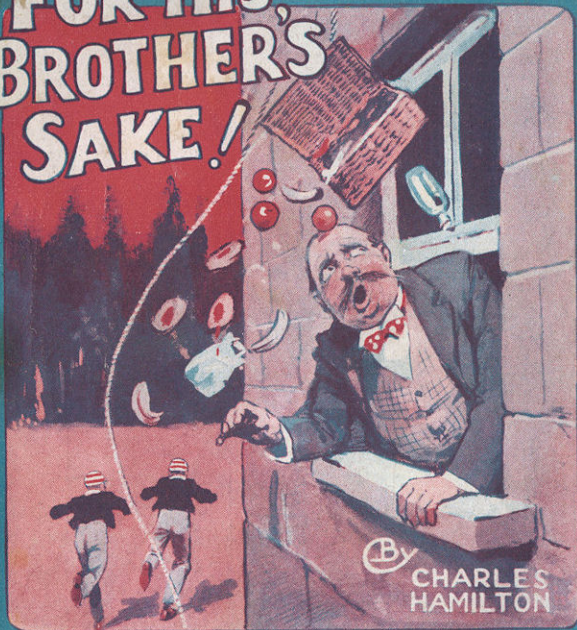


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CHAPTER I.

The New Junior!

"O KEHOLME! Alight 'ere for St. Dorothy's!"

The train clattered to a halt in the quiet little country station, and Sidney Redfern opened the carriage door and jumped out.

He looked up and down the long, plank platform, bordered on one side with trim flower-beds and a green hedge. It was a pleasant summer's afternoon, and there was hardly a cloud in the blue sky.

Sidney Redfern's face was very cheerful as he looked about him—cheerful and expectant. He was evidently expecting someone to meet him at the station, but, save for two or three passengers who had alighted from the train, the platform was deserted.

Bump!

A neatly strapped trunk whirled out of the guard's van, and bumped on the platform. Sidney Redfern hurried to look after his property.

"Easy does it!" he exclaimed. "There's a camera in there. That's a travelling-trunk, you know, not a giddy shuttlecock or a football!"

The porter grinned, and touched his cap. The box was labelled for St. Dorothy's, so it was pretty clear that Redfern was a new boy going to the old school, and the Okeholme porter, scented a tip.

"Yes, sir! Certainly, sir! You should 'andle the young gent's property more carefully, Bill." The guard, who did not expect a tip, only sniffed: "Shall I put it in the cart for the school, sir?"

"Yes, please!" said Redfern, extracting a shilling from his trousers-pocket and tossing it to the porter. "Catch!"

The porter caught it, and then slung the trunk upon a trolley. Redfern cast another glance up and down the platform, and a slight shade crossed his face. He walked beside the porter as the latter wheeled his trunk to the exit.

"Know if there's anybody here waiting for this train, porter?" he asked.

"I dunno, sir. There was two young gents in the doorway a while ago, sir, and they wouldn't go away when I told 'em. They was Master Skelton and Master Brown, sir, from the school."

"I suppose you know most of the St. Dorothy's fellows by sight?"

"Bless your heart, sir, I know 'em all—from Master Lunsford to the last new boy!" said the old porter. "Some of them are all right, sir; but there's some as don't ever think of a tip."

Redfern grinned.

"I see. Do you know Redfern—Arthur Redfern, of the Sixth?"

"Certainly, sir; and a pleasant-spoken young gentleman he is."

"He's my brother," said the new boy. "I'm going into the Fourth, you know. My brother's a prefect, and he's in the Sixth. Have you seen him about the station this afternoon?"

The porter shook his head.

"No, sir. He ain't been about here."

Redfern's face fell a little. He gave up his ticket, and passed out into the station entrance. Redfern was quite new to public school life, and he was only dimly aware that between the Sixth Form and the Junior Forms there was a great gulf fixed.

His big brother in the St. Dorothy's Sixth was his idol, and there was a great deal of awe and admiration mixed with his affection for him.

In the holidays, at home, Arthur had always been kind to him, and Redfern had fully expected to see his brother waiting for him at the station.

He felt just a little forlorn at that moment. He was going into a new

world, to a new life. The parting with his mother was still weighing somewhat on his heart, and the sight of his brother there would have cheered him up a great deal. Arthur might have taken the trouble, but he crushed that thought from his mind as soon as it rose.

"Here he is!"

It was a sudden shout, and Redfern started and looked round. Two youths in Etons and silk hats were standing before an automatic machine just outside the station, going through their pockets in a thorough and deliberate manner, which seemed to indicate that funds were out, but that they had a lingering hope of discovering an odd, forgotten penny somewhere.

But as they caught sight of Sidney Redfern they ceased turning out their pockets, and ran quickly towards him.

The movement was so sudden that Redfern took it as a hostile one, and involuntarily backed away a pace, and put up his fists. The two juniors of St. Dorothy's burst into a laugh.

"It's all right, young 'un!" said one, a fair-haired lad a little bigger than Redfern, with a good-natured face, but a somewhat authoritative manner. "We're not going to hurt you. We wouldn't hurt him—would we, Browney?"

"Not for untold tuck, Skelton!" said Brown solemnly. "We wouldn't hurt a hair on his head, or a freckle on his dear little nose!"

Redfern coloured a little.

"Well, what's the little game?" he demanded. "Do you belong to St. Dorothy's?"

Skelton chuckled.

"Well, I rather think so," he said. "I'm Skelton, and this chap's Brown III. We're in the Fourth Form. You're Redfern minor, of course?"

Redfern brightened up.

"Yes. Did my brother send you to meet me?"

"Meet your grandmother!" said Skelton, with crushing disdain. "Do you think we, the heads of the Fourth,

would be sent to meet a new kid? Besides, I rather think a prefect in the Sixth has something better to do than to bother his head about new fags. No, my son, we weren't sent to meet you. We came of our own accord. We happened to hear that Redfern had a minor coming, and we found out that he was coming in the Fourth. Therefore—"

"Better not tell him too much now, Skelton—"

"If you're going to start teaching me lessons, young Brown—"

"Look here—"

"Oh, ring off! We've come to meet you, young Redfern, to sort of take you under our wing. We're the heads of the Fourth Form, and if Taffy & Co. tell you anything different, you can put it down as whoppers. I suppose you know—"

"Is my brother at the school now?"

"Blow your brother! Don't interrupt me when I'm talking to you!" said Skelton, of the Fourth. "I suppose you know—"

"Sorry I can't stop! I've got to get to St. Dorothy's."

And Redfern nodded, and walked up the street. Skelton and Brown looked after him, and then looked at one another. Skelton was too amazed to speak for some moments.

"My hat!" he said at length. "Did you ever see so much coolness in a new kid, Brown?"

"Never in my natural!" said Brown.

"Are we going to stand it?"

"I don't think!"

"Come on!"

They ran after Redfern. The latter had just inquired the way to the school, and was walking thither with an easy, springy stride. Skelton and Brown came up puffing, and Redfern looked at them with a cool nod.

"Coming to the school?" he said cheerily.

"Ye-es," said Skelton. "I say, you new chap, did you come to St. Dolly's specially in search of a thick ear?"

"Not at all."

"Well, you're going just the right way to work to get one! That's a friendly warning. Now, I was explaining to you when you bolted that there are two sides at St. Dolly's—the Modern side and the Classical side. We don't have separate houses, you know; in fact, there wasn't any Modern side at St. Dolly's ten years ago. It's quite a new thing, and, in my opinion, it ought to be put down. If the Head took my advice, he would make a clean sweep of the Mods."

"But I suppose he's not likely to take it?" said Redfern innocently.

Brown chuckled, and Skelton went on rather hastily.

"You see, on the Classical side you get the sound, old-fashioned classical education, and on the Modern side you get a commercial education—which I dare say suits some fellows, or they wouldn't have it," said Skelton thoughtfully. "As you're Redfern minor, I suppose you're going to be a Classic, like your brother?"

Redfern nodded. He had heard from Arthur some stories of the division at St. Dolly's, and the rivalry—in sports and in everything else—which reigned between the Commercial and the Classical sides at the old school.

"Good!" said Skelton. "Now, as you're a new kid, I dare say you don't know that there's a crisis at St. Dolly's—a climax in the history of the school."

"No," said Redfern; "I had a letter from Arthur the other day, but he didn't mention anything about a climax or a crisis."

Skelton reddened a little.

"Perhaps a chap in the Sixth wouldn't notice how important it was," he said. "The fact is, the captain of the Fourth has left suddenly. I suppose you know every Form has its captain at St. Dolly's? Old Lunsford, the skipper of the Sixth, is captain of the school as well. But every Form has its captain—and the Fourth-Form captain has left. We're going to have a new election for Form captain to-night. I'm the candidate."

"Oh! The only one?"

"N-no! Some of the Commercial kids are putting up a candidate, too; but, of course, that's all rot!" said Skelton.

"Of course," said Brown.

"But we want to rope in all the votes we can," said Skelton. "As a matter of fact, there's been a rush of new kids into the Modern side this term, and, as it happens, they've caught us up in numbers, a thing that has never been known before in the history of the school. There are exactly twenty Classical kids in the Fourth Form, and exactly twenty Commercial."

"Oh, I see!" said Redfern, with awakening interest. "Then when you hold the election for Form captain—"

"The votes are bound to tie, because every Classical will be loyal to his own side, and those Modern kids stick together like a lot of thieves!"

Redfern laughed.

"Blessed if I can see anything to gurgle at!" said Skelton angrily. "Look here, you listen to me! You're going to vote for me, and turn the scale. see?"

"How do you know?"

"Do you mean to say you're going to betray your own side, you measly worm?" demanded Skelton hotly. "You're a Classical, and you've got to vote for me!"

"Rats!"

"Wh-wh-what! Did you say—say rats?"

"Yes, I did," said Redfern coolly. "I'm not going to be told how I'm going to vote. I'm going to settle that question for myself. I may back you up—"

"You—you may!" stammered Skelton.

"Yes; or again, I may not! It all depends."

"Depends, does it?" roared Skelton. "I'll—I'll—"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Brown, catching his friend by the arm. "Don't lose your temper, old boy! Remember—"

"Who's losing his temper?" shouted Skelton.

"Well, you—"

"I'm jolly calm and reasonable. It's this new chap who's trying to make me waxy! I'll give him a licking; it will teach him his proper place in the Form!"

"Yes, but—"

"Well, look here, if he promises instantly to vote for me I'll let him off the licking," said Skelton magnanimously. "He's got to promise, because some of those Modern kids will be squirming round trying to get his vote—you know what a mean lot they are! They'd think nothing of getting him to promise to vote on their side in advance. I hate meanness in a chap—why, there's the beast giggling again! I'll give him giggle!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you going to promise?"

"Not much."

"I'll give you a licking you'll remember for a dog's age."

"Perhaps," said Redfern, eyeing the big Fourth-Former warily. "Perhaps not. Blessed if I think you'd make much of a Form captain, anyway! I shall have to see the rival candidate before I make up my mind."

That was too much for Skelton. He was a great fighting man in the Fourth Form at St. Dolly's; even "Taffy" Morgan was not his superior, in that line, and Taffy was a boxer of renown. To be talked to like this by a new boy was too much! Skelton made a wild rush at Redfern.

What happened next was never very clear to Skelton. What he first realised was that he was lying on his back, looking up dizzily at the blue sky, and seeing more stars there in broad daylight than are usually seen on a fine night.

He lay there for some seconds, blinking, and then sat up.

"How—what—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Brown. "Sorry, Skelton; but you are funny!"

"I—I— My hat!" Skelton realised what had happened, and jumped to his

feet. "By George, I'll—I'll pulverise you!"

And he rushed at the new boy again. This time he succeeded in getting hold of him, and for some moments nothing was seen but whirling arms and legs in a cloud of dust.

Then suddenly they parted.

Skelton whirled away, and crashed into Brown III., and they rolled on the ground together. They sat up, gasping—Skelton looking very dazed and dusty and dishevelled.

Redfern was strolling away towards the school, with his hands in his pockets, whistling cheerily.

Skelton and Brown looked at one another curiously.

"My word," said Brown softly, "that new kid's hot stuff!"

And Skelton nodded as he slowly staggered to his feet, without speaking. It was borne in upon him that the "new kid" was very hot stuff indeed.

CHAPTER 2. Taffy and Co.

ARTHUR REDFERN, of the Sixth Form at St. Dorothy's, was crossing the quadrangle, with his hands thrust deep into his trousers-pockets, and a thoughtful frown upon his brow. His eyes were on the ground, and he did not see Lunsford, who had just come out of the house with a cricket-bat under his arm. Big, athletic Lunsford was captain of St. Dolly's, the finest cricketer in the school, and a perfect demon for sticking at the nets, and keeping the other fellows there.

"Hallo, Redfern!" he called out, as the Sixth-Former was passing him without looking up. "Will you take a penny for your thoughts?"

Arthur Redfern stopped and looked at him, but he did not smile.

"Coming down to the cricket-field?" asked Lunsford. "You've been cutting the game for the last few days. What's the matter?"

"Nothing!"

"Well, come on and bowl to me, old fellow!"

Redfern shook his head.

"I—I can't just now, Lunsford. Ransome's waiting for me."

Lunsford frowned.

"You spend a lot too much time with that chap," he said. "Ransome's a slacker. You never see him at the nets or in the boats, and there are kids in the Fourth and the Shell who can beat him on the cinder-path. He won't do you any good."

"I don't see what you want to run down my friends for!" said Arthur, flushing red. "Ransome's good enough for me!"

And he walked on huffily. Lunsford looked after him with a darkening brow and with hot words on his lips; but he restrained them, and strode down to the cricket-field.

Half the Sixth Form were there at practice in the bright summer afternoon, Classical and Modern being equally devoted to the great summer game. It was a pleasant scene—the wide, green playing-fields, the white-flannelled figures running, the groups of fellows looking on and cheering every successful hit, or every clever bit of fielding—in the distance the grey old college, with its high windows and red chimney-pots, its massive walls thick with ivy—walls that had fronted the storms of centuries.

But Arthur Redfern had no eyes for the charm of the scene as he strode on and entered the house. He went straight up to his study, still with the shadow on his brow, as if unpleasant thoughts were thronging in his mind and would not be dismissed.

He was a handsome lad enough, but there was a weakness about the mouth that told of a nature easily led—of one who found it easier to say "Yes" than to say "No," and who usually followed the easier path. A fellow of about his own age was sitting on the corner of the table in the study, reading a pink paper, which he lowered as Arthur came in.

"I've been waiting for you," he said, with a yawn. And then, as he caught sight of Arthur's expression, he added: "Anything up?"

"No," said Arthur.

Ransome grinned.

"Better out with it," he remarked. "What have you got on your mind? Are you beginning to get nervous about —ahem!—that little scheme we have in hand? If you're losing your nerve you'd better say so at once."

"Don't talk rot!" said Arthur irritably. "I'm not thinking of that! I've had a letter from my mother to-day—"

A sneer crossed Ransome's face.

"Lectures, I suppose?" he said.

"No, hang you! It's about my young brother—I've got a minor coming to St. Dolly's!" growled Arthur. "The mater wants me to look after him—take him under my wing, and so on—make things easy for him generally, you know."

"Blessed if I see anything to look glum about in that!" said Ransome. "The youngster might be useful to us. You can take him for your fag, and he can be trusted more than Morgan or any of the others."

Arthur flushed hotly.

"If you think I'm going to have my young brother mixed up in—in—well, in anything you have a hand in, Ransome, you're jolly well mistaken."

"You're getting jolly civil, I must say," said Ransome, quite unmoved. "You can keep the kid in a glass case for all I care. I was only giving you a tip. Blessed if I care what you do with him."

"It's beastly awkward his coming now. It will interfere with me in a lot of ways. I shall have to look after him. He's bound to be a lot in my study, I suppose, or else he'll consider himself neglected. I shall have to be careful. I think it's deuced hard on me."

"So it is—deuced hard," agreed Ransome. "These minors are a general nuisance. You have to coddle them, or they write home and say they're badly

treated, and then there's a family council on the subject. When is the kid coming?"

Arthur started, and felt in his pockets.

"This afternoon," he said. "I—I meant to make a note of the train, and—and go and meet it, but it slipped my memory."

"Oh, rats! You're coming out with me," said Ransome warmly. "I suppose you're not going to throw me over for a confounded minor just out of the nursery!"

"Well, it's his first day at a Public school, and—"

"Rot! Let him look after himself."

"It would be only decent—"

"Oh, well, if you want to go, go!" said Ransome sulkily. "I may as well cut, I suppose. Blessed if I should have expected a chap like you to throw his old friends over for the sake of a whining little monkey with his thumb in his mouth—"

"Hold on!" said Arthur weakly. "The mater says his train gets in at Okeholme at three—"

"That's a quarter of an hour ago," said Ransome. "You can't meet him, you see, so you may as well come over to Wyndale."

"Yes, I suppose so. But—"

"Look here! You can send some fag or other to meet him on the road," said Ransome. "That will do. You can tell him afterwards you had an important engagement. Come on, for goodness' sake, or we shall be late! We can send somebody as we go."

And Ransome put on his straw hat. Arthur hesitated a moment, and then followed his example, and the two seniors left the study. Arthur paused in the passage a moment to shout "Fag!"

But he called in vain. In the bright weather almost all the St. Dolly's fellows were out of doors, and the fags who happened to be in their studies did not hear—or made it a point not to hear.

"Fag! Fa-a-a-ag! Fag!"

"Young monkeys!" grunted Arthur. "I'll bet there are half a dozen at least who can hear me perfectly well. They don't like fagging on holidays."

"Let's look in the Fourth Form passage."

The two seniors hastened thither. It was a wide, flagged passage, with walls of oak blackened by age, in which innumerable initials and names were cut. Doors opened on both sides of it. On one side were the studies tenanted by the Classical scholars, and on the other side the quarters of the Moderns—variously known at St. Dolly's as Moderns, "Mods," and Commercialists. When the rivalry between the two factions ran high, the passage was frequently the scene of heroic combats, and bloodshed was by no means unknown, the blood being shed from the nose, as a rule.

The studies were deserted now, the juniors being out of doors, but from the first study in the passage, on the Modern side, came the sound of voices. It was the room occupied by Morgan, Rake, and Vernon, the leaders of the junior Moderns in their alarms and excursions against the Classicals. The door was open, as well as the window, on account of the heat of the afternoon, and Arthur Redfern and Ransome heard the voices of the fags in excited discussion.

"What price getting out to the cricket?" said Rake, as the seniors came along. "We've been jawing this over for a quarter of an hour, but it makes no difference."

"You can't change the numbers by jawing about it, chappy," said Vernon. "It will be a dead-heat at the election."

"Rats!" growled Morgan, generally known among the juniors as "Taffy." "Rats! We're going to pull off the election somehow, look you. I was thinking—"

"Shut up!" muttered Rake, as he caught sight of the seniors at the door.

Taffy promptly shut up. He had his plans regarding the forthcoming Fourth Form election, but he did not

mean to let Upper Form fellows into his confidence.

"Didn't you hear me call for a fag?" exclaimed Arthur Redfern angrily.

"Did you call?" said Taffy innocently. "Look here, I want you—"

"Can't you find a Classical kid?" demanded Taffy. "You know the rule—you can only fag kids on your own side. We're busy."

"Awfully busy, chappy," said Vernon, who was the dandy of the Fourth and affected an elegant drawl. "Shut the door after you."

Ransome scowled, and Arthur Redfern looked irritable. He was good-natured as a rule, but impatient of contradiction. The rule to which Taffy Morgan alluded was upheld by Lunsford himself, but the seniors often transgressed it.

"Don't be a young ass!" said Arthur. "Look here, I've got a minor coming this afternoon, and he's out of the station already. I want somebody to go and look after him a bit. If you don't want a jolly good hiding—"

Taffy's eyes gleamed.

"It's all right, Redfern, we'll go."

Vernon and Rake glared at their comrade in amazement. It wasn't easy, of course, to "buck" against Sixth-Formers, but Taffy, as a rule, had nerve enough for anything. His sudden change of front amazed his chums, and made them indignant.

"Well, cut off, then," said Arthur. "You can tell my minor I was sorry I had an important engagement over in Wyndale."

"Right-ho, my son!"

Arthur quitted the study with Ransome, and a minute afterwards was leaving the school gates. In Study 10, in the Fourth Form passage, two juniors glared wrathfully at Taffy Morgan, who was chuckling.

"You—you worm!" said Vernon, in measured accents. "You apology for a worm! You cheap imitation of an apology for a worm!"

"Hallo! What's the matter?"

"My hat!" said Rake. "He says:

"What's the matter?" after knuckling under like that. Yah, you make me tired, Taffy! Look here, Verny, we ought to bump him!"

"By Jove, yes! Bump him!"

"Here, hold on!" yelled Taffy. "I

But they did not hold on—or, rather, to be more exact, they did! They grasped him as he jumped up, and in a moment he was being bumped with force and energy. The process of "bumping," known at most Public schools, consisted at St. Dolly's of seizing the victim in a grasp of iron and rolling him over and over, giving him a heavy bump on the ground at every roll.

It was a common enough punishment in the junior studies, and Taffy now had the benefit of it to the full. He struggled and yelled in vain. They bumped him and bumped him again, and rolled him over, till he was gasping for breath. He had no mercy from his indignant chums.

"Hold on!" shrieked Taffy. "I—I mean, leggo! Chuck it! Stop it, you asses! I'll give you a prize thick ear, Vernon! I'll lick you into fits, Rakey! Ow, you beasts! I tell you I—Ow—wow!"

Bump, bump, bump!

"Ow! Oh! Ow!"

"We'll jolly well teach you to lower the dignity of the side to those Classical cads!" growled Rake. "Give him another!"

"And another, chappy!"

Bump, bump!

"You—you asses!" grasped the unhappy Taffy, helpless in the grasp of his indignant chums. "Let go! Stop it! I tell you it's a wheeze I wasn't giving in or knuckling under. It's a wheeze!"

"Rats! Bump him again!"

Bump, bump!

Taffy tore himself at last from the grasp of the avengers and sat up, dusty, dishevelled, his collar torn out, and his hair like a mop. His face was crimson with exertion and wrath.

"You shrieking duffers!" he yelled.

"You haven't the sense of a giddy oyster! I tell you it's a wheeze—a splendid scheme!"

"Where does the scheme come in?" said Rake suspiciously.

"Why, you howling ass, we want an extra voter for the election, don't we?"

"Yes, but—"

"Well, Redfern minor's the chap!"

Rake and Vernon started—and whistled. Taffy collected himself together and got up, breathing stertorously.

"Do you see now, you prize asses?" he demanded witheringly. "That's why I'm going down to meet Redfern minor. He's the voter we want."

"By Jove!"

"Bravo!"

"I haven't time to lick you now," said Taffy, trying to fasten his collar. "Let's get out and meet the kid; we must collar him before any of those Classical kids get hold of him. They'd be mean enough to capture him if they could, and keep him in their clutches till the election, and make him vote for them. We've got to see that they don't get hold of him. Come on!"

"Right you are!"

And, hastily jamming their caps on, the three juniors hurriedly left the house, dashed across the quad and out of the gates, and tore away down the road towards the village as if they were on the cinder-path.

CHAPTER 3.

The Rivals of St. Dorothy's!

ST. DOROTHY'S was one of the oldest schools in mid-England, and fellows of an antiquarian turn of mind related with pride that it had been founded by Bishop Tunstall, in the reign of King John. It stood in the heart of the county of Warwickshire, amid some of the finest scenery in England. It had stood there for many centuries, and it had gone through many vicissitudes. The ruined chapel

was a reminder of the parliamentary wars, and there were fellows who pointed out the marks left by Cromwell's cannon-balls on the walls, fellows of an imaginative turn, perhaps. St. Dolly's, at all events, had seen stormy times, and there had probably been more than one crisis in her history. But the most staggering blow she had ever received, in the opinion of a large number of the "Saints," was when the Modern side had been established in the old school.

Modern tendencies, they admitted, were making themselves felt everywhere. Other Public schools had opened a "Commercial" side; but St. Dolly's might have been true to its traditions. What a chap wanted was an old-fashioned, classical education, and if a chap couldn't get on in the world with Latin, how was he to expect to get on without it? It was not observed that the enthusiastic supporters of the classical point of view were specially keen on sticking to their Latin exercises, or that any of them took Greek unless their parents insisted upon it. Nevertheless, they were heart and soul on the Classical side, and sniffed at the Commercials. The latter, in their turn, sniffed back. They took German instead of Greek, and chemistry instead of Latin, and seemed to thrive on it.

The Classical fellows averred solemnly that the school was going to the dogs, and the Moderns declared that it had already gone there, before their time, and that they were bringing it back again. The two sides agreed to differ, but it was not only in the class-room that mutual distaste was visible. On the playing-fields the sides were rivals; they contended for places in the eleven and the eight, and Lunsford, since he had been captain of St. Dolly's, had sometimes found it difficult to keep the peace.

