. The idea of Arthur Augustus, boiling with wrath, threading dark passages and staircases, in search of a fellow who had not left the dormitory at all, had its comic side. How long it would be before he gave up and came back nobody could guess. Cardew, grinning, went back to bed: and there were chuckles up and down the dormitory as the Fourth Form settled down once more after that spot of excitement.

10

Awful for Aubrey!

AUBREY RACKE sat up in bed, in the Shell dormitory, and peered suspiciously into the gloom.

Like D'Arcy in the Fourth-form dormitory, he waited for the hour of ten to boom from the clock-tower. But he was not sleepy like Arthur Augustus: not in the least disposed to lay his head on the pillow and close his eyes. He was thinking of the back room at the Green Man, the glimmering cards in Bill Lodgey's hand, the haze of cigarette smoke. That kind of thing, according to Racke's ideas, was "life": and he was keen and eager to get out and see that spot of "life." Racke had much more money than was good for him: and Mr. Lodgey, at the Green Man, was only too willing to help him get rid of some of it. Aubrey enjoyed those dingy excursions: or fancied that he did. Anyhow, he was very keen to go: and as Cardew had refused to join up, he was going on his own.

But he knew the risk, and it made him very uneasy: he had not, like Cardew, the courage of his misdeeds. And a sound in the silent dormitory startled him, as he lay waiting for the hour to strike: and he sat up and peered round him in the shadows, wondering if some other fellow was up.

Glimmering moonlight fell in at the high windows. It seemed to Racke that, for a moment, he saw a shadow move in the glimmer. Startled, he stared at it. But if it was there, it was gone in a moment. And if there had been a sound, it was succeeded by deep silence.

"Is that you, Croke?" whispered Racke.

There was no answer.

"Any fellow up?" asked Racke, in a louder whisper. If nobody was awake, he did not want to awaken anyone. But he was almost certain that someone had moved in the dim shadows, and he wanted to know.

Still there was no reply.

Racke waited, and listened. It seemed to him that a faint sound came from the direction of the door. He strained his ears.

But he had to conclude that he had been mistaken. There was no sound, save the steady breathing of sleepers in the adjacent beds. He decided that it was only nerves, and settled down again to wait for ten to strike. Earlier than that he did not care to make the venture.

The boom from the clock-tower came, at last, through the night. Then Racke turned out of bed, and dressed himself in the dark. He moved quietly, making hardly a sound.

He trod lightly to the door, and opened it. He peered into the passage outside. From a high window, a shaft of bright moonlight fell across the passage, making a pool of light in one spot. The rest was deeply dark.

All was silent and still.

It was safe enough—safe as houses! What he had done before, it was easy to do again. Racke stepped out of the dormitory, drew the door silently shut after him, and trod away softly down the passage.

Suddenly he stopped, his heart leaping almost into his mouth. He had just reached the pool of moonlight, when he heard a sound—an unmistakable sound—further on! It was a footstep! And it was approaching!

Before he could make a backward step, before he could even think, a figure from the darkness beyond, stepped into the pool of moonlight. It was a figure in a master's cap and gown.

Only for a split second Racke's terrified eyes fell on that startling figure. He did not stay to give it a second look—or even to look at it at all. Like a frightened rabbit, he turned and bolted.

He was not thinking of the back room at the Green Man now: of Bill Lodgey, and cards and smokes. One glimpse of a "beak" was more than enough for him. He raced back

to the dormitory he had left, only hoping that he had not been recognized—he knew that he must have been seen. In that pool of moonlight in the passage, he must have been visible to the “beak,” as the “beak” had been to him. But perhaps he had not been recognized—that was his only hope!

He was back in the dormitory in a matter of moments. Trembling in every limb, he closed the door after him, as silently as he could. As he did so, he heard the sound of footsteps coming up the passage. The “beak” was following him! Was he coming to that dormitory? Racke could have no doubt that he was—and his heart was sick within him, with terror, as he groped to his bed.

There was no time to get his clothes off: the door might open any second. He plunged into bed as he was, and drew the blankets over him, his heart pounding. He had risked this a dozen times before, but it had never happened. Now, it seemed, it had happened: and in Aubrey's terrified mind was a picture of the Head's study, of the stern face of his Head-master, of the dread sentence that would follow. He could have groaned aloud in utter funk. As he dragged the bedclothes up about his ears, to conceal his collar, a voice came from one of the beds.

“Somebody up?” It was Tom Merry's voice.

“Quiet!” breathed Racke.

“Is that you, Racke?”

“Yes, yes! Quiet!”

“What is there to be specially quiet about?” came Manners' voice. “Anything up, Racke?”

“Will you be quiet?” hissed Racke. “There's a beak up—he's coming here—may be here any second. Quiet!”

“Rot!” said Manners. “There's no beak coming here—”

“I—I nearly ran into him in the passage—will you be quiet?” breathed Racke. “Let him think we're asleep—”

There was a sound of the door-handle turning. Racke's scared whisper died away, and he lay scarcely breathing.

The door opened.

Racke expected the light to flash on. But the person who entered the dormitory did not turn on the light, and Racke breathed again. If the beak had not recognized him, if he had merely glimpsed a fleeing figure for a moment, he could not be sure into which dormitory the fugitive had vanished.

Racke hoped so, at least. It was a chance. If the beak was simply looking in to ascertain whether all was quiet, he had only to keep silent and affect slumber, and all would be well.

But although the newcomer did not turn on the light, he came into the dormitory: and Racke, peering over the edge of a blanket, glimpsed a figure in a shaft of moonlight from the window. He could not make out the face, but he glimpsed cap and gown plainly enough, and that was enough for him. His eyes popped at the shadowy figure, which had come to a stop, in that patch of moonlight, really as if desirous of being seen.

Then came a voice in the silence.

"Is any boy here out of bed?"

It was a deep, rather throaty voice. Racke, had he been less terrified, might have guessed that it was a disguised voice: that of a boy trying to make his tones sound like a man's. But no such thought occurred to the scared Aubrey. He did not recognize the voice. Whose it was Racke did not know. Certainly it sounded nothing like Monty Lowther's. It sounded like that of a man whose throat was husky with a bad cold. It might really have been any beak's at St. Jim's, if that beak had a cold and a husky throat.

Racke did not dream of replying to the question. But an answer came from Tom Merry's bed.

"Who's that?"

"It is I, Merry! Is that Merry speaking?" demanded the deep, husky, throaty voice.

"Yes, sir!"

"Is any boy here out of bed, Merry?"

"I don't think so, sir."

"There was someone in the passage—he ran away, and I am sure that he came into this dormitory."

Aubrey Racke shivered under the blankets.

"I think every fellow is in bed, sir!" came Manners' voice.

"No doubt! No doubt! But someone here has recently been out of bed. I must ascertain who it was! I think it was Racke."

Aubrey trembled.

The figure in cap and gown moved out of the moonlight, and came towards Racke's bed. Racke shut his eyes, and tried to still the thumping of his heart. If only the beak

would believe that he was fast asleep—!

“Racke!” came the husky, throaty voice.

No answer.

“Are you awake, Racke?”

Silence from Racke. But there were sounds from other beds. Many of the Shell fellows were awakening now, peering into the shadows, and wondering what was up. Evidently something was!

“Is that somebody larking?” came Talbot’s voice.

“Who’s that?” called out Kangaroo.

“What’s up?” exclaimed Gore. Six or seven voices joined in.

“Silence, please!” came the deep husky voice. “Racke! Get out of bed at once.”

Aubrey Racke did not stir. His eyes were glued shut, his cheek on the pillow. A hand groped for him, and to Racke’s amazement, fastened on his nose. Never could Racke have dreamed that a beak would awaken a fellow by pulling his nose. But that beak did! Racke came out of his affected slumber with a startled splutter.

“Gooooooooooooogh!”

“Ah! You are awake now, Racke?”

“Urrrgh! Yes, sir!” gurgled Racke. “Ow! Yes!”

“Have you been out of your dormitory, Racke, since lights out?”

“Urrgh!” Racke rubbed his nose. “No, sir!”

“Have you been out of bed at all?”

“No, sir!”

“You are not the boy I saw in the passage a few minutes ago?”

“No, sir!”

If lying could save him, Aubrey Racke was all right! But he had little hope that it could. If the beak discovered that he was fully dressed, even to his shoes—that would settle the matter: and there was nothing for it, for Racke, but the Head-master’s study in the morning! And the next words in the husky throaty voice banished Racke’s last hope.

“Get out of bed, Racke.”

“Wha-a-at for, sir?”

“So that I can see for myself, Racke, whether you were prepared to break bounds, as I strongly suspect.”

"I—I—I—!" stammered Racke.

"Get up at once."

There was no help for it. Racke, his last hope gone, crawled dismally out of bed. The husky voice rapped out:

"Merry! Get up and turn on the light!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a rather unexpected reply from the junior addressed. Manners added a chuckle.

"What? what? What are you laughing at, Merry? Is this a laughing matter? Go and switch on the light immediately!"

"Yes, sir!" gurgled Tom Merry.

Every fellow in the Shell dormitory was wide awake now. Everyone was sitting up in bed, peering into the shadows, wondering who the "beak" was who had "copped" Aubrey Racke. That Racke was "copped" at last, and "for it," nobody could doubt—excepting the three who were aware of the real identity of that particular "beak."

Tom Merry was heard to cross to the door, where the electric switch was. The light flashed on. The whole dormitory was suddenly illuminated.

In the light, every eye fastened on Racke, standing beside his bed, fully dressed, his face like chalk: and on the figure in cap and gown that stood facing him. Racke's eyes were on the floor, and he did not, for the moment, see what leaped to every other eye. In the dim glimmer of uncertain moonlight the figure in cap and gown had undoubtedly looked like that of a master. In the clear electric light, the face was plain to the view, as well as the cap and gown—and a sea of eyes popped at the well-known features of Montague Lowther of the Shell!

"Lowther!" exclaimed Talbot.

"Lowther!" stuttered Kangaroo.

"That japing ass—!" yelled Gore.

"'Tain't a beak at all—"

"It's Lowther—!"

"It's that fathead Lowther—!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Aubrey Racke looked up. For a moment or two, he did not understand. But as he stared at Monty Lowther's grinning face under the mortar-board, it dawned on him. He stared at that face—goggled at it, hardly believing his eyes!

Lowther gave him a cheery nod.

"You!" breathed Racke. "I—I thought—Oh! You!" He choked with rage, as he realised it. "You! You japing idiot—you!" His eyes flamed at Monty Lowther's grinning face. "You! One of your tricks—!"

"Sort of!" assented Lowther. "Funny, what?"

"You—you—you—!" gasped Racke.

"Not so funny as shoving your smokes into another fellow's pocket, but rather amusin', what?" grinned Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ass, Lowther!" exclaimed Talbot, laughing. "But lucky for you it's only a practical joker, Racke."