Needless to say, the division, which was keen enough among the seniors, was far keener among the juniors. What the elders thought, or half-thought, the youngsters proclaimed at the top of their voices. The rows between Clas-

sicals and Mods were endless, and though, as a matter of fact, there was little or no real ill-feeling, there was incessant trouble.

The Modern side had been steadily increasing in numbers from its foundation, and of late had come to equal the Classical side, a matter for great rejoicing among the present Mods, and of great anxiety to their rivals. Up till now the Form captains had been, without exception, Classics. For the first time since the foundation of the Commercial side a Modern candidate had a chance of election. Numbers in the Fourth Form were equally balanced, and the anxiety was keen.

The seniors affected a lordly indifference to the elections in the Lower Forms, but, as a matter of fact, some of them felt a keen interest in the result. But interference was not possible. Form captains were elected by their own Form, every boy having a vote, and no outsiders were admitted to the elections.

And so the keenness of the rival candidates to secure the new boy as a voter will be easily understood.

The single voice of Sidney Redfern was enough to turn the scale. Otherwise, the election would tie, and then probably the Head would appoint a Form captain. He was as likely to appoint a Modern as a Classical. St. Dolly's, as we have said, had passed through crises in her history, but, in the opinion of the heroes of the Fourth, no crisis of past days had been like unto this.

Cromwell's cannonade, in Skelton's opinion, was a joke compared with the danger of having a Commercial youth for Form captain. The Fourth Form captain was not a very important person at St. Dolly's in the general estimation, but in the estimation of the Fourth itself he was a very important person indeed. The election of a captain of the school would not have stirred the youngsters nearly so deeply.

It was no wonder that Taffy, Rake, and Vernon jumped at the chance of securing the extra voter. It was the

first hint they had had of his existence, and they did not know that Skelton and Brown had already met him at the station. To get hold of the new boy, to keep him to themselves till the election in the Form-room, and then to suddenly produce him, to the utter confusion of the Classics, that was Taffy's "wheeze." There was no need to hesitate about the matter, for he knew perfectly well that Skelton and Brown would have done exactly the same if they had had the chance, and, as Taffy added proudly, the sense.

The three juniors went along the road at top speed, eager to meet the new boy at the earliest possible moment. As they went round a bend in the lane at a headlong pace, they pushed right into the youth, who was strolling from the direction of the village, and sent him fairly flying.

The stranger reeled back, and fell with a flop in the middle of the road, sending up a cloud of dust, and the three juniors gasped and halted, nearly falling over themselves.

"M-my hat!" gasped Taffy. "You utter ass, what do you mean by running into us like that?"

The prostrate youth sat up rather dully.

"You—you dummies!" he said. "How did they come to let you out of your strait-jackets?"

Taffy was about to make a hot retort, but he checked himself. He noted that the boy was dressed in Etons, and he guessed at once that this was the youth they were to meet on the road.

"Here, I say!" exclaimed Taffy amicably. "Are you Redfern minor?"

"I'm Sidney Redfern."

"Good! I—I say, I'm awfully sorry we biffed into you," said Taffy. "You see, your brother sent us to meet you, and we were in a hurry to—to find you. We thought you'd like somebody to look after you a bit, coming to a strange school."

"Just what I was going to say," said Rake.

"That's awfully decent of you," said Redfern gratefully.

"Oh, we're awfully decent chaps, you know. Your brother is sorry he had to go to Wyndale—important appointment or something; but we're to take care of you," said Taffy hospitably. "We're going to show you round, and look after you generally. I suppose you're pretty peckish after a long train journey?"

"Yes, a little," said Redfern, smiling.

"That's all right. I suppose you'll have tea in our study. We've got something decent for tea—ahem!—I mean, we're going to have something decent for tea, and we should like you to come. You'll come, won't you?"

"Jolly glad, too."

"Good again! No malice for that biff, eh? It was quite an accident."

"Not a bit," said Redfern cheerily.

He dusted down his clothes, feeling his heart a good deal lighter than it had been. His brother had not forgotten him after all, and, besides that, the kindness of these juniors, perfect strangers to him, was really enough to make any fellow feel cheerful.

He felt that if all the fellows at St. Dolly's were like these, his life would be jolly enough. If they were like this to a stranger and a new boy, what would they be like when they got chummy?

Taffy linked his arm affectionately in Redfern's.

"Come along, Reddy! You don't mind if I call you Reddy, do you?"

"Of course not," said Redfern, more and more surprised. "This is jolly decent of you. I've heard that new boys are generally ragged or put upon in Public schools."

Taffy & Co., remembering some of their own experiences as new boys, grinned a little, but became serious again at once.

"Nothing of that kind with us," said Taffy. "I know there are some kids in the Fourth—like Skelton and Brown—young ruffians, who'd play any tricks on a stranger. You want to keep clear of fellows like that. You stick to us, and I'll see you through. Let's get in to tea."

They were not long in reaching St.

Dolly's. As they passed in, Redfern glanced at the cricketers. Lunsford had just hit a ball for three, and the fellows were cheering. Redfern would gladly have looked on for a bit at the cricket, but Taffy & Co., who were on tenterhooks lest a Classical youth should spot the new boy, hurried him on. And as they were hurrying him in to have tea, Redfern could not very well object.

They hurried him into the house, and upstairs to Study 10, and Taffy heaved a great sigh of relief as he was marched into the study. Rake immediately closed the door. Involuntarily, the juniors put their backs to it, as if prepared to resist, by force, any attempt of the new boy to escape. But Redfern was not thinking of escape just then. He was, as a matter of fact, hungry after his journey, and quite ready for tea. There were no signs of tea in the study as he looked round.

"It's all right," said Taffy hastily. "We're just going to get tea. Shove some sticks in the grate, Rakey, and get a fire going. I'll go and fill the kettle." "Can I do anything to help?" asked Redfern.

"No; that's all right," said Taffy. "You sit down!" He almost pushed Redfern into the armchair. "You must be tired. We've as good as promised Redfern major to take every care of you. How's the little ones at home?"

"Eh? There aren't any," said Redfern, in amazement.

"Hem! I—I mean, how are your people—mater and pater, you know?" stammered Taffy, who hardly knew what he did mean, or what he was saying, in his anxiety to keep the new boy peacefully in the study.

"Oh, they're all right!" said Redfern. "Look here, let me fill the kettle for you—you can tell me where the tap is. I don't want to slack!"

"That's all right. We can't allow a guest to work. You just sit where you are. Here's the latest number of 'The Magnet.' Look at that while we're

getting tea. Is that fire never going to burn, Rake?"

"It's getting on. You haven't filled the kettle yet."

"Go and fill the kettle, Vernon!"

"Really, chappy—"

"Go and fill the kettle!" roared Taffy. And Vernon picked up the kettle and went. "Buck up with that fire, Rake! Here, I'll lend you a hand! You get the grub out of the cupboard!"

The fire was soon going. Vernon returned with the kettle, which was jammed on the smoky fire. The "grub" was turned out of the cupboard, but it did not make much of a spread. Taffy looked at half a loaf, a scrap of butter, and a small tin of sardines in something like dismay.

"This won't do!" he muttered to Vernon. "We've got to keep this chap here till the election. Go and raise some grub along the corridor—quick! Get anything you can. We can explain afterwards!"

"Really, chappy—"

Taffy shook him by the shoulder, and slung him out of the study. Vernon pushed back his cuffs; and then, remembering what was at stake, he obeyed orders. Taffy closed the door. But it was opened the next moment, and a junior looked in.

"Look here, Verney— Hallo!"

It was not Vernon returning. It was Phipps, of the Fourth, a Classical junior. He looked across at Redfern.

"Hallo," he exclaimed. "I thought I spotted him in the quad! Is that a new kid?"

Taffy did not reply. He did not want awkward explanations before Redfern. He rushed straight at Phipps, who retreated in alarm. Taffy seized him by the shoulders and wheeled him round, and Phipps struggled in vain as he was driven down the passage under a succession of powerful kicks.

"There!" gasped Taffy. "Don't you come poking into my study again!" He hurried back, and closed the door after

him, and met Redfern's stare of astonishment with a feeble grin.

"Who was that?" said Redfern.

"Oh, only one of the chaps!" said Taffy. "One—one of the chaps I was telling you about, you know, who are death on new fellows. But don't you be nervous. We'll look after you."

"I'm not nervous."

"N-n-no, of course not," agreed Taffy, who would have agreed to anything then. "I know you're not. I didn't mean that. I mean we'll back you up!"

"Just what I was going to say," said Rake.

"Really, chappy—" said Vernon, coming into the study, heavy laden.

"Oh, get the tea, and not so much of your 'really, chappy!'" exclaimed Taffy. "Can't you see the new chap is hungry? We're bound to be hospitable for—for Redfern major's sake. Redfern major is a ripping chap!"

"Yes, isn't he?" said Sidney eagerly.

"Simply stunning!" said Taffy.

"Best chap in the Sixth. Hasn't a second. The others are only outsiders. Is that kettle boiling?"

"Yes; I'm making the tea," said Rake.

"Good! Do you like your tea strong or weak, Reddy?"

"I'm not particular."

"Oh, we want to give you what you like, you know! I say, Verney, this is a decent spread." Taffy looked over the table, garnished with a new loaf, a pat of butter, a chunk of cheese, a pound or more of cold ham, half a chicken, several tins of salmon and sardines, and a big plum cake. "I should say you made a pretty good swoop up the passage."

"It's ripping!" said Redfern. "You're treating me jolly well, and I don't know how to thank you."

"Not at all. You see, we're so fond of Redfern major," said Taffy.

Redfern looked at his eager entertainers rather curiously, and a smile dawned upon his face. Their hospitality to a new boy, a perfect stranger,

was remarkable; and, little as he knew of Public schools, he knew that much. Back to his mind came his talk with Skelton and Brown. Were these extremely hospitable juniors after his vote at the Form election?

Perhaps—perhaps not! At all events, he was hungry, and the tea was certainly ripping, and he was satisfied to take things as they came.

The four juniors sat down round the table, and Vernon poured out the tea. But the meal was not destined to commence in peace. There was a sound in the passage of many footsteps.

"He's in there! I've seen him!" It was the excited voice of Phipps, of the Fourth, perfectly audible in the study. It was Skelton's voice that replied:

"We'll jolly soon see!"

Taffy sprang to his feet as the study door was flung open. Skelton and Brown stood on the threshold, with wrathful and indignant faces. Behind them was a crowd of Classical juniors. "Caught you, have we!" roared Skelton.

"Look here, get out of our study, you Classical cads! I—"

"Back up!" roared Skelton, and he rushed into the study, with his followers hot at his heels. "Down with the Mods!"

"Hurrah!"

The three Commercial juniors lined up desperately, and hit out right and left; but the rush of the Classics swept them away. The tea-table went over with a crash, and there was crash on crash of smashing crockery. Plates and cups and saucers, jam and ham and butter and cake, were trampled recklessly underfoot in a wild and whirling conflict.

CHAPTER 4.

Redfern Meets His Brother!

"SOCK it into them!"

"Down with the Mods!"

But the Mods were down already. The table was down, and the

crochery was down, and the tea and the cake and the tarts and the sardines were down, and the Moderns were sprawling among the wreckage, with the Classical juniors sprawling over them.

Skelton, flushed with victory, looked round the study. Never had there been so complete a wreck in so short a time. Several of the Classical juniors, in the heat and excitement of the moment, were attacking Sidney Redfern, forgetful of the fact that they had invaded the study to rescue the new boy from the clutches of the Mods. Redfern was giving a good account of himself, and two of Skelton's enthusiastic followers had rolled over under his fists.

"Hold on!" shouted Skelton. "This way, Redfern!"

"Eh?"

"It's a rescue!" gasped Skelton. "We're saving you from these Commercial bounders. Come on!"

And he clutched the new junior by the arm.

"But I don't want to be rescued!" objected Redfern. "I was just going to have tea, and—"

"Blow tea! We'll stand you some tea! Come on!"

"But—"

"Come on!" roared Skelton, losing patience. "There'll be a crowd of Mods here in a minute. This way! Here, lend a hand, some of you—this chap has got to be rescued!"

Half a dozen Classical juniors promptly piled upon Redfern, and he was "rescued" in spite of his resistance. They whisked him out of the study, and down the passage. The whole troop of Classicals, whooping with triumph, followed. In the wreck of the study Taffy & Co. sat up dazedly.

"M-m-m-my hat!" gasped Taffy.

"Really, chappy, I feel awfully—er—dishevelled!" murmured Vernon, trying to rub the jam out of his hair. "By Jove!"

Taffy staggered to his feet.

"After them!" he grunted. "They're not going to collar that new chap and

his giddy vote. We'll call up the fellows!"

And Taffy and Rake hurried out of the dismantled study. Vernon went on rubbing the jam out of his hair. He had had enough of "scrapping" for the time. But Taffy and Rake could do no good. Redfern had been whisked along the Fourth-Form passage to Skelton's study, and whisked into it, and the door was closed and locked on the inside. A yell of derision from a Classical crowd greeted the baffled Mods, and they speedily beat a retreat again.

Inside Skelton's study, Redfern was bumped down on the carpet. His rough handling had rather bewildered him, and he sat there for some moments hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels.

"Done them!" gasped Skelton.

"A clean do!" chuckled Brown III, dabbing his nose with his handkerchief. Taffy's fist had smitten that nose, and smitten it hard, and there was a liberal flow of "claret" as a result; but little did Brown III care for that. He dabbed away and grinned cheerfully.

Redfern jumped up.

"You stay where you are!" said Skelton warningly. "We've rescued you, and you belong to us. If you weren't a new kid, I'd lick you for going round with Mods. We keep up the giddy dignity of our side in this school. I can tell you. As a matter of fact, the Classical side is the school, and the Moderns are nobodies, and nowhere. You ought to be jolly glad to be rescued from the measly bounders. Now you're going to stick here till the Fourth-Form election comes off, and then you're going to vote for me!"

"Rats!" said Redfern cheerfully. "I haven't yet decided whom I'm going to vote for, but I'm not going to stick here, anyway. I suppose I'm my own master?"

"I suppose you're not!" said Skelton, with a sniff. "You young rotter, you're bound to stand by your side. You're a Classical, ain't you? You—you worm!"

"You're calling me some pretty names—"

"I'll give you some pretty thick ears, too, if you talk to me!" said Skelton. "After all the trouble we've taken over you!"

"Ungrateful pig!" said Brown.

Redfern grinned.

"Look here—unlock that door!"

"No fear!"

"I don't want to stay here! For one thing, I want to speak to my brother as soon as he comes in. Now——"

"Blow your brother! I can tell you, you're not going to come any rot in the Fourth Form, because you've got a brother in the Sixth," said Skelton. "It's rather against a junior to have a major in an Upper Form, and the less you say about it the better!"

"More rats!" Redfern stepped towards the door, and Skelton stepped into his way. "Now, I want to get out!"

"You'll stay there!"

"There'll be trouble!"

Skelton laughed. He thought it would be simple enough for himself and Brown to keep the new boy in the study. But he left off laughing the next moment as Redfern's strong grasp closed upon him. He was whirled away from the door, gasping in amazement at the muscular strength displayed by the new boy.

"Leggo!" he gasped. "Here, lend a hand, Brown—the beast will be getting out!"

Brown rushed forward.

Redfern swung Skelton round, and suddenly releasing his hold, sent him crashing into Brown.

"Oh!" roared Brown.

He sat down violently in the fender, and Skelton sat on him. For the moment they were too dazed to move again. Redfern unlocked the door, and slipped the key into the outside of the lock.

"Hold on," roared Skelton—"hold on! I——"

"Gerroff my chest!" murmured Brown, in a muffled voice.

"Hold on——" Skelton leaped up, but it was too late.

"Good-bye!" said Redfern sweetly; and the door shut, and the key clicked in the lock as Skelton hurled himself madly upon it.

Skelton dragged at the handle, but the door was fast. He kicked and shouted, and was only answered by a chuckle from outside. Redfern slipped the key into his pocket, and walked away down the passage.

Skelton kicked frantically at the solid oak door.

"Open this door!" he roared. "Rescue, Classics! Collar that cad! Rescue!"

There were a good many of the Classical juniors still in the passage, and some of them had observed Redfern's action with blank amazement. At the kicking and shouting from within Study B they understood, and five or six of them ran towards Redfern.

"Collar him!" shouted Phipps.

Redfern broke into a run. He did not mean to be "collared" by either party of the rivals of St. Dorothy's, and he guessed that in the Close he would be safe from open attack. He ran for the stairs, and ran down them with half a dozen excited and angry Classics whooping on his track. In the lower passage he could see the open door with the wide green Close beyond, and could catch a glimpse of the cricketers.

But just as he scudded for the door, with the pursuers close behind, a senior came in from the Close. There was no time for Redfern to stop. He was right upon the newcomer before he saw him, and nothing could possibly have stopped a collision.

Right into him Redfern dashed, and the Sixth-Former, with a startled and angry exclamation, staggered back. Redfern, dizzy from the shock, reeled against the door. The pursuing juniors, scared at the sight of a prefect "biffed" by a Lower-Form boy, scattered in an

instant, and in the twinkling of an eye they had vanished from sight.

Redfern was not so lucky.

The Sixth-Former recovered himself in a moment, and his grasp closed savagely on the boy's collar. Redfern was dragged away from the door, and shaken till his head swam.

"You young sweep!" said the prefect angrily. "How dare you— Why, Sidney!"

He released the junior, and at the same moment Sidney Redfern recognised his brother.

"Arthur!"

Arthur Redfern looked at his minor with a gloomy expression.

"Come to my study," he said abruptly, and strode away.

And Redfern, with a curious sinking at the heart, followed him.

CHAPTER 5.

Ransome's Rag!

ARTHUR REDFERN'S face did not relax when he stood in his study and looked at his younger brother. In fact, the cloud on his brow seemed to deepen. Sidney stole a glance at his face, and his glance was half appealing. He knew that his major was angry with him, and he was greatly troubled by the thought. He had come to the school with the intention of doing everything in his power to gain the approval of Arthur. There were few things he would not have done to win a cordial nod from the big brother whom he regarded as the ideal of young manhood. He realised miserably that he had made a bad start.

"So you've come!" said Redfern major grimly.

Sidney started.

"I—I'm sorry I biffed into you like that, Arthur," he said slowly. "The chaps were after me—of course, it was only a lark—and I didn't see you—" He broke off. He was beginning to realise that it was not the collision in

the doorway that had brought that dark cloud to his brother's face. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing!"

"Didn't you want me to come to St. Dorothy's?" asked the junior, and there was a ring of indignation as well as pain in his voice.

Arthur's expression changed a little.

"Oh, rot!" he said irritably. "Of—of course I wanted you to come. I sent some fags to meet you. Did you see them?"

Sidney grinned at the recollection of his experiences with Taffy & Co.

"Oh, yes, that was all right!" he said.

"The mater wanted me to meet you," said Arthur with an irritable laugh. "She doesn't know anything about Public schools. We shan't be on the same terms here that we are at home in the holidays. You may as well understand that from the start. I'm in the Sixth, and a prefect. You're a Fourth Form fag. We shan't see much of each other—perhaps shan't meet twice a week."

Redfern's face fell.

This was very unlike the prospect he had dimly mapped out in his mind—of exercises done in Arthur's study, under Arthur's brotherly eye, of coaching on the cricket-field and the river, and jolly cycle rides in the summer evenings. Arthur did not appear to see the dismay in his face.

"Of course, I want to help you every way possible," he went on. "But it won't help you in your own Form to be backed up by a prefect. If the juniors think you've got a friend to stand by you in the Sixth, they'll make your life a burden."

Sidney coloured.

"I can look after myself!" he exclaimed. "I shouldn't dream of dragging you into a Fourth Form row, Arthur. You can't think that of me."

"Well, I hope you won't. Have a little sense and we shall get on all right. Don't forget that I'm a senior and

you're a junior, and don't come marching up in the quad or the cricket field and calling me Arthur before all the seniors. There, there, I don't want to hurt your feelings!" went on the major hastily, as the minor's lower lip gave a suspicious quiver. "I know you're fond of me, and all that, but I'm speaking for your own good."

"I—I suppose so. It's all right."

"You haven't been taken as a fag yet?" asked Redfern major, changing the subject.

Sidney shook his head.

"I haven't been here long," he said; "only an hour or so."

"You might have been picked up at sight by any senior who wanted a fag. Look here, I'll speak a word for you to Lunsford, our skipper."

"Couldn't—couldn't I be your fag, Arthur?" asked Sidney hesitatingly.

"I'd—I'd rather fag for you than Lunsford."

Arthur shook his head.

"No; it's impossible. I——"

There was a knock at the door of the study, and Ransome came in. He did not see Sidney for the moment, as he entered hastily.

"It's all right, Arthur!" he exclaimed. "I've satisfied the beak that we were only going to Wyndale to see about some new cricket-nets——" Arthur was making furious signs to the Sixth-Former to hold his tongue, and Ransome caught sight of Sidney, and broke off: "Oh, I didn't know you had anybody with you!"

"It's only my young brother," said Arthur savagely.

Ransome recovered his coolness in a moment. He looked at Sidney with a cool and criticising gaze that took in every detail from his toes to his curly hair.

"Glad to meet you, Redfern minor," said Ransome, offering his hand, which Sidney took rather shyly. After Arthur's unpromising greeting, it seemed to him an act of great condescension for a Sixth-Former to shake hands with a new fag. "I should have known you

anywhere, you're so like Arthur. Are you anybody's fag yet?"

"I'm going to speak a word to Lunsford for him," said Arthur quickly.

"No good," said Ransome coolly; "Lunsford's quite satisfied with Skelton, and Skelton would knock the new kid into pancakes if he ousted him. Look here, Arthur, I'll take your young brother as my fag."

"Look here, Ransome——"

"Wouldn't you like to fag for me, kid?" said Ransome with a smile to Sidney—and he could look very agreeable when he chose. "You won't have a hard time. I treat my fags well—lots of pickings, and not much to do. You may get snapped up by someone who'd bully you. Better stick to me while you've got a chance."

Redfern looked at his brother.

"Better let him come to me, Arthur," said Ransome. "Look here, don't be an ass! It will suit us well!"

"What do you mean?" asked Arthur, with a start.

"You get out for a bit, kid," said Ransome. "Go and wait for me in my study—Number Four. I'll join you there in a jiffy."

Sidney again looked to his brother for instructions; but Arthur nodded shortly, and the junior left the study, closing the door behind him.

The moment he was gone Arthur Redfern turned angrily to his friend.

"What do you mean by that, Ransome? I've told you I won't have the boy mixed up in anything. I tell you——"

"Softer, please!" said Ransome, in his provokingly cool way. "No need to shout and tell the fags in the passage. That kid's coming to the school is a blessing in disguise. You've told me how attached he is to you and how you expect him to haunt and worry you. Well, my son, that's where we come in. I've heard something about him already, that shows he's a lad with spirit. Look here, he will be useful to us."

"I've told you——" began Arthur hotly.

Ransome raised his hand.

"Soft again! Don't be an ass! Mr. Mannering met us on the road to Wyndale, and stopped us. I've succeeded in satisfying him that we were going there to see about some cricket things we couldn't get in Okeholme. But he's got an eye open—a jolly suspicious eye! We can't go again for a bit."

"I know we can't."

"Well," said Ransome, "you know how matters stand. It's no good mincing matters, Arthur. You're as deep in the mud as I am in the mire. If we don't keep in touch with Cunliffe the man will come up to the school. What will happen then?"

Arthur's face went white.

"He would never dare!"

"What has he to fear? He has our paper—our signatures. We owe him money."

"He would never get a penny by giving us away—"

"Perhaps not; but I dare say it would be some satisfaction to him to show us up. You know, anyway, what Dr. Cranston would do if he saw the papers that Cunliffe could show him. We should be—"

"Expelled!" said Arthur, with a bitter groan.

"Exactly."

Arthur Redfern sank into a chair, and covered his face with his hands.

"What a mad fool I've been!"

Ransome watched him with a bitter sneer.

"That won't help you," he said.

"This is a time for action. We can stave Cunliffe off for the time being, but it will be very useful to have a fag handy whom we can rely on, in case we have to send a message to Cunliffe. Your young brother would keep his mouth shut—for his precious brother's sake." Ransome grinned derisively.

"Better let him fag for me."

"Oh, do as you like!" said Arthur. "I'm sick of the whole business. Do as you like."

Ransome nodded and quitted the study. He walked along to No. 4 with

a curiously derisive grin upon his features, and, entering, found Sidney Redfern standing by the table waiting. The boy was looking uneasy and troubled. Ransome gave him a cheery nod.

"It's all right," he announced. "Your brother likes the idea of your being my fag, now I've explained to him. Of course, I had a right to take you, anyway; but Arthur is my chum. Do you like the idea?"

"Ye-es, I think so," said Sidney doubtfully.

Ransome laughed as he threw himself into a chair.

"Good! In doing things for me you'll be doing them just as much for your brother really, as we chum together. You can buzz off now—my other fag will get my tea," said Ransome graciously. "I think we shall get on together, Redfern minor."

And Redfern, who hardly knew whether to be pleased or not, quitted the study of his new master.

CHAPTER 6.

Taffy in Trouble!

"HERE, Redfern, you bounder!" It was the day after the election. Skelton had beaten Taffy for the captaincy by one vote—and that voter was Redfern minor.

Redfern had turned the corner, and run right into Skelton and Brown, who were waiting for him. They seized him by either arm and marched him on towards their study. Redfern hardly knew whether their intentions were friendly or hostile, and he struggled in their grasp.

"It's all right," grinned Skelton. "Don't be alarmed, my infant. Where have you been all this time? We've been looking for you."

"Hunting all over the place," said Brown. "Saw you come in with Lunsford, though. The feed will be spoiled."

"The feed?"

"Yes, rather. We're having a bit of a feed in our study to celebrate my get-

ting in as captain of the Fourth," explained Skelton. "It's a big triumph for the Classical side. Taffy & Co. are wild, I can tell you. I'm sorry you're fagging for Ransome, young Redfern."

"Why?"

"He's a rotter. We're not proud of him, though he's a Classical senior. I never could make out what your major saw in him. If you're going to fag for him I shall have to put you up to some points. Never mind that now, though. Here we are! The herrings will be warm, as I left 'em on the hob—"

Skelton opened the door of his study, and stood stupefied.

The room was not empty.

And the herrings were not on the hob. Four juniors were seated round the table, and they had just finished the herrings, and were starting on the strawberry jam.

Taffy Morgan, Rake Vernon, and another Modern junior looked up with agreeable smiles at the astounded and enraged Classics.

"What's this?" yelled Brown.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Taffy. "This is where we grin! Grin, you bouncers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was very nice, chappies!" said Vernon softly. "The herrings were done to a turn. The only fault is that there were no more!"

"Exactly!" said Rake.

"Still, there's the strawberry-jam," said Taffy. "I am rather fond of the strawberry-jam. Look you! Shall I help myself, Skelton?"

"No. I'll help you!" roared Skelton, rushing upon the rival leader of the Fourth. "Wade in, Classics!"

The Moderns jumped up from the table, and Taffy went rolling on the hearthrug in the grasp of Skelton, who rubbed a handful of strawberry-jam well into his face. Taffy gasped and roared, and struggled furiously.

The other juniors were equally hotly engaged. Phipps and Spratt, of the Classical side, looked into the study. They were looking for an invitation to

the feed, but they found a fight going on instead. They promptly joined in, and with the odds against them Taffy & Co. were rolled ignominiously out of the study.

"Outside, you Modern rotters!" gasped Skelton. "Do you want any more strawberry-jam, Taffy?"

"Yes!" roared Taffy, charging back into the study doorway like a bull.

Skelton seized him, and they rolled on the carpet, and then Brown lent a hand, and the Modern junior was pinned. Redfern picked up the milk-jug from the table.

"Now, Taffy, are you going quietly?"

"No!" roared Taffy.

"Very good! Say when!" said Redfern cheerfully. And he commenced to pour the milk upon Taffy's upturned, crimson face.

"Ow, ow, ow! Grooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you going quietly?"

"N-n-no, no, no!" roared Taffy. "Ow! Grooh! Gerrooh! Yow! Yes! I think I'll go! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha! I thought you would!"

The Moderns in the passage had made a desperate rush to aid their leader, but Phipps and Spratt had slammed the door, and jammed their feet against it, and the ragging rescuers could not get it open.

"Lemme gerrup!" gasped Taffy. "Oh, you beasts! I'll make you wriggle for this!"

Redfern chuckled.

"You're doing the wriggling at present," he remarked. "Are you sorry you came and scooped our feed?"

"No!" roared Taffy. "I'm glad! I'm jolly glad!"

"Then you shall have the tea!"

Redfern took the teapot from the table, and filled it with cold water. Skelton and Brown were laughing so hysterically that they could hardly hold the struggling Taffy. The Modern leader squirmed as the teapot approached.

"Are you sorry you scooped the feed?" asked Redfern sweetly.

"No, no, no!"

"Good! Say when!"

And Redfern began to pour.

The stream of pale-brown liquid from the spout of the teapot splashed in a little cascade on Taffy's face, and thence ran to various parts of him. He was getting a bath of weak tea, but his courage held out.

"Are you sorry?"

"No!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here, hold on!" choked Taffy, as a stream went into his mouth. "I—I—I—"

"Are you sorry?"

"No! Yes, yes!"

"Are you fearfully sorry?"

"N— Yes, yes!"

"Are you awfully, fearfully sorry?"

"Yes!" roared Taffy. "Chuck it!" Redfern replaced the teapot on the table.

"The prisoner is discharged," he said.

"Yow! Wow! You wait till I get hold of you, young Redfern! Yow!"

"The prisoner is discharged on condition that he makes it pax for the rest of the evening."

"Rats!"

"Have some more tea?"

"Ow! No! Chuck it!"

"Will you make it pax?"

"No! Yes; I'll make it pax till bed-time!"

Redfern chuckled.

"You'll make it pax till to-morrow morning, my son. I know your little game. No dormitory tricks for me. Will you make it pax till to-morrow morning?"

"No!"

"Well, there's some more tea!"

"Ow! Stop! Yes, yes, it's pax till to-morrow!"

"The prisoner is discharged!"

Taffy staggered to his feet. He was drenched and dripping, dishevelled and furious. But for his parole he would have charged at Redfern on the spot. But "pax" was sacred. It was peace till the morning.

"Ow!" grunted Taffy. "Beast!"

You're taking a jolly lot on yourself for a new kid. I'll look after you to-morrow! Br-r-r-r!"

And he went out of the study, and made a bee-line to the nearest bath-room. Skelton chuckled, and gave Redfern a sounding slap on the shoulder.

"Ain't he getting into the way of it, Brownney?" he grinned.

"He—he are!" said Brown chuckling.

"I never saw Taffy so done up in my natural. I expect he will lick Redfern to-morrow. But what about the feed?"

"They've made a good clearance," said Skelton. "Taffy's taken away most of what they haven't eaten on his face."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Never mind, there's bread and cheese, and some of the jam. It's rotten! They were ripping herrings, and done to a turn. I suppose those Modern rotters caught a whiff of them cooking, and knew there was a feed on. Think you can put up with bread and cheese, Redfern, and leave the feed till to-morrow?"

"Yes, rather!" said Redfern cheerfully. "I'm as hungry as a hunter. Hand over the bread and cheese, my son, and never mind the giddy herrings."

"You're staying to grub?" asked Skelton, with a grin, as Phipps and Spratt turned towards the door.

Phipps sniffed, and Spratts grunted.

"Not much," said Phipps. "I nipped the herrings—I—I mean, I just looked in. I'm not hungry for bread and cheese."

"We can get that in our own study," remarked Spratt.

And the two juniors withdrew, leaving Redfern and his two new chums to their supper, which they enjoyed keenly enough, with the healthy appetites of healthy youths. Skelton bemoaned the herrings once or twice, but Redfern was quite satisfied.

When the Fourth Form went up to bed, Taffy & Co. eyed Redfern very curiously. The Fourth Form occupied two dormitories, on opposite sides of a long passage, and it was easy to see that that passage was frequently the

scene of alarms and excursions. But for the "pax" established between the rivals of the Fourth, the new junior would undoubtedly have received some kind attention from Taffy & Co after lights out. Redfern grinned cheerfully at the chief of the Modern juniors, and Taffy could not help grinning back.

Lunsford saw lights out in the Fourth Form. He did not glance at Redfern. Two minutes after the lights were extinguished Sidney Redfern was fast asleep, and he did not open his eyes again till the rising-bell was clanging in the morning.

CHAPTER 7.

With the Gloves On!

AFTER morning lessons, when the Fourth Form poured out into the passage, Taffy & Co. came over to Redfern. The junior had almost forgotten his little difficulties with the Modern youths.

Taffy gave him a tap on the shoulder "Hallo," said Redfern, "what do you want?"

"Only a little talk," said Taffy sweetly. "Will you come behind the chapel?"

"Behind the chapel? What for?"

"To talk, of course," said Taffy, with polite and elaborate sarcasm. "We're thinking of giving a small conversazione there, and we want you as a distinguished guest."

Rake and Vernon chuckled. Taffy's manner caused a goodly crowd of Fourth-Formers to gather round in anticipation of trouble—and a good many of the Third, for that matter.

"Will you come, chappy?" asked Vernon.

"Of course he'll come!" said Skelton indignantly. "You'll be jolly sorry he's come, too, Taffy my son! Of course, he's quite ready!"

"Ahem! He doesn't seem to be so ready for himself as you are for him!" grinned Taffy. "What do you say, Redfern?"

"Oh, I'll come!" said Redfern

cheerily. "I suppose what you want is a fight?"

"Not exactly! I'm going to lick you, you see."

"Well, you'll get the fight first, and a jolly stiff one, I can assure you!" said Redfern. "But what are we going to fight about?"

"You've got a bad memory, my son. I'm going to lick you for laying violent hands upon the chief of the Fourth Form at St. Dolly's!"

"Rats!" howled Skelton. "Who's chief! I'm Form captain, I—"

"Peace, my son! You are Form captain, in a manner of speaking—"

"I tell you I—"

"Really, chappy—"

"Shut up, Vernon! I'm Form captain, and blow your manner of speaking," said Skelton hotly. "I'm willing to lick anybody who says anything different!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Look here, there's nothing for us to fight about," said Redfern. "You must be an ass to bear malice for a jape—"

"Eh? I don't bear malice!" said Taffy indignantly. "What are you getting at?"

"Then what do you want to fight for?"

"Oh, that's different! I think I ought to lick you. I owe it to my position in the Form. You have too much nerve for a new kid. It will really be a kindness to take it out of you before it gets you into trouble," explained Taffy.

"Well, if you mean to be kind, of course I don't want to balk you!" grinned Redfern. "Somebody will be hurt, that's all!"

"Ye-es, I fancy so!"

"This way," said Skelton, linking his arm in Redfern's. "If you don't lick him, I will." He lowered his voice. "I suppose you can fight, kid? I know you can hit hard enough; but do you know anything about the rules?"

"Oh, yes—pretty fair!"

"Taffy's a demon at it," said Skelton. "Not to put too fine a point on it, I couldn't lick him, you know. As a matter of fact—I'm telling you this for

your information—he has licked me. You wouldn't think it from his manner—nothing of the crowing sort about Taffy. But he has; and he could do it again. Now, I'm a pretty good man with my hands, you know. You'll have all your work cut out to hold up against Taffy when he gets going!"

"Well, a chap can only do his best!"

"Ye-es, I s'pose so! Stick it out as long as you can, for the honour of the Classical side. It's rotten for us, you know, that we haven't a chap on the Classical side who can handle Taffy. If he were a bullying sort, it would be rottener still—as it is, it's rotten. Stick it out!"

"I'll do my best, anyway!"

Quite a crowd followed the juniors behind the chapel. There, on a level stretch of green under the shade of ancient elms, was a secluded spot, far from the ken of masters and prefects, where youthful disputes were frequently fought out. The juniors were not backward in making remarks, and if Redfern had been open to discouragement, he would certainly have been discouraged by the remarks he heard on all sides. Even the Classics did not believe for a moment that he would win. They recounted former triumphs of Taffy, spoke with awe and admiration of a famous left-hander he possessed, and debated whether the new boy would be able to stand up to him for a whole round.

But Redfern did not seem to be discouraged. His manner was as cool and self-possessed as ever when the crowd halted under a big elm. Taffy gave his jacket to Vernon and his cap to Rake.

"Are you ready, kid?" he asked negligently.

"Yes; but one moment! Why not have the gloves on?"

"The gloves!"

"Certainly! I don't want to hurt you!"

"What!" roared Taffy.

"And you don't want to hurt me! There's no malice on either side, I hope," said Redfern. "I'd rather put on the gloves!"

"Good wheeze!" said Skelton.

"Yah! He's afraid!" yelled a voice from the back of the crowd.

Redfern looked towards the speaker.

"If the chap who spoke will step out here for a minute, I'll show him whether I'm afraid or not," he remarked.

The invitation was not accepted.

"We'll have on the gloves, by all means," said Taffy. "Cut off and get them, Verny!"

"Certainly, chappy!"

In a couple of minutes the boxing-gloves were forthcoming. The two juniors, in their shirt-sleeves, faced one another, with a circle of eager faces round them. Vernon had appointed himself timekeeper, and he stood with a big gold watch in his hand—the only gold watch in the Fourth Form—his eye on the dial.

"Are you ready?"

"Yes, rather!" said Redfern.

"Oh, yes!" said Taffy carelessly.

It was evident that the Modern leader did not take up the fight very seriously.

"Time!"

The adversaries shook hands and the fight commenced. Taffy lunged into it, as if it were an affair quite below any serious effort on his part—as, indeed, the whole crowd considered it. Skelton was the only one who thought Redfern had any chance against the redoubtable fighting-man of the Fourth, and he was very doubtful.

But there was a surprise in store for the Fourth Form.

Redfern sparred cautiously, giving ground at first, and Taffy followed him half round the ring. There was a buzz as Taffy was seen to hit out at last, and every eye watched for Redfern's fall.

But he did not fall. Where Taffy's blow went, Taffy hardly knew; but it did not touch the cool, smiling face before him. And before he could recover himself Redfern was upon him, hitting out right and left. One drive Taffy partly guarded, the second caught him on the cheek and made him reel, and the third got home fairly under his chin, lifting him almost off his feet. Right

over went the Modern junior, and he thudded down in the grass like a sack of wheat.

"There was a shout of surprise.

"Taffy's down!"

"My hat!"

"Bravo!"

And Taffy sat up in the grass and blinked at Redfern, with an expression of utter amazement that made the whole crowd burst into a roar of laughter.

CHAPTER 8.

A Fight to a Finish!

"**B**RAVO, Redfern!" The shout burst from all the Classical juniors in the crowd behind the chapel. The fall of the great Taffy amazed them. Up to that moment no Classical junior had ever been able to stand up to the Modern leader. And so the Classics rejoiced, and the Modern juniors looked at one another very dubiously.

Everybody had expected to see Redfern wiped off the face of the earth, so to speak, in the first round. And the first round had ended with Taffy on his back on the grass, looking up at the blue sky, and seeing more stars there than any astronomer ever saw with the most powerful glass.

Rake helped his chum to his feet. Taffy was looking a little dazed, and very much surprised. His look made the Classical juniors chuckle again. It was evident that he was experiencing an astonishment he would not soon recover from.

"It was a fluke, of course, Rake," he remarked.

"Of course," said Rake. "Let me sponge your chivvy!"

"I wasn't exactly looking for that, you know."

"Of course not. Take a rest on my knee!"

"Oh, I don't want a rest! I shall squash him in the second round, now that I know what to expect!"

"Ye-es, of course you will!" said Rake loyally.

But, loyal as he was, he glanced at the opposite corner of the ring with some misgiving. Redfern did not seem to have turned a hair during that exciting round. Skelton had made a knee for him, and Redfern did not disdain to sit down. Brown was fanning him with his hat.

"Blessed if I expected anything like this!" grinned Skelton. "There's more in this chap than meets the eye. I suppose you'll be licked, Reddy, but you'll give Taffy a bit of a tussle first, and that's one comfort."

"Yes, that's a comfort, isn't it?" said Redfern cheerfully.

"Might pull out ahead if you're careful. If Taffy loses his temper you'll have a chance. Don't let him get too close; he hits like a steam-hammer. I know it; I've been there."

And Skelton rubbed his nose, as if a painful recollection had just come into his mind. Vernon was looking at his watch.

"Time!"

The adversaries stepped up to the line again. Skelton whispered to Phipps to fetch a basin of water and a sponge, and Phipps cut off. It was pretty plain by this time that the fight was not to be, at all events, a walk-over. It was more likely to be the most obstinate contest that the Fourth Form at St. Dorothy's had ever seen.

Taffy was more cautious now. His lesson had not been lost on him. But his head was still singing a little, while Redfern was as fresh as paint.

The crowd looked on eagerly. If Redfern lived through the round they were prepared to believe that he had a chance. For some time the opponents sparred with so much caution that neither was touched, but suddenly the fighting became close. Taffy got in a body blow that made Redfern stagger, and followed it up with a rap on the nose that dropped the new boy on the grass in a sitting posture.

Redfern blinked; in spite of the glove,

the blow had told heavily, and the water rushed to his eyes. Vernon began to count:

"One, two, three, four, five——"

If Redfern did not rise before ten he was "done."

"Six, seven——"

Redfern sprang up, and Taffy knocked him down again immediately, with a grin on his face. But he seemed like a Jack-in-the-box; he was up again in a second, and holding his own, keeping Taffy's attack off by sheer skill of guard, till the welcome call of time gave him a much-needed relief.

"Time!" rapped out Vernon.

Redfern was gasping a little as he sank upon Skelton's knee. Brown III, fanned him, and sponged the perspiration from his face. The contact of the cool sponge freshened the junior wonderfully.

"How do you feel?" asked Skelton anxiously.

"All right," said Redfern.

"Bellows to mend—eh?"

"I shall be all right."

"Well, you've got pluck, and no mistake! My hat! If you lick Taffy we'll—we'll celebrate it somehow! Wire in—do your best!"

"You can jolly well depend on that!" grinned Redfern. "I shan't be licked if I can help it. What!"

"Time, chappies!"

The third round began. The smile of superiority had returned to Taffy's face, but it did not remain there long. A hard glove crashing upon the nose was sufficient to banish any smile. Redfern's right got home with terrific force. Taffy hardly knew how. The Modern leader staggered, but recovered himself, and guarded his face well for the rest of the round, without trying to attack. His head was swimming, and he could do no more. The call of time was as welcome to him then as it had previously been to Redfern.

The fourth round was the hardest of all so far. Both the juniors received punishment, hard and fast, but they stood it well; and **Classicals** and

Moderns looked on with bated breath. But for the gloves, the juniors would have been battered and bruised, and even with the gloves they began to show very visible signs of the punishment they were giving and taking.

Taffy's left eye was closing, and Redfern's nose was emitting a thin stream of red. But there was nothing "soft" about either of them. They could bear pain, and they never thought of flinching.

When time was called they parted, and it was difficult to say which had had the better of the struggle. But the Moderns were growing anxious. They had expected Taffy to simply walk over the "new kid," and he had not done it. Rake and Vernon looked anxious and worried. It would never do for the **Classicals** to win; but there was no doubt that Taffy was getting "groggy."

"Buck up, old chap!" said Rake, as he bathed his chief's heated brow. "Put your beef into it, you know!"

Taffy glared at him.

"If you're looking for a thick ear, Rake, you'd better take him on yourself!" he grunted.

"Oh, I don't mean that, Taffy! Only remember what there is at stake. The **Classicals** will crow over us no end if he licks you."

"Do you think he's going to lick me, you ass?"

"Well, just put your beef into it, that's all!"

"If you know more about fighting than I do——"

"Time!"

Taffy jerked himself into the ring again. Rake's evident doubts annoyed him, and he meant to show the doubting Thomas, in that round, how unfounded his doubts were. It was rather unfortunate, for it led Taffy to attack recklessly and force the fighting; and Redfern was not an opponent with whom any chances could be taken. There were two minutes of the briskest fighting, watched with eager interest by the crowd of juniors, and then Taffy

went down, with Redfern's gloved fist under his chin. He dropped with an audible bump; but he was up again in a second, only to fall again, and he was on the ground when time was called.

Rake helped him up with a gloomy expression on his face that exasperated Taffy.

"That was another fluke," said Taffy, sipping water.

"Ye-e-es! A few more flukes like that, and you're done for, though!"

"Oh, ring off!"

"Why don't you put your beef into it?" demanded Rake. "You've got the honour of the Modern side to think of. Put your beef into it!"

"Well, you're a nice, cheerful sort of idiot to be a chap's second in a fight—I don't think!" said Taffy, glowering at him.

"Well, I think you ought to put your beef into it. This isn't a bit of amusement for you; it concerns the whole side."

B-r-r-r!

Taffy looked a little unsteady as he walked up for the sixth round. Redfern stood like a rock. Taffy found it a little difficult to see with one eye closed, and his nose swollen to nearly twice its natural size; at least, that was what it felt like. But he threw himself into the round desperately.

But Redfern's guard was not to be passed. Not a single tap reached the new boy's face, while rap after rap came home upon Taffy. The Classics were crowing with delight now. It was getting clear that Taffy would not win.

Rap, rap, rap!

Redfern's fists came in like lightning, and Taffy did not stop them. He went down like a log.

Bump!

"Bravo!" yelled the Classics; and even the Moderns, like the Tuscans of old, could scarce forbear a cheer.

"Bravo, Reddy! Hurrah!"

Vernon looked anxiously at his friend as the minute crept by. Only one minute was allowed between the

rounds. And Taffy did not look as if he would be ready for the seventh.

Rake was just as anxious, and somewhat indignant. Taffy had always had the reputation of being an invincible fighting-man, and what did he mean by getting licked like this? That was how Rake looked at it.

"Think you'll go on?" he asked.

"Think! Ass! Of course I'm going on!"

"Better chuck it, you know. You're done."

"Don't be an ass! I'm going to lick him."

"You might have, if you'd put your beef into it. But now——"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Time!"

Taffy staggered to his feet, and almost fell. There was a yell from the Classics.

"Redfern wins!"

"Bravo!"

"Rats!" shrieked Taffy. "I'm not done. I tell you I'm going on! Shut up! Go and eat coke! I'm ready!"

And he staggered into the ring.

"Better chuck it, chappy!" said Vernon, in a low voice. "The game's up."

"Bosh!"

"Really, chappy——"

"Rats!"

Redfern toed the line. He was looking groggy himself now; he had had plenty of punishment. But he was quite fit to go on.

"Hang it, kids, let's call it a draw!" said Redfern impulsively. "I don't want to go on."

"Confess you're licked, then!"

"Licked!" Redfern laughed. "Rats, and many of 'em!"

"Then come on!"

And the seventh—and last—round commenced. Taffy hit out blindly, and his blows were guarded with ease. Redfern could have punished him terribly, but he did not. Only towards the end of the round, when Taffy could hardly keep his feet, Redfern gave him a gentle tap that made him sit on the grass.

Rake dragged him upon his knee.

Taffy was gasping, and it was pretty clear even to himself that he could not go on. Vernon kept his eye on his watch.

"Time!"

Taffy tottered up, and fell again. Rake caught him.

"It's all up!" said Rake. "My man's licked!"

And he threw up the sponge. Perhaps it was an accident—and perhaps it wasn't—but the sponge descended upon Brown's face as he opened his mouth to give a tremendous cheer.

"Hurrah! Ow! Gr-r-rooch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ass!" roared Brown. "What did you—ooch—do that for? Groo!"

"I was only chucking up the sponge," said Rake innocently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then you can have it back!" grunted Brown; and he sent it in as if it were a cricket-ball he was fielding, and it landed on Rake's nose with a squelch.

Skelton, in the fullness of his heart, rushed at Redfern and hugged him. The Classical juniors were wild with delight.

"We've won!" chuckled Skelton. "Oh, my only summer hat! It's ripping! Licked, by George! The Classical side is top side now, my sons! What?"

"Yes, rather! Hurrah!"

Redfern put on his jacket and walked over to Taffy. Taffy and Rake were just concluding a little argument. Rake was still convinced that the affair would have gone better for the Modern side if Taffy had taken his advice.

"You see, old fellow, you should have put your beef into it!" explained Rake.

Taffy looked at him. He was not feeling in the best temper in the world just then, and Rake could not be called tactful. Taffy did not reply. He simply landed out with his right, and the astounded Rake caught it on the chin, and rolled over. He sat up and blinked in amazed indignation at Taffy.

"What on earth—"

"You ring off!" said Taffy. "Did I put enough beef into that, you ass, or shall I give you another?"

Rake apparently thought that one sample was enough, for he hurriedly got out of Taffy's reach. Taffy put on his outer garments, with the help of Vernon. Vernon was sympathetic, but tactful enough to say nothing. Taffy looked rather grimly at Redfern as the latter came towards him. Redfern grinned cheerfully, and held out his hand.

"Give us your fin, old son!" he said. "No malice, I hope? It was a jolly good fight; and if you'd kept on your pins for another round, I don't think I could have kept on mine."

There was no resisting Redfern's good temper, and the utter absence of anything like crowing in his manner. Taffy grinned, and took his hand.