Racke stood trembling with rage. He had had the scare of his life: he had given himself up for lost: he had not doubted that, in the morning, he would be taken before his Head-master to be "sacked." And it was only the funny man of the Shell, rigged up in a shabby old cap and gown from the junior Dramatic Society's property-box! There was a ripple of laughter up and down the Shell dormitory. Racke glanced round, with smouldering eyes, at Tom Merry and Manners.

"You were all in this!" he muttered, in a choking voice. "I'll make you sorry for it somehow, Tom Merry. I—I—I—" he choked.

"Rats!" said Tom Merry, cheerfully.

"Better turn off the light, Tom," said Talbot. "We shall have a beak up here if it's seen—a genuine one—"

Tom Merry laughed, and shut off the light.

Monty Lowther, chuckling, peeled off the cap and gown. Every fellow in the dormitory was laughing—except Racke! Even his pal Crooke was laughing with the rest.

But Aubrey Racke was not feeling like laughing! It had been awful for Aubrey: and his relief at discovering that he was not, after all, "copped" by a "beak," was as nothing compared with his rage and resentment. His face was pale with fury as he slipped off his clothes to go back to bed. After the scare he had had, he was not thinking of carrying on with the dingy excursion he had planned for that night.

He turned in, white and furious: but it was long before he slept.

Long after the rest of the Shell were fast asleep, Aubrey Racke lay wide awake, his eyes burning in the gloom: hatred and all uncharitableness running riot in his breast. Somehow, anyhow, he was going to get even with the Terrible Three for this—and while the other fellows slept, he lay thinking, and thinking, and thinking, with savage concentration, till at last a scheme took shape in his bitter mind. Tom Merry and Co., if they were dreaming, little dreamed what was to be the outcome of that jape on the black sheep of the Shell.

11

Caught !

BUMP!

“Wow!”

It was a case of more haste and less speed.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, naturally, was in haste when he rushed out of the Fourth-form dormitory in pursuit of Cardew. He tore down the corridor to the dormitory landing, and tore across it. Not having the remotest idea or suspicion that Cardew had not gone out at all, he was only anxious to catch him before he could get out of the House, when he was prepared, as he had declared, to drag him back to his dorm by the ears, if gentler methods did not suffice.

Nevertheless, hurried as he was, it would have been judicious to proceed at a more moderate pace in the dark. The dormitory landing was in darkness, and Arthur Augustus shot across it to the staircase, down which he had no doubt that his relative had preceded him. Really it was not surprising that, in his haste, and in the dark, he missed the top step.

But it was very disconcerting.

He clutched wildly at banisters to save himself, and rolled. Bump! bump! bump! sounded on stair after stair.

“Ooogh! Oh, cwikey! Wow!” spluttered Arthur Augustus, as he rolled. He found himself sitting on the landing below—the study landing—in a breathless, shaken, and dizzy state.

But he did not linger there. Rolling down a flight of stairs in the dark was disconcerting, but it was not enough to deter Arthur Augustus D'Arcy when his noble mind was made up.

He scrambled to his feet, and hurried along. He cut across

the landing to the Fourth-form study passage, and went along that passage almost like an arrow from a bow. Breathless, he arrived at the window at the end. It was well known in the Fourth that Cardew, on more than one nocturnal occasion, had dropped from that window, and clambered back with the help of a rain-pipe. Arthur Augustus had no doubt that that was the way he had gone, as he had gone before: and he hoped to catch him there before he could climb out.

But no one was there! And Arthur Augustus, as he groped over the window, made the surprising discovery that it was shut and fastened.

"Bai Jove!" he breathed.

He had banked on catching Cardew before he could get out of the House. Had Cardew gone that way, no doubt he would have succeeded. But it certainly looked as if Cardew had not gone that way!

"Oh, the wottah!" breather Arthur Augustus.

He stood, in the glimmer of moonlight at the window, at a loss, breathing wrath.

Cardew had not gone that way. No fellow could have fastened the window on the inside after getting out. Had he, knowing that D'Arcy would be after him, selected some other mode of egress? That was the only conclusion to which the exasperated swell of St. Jim's could come!

Certainly, there were many other ways by which a breaker of bounds could get out of the School House. Cardew might have made for the box-room, and clambered out by the leads below the window there. He might have clambered down on the ivy from a study window. He might have gone down to the junior lobby on the ground floor, if he had cared to take the risk of being seen—for lights were still on below the big staircase. He might, in fact, have gone by half a dozen different ways: all that was certain was, that he had not gone by the way Gussy had expected him to go. The swell of St. Jim's was left without a clue.

"Bai Jove! I will punch his wotten head for this!" breathed Arthur Augustus. "The uttah wottah! The dis-reputable scallywag! Bai Jove! I weally do not know where to go on fwom heah!"

It was rather a puzzle, and Arthur Augustus stood for some minutes thinking it out: hardly heeding several aches and

pains in his bones, the result of his tumble down the dormitory staircase.

If Cardew was already out of the House, by another exit, further pursuit was a hopeless proposition. Obviously, Arthur Augustus was not likely now to overtake the breaker of bounds, even if he knew where to look for him—which he did not.

It was borne in upon Arthur Augustus's exasperated mind that there was nothing doing! The scapegrace of St. Jim's had to be left to his own devices: and all that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy could do was to return to his dormitory and go back to bed. It was intensely exasperating, but he realised that there was nothing else to be done—and at length he made up his mind to it.

With deep feelings, he retraced his steps along the Fourth-form passage, to the study landing.

But he stopped, suddenly, in alarm.

That landing had been dark when he shot across it. But it was not dark now. A light glimmered there.

"Oh, cwikey!" murmured Arthur Augustus, in dismay. "Did somebody heah me woll down those wotten stairs? Oh, cwumbs!"

It had not occurred to him, in his haste and hurry, before. Really, it might have—but it hadn't! It occurred to him now, as he came to a dismayed halt in the study passage, blinking at the light that glimmered on the landing. If that noise had been heard, and a "beak" or a "pre" had come up to investigate, his return to the Fourth-form dormitory was barred.

He peered out of the passage, and scanned the landing with a cautious eye. A light, certainly, had been turned on there. But no one was to be seen. Lighted as it was, the study-landing was quite deserted. Somebody must have come up: but whoever it was, had left the light burning, and gone.

That was encouraging. Excellent as his motives had been in leaving his dormitory after lights out, Arthur Augustus did not want to be caught. That would mean Extra School, at least, if not something more severe. But as the coast seemed to be clear, he cut across the landing to the dormitory staircase and hurried up.

Half-way up, however, he halted again. There was a light

above as well as below. A light had been turned on, on the dormitory landing also! Arthur Augustus stared up at the glimmer, dismayed once more.

"Oh, cwumbs!" he breathed.

He could guess what had happened now. Some master downstairs had heard the crash and come up. Finding nothing amiss on the study landing, he had gone up the second staircase to look round there, very probably suspecting that some junior was out of his dormitory. Now that beak was on the dormitory landing, with the light on—between Arthur Augustus and the bed which he began to wish that he had never left!

As he stood in dismay on the dormitory staircase, voices floated to his ears from above. More than one beak had been alerted!

"Nothing seems to be the matter, Lathom." It was the voice of Mr. Railton, the House-master.

"It is very singular, Mr. Railton," came back Mr. Lathom's squeaky voice. "It was quite a loud noise—it sounded to me like someone falling down the stairs."

"To me also!" said Mr. Railton. "Some foolish boy must have left his dormitory, and fallen in the dark—"

"No doubt!"

"Nothing is to be seen of him here. It is possible that he may have gone down to a study—I will look in the studies."

As he was speaking, Mr. Railton appeared at the top of the staircase on which Arthur Augustus had come to a dismayed halt. He gave quite a jump, as he saw Arthur Augustus there.

"D'Arcy!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, staring down at him.

"Oh, cwikey!"

"D'Arcy! You are out of your dormitory, at this hour of the night!"

"Oh, cwumbs!"

"Come here at once, you stupid boy."

Arthur Augustus, in the lowest spirits, negotiated the rest of the stairs, and stepped on the dormitory landing. Mr. Railton eyed him sternly, and Mr. Lathom blinked at him over his spectacles, rather like a surprised owl.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Lathom. "It is D'Arcy—a boy of my

Form! It must have been D'Arcy that we heard, Mr. Railton."

"Did you fall on the stairs, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, sir!" mumbled Arthur Augustus. "I was in wathah a huwwy, and I—I missed the step in the dark—I—I—I was vewy sowwy that I disturbed you, sir—"

"No doubt," said the House-master, dryly.

"Why are you out of bed at this hour, D'Arcy?" squeaked Mr. Lathom.

"I—I—I—!" stammered Arthur Augustus. The colour flushed into his face. "I twust, sir, that you do not suppose, for one moment, sir, that I was goin' to bweak bounds—"

Mr. Railton's stern face relaxed, involuntarily, into a smile. As Arthur Augustus's feet were bare, and he was clad in nothing but his trousers, into which his pyjamas were tucked, the most doubting beak would hardly have suspected him of intending to take a walk abroad.

"Do not be absurd, D'Arcy," said the House-master.

"Oh! Yaas, sir—I mean, no, sir! I assuah you—"

"It is only a foolish escapade, Mr. Railton," said the Fourth-form Master. "I suppose the boy has been down to the studies. Have you been down to the studies, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, sir," faltered Arthur Augustus.

"You are a very foolish, unthinking boy," said Mr. Lathom.

"Weally, sir—"

"You will go into Extra School to-morrow afternoon, D'Arcy. I think that will meet the case, Mr. Railton."

"Quite!" said the House-master. "Go back to your dormitory at once, D'Arcy. If you leave it again you will be caned."

"Vewy well, sir!" said Arthur Augustus, meekly.

And he went.

12

Not Out!

JACK BLAKE sat up in bed, as he heard the door of the dormitory open. It was a quarter of an hour since Arthur Augustus had rushed forth: but in that time, hardly a fellow had gone to sleep again. They were too interested in Arthur Augustus's wild-goose chase: and his friends were rather anxious about him. It was a relief to Blake and Co. to hear the door open.

"Is that you, Gussy, you ass?" asked Blake, as the door shut again.

"Weally, Blake—"

"So you've got back, fathead," said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Copped?" asked Dig.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Poor old Gussy!" sighed Blake. "If there was a beak or a pre about, you'd be bound to run into him!"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus, crossly. He came towards his bed, almost all the juniors sitting up and peering at him in the glimmer of moonlight from the windows. There was a sound of chuckling.

"Did you catch Cardew, D'Arcy?" squeaked Baggy Trimble.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I did not catch Cardew, Twimble—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows, I quite fail to see any weason for all that widiculous cacklin'," snapped Arthur Augustus.

"You'd see if you turned on a light," chuckled Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, wats! Cardew did not go out the way I expected, and so I did not catch him. That is all!"

"You only got caught yourself!" said Wildrake, laughing. "Poor old Gussy! Did you walk into Railton or Kildare?"

"I did not walk into Wailton or Kildare, Wildwake! Wailton and Lathom seem to have heard me fallin' on the staircase—"

"You had to fall on the staircase!" sighed Blake.

"You would!" remarked Herries.

"Gussy all over!" assented Dig.

"Weally, you fellows, any fellow in a huwwy might miss the step in the dark—"

"Any fellow named Gussy!" agreed Blake.

"Oh, wats!" said Arthur Augustus.

He peeled off his trousers, and turned into bed. For once, the swell of St. Jim's was not in the best of tempers. He had several aches and pains from his tumble on the staircase: he had Extra School for the half-holiday on the morrow: and he had failed to catch his erring relative. That chapter of accidents was enough to ruffle even Arthur Augustus's serenity.

Neither were the chuckles up and down the dormitory soothing. Arthur Augustus could see nothing whatever to chuckle at: being still blissfully unaware that the scapegrace, of whom he had gone in chase, had not left the dormitory at all, and was within a few yards of him.

Cardew had not spoken. He was waiting, with considerable amusement, for Arthur Augustus to make that surprising discovery.

"So you never saw anything of Cardew?" asked Blake, with another chuckle: the question evoking another ripple of chuckles from bed to bed.

"Nothin' at all, Blake! He did not go out the way he usually goes when he bweaks bounds, the wottah! Pewwaps it was because he was with Wacke, and that wottah goes out anothah way, for all I know."

"He was with Racke, was he?" gurgled Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! You see, I heard him fixin' it up with Wacke—that is how I knew he was goin'—"

"Might have been pulling your leg!" suggested Levison.

"Wubbish!"

"Perhaps he never meant to go out at all!" said Sidney Clive, laughing.

"Wubbish!" repeated Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you silly asses keep on cacklin', you may bwing Wailton heah," snapped Arthur Augustus. "I left him on the landin' with Lathom. If he comes heah, he will see that Cardew is missin' and it will be the sack for him—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I do not want my wrelative to be bunked fwom St. Jim's, wottah as he is," yapped Arthur Augustus. "I wegard him as a disgwace to the House, but I do not want him kicked out. I have a vevy gweat mind to give him a feahful thwashin' when he comes in—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! If you silly asses are goin' to cackle evewy time a fellow opens his mouth—"

"You ass!" gasped Blake. "Cardew never went out at all! He was pulling your silly leg all the time."

"Wubbish!"

"He's in bed now!" howled Blake.

"Wot!"

"I tell you he never left the dorm—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"He hid under his bed," yelled Herries. "Got it now, fat-head? He never went out, and he's here now."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Blake. "You'll be the death of me some day, Gussy: you really will! I tell you Cardew's been here all the time—"

"You can go on tellin' me till you are black in the face, if you like, you ass, but you cannot pull my leg like that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a howl of laughter in the Fourth-form dormitory. So far from suspecting that Cardew was still there, Arthur Augustus did not believe it now that he was told! He was quite assured that his erring relative had been ahead of him, when he had chased down to the studies.

"Pipe up, Cardew!" gasped Blake. "Gone dumb? Tell that ass you're here."

"Pway do not be such an ass, Blake! I am vevy well

awah that Cardew is not heah, and that he is at the Gween Man by this time, with Wacke, the wottah! The disweputable wapscallion—”

“Thanks!” drawled a voice from the shadows.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Arthur Augustus jumped. In his amazement, he almost jumped out of bed. He stared round blankly in the gloom.

“Bai Jove! That sounded like Cardew’s voice!” he ejaculated. “Is—is—is that wottah in the dorm aftah all?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Cardew!” Arthur Augustus almost roared. “Are you there, you wat?”

“Here I am, old bean,” came Cardew’s drawling voice. “Wonderin’ if you’re ever goin’ to shut up, and let a fellow go to sleep.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Arthur Augustus sat up in bed, peering in the gloom, and breathing wrath. He could no longer doubt that Cardew was there, and that his noble leg had been pulled. He had bagged that tumble on the stairs, and Extra School from his Form-master, on a wild-goose chase after a fellow who had not gone out at all.

“You—you uttah wottah!” he gasped. “You wapscallion! You leg-pullin’ wat! You—you—you—”

“Speech may be taken as read!” suggested Cardew.

“I have a gweat mind to turn out of bed and give you a feahful thwashin’, you wat! I have got Extwa School to-morrow thwough goin’ aftah you, and you nevah went at all—”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Extra School to-morrow!” exclaimed Blake.

“Yaas, wathah!”

“Oh, you howling ass—!”

“Weally, Blake—”

“You blithering chump!” howled Blake. “Then you’re out of the cricket to-morrow. Think you can play cricket in Extra?”

“Oh! Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!”

“Oh, you ass!” said Herries.

“Oh, you fathead!” said Dig.

“Bai Jove! This is weally wotten luck!” said Arthur

Augustus. "I shall not be able to play for St. Jim's to-morrow and that means that Carcroft will pull it off again as they did last time—"

"Ass!"

"Fathead!"

"Chump!"

"Weally, you fellows, it is no good callin' me names because I have got Extwa to-morrow. I did not ask Lathom for Extwa! It is all Cardew's fault! I twust you are satisfied now, Cardew!" added Arthur Augustus, with crushing sarcasm.

Cardew made no reply to that. The other fellows could not see the smile on his face. If Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was out of the Carcroft match, there was room for another man: and if Cardew had answered D'Arcy's sarcastic question, the answer would have been in the affirmative. Other fellows might be dismayed, especially Arthur Augustus, but Ralph Reckness Cardew had reason to be satisfied: or so it seemed to him, at least.

13

The Tempter!

“**TOM MERRY!**”

Aubrey Racke glanced round, as that name was spoken.

He was leaning on an old elm, in the sunny morning, his hands driven deep into his pockets, and a dark look on his face. It was not yet time for class, and there were a good many fellows in the quad, most of them looking merry and bright in the summer morning: quite a contrast to Aubrey Racke's dark and bitter face.

The name of Tom Merry was not music to Racke's ears just then. His dark face darkened still more, and his eyes glinted, as he glanced round. It was Cardew of the Fourth who had spoken—Tom Merry had just come out of the House, and was starting to cross the quad towards the New House, when Cardew stopped him.

“Well, what?” asked Tom, impatiently. He did not glance towards Racke, or see him standing there: his eyes fixed on Cardew, with impatient inquiry. He had, in fact, no time for the dandy of the Fourth.

“Just a word, if you're not in too big a hurry,” drawled Cardew.

“I am in a hurry,” answered Tom. “I've got to speak to Figgins before we go into form—I'm going over to the New House—”

“I won't keep you more than a minute. I hear that D'Arcy is out of the game this afternoon—Extra School or somethin'.”

Tom Merry knitted his brows.

“Yes, and it's your fault,” he snapped, angrily. “I've lost

one of my best bats for the Carcroft match, all through your trickery. I've just heard it from D'Arcy, and I've told him what I think of him. Do you want to hear what I think of you?"

"Not particularly—I'm afraid I shouldn't be flattered," said Cardew, shaking his head. "But really it wasn't quite my fault if Gussy chose to play the giddy ox and get bunged into Extra—"

"Oh, rats! Anyhow, we're left a man short for the Carcroft match—one of our best, too. Is that all you've got to say?"

"Not quite! You'll want another man, as you've just said. Any use my offerin' my humble services?"

Cardew spoke in a careless drawl, but his eyes were keen. He was very keen indeed to play for St. Jim's against Carcroft: and in fact he was banking on it, now that D'Arcy was out of the eleven. The place had to be filled: and it would have been hard to find a better man to fill it—in the opinion of a good many fellows, as well as Cardew.

So far as Cardew, at least, could see, only the cricket captain's personal prejudice stood between him and the coveted place. His pals, Levison and Clive, were both in the team: and Cardew, at his best, was twice as good as either of them. True, he was not always at his best: and he admitted even to himself that he was untrustworthy. But for the present, at least, Cardew was on a new tack: bookies, and gee-gees, and breaking bounds, were, for the moment, things of the past, and he was prepared to throw himself, heart and soul, into the summer game. If Tom Merry trusted to that, all was clear.

But the look on Tom's face showed that he did not trust to that, or think for one moment of doing so. Cardew was a fellow to chop and change: Tom Merry was not. When his mind was made up, it was made up: and it did not, like Cardew's, veer like a variable wind.

His answer was short and sharp.

"Thanks! No."

Cardew's face hardened. Aubrey Racke, looking on from under the tree, had a sardonic grin on his face. It was not displeasing to him to see the arrogant dandy of the Fourth taken down a peg.

Having answered, Tom Merry would have passed on. But Cardew blocked his way.

"Hold on a minute—!" he said.

"I've told you I've no time to waste."

"Hold on a minute, all the same. You've got a place to fill in the eleven, and you know I'm keen to play—"

"For how long?" asked Tom, sarcastically. "Sure you won't change your mind before Carcroft get here?"

"You can rely on me to play up—"

"Any fellow who relied on you in anything would be a fool," answered Tom. "Your own pals can't rely on you for ten minutes together. Do you expect to get D'Arcy's place in the team as a reward for shifting him out?"

"That was not my fault—" Cardew's eyes glinted. "Are you still sore about that joke in Study No. 6 a couple of days ago?"

"You call it a joke, when you nearly landed a fellow in a row with all his best friends!" said Tom. "Yes, I suppose that's your idea of a joke. And it was another joke to get D'Arcy landed in Extra on a match day. But it's not that—you're not a man to be trusted, and you know it. Haven't I seen you conk out in a game because you'd been out overnight, and smoked yourself sick?" snapped Tom. "Chuck it!"

"I've chucked all that—"

"Perhaps!"

"If you can't take a fellow's word—"

"Your word!" said Tom, scornfully. "What's that worth?" Cardew crimsoned.

"You rotter!" he said, between his teeth. "What you mean is, that you're going to keep me out of the cricket, whether there's any reason or not. You've got the upper hand, and you're using it. There isn't a man in the House up to my form at the game—"

"I'm putting in a New House man, if you want to know," said Tom. "I'm going over to the New House now, to tell Figgins that Redfern will be wanted."

"Redfern?" repeated Cardew. "You're throwing over a man in your own House, to play a New House tick—"

"Houses have nothing to do with a School match, as you know, or ought to know. The best men have to be picked

where they can be found. Redfern isn't as good a man as you at your best—but he's ten times better than you at your worst—and he can be trusted. That's all!"

And as Cardew did not move, Tom Merry walked round him, and went on his way to the New House.

Cardew stood quite still, breathing very hard. His face was almost white with rage and disappointment. He had counted on that vacant place—banked on it—but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's misadventure over-night had not, after all, made any difference: he was out of the junior eleven, and staying out. He stood quivering with bitter rage and resentment.