"You're a decent sort," he said; "and—and I'm jolly glad we had the gloves on, after all."

"So am I," said Redfern, rubbing his nose. "No harm in a little friendly punching-bee, so long as a chap doesn't lose his temper; and I've always noticed that you get on better with a chap after you've punched his nose once or twice."

Taffy chuckled.

"Then we shall get on all right," he said.

Redfern was the hero of the Classics as he strolled away. Everybody wanted to walk with him, but Skelton and Brown linked arms with him, and glared at anybody who tried to get too near.

Redfern belonged to them, and they marched him off in triumph. At the corner of the chapel railings they almost ran into a Sixth-Former who had evidently been watching the fight. It was Ransome. He gave Redfern a nod.

"Jolly good!" he said. "You can handle the gloves well, Redfern minor. Hanged if you don't put them up like a real pug. You like that game—eh?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Redfern, rather surprised that a Sixth-Former

should take any interest in a junior "scrap." "I generally manage to hold my own, that's all."

"Good—very good! You ought to keep in practice. I like the way you handled Morgan. And look here, young Redfern, after tea to-night you can stay in my study, and I'll put you up to some wheezes in the boxing line."

"Thanks very much!" said Redfern wonderingly.

Skelton and Brown looked at him very curiously as they strolled on.

"Ransome seems to have taken a big fancy to you," said Skelton. "What's his little game, I wonder? He's the deepest card in the school. I'll bet he's thinking of some way to make use of you. Nobody likes Ransome."

And Redfern could not help thinking that, in spite of the senior's kindness to him, he did not like him, either. There was a peculiar glimmer in Ransome's eyes as he looked after the well-settled form of the new boy.

"Clever—very clever!" he muttered. "Just what I've been looking for—just the thing! I wonder if I could work it—I wonder?"

And Ransome's face was dark with thought as he walked away. Redfern would have been astonished if he had known what line the senior's reflections were following.

CHAPTER 9.

Bad Company for Arthur!

"GOOD-AFTERNOON!" Arthur Redfern started and looked up suddenly. He was coming along the lane to the school when the squat figure of Mr. Cunliffe approached him.

Mr. Cunliffe, landlord of the Green Man inn at Wyndale, was a well-known figure in the neighbourhood of St. Dolly's. He was not a popular character with the school authorities, and it was strictly forbidden to any St. Dolly's man to hold any traffic or conversation with him. Nevertheless, it was pretty well known in the school

generally that certain fellows had dealings with Mr. Cunliffe, and there was a strong rumour that the school authorities had their suspicions, too.

For these reasons, and others, it was rather a shock to Arthur Redfern to see Mr. Cunliffe so close to St. Dolly's in the broad light of day.

"Good-afternoon," stammered Arthur. "How do you do?"

"You don't look very pleased to see me."

"Look here, Cunliffe," Arthur broke out, "don't be a fool! You know the harm it would do me to be seen speaking to you, and here you are, almost within sight of the school. You might be more considerate."

"As you didn't come to see me, I thought I'd give you a look in," said Mr. Cunliffe agreeably.

Arthur gave a violent start.

"You weren't coming to the school?"

"Why not?"

"Are you mad? Do you know I should be expelled if—if it were known—"

"That you played cards o' nights at the Green Man and laid money on horses through yours truly," grinned the publican. "Werry likely. But that's no business of mine. You came into the game with your eyes open."

"Fool—idiot that I was!"

The publican shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't want to 'urt you. Jimmy Cunliffe never went back on a pal yet. You owe me a long account. I want it settled. I can't wait for ever. When are you going to settle?"

"I—I shall settle as soon as I can. I am trying to raise the money now. Don't be a cad, Cunliffe. You know that I shall pay you."

The man looked discontented.

"I've got bills to meet myself, I 'ave," he remarked. "I'll give you until to-morrow night, then, Mister Redfern."

He made a movement to go, or affected to do so. Redfern, in great agitation, started forward and caught him by the arm.

"Cunliffe! Don't be unreasonable.

I can't possibly fix it by to-morrow night, but—in a few days, I hope. Ransome has some plan for raising the money. If you cut up rusty you'll only lose your money, whatever happens to me. Give me another week, and—"

"I've given you too many weeks already," said Cunliffe. "When I've owed you money ain't I always cashed up decent?"

"I admit you have."

"I only ask fair and square. I'm a straight man, and I expects to be dealt with as such. I give you till to-morrow night. In the matter ain't settled by then, look out for squalls, Mr. Redfern."

And the publican, shaking off Redfern's detaining grasp, strode away. The Sixth-Former of St. Dolly's stood looking after him with haggard eyes.

"Cunliffe!" he called out, but the man did not even turn his head. From the direction of the school three figures came in sight—three juniors in straw hats, with cheery faces and linked arms. They were the Classical chums of the Fourth—Skelton, Brown, and Redfern minor.

They heard the Sixth-Former's call, and caught a glimpse of the squat figure of the publican disappearing among the trees. Arthur, staring after the man, did not see them for the moment.

As he turned to go on, however, he came face to face with the three juniors, and caught his younger brother's startled look.

The colour fled from his face.

"Arthur!" exclaimed Redfern involuntarily, running towards him.

The prefect looked at him savagely, and gave him a violent push out of the way. Then he strode on towards the school, without once looking back.

Skelton gave a low whistle. He exchanged glances with Brown, but neither looked at Redfern minor. They guessed what he was feeling like at that moment.

Sidney Redfern's face had gone crimson, and then white.

He had heard rumours of his brother's being mixed up in some way with the

shady publican, and the idea had secretly worried him very much.

"Let's get on," said Redfern abruptly.

Skelton and Brown nodded, and they strode on towards the village. But all the brightness was gone out of Redfern's face; to him the sun was no longer shining. That meeting had told him more than he had guessed before of his brother's connection with Cunliffe, and the repulse he had received had hurt him bitterly.

CHAPTER 10.

Where is Arthur Redfern?

THE great cricket match of the season at St. Dolly's was that against Lexham—played on the Lexham ground. The whole school went over to Lexham in a body to watch it, and by ancient tradition, a good deal of licence in regard to school rules was allowed on Lexham match day.

But the Lexham match brought no happiness to Sidney Redfern. He went over to see it with a jolly and noisy crowd of Fourth-Formers, feeling as carefree as any of his companions. But the sight of Cunliffe, the betting publican, on the Lexham ground, brought a frown to his brow. Later on, Sidney caught a momentary glimpse of the publican in close confabulation with one of the cricketers behind the pavilion, and his heart was like lead as he recognised in the tall flannelled figure his brother Arthur!

After that the afternoon passed like a nightmare to Sidney. His brother Arthur, who was expected to do great things for St. Dolly's, played wretchedly, and was largely responsible for the overwhelming defeat of the school team by more than a hundred runs. Sidney wondered miserably whether the poor form displayed by his brother had any connection with his meeting with Cunliffe before the match—and he shuddered at the thought!

Altogether, Sidney Redfern was thankful when he got back to St. Dolly's at last with his chums.

"The cricket season is practically over," remarked Skelton, in his study in the Fourth Form passage, "and we must soon be thinking about football now. Do you play footer, Reddy?"

Redfern minor came out of a brown study.

The Classical chums were having a late tea in their quarters—a very late tea, for it was close upon bedtime. They had reached the school hungry enough after the journey home from Lexham.

"Eh! Did you speak, Skelty?"

Redfern was what Brown III. described as "mooning" over his teacup. He was thinking. It was not easy for him to get the events of the afternoon out of his mind.

"Yes, I did speak," said Skelton. "I asked you if you played footer?"

Redfern smiled.

"Yes, little bit," he said.

"Good! We shall be having an inter-Form match with the Modern cads at the beginning of next term, you know, and if you can play, we'll play you," said Skelton, rising from the table. "We'll see what you can do to-night."

Redfern stared.

"To-night! Off your rocker?"

"Not a bit! We always have a bit of a high old time on Lexham match night. The seniors come in at all hours and the juniors kick up a hullabaloo in the Form-room. Let's get along to it. I've got a footer here."

"Wants inflating, I should say,"

Brown remarked, with a glance at the footer.

"That won't take long."

Redfern roused himself from his gloomy mood. After all, what was the good of worrying? He could not help it if Arthur were in bad hands.

It was useless to worry, and it was worse than useless to worry his friends with a doleful face, so he jumped up briskly.

"I'm on," he said. "We've got nearly half an hour before bedtime."

"That's all right, too!" chuckled Skelton as they left the study. "It's Redfern major's turn to see lights out for

the Fourth to-night. You know the pre-fects take it in turns."

"What difference does that make?"

"Your major's gone out, that's all."

"I suppose he will be back in time."

"I don't think! He went out with Ransome, and I saw Fansome, too. I know what his look meant. They won't be back till late. Lexham night, you know. Your major's forgotten all about looking after the Fourth, and I suppose Ransome doesn't know."

Redfern minor nodded without speaking.

He did not feel in the least inclined for bed himself, and he was as keen as anybody to keep up the fun as long as possible. Yet he hoped that Arthur would not forget his duty as a prefect.

The Fourth Form-room presented a lively spectacle.

Taffy & Co. were standing a little feed on some of the desks, and there was a general popping of corks and gurgling of ginger beer.

"Clear the place, you fellows!" Skelton said, addressing the Classical Fourth-Formers, who were mostly in the room. "This is the first footer practice of the season, and we shall want some room. If any Modern worms get in the way, tread on 'em!"

"What-ho!"

"You can't play footer in here, look you!" exclaimed Taffy, glancing up from a glass of ginger beer. "We can't have you kids making a row!"

"Rats!"

And the Classics proceeded to form sides. The desk at the end of the room was decided upon for one goal, and the spot where the Moderns were feasting upon ginger beer and doughnuts was the other.

The Classics lined up in two sides, captained respectively by Redfern and Skelton. As a matter of fact the division was only formal. They knew very well that they would soon be united again in a general scramble with their Modern rivals.

"Kick off!" said Skelton.

Redfern, who was facing the goal occupied by Taffy & Co., grinned and kicked off. The opposing forwards and halves did not try to stop the ball. Redfern had kicked it straight for goal, and it landed there.

The ball swooped upon a desk where ginger-beer bottles stood in plentiful array, and there was a terrific crashing and smashing.

Then it landed on Taffy's chest, and Taffy went over backwards, and lay puffing and spluttering, nearly choked by a doughnut.

"Goal!" shrieked Brown III.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Reddy!"

A yell of wrath rose from the Moderns.

"Yah! Classical cads!"

"Keep your rotten footer away!"

"Go for 'em!"

"Give us that ball!" shouted Skelton.

"Rats!"

"Hand it over!"

"More rats!"

Rake had the ball under his arm, and was holding it fast. The Moderns, indignant at the loss of their ginger beer, rallied round him. Skelton & Co. came crowding round.

"Give us our ball!"

"Go and eat coke!"

Taffy jumped up, as red as a beetroot with spluttering. But he was in a perfectly good temper, though full of excitement.

"Here, line up!" he exclaimed. "If they want footer, we'll give 'em footer, and wipe up the floor with 'em!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Right you are!" exclaimed Skelton. "We'll make a match of it. We don't particularly want to lick you."

"Lucky for you, isn't it?"

"If you think we couldn't——"

"Yah!" roared the Moderns.

"Look here——"

"Order!" exclaimed Redfern. "If we're going to play footer, play footer, and let the slanging alone!"

"Right-ho! Come on, you Modern worms!"

"Order! Let's get the ground marked out, and play in proper style."

"Oh, just as you like!"

"Really, chappies, it's a good idea!"

"Just what I was going to——"

"Oh, ring off, Rakey! We know you were just going to say it; you always are."

"Chalk!" said Redfern.

Somebody produced chalk, and Redfern marked out the ground. There was a considerable clear space in the Form-room—room enough, at all events, for a little fun. The "elevens" did not number eleven, as every fellow present insisted upon his right to play, and the skippers did not say them nay. With sides of over a score each, the match resembled an old-fashioned Rugby match.

But it was all in the game. Skelton marshalled his merry men on one side, Taffy on the other. Taffy kicked off.

"On the ball!" roared Skelton.

And the Classics were "on the ball" in next to no time.

Redfern minor captured it, and took it up the room in fine style, bumping over several Moderns who tried to rob him of it. Then Taffy, forgetting that he wasn't playing Rugger—a game he was used to at home in Wales in the holidays—tackled Redfern low and brought him down with a tremendous bump on the floor.

There was a roar at once from the Classics.

"Foul!"

"Penalty!"

"Where's the referee?"

Benson, armed with a police-whistle, was acting referee. He blew a blast that could have been heard as far as the gates of St. Dolly's.

The play stopped. Several of the opposing forwards were engaged in settling private differences with their fists among the desks, but otherwise the proceedings ceased.

Redfern staggered up and rubbed his bones ruefully.

"I say, I'm sorry!" exclaimed Taffy.

"I forgot. That bump on the floor must

have hurt you. I was sort of carried away, you know, and forgot we weren't on a footer-field. I'm sorry!"

Redfern grinned.

"Oh, it's all right! I don't mind a hard knock."

"That's all very well," said Skelton; "but it was a foul, all the same, and we claim a penalty."

"Rats!" chorused the Moderns.

"Penalty!" hooted the Classicals.

"Referee!"

"I award a penalty!" said Benson, with another blast on the whistle, by way of flourish. "I award a penalty against the Modern worms!"

"Rats! You're a beastly Classical yourself!"

"I'm referee!"

"Booh!"

"Yah!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Taffy. "I uphold the referee. It's all right. Give 'em the penalty. Go ahead, you worms!"

The voice of their leader quieted the Moderns. The penalty was taken, and Brown III. was given the kick. The Moderns watched him hungrily. Rake, in goal—behind a desk—kept his eyes fixed upon him.

Brown kicked. Right at the goal flew the leather, and Rake swept his fist through the air at it, missed it, and hit the lid of the desk a sounding thump.

"Ow!" yelled Rake.

The next moment he was dancing up and down in goal, clasping his right hand under his arm and sucking it alternately, and emitting a strange series of squeaks and grunts.

"Throw out that ball!" shouted Skelton, while his followers roared "Goal!" jubilantly. "Throw it out! This isn't a dancing-hall, young Rake!"

"Ow—yow!"

"Oh, bother your 'ow—yows'! We're waiting to play!"

Vernon fielded the ball, so to speak, and it was thrown out to the centre of the floor again.

Rake, sucking his hand, took up his

position in goal again, mentally resolving to be a little less reckless next time.

The Classicals had scored one, and Benson chalked it up in a good size on the blackboard, with a big, round nought for the Moderns.

Taffy kicked off again, and the Moderns followed up the kick-off with a rush that carried them right through the Classicals.

They rushed the ball goalward, till Redfern robbed them of it and got away to midfield again; but there he was promptly tackled by Taffy and Vernon. He was charged over, and Taffy gained possession of the ball, and was promptly charged over in his turn by Benson, who kicked the leather away to the Classicals. There was a roar from the Moderns.

"Foul!"

"Stop the game!"

Benson stood covered with confusion, and even Skelton & Co. could not uphold him. He had forgotten that he was a referee, and remembered only that he was a Classical, and he had played up for the Classical side.

The Moderns were simply boiling with indignation, not without cause.

"Down with the ref!"

"Kick him off the field!"

"Here, hold on!" shouted Skelton.

"Rats! Kick him out!"

"Snatch him baldheaded!"

And the Moderns, careless of the game, crowded round the unhappy Benson, who vainly protested that he had forgotten, that he hadn't meant it, and that he wouldn't do it any more.

"Frog's march him!" shouted Taffy; and the idea was taken up with enthusiasm.

"Frog's march the referee! Hurrah!"

"Let him alone!"

"Yah! Stand back!"

"Rescue!" howled Benson, as he was rolled over in many hands. "Rescue!"

"Frog's march him!"

"Roll him over!"

"Ow! Rescue!"

"Hang it, we're not going to stand this!" exclaimed Redfern minor. "To

the rescue and knock the Modern cads to bits!"

"Hurrah! Down with the Commers!"

And the Classics rushed to the rescue of Benson from all sides.

In a few seconds the football match was changed into a wild and excited scrimmage, in which fists were freely used, and eyes and noses gave plain signs of rough usage ere many minutes had passed.

The din was simply terrific.

On that special night the masters were accustomed to wink at a certain amount of noise in the Form-rooms and passages, but the excited Classics and Moderns of the Fourth were passing all bounds now.

The trampling, the yelling, the shouting, the cat-calling made a pandemonium of the Fourth-room, and the noise of it could be heard far and wide. Little did the juniors reckon.

In the midst of the terrific din the door of the Form-room opened, and an awe-inspiring figure in cap and gown appeared on the threshold.

It was the Head!

But in their excitement the juniors never noticed the opening of the door—never noticed the steady, indignant stare fixed upon them.

They rallied to the scrimmage with more vim than ever.

"Go it, Mods!"

"Yah! Down with the Commercialists!"

"Sock into 'em!"

"Knock 'em sky-high!"

"Hurrah!"

"Boys!"

The doctor's voice was not loud, but it seemed to penetrate into the din in the Form-room like a knife.

The scrimmage suddenly ceased.

Three or four fellows who were rolling under the desks, went on pommelling one another, otherwise a dreadful silence fell.

The doctor looked at the boys; the boys looked at the doctor.

"Boys!"

The last sound of the scrimmage died away. Dusty and dishevelled fellows crawled from under the desks, and stood looking sheepish and dismayed.

Dr. Cranston looked at his watch with a slow and deliberate motion that meant much. The juniors had forgotten all about bedtime, and the prefect whose duty it was to see them off to their dormitories was absent.

"It is a quarter to ten," said Dr. Cranston.

The juniors were silent. Skelton surreptitiously wiped away a thin stream of red that was trickling from his nose. Benson caressed a discoloured eye.

"What is the bedtime of the Fourth Form, Skelton?" said Dr. Cranston, addressing Skelton, as captain of the Form.

"Half-past nine, sir."

"It is a quarter to ten now."

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"Why are you not in bed?"

"We—we—we haven't gone, sir," said Skelton vaguely.

Some of the juniors smiled at that rather obvious explanation; but the doctor's face remained cold and hard. He was plainly not so much annoyed by the disturbance the juniors had made, though it had brought him away from his work in his study, as by the evident fact that there had been a serious neglect of duty by a prefect.

"I can see that you haven't gone to bed, Skelton," said the doctor quietly. "I want to know the reason why."

"I—I—we—we forgot, sir. You see, sir, we—we were a little excited," stammered Skelton. "We—we always are, sir, on the Lexham match night."

"I am aware of that also, though I must observe that you have carried the usual licence a little too far. Every boy present will take one hundred lines for his part in this disturbance."

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"For not going to bed at the proper time I do not blame you. It was the prefect's duty to see that you did so.

Which prefect should have seen the lights out in the Fourth-Form dormitory to-night?"

Skelton gave a helpless look at Redfern minor, whose face was very pale and troubled. There was no avoiding the question.

"Redfern major, sir."

"Ah! Where is Redfern major now? Do you know?"

"No, sir."

Dr. Cranston compressed his lips.

"Very well," he said quietly, "I will speak to Redfern major. Go to your dormitory now, and I will send another prefect to see the lights out."

And he moved away. The juniors did not move till the rustle of the gown had died away in the passage; then they slowly made their way upstairs. There was a hush on the Fourth Form, strangely in contrast with the din a few minutes ago.

"My hat!" muttered Skelton. "I shouldn't care to be in Redfern major's shoes to-night!"

CHAPTER 11.

The Only Way!

REDFERN MINOR lay quite silent in his bed in the Fourth-Form dormitory at St. Dolly's; but he was not thinking of sleep.

His eyes, wide open, were staring into the darkness. His mind was thronged with thoughts—thoughts that troubled him.

The Head's words still rang in his ears:

"I shall speak to Redfern major."

Dr. Cranston's voice had been very quiet; his look had been quite calm. But that quietness, that calmness, alarmed Redfern minor more than angry words would have done. Redfern was thinking of his brother. Where was he?

Where was Redfern major?

He had gone out with Ransome, and he had not returned. It had been his duty to see lights out for the Fourth

Form, and he had forgotten and neglected the duty. The riot in the Form-room had brought the fact to the doctor's notice.

Redfern minor had been long enough at St. Dolly's to know that that was a serious matter. But there was more than that to think of.

The Head intended to see Redfern major and to speak to him, and he would ask where he had been, what he had been doing. Redfern major would probably not come in till late; he might even be searched for. And if it were found out where he was—

The boy almost trembled at the thought.

He was in little doubt as to where Arthur was. The fact that he had gone with Ransome, and had not returned when he should have done so, was enough; he had undoubtedly gone over to Wyndale to see the betting publican.

And if it were discovered that he was there—and, unless he were somehow warned, he would stay late—all would be found out.

The buzz of talk from the other Fourth-Formers went on unheeded by Redfern minor for a time. The juniors were all in a somewhat nervous state of mind. It was seldom that the Head came down heavily upon the Fourth Form; they were usually left to the tender mercies of their Form-master.

"It's all Redfern major's fault," said Benson. "Why couldn't he come in? How could we be expected to notice that it was bedtime?"

"It was for making the row that we were lined," said Brown III. "Redfern major has got to answer for the rest."

"Serve him jolly well right!"

"I wonder where he is?" said another junior.

Benson chuckled.

"Not much doubt on that point."

"What do you mean?"

"They think the fags don't notice," said Benson disdainfully. "There's hardly a chap in the Lower School who doesn't know where Redfern major goes with Ransome. I could jolly well point

out where he is, if the Head asked me! Of course, I shouldn't give him away, though. It's no business of mine."

The words struck on Redfern minor's ears.

"And where do you think he is, Benson?" he asked quietly.

Benson gave a low whistle.

"My hat! I forgot you, young Redfern. Of course, I didn't mean to be saying anything against your major. There are other fellows in the Sixth just the same, and it's no business of ours."

"Where do you think he is?"

"Oh, never mind!"

"I want you to answer me."

"Well, if you want to know," said Benson, "he's jolly well at Cunliffe's place in Wyndale, or I'll eat my hat!"

"Oh, bosh!" said Miller. "A prefect wouldn't go there."

"That's all you know."

Redfern did not speak again. He had felt certain of it himself, but he wanted to have his suspicion confirmed.

He lay silent, his face very pale in the darkness, trying to think it out. The buzz of talk gradually died away. Skelton and Brown had said little. They knew what must be passing in Sidney Redfern's mind, and they were sorry for what had happened. But they did not guess all that Redfern was thinking of.

Skelton had turned his head on his pillow, and was settling down to sleep, when he gave a sudden start as a hand touched him in the darkness.

"Wh-wh-what—"

"Don't make a row, Skelton."

Skelton knew the whispering voice.

"Reddy!"

"Yes, I want to—to speak to you." Redfern's voice was low and muttering; he did not wish his words to reach other ears. "Skelton, old man, I suppose you agree with what Benson said?"

"About your brother?"

"Yes. You think he's there?"

"I suppose so."

"The Head will be inquiring for him now?"

"Yes."

"If he does not come in till late—"

"There will be a row, I suppose."

"And it may all come out?"

"Likely as not."

"What then?"

Skelton did not reply.

"What then, Skelton?"

"Well, I suppose it will mean the sack for him," said Skelton uncomfortably.

"I'm awfully sorry, Reddy; but he's got into it himself, you know."

"You think the Head means business?"

"Yes. When he speaks like that he always does."

"And Arthur—my brother won't know till he gets back, and then it may be too late."

"I know—it's hard cheese."

Redfern was silent.

"I don't see why you should trouble your head about him so much," said Skelton. "He hasn't treated you well since you've been to St. Dolly's."

Redfern made no answer to that.

"I suppose you are up to some dodges for getting out of the house?" he said quietly. "You've been here a long time."

Skelton started violently in the dark.

"I—I don't quite catch on, Reddy."

"I am going out."

"What for?"

"To see Arthur, and put him on his guard."

"You can't. The gates are locked."

"I know where to get over the wall, as far as that goes."

"How the dickens do you know?"

"Never mind that. I do know. It is a question of getting out of the house. I want you to help me."

"You can't go," said Skelton, in an agitated whisper. "Don't be an ass! You don't know what it would mean for a junior to be found breaking bounds after lights out. You would be expelled."

"I'm going."

"You can't. There's no safe way of getting out, either."

"If you won't help me, I shall manage it for myself."

Redfern moved away from the bed, and began to dress himself in the darkness. Skelton was out of bed in a twinkling.

"If you're really going, Reddy, I'll help you all I can. I think you're a fool! You don't know the risk you're running."

"I don't care."

"What's all that jaw about?" said Brown drowsily, from his bed. "Why can't you fellows go to sleep?"

"Oh, you go to sleep, and don't bother!" said Skelton.