"So that's that!" said an unpleasant voice, and he stared round at Aubrey Racke, whom he had noticed before. His eyes flashed. It was an added humiliation that Aubrey Racke had been a witness to that scene. He stepped towards him, his hands clenching, as Racke looked at him with a sneering grin.

"Tom Merry banged your head the other day, Racke," he said. "Do you want it banged again, on that tree?"

"Keep your temper," said Racke, coolly. "Tom Merry's going to be sorry for banging my head, and for some other things, too. Perhaps you'd like to make him sorry for turfing you out of the cricket."

Cardew's eyes blazed.

"I'll make him sorry, somehow," he muttered. "The rotter! He knows I'm the best man available, and he won't play me at any price. He's keen on beating Carcroft this time—keen as mustard—but that won't make him put his personal dislikes in his pocket. He knows I'm a better man than Redfern, any day! He knows all right—! But—" Cardew broke off, almost choking.

It was not like the supercilious dandy of the Fourth to speak so freely, and reveal his feelings so openly, especially to a fellow like Racke. But his accustomed cool self-control seemed to have deserted him now. His resentment was too deep and bitter for him to care what he said.

Racke's eyes gleamed. Cardew was in a mood that would have made his friends uneasy: but it was a mood that suited Aubrey Racke.

He glanced round, and lowered his voice, as he spoke again.

"He's keeping you out of the cricket! How would you like to serve him as he's serving you?"

"What do you mean?" snapped Cardew.

"I mean what I say! You know how keen he is on the match with Carcroft to-day—"

"Not keen enough to play a fellow he dislikes," said Cardew, between his teeth.

"No! But keen as mustard, all the same. He's keeping you out! Are you game to keep him out, too?"

Cardew laughed angrily.

"I wouldn't stop at much, to do that," he said, "but talk sense! By gad, if I could dish him as he's dished me—but you're talking rot!" He gave Racke a sharp, searching suspicious look. "What have you got in your head, Racke?"

"I've got it all cut and dried, if you're game," muttered Racke. "I can't handle it alone, and Crooke funks it—but you're no funk, Cardew. If you're game—!"

"Oh, don't be a fool! I'm game for anything, if it will serve that rotter as he's served me. What do you mean?"

"Tom Merry and his friends dished me last night, and gave me the scare of my life; into the bargain," muttered Racke. "I'm hitting back—and where it hurt most, and that's in the cricket. I've thought it all out, and got it all cut and dried—with a pal to help! If you're on—!" He paused, watching Cardew like a cat.

For a moment, Cardew did not speak. All his better instincts warned him not to listen further to the dingy outsider, who had some treacherous trickery in mind. In a normal mood, he would have turned his back on Aubrey and walked away without another word.

But he was not in a normal mood now—far from it. He paused. But the pause was brief.

"Go on!" he said.

And Racke, in a low muttering voice, went on: and Cardew listened to the voice of the tempter.

Arthur Augustus Intervenes

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY frowned.

That morning, Arthur Augustus was not in the best of tempers. For once his noble serenity was ruffled. In the form-room, his aristocratic face was clouded. Several times he glanced at his relative, Ralph Reckness Cardew, with knitted brows. It was all through Cardew, and his impish sense of humour, that Arthur Augustus was booked for Extra School that afternoon: doomed to sit dismally under a detention master while other fellows were playing cricket. Concerned as he had been about his relative, his chief concern about him now was a strong inclination to punch his head!

Extra, on that special occasion, was, from Arthur Augustus's point of view, an extremely serious matter. Indeed, at the moment, it seemed to him the most serious thing going on in the universe just then. It was not only that no fellow liked Extra. It was not only that Gussy was very keen to play cricket. But he had great doubts about the result of the Carcroft match, minus his presence in the eleven.

Tom Merry had been disconcerted when he heard of it. Arthur Augustus, with all his superb ways, and his elegant manners and customs, was undoubtedly one of the best junior bats in the House, and it was a fact that he was wanted in the side. However, Tom Merry had to make the best of it: and he had picked Redfern of the New House to take D'Arcy's place, and that was that. The loss of Arthur Augustus was

a blow: but it was not, in the junior cricket captain's eyes, quite so tremendous a blow as it seemed to Gussy himself. Gussy took a much more serious view of it!

Extra for himself and what seemed to him extremely dubious prospects for the Carcroft match, caused Arthur Augustus's usually cheery face to be quite overcast that morning, in the Fourth-form room.

With that weight on his mind, he was not able to give his Form-master, Lathom, all the attention that that gentleman expected in form: and when morning break came, the unfortunate Gussy was the richer by a hundred lines, which did not tend to raise his spirits.

He came out into the sunny quad, in a far from exuberant mood, and his eye lingered on Cardew, inimically.

Cardew was taking no heed of him: and had probably forgotten his existence. He was thinking of other things: and certainly had no suspicion that Arthur Augustus was feeling more and more disposed to punch his head, and even considering whether to do so, now that they were out of the form-room.

Cardew came out with Levison and Clive, but he left them, and joined Racke of the Shell in the quad. It was then that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy frowned: a deep frown, really not unlike the 'frightful, fearful, frantic frown' of the Lord High Executioner.

"Brace up, Gussy, old man," said Blake. "You'll be out of Extra in time to see us wipe Carcroft off the ground."

"Weally, Blake—"

"It's hard luck, old chap: but the Carcroft match isn't the only pebble on the beach," said Dig, encouragingly. "You'll be playing in the Greyfriars match, you know—"

"If you don't go wandering about the House in the middle of the night and getting bunged into Extra again!" remarked Herries.

Arthur Augustus did not heed. His eyes were on Cardew and Racke, and he could not help seeing that they had strolled away, and disappeared together behind the elms by the school wall. His frown deepened.

"That wottah—!" he muttered.

"Eh? Who—what—?" asked Blake. Blake was not in

the least interested in Cardew or Racke, and had not noticed them or their movements.

"My wrelative seems to be chummin' with that wottah Wacke," said Arthur Augustus. "They have just gone off togethah."

Blake yawned.

"Let 'em rip!" he suggested. "I say, I hear that Carcroft have got a jolly good man—chap named Vane-Carter—they call him V.C. for short—"

"Bothah Vane-Carter," said Arthur Augustus, crossly: he was no more interested in Vane-Carter of Carcroft, than Blake was in Racke and Cardew.

And leaving his friends to talk cricket, Arthur Augustus ambled away, following the direction Racke and Cardew had taken. In that remote corner behind the old elms, was the spot where Aubrey Racke had very nearly been caught by Kildare with his cigarettes: and Arthur Augustus had no doubt why the two black sheep had disappeared in that direction. And it caused him finally to make up his mind to punch Cardew's head!

As he came through the elms to the shady path by the school wall, he heard Racke's voice.

"You'll have to hurry."

"I'm not goin' to lose time," came Cardew's drawl. "If I'm not back in time for third school, it will mean lines from Lathom: but it's worth it."

"Safer not to be missed."

"Safety-first is always your motto, isn't it, Racke?" There was a sneer in Cardew's voice. "I'm not worryin'. Bunk me up!"

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

He stared at what met his eyes. It was not smoking that was going on in that hidden corner. Racke was "bunking" Cardew up to the wall: Cardew, evidently, was going out, and Racke was helping him. No fellow was allowed out of the school precincts in morning break without leave: and unless Cardew, wherever he was going, was back within fifteen minutes, he was certain to be missed—a risk that he was taking with his usual cool carelessness.

Arthur Augustus's frown, already deep, deepened. Cardew had not, after all, gone out of bounds the previous night.

But he was going out of bounds now—not, however, if Arthur Augustus could stop him!

He ran forward.

“Cardew, you wottah! Stop!” shouted Arthur Augustus.

“Oh, gad!” Cardew, with his hands on top of the wall, stared down. Racke, with a furious face, stared round.

Arthur Augustus came up, breathlessly.

“Cardew—!”

“You meddlin’ fool, mind your own business,” snapped Cardew.

“Get out of this, D’Arcy,” muttered Racke.

Arthur Augustus’s reply to that was not in words, but in action. He gave the Shell fellow a vigorous and unceremonious shove, and Racke went staggering. Cardew was left hanging by his hands on the wall, his face as furious as Racke’s.

“Now dwop, you wottah!” snapped Arthur Augustus.

“Will you mind your own business, you gabblin’ fool?” hissed Cardew.

“I wegard it as my business, Cardew, to pwevent a wela-tive fwom gettin’ sacked,” answered Arthur Augustus. “I should have stopped you last night, and I am goin’ to stop you now.”

“Keep away, you idiot.”

“Wats!”

And as Cardew dragged himself up, Arthur Augustus grabbed at an ankle, and held on to it. Cardew, breathing fury, kicked out with his other foot.

Thud!

“Yawooh!” roared Arthur Augustus, as a heel thudded on his noble nose, and he let go his hold, tottering back, with both hands clasped to his nose. “Ow! Oh! You uttah wuffian! Wow!”

Cardew was over the wall the next moment, dropping on the outer side. There was a sound of running feet, as he departed in haste. Arthur Augustus was left nursing his nose, and Racke grinning.

“Oh, cwikey! Ow! Oh, my nose!” gasped Arthur

Augustus. "Wow! Bai Jove, what are you gwinnin' at Wacke? You wottah, I—I—"

Racke, still grinning, disappeared through the elms. Arthur Augustus dabbed his nose with his handkerchief, on which were several spots of red. His feelings were deep. Cardew was gone: and Arthur Augustus's intervention had resulted in nothing but a pain in his noble nose. The scapegrace of St. Jim's had to be left to his own devices.

Those devices, if Arthur Augustus had known, would have surprised him. He was not likely to guess, or dream, that Cardew, at the village post-office, had gone into the telephone kiosk: and he would have been still more surprised, could he have known that the number Cardew rang was a St. Jim's number.

15

A Trick on the Telephone

“PLEASE, Mr. Railton, sir—”

Toby, the House page, looked into Masters' Common-Room. Mr. Railton, House-master of the School House, was there, in conversation with Linton, Master of the Shell, and Lathom, Master of the Fourth. He glanced round as Toby's chubby face looked in.

“What is it?” he asked.

“The telephone in your study, sir! Gentleman rung up from the Hotel Royal in Wayland, sir.”

“Very well!”

Mr. Railton left the Common-Room, and proceeded to his study. He was not expecting a telephone-call from a gentleman at the Hotel Royal in Wayland, but supposed that it would be from some parent or relative of some boy in his House, who was in the neighbourhood. Communications from parents and relatives of boys in his House were one of the inevitable trials of a House-master's life.

He picked up the receiver.

“Mr. Railton speaking! What—?”

“Tat is Mr. Railton, at te School House, yes?” asked a voice with a strong German accent. “Tis is Mistair Krug tat speak.”

Mr. Railton raised his eyebrows slightly. He was aware that the Hotel Royal, in Wayland, was run by a foreign gentleman: and had heard that his name was Krug, but that was all that he knew about him.

“What is it, Mr. Krug?” he asked. It struck him that Mr. Krug's voice had a somewhat youthful sound, for an hotel-

keeper: but he did not think of attaching any importance to that circumstance. Certainly it was not likely to occur to him that a schoolboy might adopt a foreign accent in order to disguise his voice and delude him.

"Miss Fawcett is here, sir, and she vish to see a poy to come to lunch, if you permit. A Miss Briscilla Fawcett—you know te name, sir?"

"Miss Priscilla Fawcett? Quite! Miss Fawcett is the guardian of a boy in my House—"

"Tat is vat te goot lady say, sair! A poy name Murray, I tink—"

"Merry!" said Mr. Railton.

"Ach! ja, ja! Tat is te name—Merry! Miss Fawcett ask me to telephone, she go to rest after te train. She come to see a match of te cricket at te school, and she vish if you permit tat Murray—tat is to say Merry—he come ovair to tis hotel to lunch mit her, and bring her to te school after, isn't it. Tat is te message, sair."

"Certainly," said Mr. Railton. "Please tell Miss Fawcett that Merry shall come, immediately after third school. I will tell the boy myself."

"Tank you, sair."

"Not at all, Mr. Krug."

Mr. Railton replaced the receiver. What had been asked was quite a normal thing, and not the remotest doubt crossed his mind that it had been Mr. Krug, of the Hotel Royal at Wayland, who had been on the telephone. He would have been amazed, indeed astounded, could he have seen his interlocutor grinning in the telephone-kiosk at Rylcombe.

The Terrible Three were on the quad, and Mr. Railton called to Tom Merry from his open study window.

"Merry!"

Tom looked round.

"Yes, sir!"

He left Manners and Lowther, and hurried across to the House-Master's window. Mr. Railton gave him a kind glance.

"I have just received a telephone message from the Royal Hotel at Wayland, Merry. Your guardian, Miss Fawcett, has arrived there, apparently with the intention of coming here to see the cricket match this afternoon. She desires

you to go to lunch with her at the hotel and escort her to the school. You may go as soon as third school is dismissed."

"Thank you, sir," said Tom.

He rejoined his friends in the quad, with a cheery face.

"What's the jolly news?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Something good?" asked Manners.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, yes. My old guardian is coming to see the game this afternoon—Miss Priscilla, you know. Queer that she never mentioned it in her letter yesterday: I suppose she made up her mind all of a sudden. I shall be jolly glad to see her: and we've jolly well got to let her see us beat Carcroft."

"Hear, hear," said Lowther.

"I'm to go over to lunch at the hotel, and bring her back here," added Tom. "I shall have to clear off as soon as we come out of form. She's at the Hotel Royal at Wayland now."

"I've heard that they have jolly good prog at that show," remarked Monty Lowther. "Beats the school tiffin hollow, I believe. Did Miss Fawcett ask you to take your pals with you?"

"Sorry—no!" said Tom, laughing.

"Thoughtless of her," said Monty, shaking his head. "Hallo, there goes the bell! Great pip! What's happened to the one and only?"

The bell for third school had started to ring. Among the fellows coming towards the House was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth. Blake and Herries and Dig, who were with him, were grinning, as if amused about something. But Arthur Augustus, very clearly, was not amused. His noble nose looked red, and a little raw, and he was rubbing it tenderly. Something, it was clear, had happened to that aristocratic proboscis.

"Been scrapping?" asked Tom.

"I have not been scwappin', Tom Mewwy," answered Arthur Augustus, breathing hard. "I have been back-heeled on the nose."

"Back-heeled on the nose!" repeated Tom, blankly. "How on earth did that happen?"

"That wank wottah Cardew was climbin' out ovah the wall, and I gwabbed his ankle to dwag him back," explained Arthur Augustus. "He had the fwightful nerve to back-heel my nose, to make me let go."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is not a laughin' mattah," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, indignantly. "I have a pain in my nose—"

"As well as a pane in your eye!" sighed Monty Lowther. "Too bad!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"But has Cardew gone out of bounds in break?" asked Manners.

"Yaas, wathah! That wottah of your form, Wacke, bunked him ovah the wall. He will be late in form, and I shall not be sowwy if Lathom whops him. Is my nose vewy wed?"

"Red as a rose!" grinned Lowther.

"Bai Jove! Is it weally as wed as a wose? The uttah wottah and wuffian—"

"Gussy asks for these things," remarked Blake. "He can't let that relation of his rip."

"I wefuse to let him wip, Blake! I am not goin' to have a wrelative of mine sacked fwom St. Jim's if I can pwevent it. I wegard that as a dutay!" said Arthur Augustus, firmly.

"You seem to be getting more kicks than ha'pence out of it" remarked Manners. "Extra School, and a prize nose—why not let him rip, Gussy?"

"Nothin' will induce me to let him wip, Mannahs." And Arthur Augustus marched on with his grinning friends, Tom Merry and Co. following, grinning also. It was a serious matter to Arthur Augustus—very serious indeed—but to his comrades, his fatherly concern for his erring relative was not without an element of the comic.

Cardew was late in thir'd school. The lesson had, in fact, been going on for more than a quarter of an hour, when he arrived in the form-room. Mr. Lathom gave him a stern look.

"You are late, Cardew!"

"I'm so sorry, sir,—I—"

"I desire to hear no excuses," snapped Mr. Lathom. "Take two hundred lines, Cardew, and go to your place."

"Yes, sir!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave his relative a grim and severe look as he went to his place, and gave his reddened nose another rub. He whispered as Cardew passed him.

"You uttah wottah! I am goin' to punch your nose aftah class, and make it as wed as mine, or weddah!"

"Oh, do! I'll wait for you in that corner behind the elms," whispered back Cardew.

"I shall be there, you wottah!"

"Silence in the class!" rapped Mr. Lathom.

When third school was dismissed, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy headed for the corner behind the elms. But Ralph Reckness Cardew did not join him there. Having waited five minutes, it dawned upon Arthur Augustus that Cardew was not coming, and in deep wrath he went to look for him. He did not find him. He learned from Trimble that Cardew had gone out of gates: and his wrath had to remain in a bottled-up state.

Had he been interested in Racke's movements, he might have learned that Aubrey Racke also had disappeared out of gates immediately his form was dismissed. But he was not thinking of Aubrey Racke: and neither was Tom Merry, when a little later, having made himself spick and span for lunch at the Hotel Royal, he started walking by the foot-path through the wood to Wayland.

Trapped !

TOM MERRY hardly knew what was happening.

Never had a fellow been so utterly taken by surprise.

He was swinging cheerily along the footpath in the wood, under the over-hanging branches, thick with their summer foliage, without a care on his mind. He was going to have a jolly good lunch at the Hotel Royal with his old guardian: then he was going to escort Miss Priscilla to the school: and that kind old soul was going to watch the junior cricket match: and Tom—he hoped at least—was going to put up a jolly good innings for her to watch. It was a pleasant prospect: Miss Priscilla's visits to St. Jim's were few and far between, and Tom was very fond of the kind old lady. Not for an instant could it have crossed his mind that the whole thing was a trick: and that Miss Priscilla was all the while at home in Hampshire. He had almost forgotten the existence of Racke and Cardew, and did not even know that they were out of gates: certainly never dreaming that they were ahead of him and lurking in the shady wood.

Neither did he think of them when it happened. What happened was utterly unexpected and quite inexplicable.

In one spot, where the footpath was very narrow, the thickets encroaching on either side, a massive old oak bulged out into the path, the branches mingling with branches of other trees on the opposite side. Under that thick canopy of foliage it was dusky, even on a sunny summer's day. As Tom swung by under the oak branches, something suddenly dropped over his head, enveloping him almost to his feet,

blotting out every ray of light. It was a large open sack, and it descended so suddenly and unexpectedly that he had not the remotest chance of avoiding it, or even knowing that it was coming.

Utterly amazed, he staggered, inside the enveloping sack, too astounded, for the moment, to do anything but gasp.

Before he could begin to recover his wits, or make any movement to free himself, there was a thud, and a thud again, of two figures that dropped from the oak branches.

He was gripped on either side.

There was a cord round the neck of the sack, which reached below his knees. That cord was drawn tight and knotted. It was the work of seconds: and Tom Merry, bodily enveloped by the thick sack, was a helpless prisoner.

He gasped for breath in the sack, hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels, in his overwhelming amazement.

But he began to struggle.

"Who's that—what's this—what do you mean?" he panted. "Let me out of this, will you? Who are you? What do you think you're up to?"

There was no reply.

But two pairs of hands were gripping him in the sack, and he knew that he had to deal with two persons, whoever they were.

He felt himself being dragged off the footpath, into the thickets of Wayland Wood. It was so amazing that it seemed more like a dream than reality. But it was happening: and Tom struggled with all his strength.

"Let me go!" he shouted, angrily. "What are you up to? Let me out of this, I tell you."

He heard a low chuckle, but that was the only reply. His struggling was of little avail. He was a prisoner in the sack, and could not use his hands. The closeness of it half-suffocated him.

Two pairs of hands dragged him onward, into the wood, heedless of his struggling. How far he was bundled, and dragged, and rolled, he did not know, but he knew that it was to a good distance from the footpath. He could hear his unknown captors panting with the exertion. From the dragging and scratching of bush and bramble, he was aware

that he was being taken into the thickest part of the wood.

They stopped at last.

Panting breathing came to his ears, as he lay on the ground in the huge thick sack. But there was no sound of voices.

Dizzy with amazement and anger, Tom Merry lay where he had been dropped, utterly unable to understand why this had happened, or what his unseen captors intended to do with him. He could only surmise dazedly that it was some sort of a rough practical joke, but who were its perpetrators he had not the remotest idea.

"Will you chuck this?" he shouted. "Let me out of this sack! Who are you? What are you doing this for? Mad?"

Again there was a chuckle. But there was no answer: and, to his dismay, he heard a sound of departing footsteps, a brushing among the thick bushes and brambles. His captors were going—apparently intending to leave him there, tied up in the sack!

He shouted again, desperately.

"You rotters! Let me loose! Do you hear? Let me out of this! Are you mad, or what? Will you let me out?"

There was silence, save for the twittering of birds in the trees. The unknown pair were gone.

Tom Merry lay breathless, panting, enraged, but more amazed than enraged. They were gone, leaving him there—and Miss Priscilla would be expecting him in Wayland—He made desperate, almost frantic, efforts to release himself from the sack.

But he soon had to realise that there was no chance of that. The sacking was thick and strong, impossible to burst or split. The cord knotted under his knees kept the sack in place, and with all his exertions he could not loosen it, to slip the sack off.

After four or five minutes of desperate efforts, he had to give it up, exhausted and breathless. He lay inside the sack panting and perspiring. He was a helpless prisoner: until they chose to come back and release him.