The two juniors dressed themselves. Redfern's face was pale and set, and Skelton's was very anxious. He took Redfern by the arm, and led him quietly to the door, and they stopped in the dark passage outside, with the door closed behind them.

"Where now?" muttered Redfern. "We can't go downstairs."

"We have to get down to the next landing, and then you can bunk out of a window and slide down a rain-pipe," said Skelton. "It's risky. I've never done it myself, but I've known a fellow do it. You've heaps of nerve, though."

"That's all right."

"Come on, then."

Redfern followed his chum down the first flight of stairs. The lower passage was dimly lighted. Skelton scuttled along to the gas jet, and coolly turned it out, and the passage was plunged in darkness.

"Now we're safer," he muttered, as he rejoined Redfern at the window. "Don't make a row. Look here, I wish you wouldn't go."

"Never mind that now."

"I suppose it's no good talking to you. Help me open the window."

The window slid up easily enough. There was a glimmer of starlight in the quadrangle, partly shut out by the wide branches of the trees. Redfern leaned out of the window, but a big tree obstructed his view of the ground below.

Close by the window ran a perpendicular rain-pipe from the gutter above to the ground. It would have been a

risky business climbing down it in the daylight. In the dark it was decidedly risky. But Redfern did not hesitate. He swung himself out upon the window-sill.

Skelton watched him with a beating heart. He had learned enough of Redfern to know that he had a determined will. When the junior had made up his mind the matter was ended; and he had made it up now.

But Skelton was feeling very uncomfortable, and half regretting that he had consented to have a hand in the matter at all.

"It's all right," whispered Redfern. "I can see the pipe. You can cut back to the dorm. now."

"I'll see you off. For goodness' sake, be careful!"

"I'm all right."

Redfern swung down the pipe. Skelton watched him anxiously from the window till the descending form was lost in the shadows. Lower and lower went Redfern minor.

The pipe was strong, and firmly clamped to the wall. All he wanted was an iron nerve, and he possessed that.

Lower he went, hand below hand, till his feet clumped on the earth at the foot of the wall, and he let go the pipe, and stood still, breathing deeply.

A whispering voice came from above.

"All serene?"

"All serene," answered Redfern.

There was a sound of the window closing. Redfern started a little. He had not made any arrangement with Skelton about his return. The captain of the Fourth would have to stay up for him; but Redfern knew that he could depend upon Skelton.

Redfern minor knew his way about the quadrangle in light or darkness. He cut across towards the wall on the lane.

He had to pass within sight of the gates of the school to reach it, and as he crossed the gravel path, the sound of footsteps crunching came to his ears, and he stopped. Two figures loomed up in the gloom, and one of them, by

the outline, Redfern knew must be a master. His heart beat quickly.

To be caught then—to face the punishment of leaving his bed at that hour, and without effecting his purpose! Quick as thought he dodged into cover behind a tree as the shadowy forms loomed up.

They had not noticed him. A voice came to his ears, and he shivered a little as he recognised the deep tones of the doctor.

"You say he has not returned, Lunsford?"

"No, sir."

"When did he go out?"

"As far as I can tell, it was soon after we came back from Lexham, sir. We got back rather late."

Redfern knew that they were speaking of his brother.

"I am speaking to you confidentially in this matter, Lunsford, as captain of the school. I have a right to your confidence and assistance."

"I know that, sir."

"This is a serious matter. Redfern major has neglected his duties as a prefect, and a disturbance in the Form-room was the result. Even a prefect is not allowed out at this hour without an explanation. The matter might never have come to my notice but by this chance. I do not know whether it is not too serious a matter to be left in your hands."

"That is as you please, sir."

"Redfern major has, I believe, a key to the side gate?"

"All the prefects have, sir."

"Exactly. In that case, but for this chance happening, no one would ever have known at what time he returned, except the boys in the Sixth Form dormitory, who would have kept their own counsel. I must say, Lunsford, that you have not treated me very well in this matter. You have allowed your good nature as a friend to outweigh the sense of your responsibility as captain of the school."

"I hope not, sir. But—but Redfern major is my friend, and he wouldn't be

that if I didn't know him to be a decent chap. The only fault I've noticed about him is that he's apt to let others lead him into trouble."

"All the more reason why he should be made to conform to the strictest rules of the school," said the Head. "That is the opinion I myself have formed of him. Lunsford, if he is in by eleven o'clock, I leave the matter in your hands."

"Yes, sir."

"If he is not in by then, you must report his absence to me, and I shall wait for him myself, and he will have to explain his conduct to me."

"Very well, sir."

The Head nodded to Lunsford, and walked away. The captain of St. Dolly's remained standing on the path, looking after him, apparently buried in reflection. Redfern did not dare to move. A movement or a sound would have betrayed his presence to the captain of St. Dolly's.

"Poor old Arthur!" Redfern heard Lunsford mutter aloud. "I hope it's not all up with him. I hope—"

His voice died away. He walked slowly towards the gates. Redfern minor set his teeth, and ran quickly towards the wall. It should not be all "up" with Arthur Redfern if his younger brother could save him.

CHAPTER 12.

To Save His Brother!

THE night was dark, but there was a glimmer of stars in the lane, Redfern minor knew the road well. He knew the distance he had to do, and the time he had to do it in.

If Redfern major was in by eleven o'clock the matter would be left to the captain of the school to deal with. Redfern knew the good nature and the kind heart of the St. Dolly's captain, and there was no doubt that Arthur would be able to pull through somehow, even if there was an unpleasant scene with

Lunsford; but if he came before the Head—

Redfern did not like to think of it. Arthur must be warned. He must return to St. Dolly's in time.

Of himself Redfern did not think at the moment. His business was to save Arthur. He broke into a run on the road, and he ran as he had seldom run on the cinder-path.

Down the dusky lane, in the faint glimmer of the stars, then into the wood, and along the footpath where the overhanging branches of the trees intercepted every gleam.

Black darkness was round him now; deep silence, broken only by the crackle of a twig as a stoat pushed his way through a thicket, or a twitter of a disturbed bird.

Right on through the darkness the junior ran.

He came out into the Wyndale Road, having scarcely slackened pace. His heart was beating against his ribs in great thumps. His breath came thick and fast. Wyndale loomed ahead—black shadows on a dark road. From the church came the chime of the half-hour.

Half-past ten!

He had done the distance quickly—very quickly, he knew that, though he did not know how long it had taken him.

He slackened in the high-road, and breathed hard, in great gulps. It seemed that the thumping of his heart would suffocate him. The perspiration was pouring down his face; his shirt was sticking to his skin, his collar to his neck.

But it was only for moments that he paused. Then he ran on again. Patter, patter, patter! His footsteps rang strangely on the hard, silent road.

Two bright lights flashed up out of the darkness; there was a whirl of wheels and the buzz of a car.

Redfern sprang to one side as a car dashed up. He stood by the roadside for a moment, and the lights flashed upon him as the car passed; but in-

stinctively he had pulled his cap over his face. There was a sharp exclamation from the car.

Redfern knew the voice. It was that of Mr. Ford, a master at St. Dolly's. He knew that the school clothes, the school cap, had been recognised.

He ran into the shadows.

The voice called from the car again. It had halted. Redfern ran on desperately. He hoped he had not been recognised, but, more than recognition, even, he feared capture, and he ran and ran. The lights faded into the night; the voice died into silence. With beating heart he ran on into Wyndale.

It had been a narrow escape. It was the worst of luck that Mr. Ford should have been driving home at that hour on that road. It might mean trouble to come, but, for the present, the business was Arthur.

The lights of the Green Man were glimmering out into the road. From the lighted windows came the sound of a vulgar chorus, roared by coarse voices.

Redfern shuddered.

His brother was there—Arthur was there! That was the environment he chose for his evening—Arthur, whom he had looked up to and respected from childhood.

Yet at that moment, after the first shock of disgust, Redfern felt only tenderness for the brother who had thrown away his chances so recklessly.

He ran on, into the lights of the public-house, and then paused.

It was of no use going into the lighted bar and asking for Arthur. He knew the looks he would have to face, the laughter and ribaldry.

He avoided the front of the house and passed into the side way, and knocked at a door from which came no glimmer of light.

There was no reply to his knock.

He knocked again, more loudly, but still the door was unmoved. Where was Arthur? He could not be among that brutal crowd shouting a chorus.

Where was he?

The junior passed on into the garden

behind the inn, where a beam of yellow light streamed out upon the shrubs from a window.

A low veranda ran behind the house, and by ascending it it was possible to reach the lighted window.

Arthur was there, perhaps.

He ascended the rickety wooden steps, and found a wooden gate at the top fastened by a padlock. But that was not likely to long baffle the most active junior in the Fourth Form at St. Dolly's.

Without a moment's hesitation, Redfern clambered over the gate. He made a little noise in doing so, but it passed unnoticed in the house.

The occupants of the room, as he soon saw, were too busy to have eyes or ears for anything going on without.

He clambered upon the veranda and ran silently and swiftly towards the lighted window.

It was curtained, but the bright light within made the interior quite visible through the flimsy curtain.

Redfern looked in upon the scene within.

For the moment his heart turned sick within him.

There were several men in the room, seated round a table under the gas-light. He recognised Mr. Cunliffe and another man he had seen before. There were two others—men with a somewhat flashy style of dress, but whose faces showed their natures plainly enough—harpies, who preyed upon the weak and the unwary.

With these four were seated two others—two lads. One was Ransome, the other was Redfern major.

There were cards upon the table, red and black, glimmering in the light of the incandescent burner above. There was money, too—money in little piles of silver, and among the silver showed p^{er}s and, there some currency notes.

They were playing nap. Redfern knew the game well enough. He had played it often for stakes of nuts or buttons. He knew what was going on—gambling—and gambling for high

stakes—high to a schoolboy, at all events.

Arthur was watching the cards eagerly, hungrily.

It did not need a second glance at his face to show that he was losing. Ransome glanced at his friend from time to time, unnoticed by him, with a strange and indefinable expression upon his face.

Once or twice his glance met that of Mr. Cunliffe, and though they did not smile, did not make any open sign, Redfern minor knew at once that there was some understanding between them.

Mr. Cunliffe gathered up the cards, and Redfern saw his brother paying out money to one of the men opposite.

The publican shuffled the pack, with a light laugh. When he spoke the words were quite audible to Redfern through the glass doors that opened upon the veranda:

"Bad luck, Master Redfern, bad luck again. It will change in the next round—eh?"

Arthur nodded without speaking.

His face was almost haggard. This was the jolly evening he had started out to spend with Ransome. No wonder he had forgotten his prefect's duties at St. Dolly's. The junior outside did not know it, but Arthur had already lost every shilling of his money, and he was playing now on his "honour," plunging into the abyss of debt. No wonder he had forgotten everything else—everything but the wretched, miserable game he was playing, and what depended upon it.

How much "pleasure" there was in gambling his expression showed. He tried his best to look unconcerned, to play the "sportsman," but though he could command his features, the haggard look of his eyes, the nervous trembling of his fingers, betrayed him. He was losing money which he could not pay. Dim, like a formless shadow, loomed ahead of him the black trouble he would have to face for that reckless evening. But he clung yet to the gambler's hope. He could not lose

always. He must win in the next round, or in the round after. There was still hope, hope as delusive as the flicker of the will-o'-the-wisp.

Mr. Cunliffe began to deal the cards.

Redfern could contain himself no longer, and seconds were precious now. He knocked at the glass door.

There was an instant commotion in the room. Mr. Cunliffe sprang to his feet, and every eye was turned apprehensively upon the window. Ransome changed colour, only Arthur glanced carelessly, doggedly round, as if he were past caring who saw him there.

Redfern felt for the latch of the glass door. It opened to his touch. He threw the door open and stepped into the room.

Mr. Cunliffe stared at him, and then grinned. He appeared to be under the impression that Redfern had come to join the party. Ransome looked black and savage. Arthur gazed dazedly at his brother for a moment, and then started to his feet.

"Arthur, I——"

Arthur Redfern snapped his teeth and sprang at the junior. He seized him savagely by the collar and shook him fiercely.

"You brat!" He grated out the words between his teeth. "What are you doing here?"

CHAPTER 13. Against Time!

REDFERN could not speak for a moment.

The surprise and the fierce grip upon his collar almost choked him. He gasped for breath and tried to struggle free.

Arthur shook him savagely again.

"What did you come here for? You spying cur. What do you want?"

"Let me alone!"

Ransome rose and caught Arthur by the arm and pulled him back.

"Hold on," he said quietly. "The kid didn't come here to spy. He's not that

sort, and he can keep a secret, too. What do you want, Redfern minor?"

"I—I came to speak to Arthur."

Arthur gritted his teeth.

"Get out!"

"But I——"

"Get out, I tell you, before I lay hands on you!" cried Arthur furiously. "Do you think I am to be watched and nursed by you, you impertinent brat? Get out!"

"Let him speak, Arthur. What did you come here for, kid?"

Redfern felt the hot tears starting to his eyes, but he bravely held them back. He had come there to save Arthur; nothing else mattered.

"Arthur, you must get back—back to St. Dolly's—at once!"

"Mind your own business!"

"Oh, don't you understand?" cried the junior. "You must go! I came to warn you. There has been a row. The Head has missed you."

Arthur staggered, and laid a hand upon the table to support himself. He stared blankly at his younger brother without speaking.

"A row?" said Ransome quietly.

"What sort of a row? What do you mean, kid?"

"The Head found out that the Fourth were up late," said Redfern, speaking very hurriedly. "He inquired for Arthur, and found he was away. I heard him speaking afterwards to Lunsford about it."

"Phew!"

Arthur gave a groan.

"I—I forgot. I had to look after the Fourth to-night. It slipped my memory. I—I've done the same before, too, without the Head putting his oar in."

"There was a row in the Form-room!" stammered Redfern. "The Head came in. I heard him say to Lunsford, in the quad, that if you were in by eleven he'd leave the matter to Lunsford."

"What else? Quick!" said Ransome rapidly.

"If Arthur isn't in by eleven, Luns-

ford is to report to the Head, and Dr. Cranston is going to wait for him."

"Oh!" muttered Arthur. "You—you came to tell me this?"

"Yes."

Ransome looked at his watch.

"Twenty to eleven," he said, in his crisp, decided way. "You can do it, Arthur—you must do it! It means the sack!"

"I know it."

Mr. Cunliffe and his friends exchanged glances. Cunliffe, to do him justice, looked concerned. The others looked bored, and glanced at the cards impatiently. They wanted to be at their game again.

"I'm sorry for this, young gents," said Mr. Cunliffe. "I know it's a serious business for you. If there's anythin' I can do, I'll do it willing."

"There's nothing," said Arthur, in a low voice. "I'm done for! The game's up!"

"Pull yourself together!" said Ransome sharply.

"What's the use? I can't get back in time; it's impossible."

"You have twenty minutes. You must get a lift somehow." Ransome spoke rapidly, but clearly, quietly. Redfern minor, much as he disliked the cad of the Sixth, could not help feeling admiration for him at that moment. He showed no trace of losing his presence of mind. "Have I been missed, kid, as well as Arthur?" he went on, turning to the junior.

"Not that I know of."

"Good! I can get in any time. The question is, how are you to get to the school—"

"I'll have a 'orse in the trap in three minutes," said Mr. Cunliffe.

Arthur shook his head.

"A trap would have to go round by the road. A horse couldn't do it in double the time. It's no good!"

"What about a bicycle?" said Ransome quickly. "Have you a cycle about the place, Cunliffe—any old jigger?"

The landlord of the Green Man nodded quickly.

"There's Mr. Norrey's bicycle," he said, glancing at one of his friends. "If he'd lend it to Master Redfern—"

"You can have the jigger," said Mr. Norrey, who was already shuffling the cards. "I can hoof it home. I shall hold Mr. Cunliffe responsible for the machine."

"That's all right. You can 'ave it, Master Redfern."

Redfern major brightened up a little.

"It's a chance!" he muttered.

"Where's the machine?"

"In the garden."

"Come on!" said Ransome abruptly. "No time to lose!"

"But you?"

"I'll follow; I'm all right."

Ransome almost dragged Arthur from the room. Both of them seemed to have forgotten the very existence of Redfern minor. He had served his purpose.

The junior stepped out upon the veranda. His heart was heavy with anxiety. Would his brother be in time?

He glanced into the room again before he went down. The publican and his friends were gathering round the table, and Mr. Norrey was already dealing the cards.

Redfern, sick at heart, clambered down into the garden. Arthur and Ransome were already wheeling the machine out into the road.

The quarter to eleven rang out.

"You've a quarter of an hour," said Ransome, as he wheeled the machine into the road and lighted the lamp. "Take the short cut through the wood and ride like the deuce, and you'll do it—with two or three minutes to spare. You know Lunsford; he'll do his best for you."

Arthur nodded, and sprang upon the machine. He started straight and swift as an arrow, and in three seconds the night had swallowed him up. They heard the furious ringing of the bell as he turned into the high-road, and then the sound of him died away into the night.

Redfern minor drew a deep breath.

He had done all he could, the rest lay

with Arthur. After the excitement he felt sick and dizzy, and he realised that he was tired, aching with fatigue. A hand was laid on his shoulder—Ransome was looking down at him with a new kindness in his face.

"You've done your brother a good turn, young 'un."

"You have done him a bad one!" said Redfern bitterly.

Ransome laughed lightly.

"I think he'll pull through all right. But it's time we were getting back ourselves; the safest place for us just now is the dorm at St. Dolly's."

Redfern nodded. They started down the road on the track of the cyclist, who had long vanished. It was a long walk back to the school, and Redfern was tired; but he hardly noticed it. He started out of a reverie as Ransome tapped him on the shoulder and pointed to a black mass looming up ahead.

"St. Dolly's!"

Had Arthur arrived in time? Redfern minor wondered. He shuddered as he thought of what would happen if he had not.

CHAPTER 14.

The Return!

DARK and gloomy looked the great pile of St. Dolly's as Ransome and Redfern minor halted before the gates. Redfern was tired and sleepy, and his eyes had closed involuntarily several times during that long tramp through the dark lanes. But he was more anxious than fatigued. How had Arthur fared? That was the thought he could not dismiss from his mind.

Ransome's expression was less cheerful than usual, too. If Arthur had gone up to the Head, there was trouble to look for—serious trouble, and an end of those little excursions to Wyndale.

"How are we getting in?" asked Redfern minor.

"The side gate."

"But it's locked."

Ransome grinned.

"That's all right."

Redfern followed him. Ransome unlocked the side gate and they passed in, and the cad of the Sixth carefully turned the key behind him. It struck Redfern as curious that he should have a key to that gate. Only masters and prefects were supposed to have them, and Ransome was not a prefect.

"Well, we part here," said Ransome, as the shadowy School House loomed up before them. "Get back to your dormitory and keep your mouth shut."

"Hold on!"

"What is it?" said Ransome impatiently. "We don't want to hang about here."

"About Arthur."

"What about him?"

"I want to know what's happened," said Redfern quietly. "If he didn't get in before eleven he was to go up to the Head. You know that means he will be sacked. I want to know what's happened."

"You'll know in the morning."

Redfern's lips tightened.

"I shall know to-night, Ransome."

Ransome started a little. It was a new tone for his fag to take with him, but he realised that he had better avoid trouble with Redfern minor at that hour, in that place.

"Well, I suppose you're anxious," he said, with a slight laugh.

"If I hadn't been anxious I shouldn't have broken bounds to get to Wyndale to warn Arthur," said Redfern quietly.

"But you can't see Arthur to-night," said Ransome uneasily. "He's gone to bed most likely. Whichever way the matter went, it's all over now. I'll tell you about it the first thing in the morning."

"That won't do."

"You cheeky brat!" said Ransome, between his teeth. "Are you going to dictate to me?"

Redfern did not flinch.

"I am going to know about Arthur to-night."

"You can't. Ten to one, it's all right."

"That's not good enough."

Ransome trembled with anger. He would have given a great deal to take his fag by the shoulders and shake him, and cuff him right and left. But the slightest noise would have betrayed him.

"Look here, Redfern minor, there's no way of seeing Arthur! I have to get in at my study window myself, and you can't come in there. You'll give the whole show away if you act the giddy ox now."

"I'm going to know whether Arthur's all right before I go to bed."

Ransome gritted his teeth.

"You obstinate young fool!"

"That's enough! If you've nothing to suggest, I'll manage it for myself," said Redfern.

He was not in the least afraid of Ransome, especially at that moment. And he was quite determined to have his way.

The cad of the Sixth reflected for a few moments. It was evidently useless either to argue with or to bully Redfern minor, and every minute he lingered outside the house was full of peril.

"Come this way," he said at last. "I'll see Arthur and speak to you from my study window."

"Good!"

Ransome's study window was easy of access. He swung himself up to the sill by means of a rain-pipe clamped to the wall. The window was unfastened, and in a couple of minutes the Sixth-Former disappeared into the house.

Redfern waited below.

The great facade of the School House was in complete darkness, except at one point, where a light burned in the window of Dr. Cranston's study.

The Head was still up.

Redfern minor wondered whether the scene he dreaded had taken place in that study; whether Arthur Redfern had been called up there to explain his absence from the school, to falter out what explanation he could under the severe eyes of the doctor. Or had he reached St. Dolly's in time?

The junior would soon know. He

waited there in the darkness, his eyes fixed upon the glimmering square of Ransome's study window. The Sixth-Former was a long time. Perhaps Arthur had gone to bed; perhaps—

Redfern's thoughts were interrupted by a shadow at the window. A head appeared from the gloom of the study and looked down at him.

"Is that you, Ransome?" asked Redfern, in bated tones.

"No!"

Redfern started. It was Arthur's voice.

"It's you, Arthur?"

"Yes, Sid."

Redfern had a curious feeling as his brother spoke. Arthur's voice was very soft. He had not called his minor "Sid" since the boy had come to St. Dolly's. That affectionate name of childhood had seemed to be quite forgotten. Even when the minor was trying to do him a service, the major always seemed to regard him as a trouble and a worry. But what Sidney Redfern had done that night had touched the heart of Arthur. For the time, at least, he was the kind elder brother Redfern had known at home, and whom he had sorely missed at St. Dolly's.

"Is it all right, Arthur?"

"Yes."

"You got in in time?"

Arthur laughed softly.

"Yes. I scorched for all I was worth, kid. I had nearly five minutes to spare, and Lunsford was as relieved as I was."

Redfern felt a weight rolled from his heart.

"I'm so glad, Arthur!"

"Thank you, young 'un! You've done a lot for me to-night."

"Oh, that's nothing! I'm glad—so glad! Then it's all right?"

"Right as rain! I shall have a jaw with Lunsford in the morning, but that will be all right. Get back to your dorm, now, young 'un. You'll be pretty heavy in the morning."

"Good-night, Arthur!"

"Good-night, Sid!"

Redfern minor, feeling very happy, ran away in the shadows. He heard the windows close softly as he went.

Sleepy and fatigued as he was, the junior had seldom been in so light a mood. He had saved Arthur, and the clouds that had arisen between him and his brother seemed to have rolled away in consequence.

The junior stopped under the window from which he had made his exit—long ago, it seemed to him. The window was closed. Was Skelton still waiting?

Redfern whistled softly.

There was no reply to the whistle—the usual signal of the Classical juniors. Redfern's heart beat hard.

Had Skelton forgotten him and gone back to bed? The window was closed, and if it was fastened, too—

Redfern climbed the rain-pipe and planted his knee on the sill. He peered in at the opaque glass. It was too dark within for him to see anything. He felt the sash with his hands; it was tightly closed, and refused to move to his touch.

It was fastened inside!

Redfern's heart almost stopped beating as he realised it. He was shut out—shut out at midnight!

Where was Skelton?

His chum could not purposely have left him in the lurch? Why had he fastened the window, too? It occurred distastefully to Redfern's mind that perhaps Skelton had gone back to the dormitory to wait there, and had fallen asleep, and perhaps some careful master had observed the unfastened window and fastened it.

However it had happened, Redfern minor was shut out.

What was to be done?

He thought of going back to Ransome's window, but that was too late. He had heard Arthur close it as he left. Arthur would be in his own room by this time. Ransome was probably in bed and asleep.

Redfern strained his eyes through the window. Perhaps, after all, Skelton was just inside, waiting for a signal.

He tapped on the glass.

Tap, tap, tap!

A slight sound came to him from within. He breathed more freely with relief. A dim shadow loomed on the glass from inside. He heard the sound of the catch being pushed back.

"Thank goodness!" murmured Redfern minor.

The window was opened for him. He tumbled in and alighted on his feet, and stood breathing hard, while the unseen helper closed the window and re-fastened the catch.

"You bouncer!" said Redfern, in a whisper. "I thought I was done, that time!"

Then he gave a sudden start. In the darkness he could not see the form beside him, but the black shadows looming up seemed too big for that of Skelton.

Redfern caught his breath.

"Who—who are you?" he stammered.