But as he lay, panting, tiny glimmers of dusky light came to him, and he realised that several holes had been cut in the bottom of the sack, where it was over his head. He

could guess easily enough what that meant—it was to admit air, so that he could breathe freely. But it meant also that his mysterious assailants meant to leave him in the sack for some time: why, he could not begin to guess: any more than he could guess who they were, or why they had kidnapped him at all.

For some time he lay, recovering his strength and his breath. Then he made an attempt to roll over in the sack, in the faint hope of rolling back the way he had come, and getting back to the footpath. But he soon found that he could not stir from the spot, amid the thickets in which he had been left.

There was nothing left for him but to shout for help: though he knew now why he had been dragged so deep into the thick recesses of the wood: it was so that his voice should not be heard by passers-by on the footpath. But it was the last hope: and he shouted with all the force of his lungs.

“Help! Help!”

His shouts were muffled by the thick sack: but they reached to a good distance. But there came no answer to his shouting—and he realised that there were no ears to hear.

He gave it up at last, and lay breathless, helpless—a **prisoner in the depths** of the wood: a prisoner till his captors chose to release him. Miss Priscilla, if she was at the Hotel Royal, would wait for him in vain: and unless he was released in time the Carcroft match at St. Jim's would be played without him! He could hardly believe that the two rascals, whoever they were, could intend to leave him so long—and he strained his ears for a sound of returning footsteps. But he strained them in vain: from the dusky depths of the wood, only the twittering of birds came to his ears.

Unexpected!

“**T**IME he was back!” said Monty Lowther.

“High time!” said Manners.

“Yaas, wathah!” concurred Arthur Augustus D’Arcy.

“He wouldn’t be late,” said Blake, “but—”

“Not likely,” said Manners. “But he ought to be here. Carcroft won’t be long now.”

It was quite a puzzle to the juniors. They did not expect Tom Merry back till after the school dinner, as he was to lunch with Miss Priscilla at Wayland. But they expected him now: and he had not come. Stumps were to be pitched early, and Tom knew when Carcroft were booked to arrive. It was puzzling, and indeed amazing, that he was hanging it out like this. Every minute the juniors expected to see a taxi from Wayland roll in, with Tom and his old guardian in it. But there was no sign of it.

Figgins and Kerr and Wynn and Redfern, from the New House, joined the little crowd at the School House steps. They were already in flannels.

“Where’s Tom Merry?” asked Figgins.

“Not back from Wayland yet,” said Blake.

Figgins raised his eyebrows.

“Gone over to Wayland just before the match?” he asked.

“Forgotten that we’re playing Carcroft to-day, perhaps!”

“Wats!” said Arthur Augustus.

“Tom will be back in time,” said Talbot. “He had to go to Wayland as Miss Fawcett was there, to bring her over to

see the match. He can't have forgotten the time."

"Hardly," said Kerr. "But he ought to be here now."

"Yaas, wathah."

Aubrey Racke, lounging near with his hands in his pockets, winked at the pigeons in the quad. Racke was finding the discussion of Tom Merry's inexplicable delay rather amusing.

Cardew came sauntering from the direction of the gates, and Talbot called to him. Arthur Augustus gave him rather a grim look. But it was no time now for punching Cardew's head!

"Anyone on the road, Cardew?"

Cardew glanced round at the group, and came to a stop. He looked at them with a curious glimmer in his eyes.

"Only a motor-coach," he answered. "I expect it's the Carcroft crowd. They're due now, aren't they?"

"Bai Jove! Carcroft heah, and Tom Mewwy not!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "It is weally vewy wemarkable of Tom Mewwy."

"Has he gone out?" asked Cardew, blandly.

"Over to Wayland to lunch at the Hotel Royal," said Blake. "Can't make out why he hasn't got back. You didn't see a taxi on the road?"

"No: only that motor coach."

"Dashed if I make it out," said Blake. "Look here, one of us had better ring up the Hotel Royal at Wayland, and see if he's still there. If he hasn't started back yet—"

"But he must have!" exclaimed Figgins. "He couldn't be such an ass—even a School House man couldn't be such an ass—"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Better phone, I think," said Monty Lowther. "I'll cut in and ask Railton to let me use his phone."

"Better, perhaps," assented Talbot.

Monty Lowther cut into the House. Mr. Railton was in Common-Room: and on hearing what was wanted, at once gave Lowther leave to telephone. Lowther hurried to the House-master's study.

There he dialled the number of the Hotel Royal at Wayland—little dreaming of the discovery he was about to make.

"Hotel Royal, Wayland," came a voice over the wires.

"Speaking from St. Jim's—St. James's School!" said Lowther. "Please tell me whether Miss Fawcett and Tom Merry have left yet."

"Miss Fawcett—Tom Merry! I do not know the names, sir! There is no one of either name staying here."

"Not staying," explained Lowther. "Miss Fawcett arrived by train in Wayland this morning, and your manager telephoned a message for her to our House-master here, asking Tom to come over to lunch—"

"There is some mistake, sir! No lady has arrived at this hotel to-day, and no schoolboy has been here to lunch."

Monty Lowther almost staggered.

"But—but—your manager, Mr. Krug, phoned our House-master—Tom was given leave to come over to lunch—hasn't he been there?"

"Nothing of the kind! There is some mistake—some other hotel, perhaps—"

"That's the Hotel Royal, isn't it?"

"Yes, this is the Hotel Royal."

"Then there is no mistake! Will you ask your manager, Mr. Krug, to come to the telephone, please?" stammered Lowther.

"Very well, sir."

There was a pause: during which Monty Lowther stood almost stupified. If Miss Priscilla was not at the hotel, and Tom Merry had not arrived there for lunch, he could not begin to guess what it all meant.

A guttural voice came through.

"Mr. Krug speaking! Vat is vanted?"

It was a German accent, very like that which Mr. Railton had heard that morning. But if Mr. Railton had been at the phone, he would have been aware that the voice was different, though the accent was much the same.

"You are Mr. Krug—?"

"Ja! Ja wohl!"

"You telephoned the school this morning, sir—"

"Nein! Nein! Vy for you tink I telephone te school?" exclaimed the voice at the other end, in tones of astonishment.

"But—but you did!" stammered Lowther. "At least,

somebody did, giving your name, and our House-master, Mr. Railton, took the call. Didn't you phone?"

"Nein!"

"Has a lady named Miss Priscilla Fawcett come to your hotel to-day?"

"Nein! I know not te name. No lady come to tis hotel to-day."

Monty Lowther felt as if his head was turning round.

"But—but—Tom Merry was given leave to come over to lunch with her," he stuttered. "Hasn't he come? Hasn't he been at the hotel? A schoolboy—"

"No schoolpoy has come to tis hotel to-day. I do not understand you. Is tis some bractical choke, or vat?" Mr. Krug seemed to be getting impatient.

"I—I can't make it out," stammered the bewildered Lowther. "If Miss Fawcett hasn't been to your hotel at all, Mr. Krug—"

"Nein!"

"And no schoolboy from here—"

"Nein!"

"You—you are sure—?"

"Ach! Gewiss! Tink you tat I do not know who is in mein own hotel?" snapped Mr. Krug. "Tere is no Mees Fawcett—tere is no schoolpoy—and tat is enoff vaste of time."

And Mr. Krug rang off.

Monty Lowther was left staring dumbfounded at the telephone. He could hardly believe it—but he had to. Miss Priscilla had not come to Wayland at all—the telephone-call had been some extraordinary trick by some person unknown. Still more amazing, Tom Merry, who had started for Wayland, had not arrived there. In utter bewilderment, Monty Lowther replaced the receiver, and left the study. His face was quite dazed when he rejoined the waiting group of juniors in the quad.

Cardew looked at him curiously. He did not look at Racke but he was aware that the cad of the Shell gave him a wink. Neither of them spoke: but almost all the other fellows spoke at once.

"Well, what's the news?"

"Where's Tom?"

"Is he coming?"

"Cough it up?"

"What on earth's the matter, Lowther?" exclaimed Talbot. "Nothing's happened, surely—no accident—?"

Lowther gave a gasp.

"I—I can't make it out! I got through to the manager of the Hotel Royal—man named Krug. He said that Miss Fawcett wasn't at the hotel, and had never been there—he didn't even know the name—"

"What?"

"Gweat Scott!"

"And Tom never got there, either!" gasped Lowther. "Krug says that no schoolboy has been there, any more than Miss Fawcett has."

"But he must have got there!" exclaimed Blake. "Why, he started walking over more than two hours ago."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's a practical joke of some sort," said Lowther. "Railton's leg was pulled on the phone—Krug never phoned him, or the school, at all. A rotten silly trick on Tom—"

"Bai Jove!"

"But—but—but that's no reason why Tom never got to the Hotel Royal," said Manners, blankly. "Even if Miss Fawcett wasn't there, Tom must have got there long ago—"

"Well, he hasn't."

"Then where is he all this while?"

"Goodness knows."

"He can't have walked off, and left us in the lurch over the cricket," said Figgins.

"Rot! Of course he hasn't! But—"

"But where is he, and why doesn't he come back?" asked Kerr.

"Must be off his rocker, I think," said Blake. "He's had lots and lots of time: and as soon as he found that his leg had been pulled, and Miss Fawcett wasn't there, he would come straight back—he could have got back for dinner—"

"Why the dickens hasn't he?" said Herries.

"What could happen to a fellow walking through Wayland Wood?" grunted Blake. "Goodness knows why he's wandered off, but he has! And here come Carcroft! If the silly ass doesn't wander in, we can't keep them waiting,

Talbot. You'll have to captain the side, and put in another man."

"But—!" said Talbot, hesitating.

"Fathead! Are we going to ask the Carcroft men to sit around and do nothing, till that Shell ass chooses to trickle in?" hooted Blake. "They've come over to play cricket, and we're going to play cricket."

Talbot cast a last glance towards the gates. But it was evidently futile to wait: Tom Merry, inexplicably, was absent: and as he had not turned up so far, it was impossible to guess when he would. If he had not arrived by the time the cricketers were ready to go into the field, the game had to be played without him: that was clear.

"Come on," said Talbot.

Cardew gave him a look. Was this his chance, if Tom Merry did not turn up on time: as Cardew had the best of reasons for knowing that he would not. But Talbot did not meet his eye.

"Get into your flannels, Herries," he said, "you'll be wanted if Tom doesn't get here on time."

"What-ho!" said Herries.

As the crowd cleared off, Cardew and Racke were left. Aubrey Racke grinned at the dandy of the Fourth. Cardew's face was a little sombre, but Racke of the Shell, was enjoying life just then.

"Did it work?" murmured Racke. "What? Tom Merry never expected me to hit back—or you either, Cardew. We've hit pretty hard though—what?"

"Quite!" drawled Cardew. "I've been wonderin'—"

"Wondering what?"

"Wonderin' whether there's such a pair of skulkin' rats as you and me, in St. Jim's, or out of it?" said Cardew, reflectively. "What do you think, Racke?"

Racke stared at him.

"We've hit back," went on Cardew, "and hit hard! But a bit below the belt, don't you think, Racke? That's your style, isn't it, Aubrey?"

"Yours, too!" sneered Racke.

"Oh, quite!" yawned Cardew. "We're birds of a feather, dear man! And to think," he added, laughing, "that if the fellows knew, there isn't a man in the school would touch us with a barge-pole—not even Trimble! Happy thought!"

"Oh, don't be a goat," said Racke. "Look here, comin' out this afternoon, Cardew? I've got an appointment with some sportin' fellows—"

Cardew shook his head.

"Thanks, no," he drawled. "We're birds of a feather—but there's a limit. If you don't mind my sayin' so, Racke. I wouldn't be found dead in your company."

Without waiting for a reply, Cardew turned his back on Aubrey Racke, and walked away to the cricket ground.

In Doubt!

“WOTTEN!” groaned Arthur Augustus D’Arcy.

It was, from Gussy’s point of view, very rotten, indeed. White-clad figures on the green made a cheerful sight: but did not cheer the swell of St. Jim’s.

Other fellows might fancy that St. Jim’s could beat Carcroft without the aid of the Honourable Arthur Augustus D’Arcy: but Gussy himself could not help entertaining doubts. And now the eleven had lost, not only Arthur Augustus, but Tom Merry, the best junior bat at St. Jim’s. And while they were fighting an uphill fight, Arthur Augustus had to go into Extra School, and leave them to it. It was no wonder that Gussy’s usually placid face was unusually pessimistic. It certainly was “rotten.”

The game was beginning, with St. Jim’s in the field. As Tom Merry was still absent, Talbot of the Shell was captaining the side: and having won the toss he had put the visiting side in, fielding a substitute: in the hope that Tom might yet arrive in time to play. Why Tom was absent, nobody could guess, or begin to guess: but his friends hoped to see him every minute, and if he came before St. Jim’s had to bat, there was still time.

“Wotten!” repeated Arthur Augustus, addressing nobody in particular, as he looked from the pavilion, and watched Fatty Wynn of the New House bowling the first over, to Dudley Vane-Carter of Carcroft. Good as Fatty was, Vane-Carter seemed able to deal with him: and Arthur Augustus watched V.C. and Harry Compton, the Carcroft captain, crossing and re-crossing the pitch, thrice.

He waited for the next ball, which came down to Compton. The Carcroft skipper whizzed it away, and Herries, in the field, made a jump at it, a second too late. Arthur Augustus sighed. Either Tom Merry or himself, he could not help feeling, would have caught that ball, and the Carcroft skipper would have been out in the first over.

It was now time for Extra, for the unfortunate fellows who were booked for detention that afternoon: and Arthur Augustus turned sadly away to walk to the House. He almost walked into Cardew, who was there at his elbow, and he paused, to give his relative a frown.

"You wottah!" he breathed: in a low tone. He did not want Carcroft fellows to hear. But he could not forget that it was through Cardew that he was booked for Extra.

Cardew raised his eyebrows.

"Anythin' up?" he inquired.

Arthur Augustus's eyeglass gleamed with scorn.

"Pwobably the game is up," he answered, "and it is all your fault, you wat! I should be playin' but for your wotten twicks last night."

"Think it would make any difference if you were?" asked Cardew, affably.

Arthur Augustus did not reply to that impertinent question. He gave Cardew a look, in which he expressed all the lofty scorn that a look, with the aid of an eyeglass, could express, and turned his back on him.

He walked away towards the House: with a clouded brow, to report himself to the detention master. Cardew stood watching the cricket.

Compton and Vane-Carter were going strong at the wickets. Runs were going up for Carcroft. Cardew's face was moody as he watched. Carcroft men who were waiting to bat watched with cheery anticipations of a good score. Manners' voice came to Cardew's ears.

"What on earth can have become of Tom?"

"The silly ass!" came Digby's voice. "What the dickens does he mean by sticking out of gates?"

"Something's keeping him away," said Manners. "He was tricked into going over to Wayland by that spoof on the telephone—"

"But he never went to the Hotel Royal at all, from what

Lowther said. Must have gone off somewhere—”

“He wouldn’t!”

“Well, where is he, then?” grunted Dig.

Manners made no reply to that. He was as puzzled as everyone else by Tom Merry’s absence.

Cardew turned his head, and glanced at them. He met an inimical glare from Dig.

“What are you doing here?” snapped Dig. “Fat lot you care about the cricket. Run out of smokes?”

“Not my fault if Tom Merry goes rambling off, and forgets all about a cricket match, is it?” smiled Cardew.

“It’s your fault that D’Arcy’s out of the team,” snapped Dig, “and he’s wanted more than ever, with Tom Merry out. Take your grinning face away, if you don’t want it smacked.”

Cardew laughed, and strolled away with his hands in his pockets. But the laughing look faded off his face, as he went, and the moody expression returned. His brow grew darker and darker, as he sauntered in the quad. Only too evidently his mind was not at ease.

A voice floated from an open window of a class-room, as he passed it. It was the voice of Monsieur Morny, the detention master.

“D’Arcy! Vunce more you look from zat vindow! I vill not allow zat you look from ze vindow, D’Arcy.”

“Sowwy, sir! I—I was just lookin’ to see if Tom Mewwy might be comin’ on—!”

“Nevair mind all zat, D’Arcy! Zat you attend.”

“Yaas, sir.”

Cardew walked on. Evidently, Arthur Augustus, in Extra School, was thinking more of cricket, and the missing batsman, than of the valuable knowledge of the French language that it was Mossoo’s duty to impart.

Two Shell fellows passed Cardew in the quad, going towards the gates. He glanced at Racke and Crooke.

They were going out: and he could guess what their destination was likely to be—sneaking in at the back door of the Green Man, most likely. Aubrey Racke gave him a look and a scowl. He had not forgotten Cardew’s last remark to him. But he left Crooke for a moment, and came towards the dandy of the Fourth.

"If you'd like to come—!" he said.

"I wouldn't!"

"It will be rather jolly—"

"Chuck it!"

"Oh, all right, if you choose to mooch about on your own," sneered Racke. "Mind, it's up to you to take a walk in the wood presently—better not leave it too late! Can't leave him there for ever."

"I know that!"

"You won't come along now?"

"No, I won't."

"Did you bank on Talbot giving you his place in the eleven?" sneered Racke. "Is that what's biting you?"

"Mind your own business."

Racke shrugged his shoulders, rejoined Crooke, and they went out of gates together. Cardew watched them go, with a lowering brow.

He resumed his aimless pacing in the quad, his brow growing moodier and moodier. He went back to the cricket-field at last. Harry Compton was out, but Vane-Carter was still going strong, with Bob Drake at the other end. Cardew glanced at the score-board: Carcroft were thirty for one wicket. He remained for some time looking on, but finally walked away again.

Once more he paced in the quad. But suddenly, as if he had made up his troubled mind with a jump, he turned and hurried away to the bike-shed.

He wheeled out his machine, and pedalled away down Rylcombe Lane. At the stile, he lifted his machine over into the footpath, and remounted it there: and rode on by the footpath regardless of local bye-laws on the subject. For a long time, that afternoon, his movements had been uncertain and desultory, in accord with the uncertainty of his mind. But now that he had come to some resolution, he moved swiftly enough. The bicycle almost flew along the footpath.

He jumped down at a spot where a massive old oak jutted into the path. Leaving the machine leaning on the trunk, he plunged into the thickness of the wood: and as he went, he whistled an operatic tune.

19

Chance !

TOM MERRY caught his breath.

A sound came to his ears—a sound that brought, at last, hope of release.

How long he had lain there in the thicket, headed up in the sack, he did not know. It seemed like hours and hours—if not days and days—but he knew that it could not have been very long. And how long his mysterious captors intended to leave him there, he could not begin to guess: any more than he could surmise who they were. He was helpless, and could only wait—and wait—till release came. Only the deep silence of the woods was round him, broken by the twittering of birds in the trees—there was little hope, or rather none, that a chance Rambler might penetrate into those remote thickets in the heart of Wayland Wood.

And then, suddenly, the sound came—a low clear whistle of a tune he knew. It was the air of “*La donna é mobile*” from a Verdi opera, and he knew of a fellow at St. Jim’s who often whistled that catchy tune.

He caught his breath, and listened. Clearly it came to his ears—someone was at hand, whether it was a St. Jim’s man or not. If he could hear the whistle, the whistler could hear a shout: and he shouted:

“Help! Help!”

The whistle suddenly stopped.

Evidently the whistler had heard.

“Help!” shouted Tom, again.

There was a sound of brushing in the thickets. Someone was coming towards the spot where he lay.

"This way!" shouted Tom. "Help!"

"By gad! Who's that—what's up?" came a familiar voice. He had not been mistaken: it was Cardew of the Fourth, who had been rambling in the wood, whistling his favourite tune.

"Cardew!" shouted Tom. "This way. I'm tied up—it's Tom Merry calling! This way!"

"Oh, gad!"

He heard footsteps close at hand. That he was on the worst of terms with Ralph Reckness Cardew did not even occur to Tom's mind at the moment. Any fellow, friend or foe, would help a fellow out of a fix like this.

"Did you say it was Tom Merry?" drawled the well-known voice.

"Yes, yes!"

"What the dickens are you doin' inside a sack?"

"Can't you see?" panted Tom. "It's tied—I can't get out of it! Two rotters bagged me like this and dragged me here—"

"Who were they?"

"I don't know—I never even saw them! For goodness sake, Cardew, get me out of this—get that cord untied—quick!"

"Anythin' to oblige," drawled Cardew. "Looks a pretty tough knot—but I've got a pen-knife. Lucky I took a walk this way, what?"

"Yes, yes, thank goodness you did!" panted Tom. "I heard you whistling, and called—thank goodness! Get me out of this!"

A keen blade sawed on the cord, and the neck of the sack fell loose under Tom's knees. In a moment more he whipped it off over his head, and emerged into the fresh air, panting.

"Thanks!" he gasped.

Cardew stood looking at him, with a curious smile. Tom Merry was red and flustered, hot and breathless. He panted and panted.

"What's the time now, Cardew?"

Cardew glanced at his wrist-watch.

"Just turned half-past three."

"Then the match has started."

"The match?" repeated Cardew, as if he had forgotten it, "Oh, the Carcroft match, you mean? Yes, I think Talbot is captaining the side, as you weren't there—Carcroft were batting when I came out. I think he's playing a substitute in the field to give you a chance to get back to bat."

"Oh!" gasped Tom. "Good old Talbot! If I get in before the St. Jim's innings is through—!"

"Bags of time," drawled Cardew. "Carcroft were going strong when I left—they won't be all out yet awhile. You'll be on time."

"Look here, Cardew—be a sport," said Tom. "My old guardian, Miss Fawcett, is waiting for me all this while at Wayland—but I just must cut back to the school now. Will you cut on to the Hotel Royal and—"

"No need," said Cardew, laughing. "It's come out that that phone call to Railton this morning was a spoof—"

"What?"