"Your Form-master," said a quiet voice. "I think you are Redfern minor."

Redfern reeled against the wall. It was the voice of Mr. Ford, the master of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 15.

Caught!

REDFERN stared blankly at the dim form of the Form-master. The quiet tones had seemed to cut the silence like a knife.

The junior could not speak—he could hardly breathe.

Midnight had rung out from the clock-tower! Midnight! To be caught by his Form-master, surreptitiously entering the school at such an hour! The mere thought of it made the boy's brain swim.

Caught!

He had risked it for Arthur's sake. The danger had not deterred him for a second, but now that it had fallen upon him, he did not regret what he had done. He had saved Arthur.

"You are Redfern minor?" repeated the quiet voice.

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"I have been waiting for you."

"Oh, sir!"

"I am sorry for this, Redfern minor. You are not the boy I should have expected it of."

"I—I——"

"Go to your dormitory."

After all, what could he say? Without betraying Arthur, he could not give his reasons for going out. Redfern turned away, and went with slow, uncertain steps towards his dormitory. After the excitement, the anxiety, and the fatigue he had been through, this was a crushing blow.

He entered the long, dark dormitory, and felt his way to his bed. He undressed quietly, in order to wake no one. But there was one who was awake. An anxious, whispering voice came through the gloom:

"Is that you, Reddy?"

"Yes, Skelton."

"Have you been nabbed?"

"Yes."

"By old Ford?"

"Yes, he caught me getting in."

"I'm awfully sorry, Reddy! It wasn't my fault. I was waiting at the window for you to come back," said Skelton, in a hurried whisper. "A jolly long wait it was, too; but that doesn't matter. I heard a car drive in, and soon after that Mr. Ford came upstairs. I bunked, of course, thinking he was going up to bed. But he didn't. He came straight to the Fourth dorm, and I had only just time to bunk into bed and pretend to be asleep. I say, Reddy, he didn't see you while he was out, did he?"

"I think he caught sight of me on the Wyndale road. He was motoring past."

"What rotten luck!"

Redfern did not speak. Luck had certainly been against him that night, as far as he himself was concerned.

"I thought he smelt a rat," said Skelton. "I watched him from under the bedclothes when he came in. He went from bed to bed, and he gave a

curious sort of grunt when he looked at yours."

Redfern could quite believe it.

"Then he went out. I followed him after a bit, and he went round looking at the windows. He grunted again when he found the landing window unfastened, and I heard him fasten it, I had no chance to help you, Reddy. He waited there without going away ever since he fastened the window. He never left the spot, except to come back here and squint into the dorm. I suppose he had a suspicion that you had one of us waiting for you, and he wasn't going to take any chances. I couldn't do anything, could I, Reddy?"

Redfern smiled grimly.

"You couldn't, old chap. It was a fair catch."

"What has he said?"

"I'm to explain in the morning."

"What will you say?"

"Blessed if I know!"

And Redfern tumbled into bed. He was anxious and troubled in mind, but he was tired. His eyes closed the moment his head touched the pillow.

"I say, Reddy," came Skelton's anxious voice.

"Eh?"

"What are you going to do?"

"Sleep!" grunted Redfern.

And he closed his eyes, and did not open them again. Skelton whistled softly in the darkness.

"Well, I always said he was a cool customer," he murmured.

And he went to sleep himself.

Redfern minor did not wake as usual at the clang of the rising-bell. He would have slept on another hour or so, in all probability, if his Form-fellows had not kindly awakened him. Benson brought a dripping sponge, and squeezed it over his face, and Redfern came with a sudden start out of the land of dreams.

"Groo—ooh—ow!" he gasped.

"Time to get up," said Benson.

"Ow! I'm wet!"

Benson giggled.

"That's the water," he explained. "It's always wet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Redfern tumbled out of bed. He had been dreaming of the Green Man, of the card-table, and the coarse faces of Mr. Cunliffe and his friends, and Arthur among them. He rubbed his eyes. He felt a heavy load upon his mind, he did not know why. He usually awoke in high spirits.

But recollection came quickly. He remembered the ill-luck of the previous night, and that promised interview with the Form-master this morning.

And his usually cheery face was clouded as he turned to his morning tub. What was he to say to Mr. Ford?

"How did you get on last night, Reddy?" asked Brown III, in a whisper, as the Classical juniors left their dormitory.

"Rotten!" said Redfern minor; and that was all the explanation he would make.

The Fourth Form master's face was very grave as he sat at the head of the Form-table. He did not glance at Redfern minor; but Redfern knew that Mr. Ford was thinking of him, and of the previous night's escapade.

What explanation was he to make? What could he say, without bringing Arthur into the matter?

Redfern ate very little breakfast. His appetite was as keen, as a rule, as any in the Fourth; but this morning he felt that he could not eat.

When the juniors left the breakfast-table Mr. Ford made a sign to Redfern minor. While the rest of the Fourth poured out into the Close, Redfern quietly followed the Form-master to his study.

Ransome came out of the dining-room and glanced towards them. He noted the expression upon Mr. Ford's face and upon Redfern's. The cad of the Sixth gave a start, and a long, low whistle. It was the first hint he had had of trouble in store for his fag.

Redfern followed Mr. Ford into his study, and closed the door at a sign from the Form-master. Mr. Ford did not sit down; he stood with one hand

resting upon the table, and his grave eyes fixed upon the junior.

Redfern was silent; his heart was beating painfully. The crucial moment had come, and he had not in the least made up his mind what was to be said or done.

"Well, Redfern," said the Form-master, speaking slowly and quietly, "have you anything to say?"

Redfern did not speak.

"Last night," said Mr. Ford, "I passed a boy, wearing the St. Dorothy's cap, on the Wyndale road at a very late hour. That was you?"

"Yes, sir."

"When I returned to the school, I waited for that boy. I discovered you getting in at a window at midnight?"

"Yes, sir."

"You had been to Wyndale?"

"Yes, sir."

The Form-master looked a little perplexed.

"I am glad to see that you are speaking the truth, so far," he said. "You have not been long at St. Dorothy's, Redfern minor, but I had noticed you, and formed a favourable opinion of you. I can forgive scrapes due to boyish effervescence of spirits, and I had seen nothing worse than that in you. But this is a matter of the greatest seriousness. There is a place of low character in Wyndale, which it is suspected that some St. Dorothy's boys have visited—and visit now—for purposes of gambling, or making bets with low men they meet there. I find you breaking bounds at a late hour—I meet you on the Wyndale road going in that direction. The conclusion is obvious."

Redfern turned pale.

It was obvious enough, according to the light Mr. Ford had on the subject. Redfern had not thought of that.

"Had you been to the Green Man, Redfern?"

The junior did not speak.

"Come, Redfern," said the Form-master, raising his voice a little. "I must insist upon an answer."

The boy's face grew almost haggard,

but he did not speak. He understood the peril he was in, but he could only save himself at his brother's expense.

"Redfern, you cannot hope to serve your cause by remaining silent," said Mr. Ford, with great patience. "If you had not been to the Green Man, you would naturally say so. If you refuse to answer, it is tantamount to a confession that you had been there."

Still Redfern was silent.

"I may take it, then, that you had been to this place?" said Mr. Ford. "It is the last thing I should have expected of you, especially of the brother of a lad who bears so high a character in the school as Redfern major."

In spite of his misery, Redfern almost smiled. There was a curious and unconscious irony in Mr. Ford's words.

"For the sake of your brother, I should like to deal with you as easily as possible," said Mr. Ford quietly. "I appeal to you to speak, Redfern. If you have anything to say that will justify me in keeping this matter from the Head, I appeal to you to say it."

Redfern's face was like chalk. Already in his mind's eye he could see the stern face of the doctor; he could hear the merciless words upon his lips; he could see himself sentenced—expelled from the school!

There was a full minute's silence. Mr. Ford waited for the junior to speak. As he did not open his lips, the Form-master went on at last:

"I am sorry for this, Redfern. I cannot understand why you do not answer me. You will have to answer the Head. Once more, did you go to the Green Man in Wyndale?"

"Yes," said Redfern desperately.

"To see Mr. Cunliffe?"

"No."

"For an unlawful purpose, at all events?"

"No, sir."

"Why did you go, then?"

Redfern was silent. A dark cloud gathered upon Mr. Ford's face.

"Redfern, you admit having been to that low den of gambling and betting

—it would have been useless for you to deny it—can you seriously maintain that you went there for an innocent purpose, and not to play cards, to make bets, or to be guilty of any offence against the rules of the college?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then why did you go?"

Silence.

"You cannot tell me?"

"Then you cannot expect me to believe so wild and absurd a statement," said Mr. Ford quietly. "I am afraid that appearances are very deceptive in your case. Under an appearance of boyish frankness, I am afraid you conceal a nature that can only do harm to the boys you associate with. It is very clear to me that you had an assistant in breaking bounds last night."

Redfern kept his eyes on the floor. He was not likely to give away Skelton.

"I will not ask you his name," said Mr. Ford. "He did not go with you, and so he is probably less guilty. For the last time, Redfern, can you give me a full and credible account of what you did last night?"

Silence.

"Very well," said the Fourth Form master quietly. "You will come with me to the Head."

He opened the study door and led the way.

CHAPTER 16.

The Last Chance!

"REDDY!"

Skelton was calling the name in the passage when the Fourth Form master came out of his study, followed by Redfern minor.

Mr. Ford did not look round. His face was very grave and pained in expression. He had a kind heart, and the escapade of Redfern minor troubled him more than the boys would easily have credited. But he had his duty to do.

Redfern glanced at Skelton, but did not speak. Skelton stared at him blankly and hurried towards him. Mr.

Ford, striding on ahead with a rustle of his gown, did not look back.

"What's the row, Reddy?" whispered Skelton.

"I'm going to the Head."

"My only hat!"

"I hope I shall pull through. Anyway, keep your mouth shut—you understand?" whispered Redfern hurriedly.

"But——"

"Not a word—about Arthur, you know—not a word about my going to see him," Redfern whispered. "Keep quiet—and tell Browny."

"But—but——"

"Mind, not a word!"

"All right, but——"

The whispered voices seemed to catch the Form-master's ear at last, and he glanced sternly round.

"Redfern, follow me more closely."

"Yes, sir."

Skelton stood open-mouthed while the junior followed the Form-master. He was almost dazed. He watched them as far as the door of Dr. Cranston's study, and he saw the door of that dreaded apartment close upon them.

Redfern was before the Head!

Skelton gave an inward groan. It was not a light thing to be taken before the Head in any case, even when innocent, and Redfern was not innocent of breaking bounds at night.

"My only hat!" murmured Skelton, hurrying away in search of Brown III, feeling that he needed counsel at that moment. "What's going to come of it? Reddy will be expelled; and he won't say a word about that rotten brother of his! What's to be done? My only summer hat! Reddy shan't be sacked if I can help it!"

Bump!

Skelton, dashing on he hardly knew whether in his anxiety and excitement, ran right into Brown III, and sent him flying.

Brown sat down on the ground and glared at Skelton, who reeled against a tree, gasping for breath.

"You—you utter ass!" panted Brown.

"Ow! Sorry!" gasped Skelton.

"You frabjous idiot!"

"Look here, shut up! Reddy's in trouble!" said Skelton quickly.

Brown whistled.

"Blessed if that chap isn't always in trouble!" he said. "What's the latest?"

"Ford's taken him in to the Head."

"Great Christopher Columbus!"

"Jolly serious, ain't it?" said Skelton glumly. "What's to be done? We're not going to have old Reddy sacked from St. Dolly's!"

"Phew!"

"That's what it means, you know. Reddy says Fordy saw him last night near Wyndale. He'll put two and two together, and make five of it, as these grown-ups generally do," said Skelton, with all the wisdom of fourteen and a half. "They'll think Reddy was on the razzle, you know. Anyway, they know he broke bounds at night, and that's enough for the sack."

"He could explain——"

"Not without giving his major away."

"By George, no! And that would mean the sack for Redfern major."

"You know Reddy," said Skelton, almost tearfully. "He'd let himself be cut in pieces for that major of his. Bless if I know what he sees in him! But there you are!"

"It's rotten!"

"I know it's rotten, but what's to be done?"

Brown shook his head. The problem was too much for him, and he gave it up.

"Reddy's made me promise not to say a word about his major," said Skelton miserably. "But for that I'd be jolly well inclined to give his lordship away, and risk being called a sneak—what?"

Brown uttered a sudden exclamation.

"I've got it!"

"You've got what?" asked Skelton suspiciously. "A bee in your bonnet?"

"No!" said Brown excitedly. "Redfern major's the man!"

"What on earth are you jabbering about?"

"Don't you see? Redfern major doesn't know anything about it so far, but when he knows he would be a worm if he didn't own up."

"And get himself sacked?"

"Well, any fellow would do it rather than let a chap suffer in his place," said Brown III sturdily. "I would, Skelty, and you would."

"I—I hope so, Brown, but—but I don't feel so sure about Redfern major. He's a prefect, and in the Sixth, and he's got a lot to lose. I—"

"Give him a chance, anyway. It's the only thing that can save Reddy."

"Blessed if I don't!" said Skelton. "It's a chance. I don't care if he knocks my head off for speaking to him. It's a chance to help Reddy. Where is the chap? Have you seen him?"

"He was over by the gym a few minutes ago, talking to Ransome."

"Then I'm off!"

And Skelton pelted away in the direction of the gym. Sure enough, there were the two Sixth-Formers standing by the door. They were chatting, and Arthur's tone was very light. He was still feeling the satisfaction of his escape on the previous night, and he had no suspicion so far that his minor was in trouble.

Skelton dashed up, and halted breathless, and the two seniors looked at him. Skelton was so out of breath that he could do nothing but gasp for some seconds. Ransome took him by the ear.

"You can go and do the dying grampus act somewhere else," he said. "Cut off!"

"I w-w-w-want—"

"You want a thick ear!"

"I wan-want to speak to Redfern major," gulped out the breathless junior.

"Go ahead!" said Arthur.

"It's about Reddy—your minor, you know," Skelton went on, panting out the words. "He was nabbed last night! Fordy collared him as he came in!"

Arthur changed colour.

"What do you mean? What—?"

"He's up before the Head!"

"What!"

"And he'll be sacked—sacked as sure as a gun—unless—unless you own up and save him!" panted out Skelton.

Arthur Redfern reeled against the wall of the gym.

CHAPTER 17.

To Speak or Not to Speak!

ARTHUR REDFERN seemed hardly to breathe for the moment.

The blow was a staggering one. He had been congratulating himself that the danger was past, that he had pulled through the difficulties that beset him, that all was plain sailing ahead.

Skelton's words came like a bolt from the blue.

He had, indeed, escaped; but all that he had escaped had fallen upon his younger brother. Redfern minor, instead of himself, was standing that morning arraigned before the Head.

The unfortunate prefect could not speak. This was the end of his security—this was the end of the good resolutions he had been making that morning. Everything was wrong again, and worse than ever.

What was he to do?

Ransome thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets, and whistled softly under his breath. He knew what he would have done, but he did not know what Arthur would do.

Skelton was watching the prefect's face eagerly.

"You can't let Reddy be sacked," said the junior at last. "He broke bounds to warn you. You can't let him—"

"Hold your tongue!" said Ransome sharply.

But even the cad of the Sixth could not restrain the speech of the Fourth-Former at that moment. Skelton was too anxious about his chum.

"I won't hold my tongue!" he cried.

"And Redfern major can't let Reddy be sacked. It was for his sake——"

Ransome drew his right hand from his pocket, the fist clenched. Skelton backed away a pace, his eyes warily on the Sixth-Former, but unsubdued.

"Reddy's with the Head now," he went on resolutely. "You know what that means. Redfern major can't leave him to face the music. He won't say a word. You know Reddy. He won't let me speak. But——"

Arthur found his voice.

"What do you know about the matter at all, Skelton?"

"I helped Reddy out of the window last night."

"You know why—why he came out?"

"Yes."

"How came he to be caught?"

"Mr. Ford saw him on the Wyndale road, and waited for him to come in. He caught him at the window."

Arthur's lips tightened. Was there ever such rotten ill-luck? He had gone safely in. He had said good-night to his minor at the window of his study, and Sidney had gone thence direct to capture! If he had only known!

"And Sidney has told Mr. Ford nothing?"

"Not a word! You know Reddy."

"And he's with the Head?"

"Mr. Ford has just taken him in."

Arthur's pale face looked strangely old and worn. There was no loophole of escape. One had to suffer, either the guilty or the innocent. Which was it to be?

"You can go, Skelton," said Arthur quietly.

"But—but you're not going to leave Reddy?"

"Leave it to me!"

Skelton hesitated, but he could do no more. He nodded and walked away to rejoin Brown III, who was waiting for him under the trees. Brown looked at him eagerly.

"Is he going to own up?"

"I don't know."

"But he must! He——"

"I think he will, unless he's a measly worm," said Skelton savagely. "But if he doesn't, I've a jolly good mind to own up for him. Reddy's not going to be sacked from St. Dolly's to shield his major, that's a cert."

Brown nodded rather hopelessly. He felt that it all depended upon Redfern major. What would Arthur do?

What could Arthur do? That was the question that was humming in the brain of the prefect. What could he do? Stand aside and say nothing—allow his younger brother to be disgraced, or own up, and take the disgrace upon himself?

He looked at Ransome. The cad of the Sixth was looking very grave. He knew that with all his cunning he must tread warily now.

"What can I do, Ransome?"

"I don't know."

Then Arthur burst out passionately.

"You don't know! You dragged me into this. You know I didn't want to come to Cunliffe's place last night. You dragged me there. Now I've got into a horrible fix over it, and ask your advice, you say coolly you don't know! You ought to know. Why can't you help?"

Ransome shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm willing enough to give advice, if you like to take it."

"Well, give it, anyway, hang you!"

"Let well alone," said Ransome.

"You're not called upon to ruin yourself for the sake of a meddling kid. He oughtn't to have been caught. Why couldn't he have more sense?"

"Besides, he was running the risk for you. If you take it all off his shoulders, it's you running the risk for him, and you never asked him to interfere."

"You want me to leave him to his fate?"

"I don't want you to do anything. It's no business of mine. You asked for my advice, and I've given it."

"I shall have to take it upon myself."

If Ransome had opposed him Arthur would have become more and more obstinate. But the cad of the Sixth knew



Ransome ran across to the window, tore away the blind, and threw it open. He plunged out into the gloom and, even as he did so, the door burst open and Lunsford rushed in. Cunliffe started forward with an oath, while Sidney Redfern sat petrified. "What d'you mean breaking in my door like that?" roared Cunliffe.

his man; he knew it all well enough, and he chose the opposite tack.

"As you like, of course," he said. "If it would make you more comfy to go to the Head and be expelled—go! You're your own master."

Arthur shivered.

"Expelled! Of course it would mean that."

"Of course it would—for you."

"And for him, too, I suppose," said Arthur angrily.

"Oh, no! He's a junior, you're a senior and a prefect. There's extenuating circumstances for him—none for you. He will very likely be flogged, but I suppose he can stand that. He may get off the sacking, especially if you speak for him."

Arthur started.

"I!" he breathed.

"Yes, you. You have a jolly good character in the school. You're a prefect; you are a favourite scholar of the Head's. He wouldn't like to bring disgrace on you by sacking your minor, if he could help it. If you speak for him, and promise to keep an eye on him in future, and generally dry-nurse him. I think—"

"Is this a time for your rotten jokes, confound you?"

"I'm not joking. If the Head feels that your minor is under your special care, he may give him another chance."

Arthur laughed mirthlessly.

"Under my care! But I suppose there's something in what you say, if I could play the hypocrite well enough."

"It's only a question of nerve. Anyway, don't be hasty. If your minor is sacked, then there's plenty of time to be sacked in his place. If it's a flogging, the youngster will face it all right. He's got pluck enough."

"How could I be such a cad—"

"That will wear off, too. Wait till the storm's blown over, and you'll forget the whole business."

"I feel that I hate you sometimes, Ransome!" broke out Arthur.

Ransome laughed.

"Because I'm your best friend."

"My worst enemy, more likely. I can't do it."

"What—own up?"

"No, hang you! I can't let Sidney suffer for me."

"Better think twice—"

"Hang it! If I think twice I shall play the cad, I know that. I'm going straight to the Head."

"That's as you choose."

Arthur gave him a bitter look, and hesitated a moment; then he swung off directly towards the schoolhouse, his face pale and set. Ransome watched him with a cynical smile on his lips.

"Ten to one he doesn't go into the house," he murmured; "and a hundred to one he doesn't go to the Head's study!"

And he watched the prefect with a mocking interest. Arthur's steps slackened as he drew nearer the house—slower and slower. At the doorway he paused, irresolute, and then, with still slower steps, he passed on, without entering the house.

Ransome smiled.

Dr. Cranston had listened quietly to Mr. Ford's explanation. Redfern minor stood silent, with a pale, troubled face and a beating heart, but an invincible resolution.

Well he knew the danger he stood in; but his determination was taken—he would utter no word that would injure his brother.

The Head turned his glance upon Redfern minor. His eyes were very hard behind his gold-rimmed pince-nez.

"You have heard all that Mr. Ford has said, Redfern?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you anything to say?"

"I am sorry, sir."

The Head's lips hardened.

"That is hardly sufficient, Redfern"

The position in which you stand is sufficient to make you sorry. You have broken bounds at night from the school?"

"Yes, sir."

"You did so for the purpose of visiting a disreputable alehouse at Wyndale?"

"Yes, sir."

"But you deny that you had friends among the habitués there, or that you went there for any unlawful purpose?"

"Yes, sir," said Redfern again.

"But you cannot explain what your purpose was?"

"No, sir."

"Is that all you have to say, Redfern?"

"That is all, sir."

"You know what the result must be?"

Redfern was silent.

"It has become known to me of late," said the Head quietly, "that boys belonging to St. Dorothy's have been seen in the vicinity of that disreputable place in Wyndale. I have requested the prefects to keep a very keen look-out. You are the first who has been detected. Do you deny that you are in the habit of visiting the place?"

Redfern flushed.

"Certainly, sir."

"I am afraid, Redfern, that you are taxing my credulity too far. In any case, I can only deal with the facts, which you cannot explain away. You have, by your own admission, visited the place. Your purpose in going there you refuse to explain. There is only one decision I can come to. You are not the kind of boy, evidently, to associate with the juniors here. I am afraid that if you remain at St. Dorothy's I shall hear of more visits to the Green Man."

Redfern bit his lip.

"You understand, therefore, Redfern, that unless you give me a full and adequate explanation, you leave St. Dorothy's."

"I—I suppose so, sir."

"I shall not act in haste, however. I cling to the hope that it is possible you have some explanation to offer," said Dr. Cranston sternly. "I should be sorry to bring disgrace upon the name you bear, which is borne by the boy in this school who shows more promise than any other. You will be confined to the punishment-room for twenty-four hours, Redfern. If at the end of that time you fail to satisfy me, you leave St. Dorothy's."

Redfern said no word. The Head rang, and Phipps appeared. Phipps, the house-porter, was generally on somewhat hostile terms with the juniors, but just now he gave Redfern a look of as much sympathy as he could manage to show. He knew even better than the junior did the position he stood in.

"You will take Master Redfern to the punishment-room, Phipps," said the Head quietly. "He will remain there till to-morrow morning, upon the usual punishment diet. You will see that no one has access to him."

"Very good, sir."

"You will go with Phipps, Redfern."

Redfern minor left the study. The Head turned to Mr. Ford with a sigh.

"I am more sorry for this than I can say, sir," said the Fourth Form master. "I rather liked the lad; and one would have expected him to follow the example of his elder brother, too."

Dr. Cranston nodded.

"I am afraid that through this boy I have been led to do Redfern major an injustice," he said. "He was away from the school last night, as I discovered by accident, and did not return till late. I am afraid I allowed myself to doubt him for the moment. I think it is very probable now that this boy may have been the cause of it. Redfern major may have discovered his pursuits, and may have been taking some steps in connection with the matter. I cannot quite understand the position taken up by the junior; but

one thing is certain—if he does not explain himself satisfactorily within twenty-four hours I shall expel him from the school."

Meanwhile, Redfern minor followed Phipps. There was a group of juniors in the passage to see him come out of the Head's study, and Skelton and Brown ran forward at once as soon as he appeared.

"What's the verdict, Reddy?" asked Skelton breathlessly.

Phipps interposed.

"Keep back, young gentlemen! You are not allowed to speak to Master Redfern."

"Oh, shut up, Phippy!"

"Head's orders, sir!"

"Where are you taking him?" demanded Skelton hotly.

"Punishment-room, sir."

And Phipps hurried his charge on, leaving the juniors staring.

"My only hat!" said Skelton. "Punishment-room! The Head must be waxy. Punishment-room hasn't been used only once since I've been at St. Dolly's, and then it was for a chap who was going to be sacked. This means that Reddy——"

"Is going to be sacked!" said Brown gloomily.