"Your pal Lowther got through to the Hotel Royal, as you didn't come back," explained Cardew. "They told him that Miss Fawcett had never been there at all—"

"Wha-a-a-t?"

"—and the manager hadn't phoned to Railton. The whole thing was a trick, to send you trotting off to Wayland for nothing."

"Oh!" gasped Tom.

"Queer business altogether," said Cardew, with a shake of the head. "Some practical joker put that call through, using the hotel-manager's name. Lowther found it out when he phoned."

Tom Merry clenched his hands.

"The rotter! I wish I knew who it was!" he breathed. Then a sudden light seemed to break on his mind. "Oh! That's how it was that they were waiting for me on the foot-path—it was one of them put the call through, to get me where they wanted me—"

"Good gad! Think so?"

"It's pretty clear now," said Tom, between his teeth. "Of course I never had a suspicion, and they trapped me like a rabbit—"

"Looks like it," said Cardew, thoughtfully. "The whole thing planned to bag you in that sack, what? But why—?"

"I can't guess—unless somebody wanted to keep me out of the Carcroft match," said Tom, savagely. "That's what it looks like."

Cardew whistled.

"By gad, it does," he said. "But that means that the fellows who bagged you belong to the school—nobody outside St. Jim's would care a bean about it."

"I suppose so—"

"But who?" said Cardew, looking at him curiously.

"I'll find out—some time! No time for that now," said Tom. "I've got to cut back to the school as fast as I can—thanks once more for getting me out of that, Cardew."

"Oh, don't mench," said Cardew, airily. "But hold on a tick," he added, as Tom was hurrying away. "If you want to save time—"

"Yes yes! What—?"

"I've left my bike on the footpath, leaning on that old oak—you know the spot—"

"That's where they got me—"

"You can borrow it if you like—I can walk back."

"Oh! Thanks!" said Tom.

He cut off through the wood.

Cardew glanced after him, as he went, with a strange smile on his face—a smile that might have puzzled Tom, had he seen it. But he did not give Cardew another glance. He was running through the wood, crashing through bramble and briar, in hot haste—thinking only of getting back to St. Jim's in time to bat for his side.

He came out panting into the footpath. A gleaming bike was leaning against the old oak—Tom grasped it, and whip-

ped it out into the path: mounted, and rode away like the wind.

He was far out of sight when Cardew came strolling out of the wood into the footpath. At a much more moderate pace, the dandy of the Fourth sauntered back to the school.

Tom Merry made the pedals fly, in Rylcombe Lane.

By sheer luck, as it seemed to him—by the happy chance that Cardew had been rambling in Wayland Wood that afternoon—he had been released in time. His captors had not intended to release him till later—too late for the cricket match at St. Jim's—he could have no doubt of that. But they had failed in that unscrupulous scheme—he would be on time yet. He ground at the pedals, and the bike fairly flew.

Long **TOM MERRY** Stories

Tom Merry & Co.	6/-
Secret of the Study	6/-
Rallying Round Gussy	6/-
The Scapegrace of St. Jim's	7/6
Talbot's Secret	7/6

All the above by **MARTIN CLIFFORD**

A story of
Rookwood School
**The Rivals of
Rookwood**

by Owen Conquest 7/6

A new story by
Frank Richards
**Jack of All
Trades 7/6**

All the above books are over 200 pages in length, and are well bound.

Obtainable from all booksellers, or from the publishers:—

MANDEVILLE PUBLICATIONS

45 GREAT RUSSELL STREET,
LONDON, W.1.

who will be pleased to forward a catalogue on request.

All's Well That Ends Well!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY waved his eyeglass in the air.

"Bwavo!" he yelled.

"Hurray!"

It was a roar on Little Side at St. Jim's. The sun was sinking behind the old elms. The long-fought tussle was at its end. Through the golden summer's day it had gone on, with varying fortune: victory on the knees of the gods right up to the finish. But victory had declared for St. Jim's: and no one was more jubilant than Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, out of "Extra" in good time to see the end.

Arthur Augustus had not enjoyed his afternoon. Never had he experienced so deep a loathing for French verbs, as while he sat in Monsieur Morny's detention class, and wondered how St. Jim's were getting on without his aid.

Arthur Augustus had been feeling deep misgivings about that match. But his misgivings were relieved, when at last he was out of Extra, and able to cut down to Little Side and see how the cricketers had got on without him.

Really, they had got on remarkably well.

Tom Merry had, after all, turned up in time for the St. Jim's first innings. And he seemed to have turned up at the top of his form. Talbot and Blake, Levison and Clive, Figgins and Co. and the rest, had backed him up in great style.

Carcroft were in great form—but St. Jim's seemed to go

just one better. In the first innings, the score was ninety-five for Carcroft, ninety-six for St. Jim's. Carcroft made a level 100 with their second knock: leaving the home team another hundred to make to win. Which they had duly done with a wicket in hand.

Arthur Augustus forgot all about Extra, and French verbs, as he waved his eyeglass and yelled.

"Cwicket is weally a vevy uncertain game," he confided to his friends. "It looked vevy doubtful, you know, with the side losin' its best bat, and Tom Mewwy away, too—!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows, I see nothin' to cackle at in that wemark. It's turned out all wight—St. Jim's has won although I was stuck in Extwa—"

"Or because of it!" suggested Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Thank goodness Tom turned up," said Manner. "Herries was going to bat if he hadn't—"

"Bai Jove! Then it was fwightfully lucky that Tom Mewwy turned up aftah all, wasn't it, Hewwies, old chap?"

"Fathead!" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Ass!"

"Wats! I am goin' to punch Cardew's head, all the same, when I see him again. I should have been battin' but for him—"

"Forget it," said Lowther. "Tom wouldn't have been here but for Cardew. He was kept away, and it was Cardew helped him get back in time—"

"Bai Jove! Then I shall certainly not punch his head," said Arthur Augustus, considerately. "In the circs, I will wefwain fwom punchin' his head, although he has asked for it. Anyhow, we have beaten Carcwoft, deah boys, and that is all that weally mattahs!"

And the dear boys agreed that it was.

"CARDEW, you fool!"

Ralph Reckness Cardew was standing at his study window, staring out moodily into the sunset in the quad, when Aubrey Racke's voice made him turn his

head. He had forgotten Racke. The Carcroft men were gone, but both Houses at St. Jim's were still celebrating the glorious victory: a celebration in which Cardew had no desire to share. His chums, Levison and Clive, had sought to drag him down to the merry crowd in the day-room: but he had snapped at them almost savagely, and they had left him at last, to moody and discontented solitude in the study.

"Oh! You!" he said, as he looked across at Racke.

Aubrey panted.

"You fool!" he repeated. "I've just come in—I've just heard—you fool! What did you do it for? Are you mad?"

"Hardly!" drawled Cardew. "I think I must have been this mornin' to listen to you for a minute, Racke! Get out of my study."

"It worked like a charm—all you had to do was to leave him there till after the match, and you—you—you—!" Racke almost stuttered with rage.

Cardew came across the study with a glint in his eyes.

"I've told you to get out!" he said. "Are you goin' on your feet, or on your neck, Racke?"

"You fool! To undo the whole thing like that—are you turning soft, or what? You fool! You—let go!" yelled Racke, as Cardew grasped him. The next moment he was whirling headlong out of the study.

Cardew slammed the door after him. He returned to the window, and his moody gazing into the quad.

Tap!

The door opened.

Cardew turned from the window again, with a savage exclamation.

"By gad! If you can't keep out, Racke—Oh! You, Tom Merry!" He stared at the junior captain of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry came quietly into the study, and closed the door after him. He stood looking at Cardew.

"Well?" snapped Cardew.

"I've just passed Racke," said Tom. "You seem to have chucked him out."

"Quite! I don't like his company," drawled Cardew. "I

can't say that I like yours much better, either. There's the door."

"I've come here to speak to you," said Tom, quietly. "I've had time to think it over, Cardew."

"You've been thinkin'?"

"Yes."

"Glad to hear it! Never suspected you of anythin' of the kind!"

"I've been thinking over what happened in Wayland Wood," said Tom, in the same quiet tone. "I was tricked out of the school, and bagged in the wood by two fellows I never saw. It was done to keep me out of the cricket."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"They must have intended to let me loose later, of course," went on Tom. "Too late for the match. They would have to make it appear an accident—one of them rambling in the wood, and finding me by chance—"

"Think so?"

"Yes! But you happened to be rambling in the wood, and found me—in time for the match."

"Happy chance, what?"

"Was it?" asked Tom.

"Well, wasn't it?"

Tom Merry looked at him very hard.

"No," he said, "I've thought it out, and I don't think it was a chance. It looks to me as if one of those fellows wasn't quite such a rotter as he thought he was—and changed his mind in time."

Cardew stood very still.

"Isn't that so?" asked Tom.

"How should I know?" drawled Cardew.

"I think you do," said Tom, "and I think I can guess who the other was—now!"

Cardew yawned.

"Very well," said Tom, quietly. "All the fellows are wondering who those rotters were—nobody knows! I shall say nothing. That's all."

He turned to the door.

"You think—?" muttered Cardew.

"I know!"

"And you're sayin' nothin'?"

"Nothing."

"Why?"

"Because you played up decently at the finish," said Tom. He paused, and turned back. "Look here, Cardew! You've done a rotten thing to-day—an awfully rotten thing—but you weren't rotter enough to carry on with it. Isn't that so?"

"Yes!" breathed Cardew.

"I'm going to forget all about it. And—" Tom hesitated a moment. "I'm willing to try to be better friends, if you are."

Cardew paused a moment before replying. Then he said: "Done!"

Tom Merry nodded, and left the study. Cardew was left alone once more, but his face was no longer dark and moody. Could they ever be friends? He wondered—and doubted! But at all events he was no longer Tom Merry's enemy.

THE END

1870
1871
1872
1873

D'ARCY of St. JIM'S

The GOLD HAWK BOOKS listed below have already been published in this popular new series by Martin Clifford. Be sure not to miss these exciting new adventures of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and the Chums of St. Jim's. Order from your bookseller or direct from the publishers.

- No. 1. TOM MERRY'S SECRET.
- No. 2. TOM MERRY'S RIVAL.
- No. 3. THE MAN FROM THE PAST.
- No. 4. WHO RAGGED RAILTON?
- No. 5. SKIMPOLE'S SNAPSHOT.
- No. 6. TROUBLE FOR TRIMBLE.
- No. 7. D'ARCY IN DANGER.
- No. 8. D'ARCY ON THE WAR-PATH.
- No. 9. D'ARCY'S DISAPPEARANCE.
- No. 10. D'ARCY THE REFORMER.
- No. 11. D'ARCY'S DAY OFF.



GOLD HAWK BOOKS are published by
Hamilton & Co. (Stafford) Ltd.,
1 & 2 Melville Court, Goldhawk Road,
London, W.12.