"Sacked!" said Taffy, with a whistle.

"What for?"

"Breaking bounds."

"Phew!"

The Fourth Form went into early lessons that morning in a perturbed frame of mind. It was known through the whole Form that Redfern minor was in the punishment-room, and that it was expected that he would be "sacked."

Mr. Ford had a difficult task with his class that morning.

Redfern's desk being unoccupied was a sufficient proof to the Fourth-Formers that the rumour was correct. Skelton and Brown were supposed to know more about the matter than the rest, as Redfern's chums, and they were assailed

with incessant inquiries; but Skelton and Brown kept their own counsel.

It was Redfern's secret, and, sorely as they were tempted to tell the facts in public, they obeyed Redfern's wishes. The curious juniors received no satisfaction from them. In the interest excited by Redfern's plight even the distinction of Classics and Moderns seemed to be forgotten.

Taffy & Co. were just as anxious about Redfern as were Skelton and Brown. The morning was a distracting one to Mr. Ford, and he was glad when he dismissed the class.

The juniors, equally glad to be released, poured out into the quadrangle, and the topic of discussion was Reddy and Reddy's bad luck.

Taffy & Co. collared Skelton in the quad., and insisted upon an explanation.

"What's the row?" demanded Taffy, clutching Skelton by the shoulder. "What's the matter with Reddy? What did he break bounds for?"

"That's telling!"

"Well, tell us."

"It's Reddy's secret."

"Rats!"

"More rats, then!" said Skelton cheerfully.

"You'd better tell us," said Taffy. "You see, we may be able to get old Reddy out of the scrape. You Classical chaps can't manage it, of course."

"Then it's jolly sure you Commercial asses wouldn't be able to!"

"If you want a thick car, Skelton——"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"I'll jolly well——"

"Pax, chappies!" said Vernon mildly. "We don't want to row now. There's Reddy to be thought of. He's in the punishment-room. He's on punishment diet. You know what that is—bread and scrape and weak tea."

"Just what I was going to say," remarked Rake.

"Awful!" said Spratt, with an expression of genuine concern. "Blessed if the Fourth ought to stand it!"

"What price a deputation to the Head on the subject?" said Benson.

"Hear, hear!"

"Rot!" said Skelton. "No good playing the giddy ass! But it's rough on Reddy. We ought to manage to get some grub to the poor chap. Fancy a whole day on bread-and-scrape!"

"Horrible!"

"Let's go and see if we can speak to him," said Skelton. "Not all you chaps; a crowd will give it away. Brown and I will go."

"Better leave it to us," suggested Taffy. "It's better for sensible chaps to deal with a delicate matter like this."

"Oh, you go and eat cokernuts!"

And Skelton and Brown entered the house. Taffy & Co, quite convinced that they were the suitable persons to deal with the matter, followed them.

The punishment-room, in spite of its name, was simply an ordinary room, with an extra strong lock upon the door and a bar across the window. It was upon the same floor as the Fourth-Form studies, and at the end of a long passage, off which several rooms opened, which were used as box-rooms.

The five juniors went up to the Fourth-Form passage with an air of exaggerated carelessness, which was quite sufficient to awaken suspicion, if they had been observed, and they reached the end of the corridor, where the narrow and dusky passage branched off. Skelton approached the corner very cautiously, and peeped round. He had expected to see Phipps on guard outside the door of the punishment-room, but the house-porter was not to be seen.

Skelton looked round at his friend.

"It's all right. Come on!"

"Jolly good!"

The juniors hurried on. They reached

the end of the passage in a few seconds, and Skelton and Taffy tapped at the door together.

"What did you tap for, you Welsh rabbit!"

"What did you tap for, you Yorkshire dumpling?"

"Look here——"

"Look here——"

"Pax," said Vernon. "Phipps may be here at any minute before you've spoken to Reddy."

"Just what I was going to say."

There was a tap from inside the room. Skelton knelt down, and put his mouth close to the keyhole.

"I say, Reddy."

"Hallo!"

"Are you all right?"

"Oh, right as rain—I don't think!"

"Hungry, I suppose?"

"Yes, rather."

"We're going to get you some grub somehow," went on Skelton hurriedly. "We'll manage it. I suppose Phipps has the key of this lock?"

"Yes; he takes it away with him."

"Might get in at the window, then. Have you a cord?"

"I've got a piece of twine."

"Good! You can lower that from the window, and I'll tie a cord on it, and you can pull that up, and then a bundle of grub."

"Thanks awfully, old chap! You're a Briton. I'm deuced peckish, and no mistake!"

"Can we do anything else for you besides the grub?"

"No."

"Suppose I tell Ford about it——"

"I'll never speak to you again if you do. Mind, you've promised."

"You'll be sacked, Reddy."

"I can stick it, I suppose."

"You're an ass!"

"Thank you!"

"Here, let me have a word with him," said Taffy, pulling Skelton away from

the keyhole. "I expect I could manage to get him off—"

"Get away!"

"You get away, you duffer! I want to speak—"

"Leggo, you Modern ass!"

"Rats, you Classical dummy!"

Skelton gave Taffy a shove, and Taffy dragged Skelton over with him. Both of them were getting excited, and the next moment—one hardly knew how—they were rolling on the floor in whirling combat.

"Hallo!" came Redfern's voice through the keyhole. "What the dickens is that row about?"

There was no reply, save a sound of grunting and scuffling. Then suddenly Vernon uttered an exclamation.

"Cave!"

Phipps was coming along the passage in great haste, and with a very red face.

CHAPTER 18.

Friends in Need!

TAFFY dragged himself loose from Skelton and jumped up. There was an ooze of red from his nose, and one of Skelton's ears was growing blue. Taffy dabbed a handkerchief on his nose as he ran. The juniors scuttled off, and Phipps arrived at the door of the punishment-room red and wrathful and panting for breath.

He selected a big key on his bunch, unlocked the door, and looked in. He seemed to want to satisfy himself that his prisoner was safe.

The room was a small one, barely furnished—bed, table, and chair. There was one window, which had a strong bar across. Redfern minor was looking towards the door, and he met Phipps' glance with a nod. Redfern was looking a little pale, but he was quite self-possessed. The position he was in troubled his mind, but did not daunt his courage.

"It's all right, Phippy," he said cheerfully. "I'm still here!"

Phippy looked at him suspiciously.

"Them young gentlemen have been a-talking to you through the keyhole, Master Redfern."

"Go hon!"

"I shall keep an eye open for them now."

"I say, Phippy, couldn't you manage a little grub for me?" said Redfern persuasively, as the house-porter was closing the door. "I'm hungry."

Phipps shook his head.

"I daren't, Master Redfern."

"But I'm hungry."

"Put him in the punishment-room on the punishment diet, says the 'Ead,'" replied Phipps. "Horders is horders, Master Redfern."

"Yes, I suppose so," assented Redfern. "I don't want to get you into a row. Roll along with the bread-and-scrape."

And Phipps grinned and locked the door. Redfern was to have bread and cheese for his dinner. Bread and cheese was a nourishing diet enough; but the hungry junior thought of the well-spread table in the dining-hall, and his mouth watered. As soon as Phipps was gone he crossed to the window and looked out, standing on the tips of his toes.

He could see a good portion of the quadrangle from the window of the punishment-room. There were plenty of fellows in the quadrangle, and he caught sight of some Fifth-Form boys punting about a football, the first punt-about of the season. A cloud crossed the junior's face. He had been looking forward keenly to football at St. Dolly's, and now he was to go.

The room he was in was on the third floor of the house. Below was the window of Herr Rheinberger's room—a window shaded by the branches of a big elm. Redfern wondered whether the German master was in his room. He usually retired there to read a

German paper at the window after his lunch.

Redfern looked round anxiously for some sign of his friends in the quad. They did not appear. A sound at the door made him turn quickly from the window. Phipps entered with a plate of bread and cheese, none too liberal in quantity.

"There you are, Master Redfern."

"Thanks awfully!" said Redfern. "Did you carry that up alone Phippy? Sit down and rest for a minute or two."

Phipps chuckled.

"I'm sorry it's no more, Master Redfern."

"Perhaps it will be more soon, old son," murmured Redfern to himself as the house-porter retired and locked the door behind him.

Redfern nibbled the bread and cheese, and watched from the window. Suddenly his eyes gleamed. It was past two o'clock, and the time was drawing near for afternoon lessons. But his friends had not forgotten him.

Round the corner of the house came Skelton and Taffy, and the latter was carrying a basket in his hand. The basket was closed; but Redfern did not need telling what it contained. It was a basket from the school tuckshop, and Redfern knew that it was packed with "tuck."

Taffy glanced up at the window and looked relieved when he saw Redfern on the watch. The bar across the window did not prevent Redfern from raising the sash. He was looking out over the sill, and he waved his hand to the two juniors below. The Classical and the Modern leaders had evidently made it "pax," for the sake of helping Redfern in the time of trouble.

Skelton waved back, with a grin. He dared not call out, for fear that his voice would be heard. The big elm-tree screened the juniors from view in the quad, but they would have been quite visible to anybody looking out of Herr Rheinberger's window.

At that window Taffy and Skelton looked very dubiously.

If the German master were there, there was a certain amount of risk in sending up the basket of provisions, which would have to be drawn up directly in front of his window. Yet it would go up so quickly, that doubtless he would not notice it. Then, the risk had to be run if the basket was to be conveyed to Reddy at all.

Redfern drew a long twine from his pocket, and tied a penknife on the end as a weight, and allowed it to slide from his window.

Skelton caught the penknife as it came within reach, and detached it, securing the light string. To the end of the string he tied a cord, by which Reddy was to draw up the basket. He also pinned a piece of paper, folded very small, to the string.

Then he waved his hand.

Redfern pulled up the string, and the cord followed. He caught the end of the cord, and gave it a turn round his wrist for security, and then detached Skelton's note.

It was a brief note in a sprawling hand.

"Look out for old Vaterland. He's in his room. I'll watch his window, as I can see it from the ground. Watch me while you're pulling up the basket, and if I raise my right hand let it go instantly and duck in."

Redfern read the note, and waved his hand to Skelton as a sign that he understood.

Taffy, after a cautious glance round, fastened the end of the cord to the handle of the basket.

He stepped away from it, and looked up at Redfern minor at the window. Redfern began to pull on the cord.

"Phew! It's pretty heavy!" he murmured.

And he grinned appreciatively.

He had expected a small consignment of "tuck" in the basket—a few sandwiches, and a bag of tarts, and a bottle of ginger-beer perhaps. But the juniors had evidently determined to look after him better than that. From the weight of the basket, it seemed to contain a very considerable selection of the good things from the school tuckshop. The Classics and the Moderns had undoubtedly had a "whip round" to do their very best for Reddy.

The cord tautened, and hung straight as a stick downwards as the weight of the basket came upon it.

So far, there was little danger. Even if Herr Rheinberger was reading his paper at the window of his room, he was not likely to see the slim cord outside.

But it would be different when the basket rose to the level of his window. It was quite likely—more than likely—that he would see it.

And so the two juniors below watched with anxious face and beating hearts. The only thing was for Reddy to put on speed as soon as the basket reached the herr's level, and whisk it up to his window as suddenly as possible.

Steadily the basket rose in the air.

Redfern pulled it up slowly and cautiously at first. The basket spun round and round, but he was careful not to give it a swing that would cause it to knock against wall or window.

It rose as high as Herr Rheinberger's window-sill.

Skelton drew a quick breath.

"Now's the time!" he muttered. "Go it, Reddy!"

"No sign of the herr yet," murmured Taffy.

Redfern pulled more quickly on the string. Unfortunately, the top of the basket caught for a moment under the edge of the window-sill and there was a sharp scraping as Redfern jerked it loose.

Swinging to and fro violently, the basket swung on upwards.

Taffy snapped his teeth.

"Rotten bad luck!"

"Look!"

"What?"

"Herr Rheinberger's window! He's seen it!"

The fat face of the German master had appeared at the window. He was looking out through the glass, and he caught a glimpse of the bottom of the basket as it floated upward past the top panes.

For a second the German was transfixed. Then he threw up the sash of his window and put his head out, to discover what was the strange object that had floated past his window.

As he heard the sash go, Skelton threw up his hand in a frantic signal to Redfern, and dodged behind the tree.

Redfern was watching Skelton, waiting for a signal, and he obeyed it. The arrangement was to let the basket go if Skelton raised his arm.

Redfern let it go instantly, and drew back from the window.

Crash!

There was a terrific yell from below.

Herr Rheinberger had put out his head just as Redfern let the basket drop, and the basket of tuck dropped fairly upon the head of the German master.

"Ach! Ow! Yow! Ach!"

"My only hat!" gasped Taffy. "Reddy's done it now!"

CHAPTER 19.
"Scot free!"

"ACH!"
"M-m-my hat! Reddy's done it!"

"Ach, Himmel!"

Redfern minor stared down over the sill of his window in blank dismay.

The basket of provisions, after bumping upon Herr Rheinberger's head, slid

off, and whizzed to the ground, where it landed with a crash.

The lid burst open and the basket rolled over, and the contents—most of them damaged—gushed out on all sides.

There were cakes and pies and jellies, bananas and apples and oranges, bottles of ginger-beer and bottles of lemonade. Most of the bottles were broken, and the refreshing beverages were streaming over the pies and the cakes and the tarts.

If Redfern minor had been going to stand a siege for a week in the punishment-room, his friends could hardly have brought him a more plentiful supply. But not a morsel of that supply was destined to reach Redfern.

Herr Rheinberger was dazed, naturally enough, for some moments. He could only blink and say "Ach!"

But at length he turned to gaze upward to discover what it was that had smitten him, and when it had come.

Redfern minor saw the German's head turning up, and he promptly popped back from the window. He had let the cord fall with the basket, and there was no evidence to connect him with the matter at all.

Herr Rheinberger gazed upwards, and an expression of profound amazement came over his plump, flaxen-whiskered face.

If the basket had been a bolt from the blue, it could not have astonished the good herr more.

"Ach!" he murmured, rubbing the back of his head. "It is no dream, because I haff te pig pump on mein head after. Ach! But vat is it? Vere is it tat it come from pefore? I am amaze! I am astound!"

Then Herr Rheinberger gazed downwards at the upset basket, the scattered provisions, and the broken bottles.

"Ach! I tink I see!"

Skelton and Taffy were making themselves as small as possible behind the big tree. Taffy peeped cautiously round the trunk.

"Is he still looking?" murmured Skelton.

"Yes, rather!"

"Blow!"

And the juniors lay low. Footsteps were coming round the corner of the house; the crashing of the falling basket had been heard.

"Better cut," whispered Skelton.

"He'll see us from the window."

"He's short-sighted; and that's a senior coming—I can tell by the fairy footsteps," said Skelton hurriedly.

"All right, cut!"

Herr Rheinberger drew in his head at that moment. He had resolved to descend and investigate upon the spot. Taffy peeped out, and saw that he was gone, and his face brightened up.

"Come on, kid!" he muttered.

And the two juniors darted off. They took the direction opposite to that from which the footsteps sounded. In about three seconds they were dashing round an angle of the building at top speed.

There was a sharp exclamation.

"Ow!" gasped Skelton. "What rotten luck!"

The flying juniors stopped just in time to avoid crashing into a Sixth-Former, who was coming towards the corner. It was Arthur Redfern. The crash had caught his attention, too.

"Stop!" said Redfern major curtly.

They halted, breathless.

"What have you been doing? What was that row about just now?"

"N-n-nothing, Redfern major."

Arthur smiled grimly.

"It was a great deal of noise for nothing," he remarked.

"Only a basket of grub upset."

"Oh! What were you doing with it?"

Skelton and Taffy exchanged helpless looks. The prefect's questions had to be answered.

"It was being pulled up to a window," said Skelton, at last.

"What window?"

Skelton drew a deep breath.

"The window of the punishment-room."

"Oh!"

"Herr Rheinberger put his head out of the window underneath, and Reddy let the basket bump on his napper," said Skelton confidentially. "It was some grub for your minor, Redfern. You don't mind, do you?"

Arthur frowned.

"If my minor is in the punishment-room it's no business of yours to send him food," he said gruffly.

"But he's hungry."

"That's the Head's business."

"Well, I—I suppose it is," said Skelton slowly. "But bread and scrape isn't much for a kid like Reddy. You should see the way he can wire in at meal-times. And—and he's your minor, Redfern. Don't make a row about it."

"You seem to forget that I am a prefect," said Arthur, still more gruffly. "I shall have to report you to your Form-master."

"Oh!" ejaculated Taffy, with a dismal vision of stopped half-holidays and endless lines in store. "Oh!"

Skelton looked a little dangerous. With any other prefect he would never have thought of arguing. But with Arthur Redfern! He remembered what was the cause of his chum's being shut up in the punishment-room at all. He recollected where Arthur had been on the previous night. And this was the prefect who had so strong a sense of duty when it was a question of punishing others.

Skelton's lip curled.

"You are going to report us, Redfern major?" he asked.

"Of course," said Arthur, looking at him.

The voice of Herr Rheinberger was heard round the angle of the wall.

"Ach! Tat is ein pasket, and tat is food—cakes and pies, ain't it, and biddings? Ach! That is certainly vat fall on mein head mit itself before. But who and vat and how, ain't it?"

"You might let us go, Redfern major," said Skelton.

"Nonsense! Why?"

"It was for your minor——"

"That is no business of yours."

"No, it's yours!" said Skelton, with spirit. "You know jolly well what he's in the punishment-room for, and whether he ought to be there; and who ought to be there in his place, if it comes to that."

Arthur turned white.

Skelton was sorry he had said so much the next moment. But he could not recall his words. The prefect looked at him without speaking for some moments. Taffy looked on in wonder.

"You can go!" said the prefect abruptly.

"I—I say, Redfern major——"

"That is enough; you can go."

And Arthur walked away.

"Better cut," whispered Taffy.

They ran. In a couple of minutes they were safe from the investigation of Herr Rheinberger. They stopped in the quad., and then Taffy, who was bursting with curiosity, caught Skelton by the sleeve.

"I say, Skelton, why did Redfern major let you off?"

"Why?" repeated Skelton vaguely.

"Yes. Why?"

"Ask me another. I give that one up."

Taffy grinned.

"Do you mean to say you don't know?"

"Oh, no, I know."

"And you don't mean to tell me——eh?"

"Exactly!" said Skelton cheerfully.

And that was all the information Taffy received on the subject.

CHAPTER 20.

Arthur Makes Up His Mind!

THE Fourth Form at St. Dorothy's had gone to bed that night in a state of unusual excitement. The sentence of expulsion hanging over the

head of a member of their Form was enough to excite them. And when the fellow was as popular as Redfern minor was, and when it was felt that he certainly hadn't done anything bad enough to merit the punishment, it was certain that the Fourth would be greatly perturbed. And so they were.

And when Arthur Redfern looked into the dormitory to see lights out he found that the Classical juniors had not even begun to undress, and there were a good many Moderns in the room talking matters over with them. The Moderns had a separate dorm, but they were in no hurry to go to bed that night.

Arthur Redfern was in a gloomy mood. He told the Modern juniors harshly to get out, and watched the Classics to bed with a face that Brown III compared with that of a gargoyle.

But Brown made that comparison in a whisper. No one felt inclined to cheek Redfern major while he had that expression on his face. Besides, the general view of the Fourth was that he was worried about his young brother, and they naturally extended him a great deal of sympathy.

The Classics tumbled into bed, and Arthur extinguished the light and left the room, without heeding or replying to the good-night of the juniors.

"Pig!" murmured Benson.

"Rats!" said Spratt. "He's bothered about young Reddy. I never thought Redfern major was so fond of his young brother."

"That's all you know!" grunted Skelton. "All his affection could be put into a winkle-shell, I think, without any overcrowding."

"He looks awfully cut up!"

"Br-r-r!"

And that was all Skelton had to say.

Redfern major put the lights out in the Modern dormitory, and the Moderns noticed his gloomy looks.

The day had been one long agony to Arthur Redfern. He knew what he

ought to do but he could not make up his mind to do it. Either his brother or he had to suffer; and he was the guilty party. But to own up in a frank and manly way, and face the trouble his folly had brought upon him, how could he do that? It meant expulsion from the school, utter ruin to his career, shame and humiliation without end. But to let Sidney suffer for him—

And he knew the boy well. Sidney Redfern would say no word!

All through the day Arthur had been miserable, gloomy, irritable. His work had been neglected, his leisure occupied with bitter thoughts.

Lunsford had said nothing to him of the previous night's escapade. The captain of St. Dolly's had intended to pick a bone with him on the subject; but now that this trouble had fallen upon Arthur, Lunsford decided to say nothing. Arthur had enough trouble now without being called to account for that.

Arthur had avoided Ransome. The cad of the Sixth had given his advice, and Arthur had taken it, hating himself all the time for doing so. He hated Ransome, too—he felt that he hated everything and everybody round him.

After leaving the Fourth Form dormitories Arthur slowly descended the stairs and went into his study. He threw himself into the armchair there and abandoned himself to gloomy reflections. The gas was unlighted, the room dark—as dark as his mood.

What was he to do?

What was Sidney thinking of him all the time? He remembered, with a pang, how harshly he had treated the boy ever since his coming to St. Dolly's. Why had he done so? Because Sidney's open frankness had been an unconscious reproach to his own crooked ways; because he did not care to meet the frank, questioning eyes of the junior.

And Sidney had repaid him like this! It was more than heaping coals of fire on his head. At this very moment the lad was in the punishment-room wait-

ing for his doom in the morning, his lips locked for his brother's sake!

Arthur Redfern groaned aloud.

"Hallo!"

It was Ransome. He had come into the study with his usual quiet tread.

Arthur Redfern looked up at him savagely. He could only dimly make out the form of the cad of the Sixth.

"What do you want?"

"Nothing," said Ransome coolly. "What are you sitting here in the dark for, mooning? You'll do yourself no good."

"I can do as I like, I suppose?"

"Don't be an ass! You've been going about all day looking about as jolly as a funeral. The fellows are putting it down to affection for your minor, and giving you lots of credit on the subject; but if you keep it up like this they'll soon begin to suspect that there's something more in it."

"I don't care!"

"What's the good of moping? The worst hasn't happened yet. I heard the Head speaking to Mr. Ford——"

Arthur sneered.

"Did you? By chance, of course?"

"Never mind that. Only I know the Head's very much in doubt about young Redfern; and he was saying something about seeing him, and trying to bring him to reason. He doesn't want to kick him out if he can help it."

"That's on my account," said Arthur, with a bitter laugh. "He wouldn't like to bring disgrace on me—— Me! Ha, ha, ha!"

"What I mean is there's a chance yet. You're an ass if you take any step till the worst comes to the worst. But it's no good moping here. Are you coming out?"

Arthur sat bolt upright in surprise.

"Coming out!"

"Yes. To Cunliffe's place. You need cheering up, you know. And we could run down there for an hour or so without risk."

"And you could go there—at such a time as this!" said Arthur slowly.

Ransome shrugged his shoulders.

"Why not?"

"Oh, don't talk to me! Leave me alone!"

"I must say you're polite."

"Get out!"

Ransome whistled softly, and left the study. Arthur Redfern rose to his feet. That he ought to go to the Head and clear his brother, he knew. But, as Ransome had suggested, it was no use meeting his fate half-way. Better wait till the worst was known, and then, as a last resource, to save his brother he could speak. If it were not the sack, but only a flogging, could not Redfern minor stand it?

Arthur felt that he must see his brother, and explain to him—have a word with him, at all events. He left the study slowly, and made his way towards Phipps' room. There were difficulties in the way. Phipps had strict orders that no one was to be admitted to the punishment-room, and it was a serious matter to infringe orders from the Head.

But Arthur felt it must be done. He could not leave Sidney to a sleepless night and the belief that he was to be expelled in the morning. If it came to that, Arthur would own up, and Sidney must know it.

Arthur tapped at Phipps' door. He intended to persuade the house-porter, and give him a liberal tip; but even so he had his doubts. But, as it happened, Phipps was not in his room. Arthur received no reply to his tap, and he opened the door and looked in. The light was burning, and the fire was bright. Phipps had evidently been just called away. Arthur's glance went eagerly to the nail beside the fireplace, upon which the hall-porter usually hung his bunch of keys. The bunch was there, and prominent on the bunch was the long, slim key which opened the door of the punishment-room.

Arthur's heart beat painfully, but he did not hesitate. He felt strangely like a thief as he detached the long key from the bunch and stepped quickly from the room. Phipps was not in sight. The prefect closed the door silently, and hurried away.

The first difficulty was over. He had the key, and after he had seen his brother he could return it to Phipps, who would say nothing about the matter, for his own sake. The prefect hurried along the dark and deserted Fourth-Form passage, and then to the door of the punishment-room.

From within he could hear a steady tramp of feet. Redfern minor was pacing the narrow limits of his prison restlessly. The sound went strangely to Arthur's heart.

He slipped the key quietly into the lock, and turned it. The tramp of footsteps within the room ceased.

Arthur opened the door, stepped quietly in, and closed it behind him. The moonlight from the window fell upon his pale face.

"Arthur!"

"It's I, Sid."

Redfern minor gazed at him. Any resentment which might have been springing up in his breast against his brother vanished as he saw the deep lines on Arthur's face. One day had been sufficient to make the handsome face of the prefect almost haggard.

"You here, Arthur!"

"I had to come and see you."

"It's all right," muttered Redfern. "I say, Arthur, old chap, you look ill. I suppose this is worrying you?"

"Can you ask?"

"Well, I suppose it would. But it's all right. I'm not going to say a word, even if I'm sacked. You don't think I'd betray you, Arthur?"

"I know you wouldn't, kid." Arthur's face worked strangely in the moonlight. "But—but you don't understand. I can't let you suffer."

"That's all right."

"I ought to have gone straight to the Head this morning," said Arthur, with a groan; "but I didn't. I don't know what you've thought of me all day. I had to see you, to tell you what I'm going to do. There would be a row if I were found here. I've borrowed the key from Phipps' bunch. I can only stay a few moments. Look here, Sid, you know what this would mean to me, if—"

"If you gave yourself away? Yes."

"The sack," said Arthur. "Utter ruin and shame, and— Oh, I can't endure to think of it. It's the same for you if you're sacked, Sid. But you mayn't be. You're only a junior, and—and I shall speak for you, too. Don't laugh. I know it's odd enough. If I speak for you, I may be able to ward off the worst. Then it'll be a flogging, Sid. It's not only the flogging—you could stand that—but the disgrace of it. Sid, old man, could you stick that—to save me?"

Redfern felt a lump in his throat.

"It's all right, Arthur," he said huskily. "I can stand it. What's a flogging if it's only that? But—I could stand the other, too."

"Never! I'm not such a coward as that," said Arthur bitterly. "It shan't come to that, Sid. If it comes to the worst, and one of us has to go, it shall be the guilty party—"

Arthur Redfern broke off suddenly.

There were footsteps in the passage; a glimmer of lamplight under the door. The jingle of a bunch of keys followed.

"Phipps!" muttered Redfern "And—and he's not alone."

"I—I can't find the key, sir." It was the house-porter's voice, clearly and audible through the door. "It's been taken off my bunch, sir!"

"Indeed!"

Arthur turned white. It was the Head's voice. He remembered what Ransome had said of the Doctor's intention to speak once more to Redfern minor. The Head could not have come at an unluckier moment.

"I'm very sorry, sir. I haven't the key now, and——"

"Have you lost it?"

"I'm sure not, sir. It's been taken off the bunch. I——"

"You have been very careless, Phipps."

"I'm very sorry, sir. I might be able to find another key."

There was a pause. The brothers, in the punishment-room, listened breathlessly. The door was, of course, unlocked, and it only needed the turning of the handle to open it. That had not occurred to Phipps. Would it occur to the Head?

"You think the key has been taken off your bunch by someone, Phipps?"

"Oh, yes, sir; I'm certain."

"Then it can only have been taken to open this door. Doubtless the door is unlocked."

Phipps turned the handle of the door. It came open at his touch. The lamp-light streamed into the room.

Arthur gave a gasp of dismay, and drew back to the further side of the room. The Head stood in the doorway, with the porter behind him holding the lamp. The light streamed in. Dr. Cranston's glance fell upon Redfern minor, and then passed him to his brother, and it fell upon Arthur, and rested there.

CHAPTER 21.

No Confession!

"REDFERN MAJOR!"

Dr. Cranston uttered the name in wonder as his glance fixed upon Arthur Redfern. A frown gathered upon his brow.

Arthur's face was pale.

It was the cruellest of ill-luck that the Head should have discovered him there, and for the moment it seemed to the prefect that all was up, that the Head must guess the truth, that the revelation he had striven to avert must come at last.

His eyes sank before Dr. Cranston's searching glance, and he could not find his voice to speak. Redfern minor looked on in silence. He had not lost his wits, but there was nothing he could say. If only his brother had not come!

"I am surprised to see you here, Redfern major."

Arthur did not speak.

"I gave orders that no one was to be admitted to the punishment-room. Someone has taken the key from Phipps' bunch. I presume it was you, as I find you here."

"Yes, sir."

Arthur's voice was very low.

"I can understand your concern for your brother," said the Head, his face relaxing a little. "But you are a prefect, Redfern, and you should know your duty better."

"I—I——"

Arthur's voice tailed away; he did not finish the sentence. What could he say? If the Head had known the terror that was in his heart at that moment, he would have pitied him; few could have seen the misery in the prefect's face without feeling for him.

"You need not explain," said the Head quietly. "I know why you are here. You had better go, Redfern major. I will speak to you again presently."

Arthur's white face went whiter.

"You—you know, sir!" he stammered

"I can guess, at all events."

"Oh!"

"You came, I suppose, to speak to your minor," said the Head, somewhat surprised by the despair in the face of the prefect. "I can understand how this disgrace of your younger brother affects you. If you had asked me for permission to try the effect of your persuasion upon this obstinate boy, I should not have refused it. But you should not have come here in this surreptitious manner.

Arthur smiled in a ghastly way.

The Head was on the wrong scent, after all. He had not guessed. After

all, how was he to guess? The prefect's terror had been founded upon his anxious mind and his shaken nerves. It was not possible for the Head to guess the facts without a clue.

Arthur breathed more freely. The Head was watching him, and he was surprised by the changing expressions of the Sixth-Former's face. He had no clue to what was passing in Arthur's mind.

"I am sorry, sir," said Arthur, more collectedly. "I know I ought not to have come without your permission; but—but—"

"I understand. You may go now. I will see you again. In fact I wished to speak to you about this matter, even if I had not found you here. Wait for me in my study."

"Yes, sir."

Arthur gave his brother a single glance as he left the room—a glance of dumb appeal. But it was not needed. This was not the first ordeal Redfern minor had been through, and he was not likely to fail in courage at the eleventh hour.

Arthur Redfern went down the passage, and the Head motioned to Phipps to place the lamp upon the table and retire. There was no gas in the punishment-room. The door closed upon the house-porter, and the Head was alone with the culprit.

The doctor did not speak at once. There was a painful silence in the room—a long pause that made Redfern's heart beat more quickly.

The light from the lamp fell upon the junior's face, and showed it troubled, but calm, steady, and resolute as ever. It was not the face of a lad who would be likely to commit petty and stealthy faults; the Head could not help thinking so as he looked at him.

"Redfern," said the Head at last—and his voice sounded strangely deep in the stillness of the room—"Redfern, you have had a day to think over your position. Have you come to any change of mind?"

"No, sir."

"You still refuse to explain your visit to the public-house in Wyndale?"

Redfern was silent.

"You still maintain that you went there with an innocent motive, and not for the purpose of associating with the men of low character who assemble there?"

"Yes, sir," said Redfern promptly. The Head sighed.

"I would gladly believe you, Redfern. But you must see yourself how absurd this story is upon the face of it. If you have an explanation to give, why do you not give it?"

"I—I cannot tell you, sir."

"Is this the respect that is due to your headmaster?" said the doctor, with great patience.

"I am sorry, sir," said Redfern earnestly. "I hope you don't think I could be disrespectful to you, sir. I'd cut off my hand first. But—but I can't tell you what you ask, sir! I—I can't!"

"Why not?"

Redfern did not speak.

"There is something in this more than appears on the surface," said the Head. "If you are telling me untruths, Redfern, you have a great deal to answer for; for if you can look like that and lie, I can never trust a boy again. Redfern, I came here to make a last appeal to you to satisfy me if you could. If you have anything to say—anything that would make your story appear less incredible—I ask you to say it. I ask you to speak to me as a friend, instead of as a headmaster."

"Oh, sir!"

"Well, Redfern?"

"I have nothing to say, sir."

The doctor's face hardened.

"Very well; I have spoken to you for the last time, Redfern. I shall not see you again till the school is assembled to-morrow morning, when you will be expelled in public!"

Redfern's face went whiter, but it did

FOR HIS BROTHER'S SAKE!

not falter. He was prepared to go through with the ordeal to the finish.

"Very well, sir. I can only say that if you knew all about it you wouldn't think so badly of me."

"I wish I could believe so, Redfern."

The Head left the room, and Phipps came in.

"I'm to see you to bed, Master Redfern, and take the light away."

"Right you are, Phippy!"

And five minutes later Redfern minor was in bed, the room in darkness, and the door once more locked upon him.

CHAPTER 22.

Arthur's Last Card!

DR. CRANSTON entered his study, and gave a slight start as he saw Redfern major standing by the desk. He had forgotten for the moment that he had directed the Sixth-Former to wait for him in his study.

"You told me to wait here for you, sir."

Arthur was still pale, but he was quite collected now.

"Very good! I want to speak to you about your brother, Redfern," said Dr. Cranston, seating himself, and turning his glance upon the prefect. "About your visit to the punishment-room I will say no more. I will take the anxiety you feel for your brother's fate as a sufficient excuse."

"Thank you, sir."

"I have spoken to Redfern minor," went on the Head. "I can get nothing from him. He refuses to explain his visit to the public-house in Wyndale. I am very sorry to have to say so, Redfern, but it leaves me no resource but to deal with him severely. But it has occurred to me that you might be able to give me some clue to his strange conduct."

Arthur started.

"I, sir?"

"Yes. As his elder brother, you have

naturally kept an eye on him to some extent since he has been at St. Dorothy's." Arthur winced, but the Head did not notice it. "As a prefect, too, you should know something of the habits of the juniors. Have you seen or heard anything of any disreputable associations your minor may have had?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"You were absent from the school at a time when it was your duty to see lights out in the Fourth-Form dormitory," said Dr. Cranston. "It occurred to me that it might have been on your minor's account."

Arthur was silent.

"Come, Redfern. If you can tell me anything, you surely know that it is your duty to do so," said the Head kindly. "For your sake, if for no other reason, I should be glad to deal as gently as possible with Redfern minor."

Arthur licked his dry lips. If he could only have had some of Ransome's nerve and cynical coolness his part would have been easier to play.

"I—I don't know what to say, sir. You know, this is a terrible blow to me. I know how my mother will feel if Sidney is sent home. I—I feel that I haven't looked after him as I ought since he has been at the school."

"I am sure you have done everything in your power, Redfern. You must not take your brother's faults too much to heart."

Again the prefect winced.

"I—I don't, sir. But—but if you'll allow me to suggest——"

"Go on."

"I—I know Sidney is innocent of any wrongdoing, sir——"

"You mean, you believe it?"

"Well, yes, sir. But—but I know him, sir. He's always been straight as a die," said Arthur. "Whoever has been doing wrong, it wasn't Sidney. I—I can't explain everything, of course; but—but I've a pretty good idea how the case stands. It isn't obstinacy that keeps my brother from speaking——"

"What is it, then?"

"He is shielding somebody else, I think, sir."

It was a bold stroke. If the Head had guessed whom Redfern minor was shielding— But how could he, when the very suggestion came from Arthur?

Dr. Cranston looked grave.

"You mean that Redfern minor—"

"I think he's sticking up for somebody else, sir. Suppose—suppose another fellow—a fellow in his Form, sir—some Fourth-Former—had gone to that place. Sidney is just the sort of chap who'd cut off like a shot to fetch him back, sir, and save him from getting into trouble." The prefect's voice grew steadier, and as he proceeded he marked the effect of his words upon the Head. "He'd cut off, without stopping to think of the consequences, to help a—a chum, sir. Now, he couldn't speak about it without giving the other fellow away. That's how I work it out, sir."

"Heaven forbid that I should expel a boy for acting from a mistaken sense of honour!" said the Head. "But—but are you sure of this, Redfern?"

"As sure as I can be of anything, sir."

"Has Redfern minor said anything to lead you to think so?"

"Well, yes, sir."

The doctor pursed his lips.

This was quite a new light to him, and, indeed, it cleared up many points that had been wrapped in mystery.

"But—"

"You know, I place great reliance upon your judgment, Redfern," said the Head, after a long pause. "You are the prefect I trust most, as you know. But are you sure that your natural anxiety for your brother has not led you to take too favourable a view of his conduct?"

"I am quite sure of that, sir. I am certain of what I say—as certain as I could be if I had been with Sidney that night."

Another long pause.

"Have you any idea what person he may be shielding?"

Arthur writhed. He shrank from the lie direct. To his weak nature it seemed much less culpable to act a falsehood than to tell one.

"I—I think I could guess, sir; but I should not care to mention names. As a prefect, I—I could look into the matter later, sir."

"You have disturbed me very much, Redfern, by telling me this. I am sure you would not speak without grounds. Leave me now; I will reflect upon the matter. I wish to be just."

Arthur Redfern left the study.

He breathed deeply when he stood outside in the corridor.

Had he succeeded? Was that danger to be escaped, after all?

The perspiration stood in thick drops on the prefect's brow.

"I—I say, Redfern major—"

It was Skelton of the Fourth. He was in pyjamas, with his trousers on, and a jacket buttoned round his neck, and a pair of slippers on his feet.

The prefect glared at him severely.

"What are you doing out of bed, Skelton?"

"I couldn't sleep," said the captain of the Fourth dismally. "I—I've been thinking about Reddy. I—I was sure you'd do something for him, Redfern major. I tried to get to his room, but Phipps is looking out. I say, is there a chance for him?"

"I think so."

Skelton's face brightened up wonderfully.

"He won't be sacked?"

"I hope not."

"Hurray!"

"Don't make a row here, you young ass! Take twenty lines for being out of your dorm after lights out," said Arthur. "Oh, never mind! Don't do the lines; but get back to bed sharp."

"But there's a real chance for Reddy?"

"Yes. Cut off!"

"Good egg!"

And Skelton cut off. But he did not go back to the Fourth Form dormitory. He scouted round Phipps' room, and saw that the house-porter was there; and then he scuttled off to the punishment-room as silently as a ghost.

He tapped lightly on the door. All was dark within, but he was pretty certain that his chum was not asleep.

"Reddy!" he whispered through the keyhole.

Redfern minor sat up in bed.

"Hallo! Is that you Skelton?"

"Yes, I've seen your major. He's been with the Head; and he says there's a chance for you. He thinks you won't be sacked!"

Redfern minor sprang out of bed. In a second he was at the keyhole, trembling with anxiety and excitement.

"Skelton!"

"I'm here!"

"Has Arthur owned up? Is he——"

"I don't think so. He didn't look like it. He's worked it somehow without giving himself away," said Skelton. "He's jolly deep, you know; and I dare say Ransome put him up to some dodge. Ransome is full of dodges."

Redfern felt a weight lifted from his mind.

"Good-night!" whispered Skelton.

"Good-night, old chap!"

Skelton scuttled away, and Redfern minor went back to bed in a greatly relieved frame of mind.

CHAPTER 23.

To Go or Not to Go!

REDFERN MINOR was out of bed in the punishment-room at the first gleam of daylight.

He had slept but little that night.

Skelton's whispered words of encouragement had done more than anything else to keep him awake, as a matter of fact.

But he did not feel heavy from want of sleep. He was in too excited a state for that.

Upon the happenings of that morning his whole future depended.

Was he to be sacked or had Arthur's intercession saved him? Was he to remain, after all, at St. Dolly's?

Long before the rest of St. Dolly's was awake Redfern was up and dressed, and filling in the time by striding about the narrow limits of the punishment-room.

It seemed an age to him before he heard the sounds of the awakening household below.

The key clicked in the door at last, and Phipps looked into the room.

There was a sombre expression upon the house-porter's face. Redfern's face fell a little as he observed it. If there was hope for him, the porter evidently did not know it.

"Good-morning, Phippy!"

"Mornin', Master Redfern!"

"Where's my brekker?"

"I ain't come for that, Master Redfern. You're to foller me to the 'Ead's study!" said Phipps sorrowfully.

"Oh!"

"Which I'm sorry it's 'appened, Master Redfern," said the house-porter, as he led the way. "If it was to be only a flogging I'd hoist you with pleasure."

"Thank you!" said the junior, with a faint smile.

Phipps tapped at the Head's door, and marched the Fourth-Former in. The Head was standing by the window, and he turned a severe face upon the boy.

"You may go, Phipps."

The house-porter retired, with a last look of commiseration at Redfern minor, which did not give the junior much encouragement.

Redfern waited.

Dr. Cranston did not seem to be in a hurry to speak. Perhaps he did not realise what torture the suspense was to the anxious lad.

Redfern's eyes had time to note the anxious and thoughtful wrinkles on the

Doctor's face, and to observe, too, the cane lying on his writing-table. What was the cane placed there ready for? If he were going to be expelled, the Head could not be going to cane him, too. It was not likely. The sight of the cane generally had a perturbing effect upon youthful delinquents shown into the Head's study. Under the circumstances, it had an opposite effect upon Redfern.

His heart beat quickly, more hopefully.

"Redfern," said the Head at last, "I have something to say to you which you will probably be glad to hear. Your brother has given me what explanation he could of your conduct, and he regards it in a more favourable light than I did myself. I have tried to come to his way of thinking. I am so anxious not to commit an act of possible injustice that I shall run the risk of pardoning one who has done flagrant wrong. You will not be expelled!"

Redfern's heart beat so hard that he felt almost suffocated. He could not speak.

"Redfern major is the prefect whom I trust the most in the school, with perhaps one exception," said the Head. "His opinion would naturally carry great weight with me. As he is your brother, he should know you. His opinion is that you are acting in this peculiar manner for the purpose of shielding someone else who is at fault—that not you but another is really guilty!"

Redfern started.

In giving that explanation to the Head, Arthur had been sailing very near to the wind—very near to the wind indeed.

Dr. Cranston read the boy's expression.

"Is this true, Redfern?"

Silence.

"Very well. I repeat that I shrink from the possibility of committing a great injustice," said the Head. "I shall not, therefore, expel you. But your

refusal to answer questions put to you by your Form-master and your head-master must be severely punished. I am going to cane you!"

"Yes, sir."

Redfern spoke quite cheerfully. He knew how Dr. Cranston could "lay it on," but the severest caning was nothing to an expulsion. He felt that he could go through that caning with a smile on his lips.

"Have you anything to say, Redfern?"

"Only that I thank you, sir, and that I am sorry I should seem to be disrespectful to you."

"Very good! Bend over!"

Dr. Cranston took up the cane. Redfern bent over, and the cane descended upon him a dozen times. Dr. Cranston had a scientific way of laying the cane on, and the first blow made Redfern shiver. Before the last had been delivered the junior's face was white and strained, and pain seemed to be tingling through every nerve in his body.

But he held his lips tightly shut; he held back the tears that would fain have forced themselves into his eyes.

Redfern was "game" all through.

Dr. Cranston laid down the cane.

"You may go, Redfern."

"Thank you, sir!"

The boy left the study unsteadily, and closed the door behind him. The pain was terrible; he had never felt anything like it before, except once, when he had had an accidental kick on the shin at football.

The Head had said that the punishment was to be severe, and it had been severe. But Redfern was to stay at St. Dolly's!

There was a patter of feet in the passage, and Skelton and Brown ran up.

"Reddy, I've just seen Phipps. You've been to the Head?"

Redfern nodded.

"What's the verdict?"

"Hold on," said Redfern in a low

voice. "Don't speak to me for a minute."

Redfern bit his lips. The pain was passing, and Redfern was tough, too.

"It's all right, kids. A licking's only a licking. Let's get in to brekker."

And Redfern minor went in to breakfast between his two chums, each of them holding an arm, and all three of them grinning serenely.

CHAPTER 24.

An Amazing Proposition!

"FAG!" Ransome stood at the door of his study and called.

Redfern minor drew a deep breath, and answered the call. There was a very agreeable expression on the senior's face as he beckoned his fag to enter.

They entered Ransome's study, and the senior closed the door. Then the agreeable expression faded from his face. Redfern, vaguely alarmed, stepped back from him and closed his fists.

The senior laughed savagely.

"Don't be afraid, you young ass!"

"I'm not afraid," said Redfern sturdily. "I don't know what your game is, but I don't trust you. I'm not going to fag for you any more!"

"I don't want you to fag for me."

"Then why—"

"Do you think your services are any more valuable than those of any other cheeky little rat in the Fourth Form?" sneered Ransome. "You are mistaken if you do. I want you for something else."

"What, then?"

"You ran a great risk for your brother yesterday?"

"That's all over."

"You think you saved him?"

"I suppose he was saved from being sacked," said Redfern wonderingly. "I don't want to talk about it. What are you driving at?"

"Only this—that Redfern major is on the verge of ruin," said Ransome. in

cold, metallic tones. "If you choose to save him, I can help you; if you don't, it's no business of mine. You can take your choice."

Redfern looked at him fixedly.

"Arthur—my brother—on the verge of ruin?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"He lost twenty pounds the other night at the Green Man!"

Redfern almost staggered.

"Twenty pounds!"

"Yes, and gave his signature for it."

"Oh!"

"If the money isn't paid in three days Cunliffe will come up to the school for it," said Ransome coldly. "It's no business of mine. I don't owe him a penny. Redfern owes him twenty pounds. He has about ten shillings, I believe, in his pockets. You can save him."

"I? I haven't any money!"

Ransome leaned towards him.

"I can tell you how to get it."

"Twenty pounds?"

"Yes."

"You're raving! How could I possibly get such a sum?"

"Easily."

Redfern drew a deep breath.

"Honestly?"

"Of course!"

"Go ahead!" said Redfern minor.

Redfern minor drew a deep breath, and waited for Ransome to speak. Ransome seemed in no hurry to do so. He went to the door, opened it slightly, and glanced into the passage, and closed it again. He evidently wanted to make certain that there were no eavesdroppers; and Redfern minor felt a strange thrill of expectancy.

Ransome came back towards him. The light, careless look was quite gone from the senior's face. His lips were tight; his eyes had a restless glitter in them.

"You are game?" he said slowly, and in a low voice.

Redfern met his eyes fearlessly.

"I am game if it's a question of helping Arthur," he said steadily. "I don't know what you're driving at."

"I can tell you how to put twenty pounds in your pocket," went on Ransome. "I believe you can do it, but it depends upon your pluck and nerve. I can simply show you the way."

"If it's honest, I'm game."

"Oh, it's honest enough. Do you think I'm proposing that you should commit a burglary?" exclaimed Ransome irritably.

"I shouldn't be surprised."

"You young cub! I— But never mind! Look here; listen to me, and don't jaw. You remember I saw your fight with young Morgan of the Fourth?"

"Taffy? Yes."

"You knocked him out easily, though he was bigger and older than you, and he was always looked upon as the best fighting-man in the Form."

"He put up a jolly good fight," said Redfern.

"After that, I took you in hand, and gave you some boxing-lessons. You've learned about as much as I can teach you now."

"Thanks!"

"And now— Mind, whether you take this thing on or not, this is to be kept dark. You understand that?"

"You can trust me."

"Good! To come to the point, are you game to meet a fellow in the ring, with twenty pounds to win for yourself if you lick him?"

Redfern almost staggered.

For some moments the full meaning of the proposition hardly came home to him, and he could only stare blankly at the Sixth-Former. Ransome was watching him with a peculiar, rat-like glance.

"In the ring?" said Redfern at last.

"Yes."

"You—you don't mean a prize-fight?"

"In a way, yes."

"A fight for money?" said Redfern,

recovering himself a little. "You—you rotten blackguard!"

Ransome's hands clenched convulsively.

"You refuse, then?"

"Yes! A thousand times, yes! What do you take me for? Why, we should both be expelled from St. Dolly's, for one thing, if Dr. Cranston got a hint of it—and we should jolly well deserve it, too!" exclaimed Redfern hotly.

"Dr. Cranston would not hear of it, you young fool. It would be a dead secret."

"Well, I won't have any hand in it. I'm jolly certain that Arthur doesn't know you have proposed such a thing to me."

Ransome's lip curled.

"Arthur would take the tin quick enough. I can assure you of that, kid. Don't worry on that point. But the question is, are you game?"

"Not for that sort of thing."

"You refuse?"

"Yes."

"Very good! It's no business of mine, as I said. If you prefer to see your major kicked out of St. Dolly's well and good."

Redfern started. In his indignation he had forgotten that for the moment,

He must save his brother at any cost.

CHAPTER 25.

The Old Story!

"I HAVE told you that Arthur owes Cunliffe twenty pounds," said Ransome coolly. "If you fight, and win, I can guarantee you the money. I think you would win. I want you to meet a kid about a year older than yourself—a tough young specimen, who has knocked out fellows over twenty—but I think you could handle it? There's a purse put up for the winner. It will be a good fight—gloves on, and little harm done. You're not afraid of a few hard knocks, I suppose?"

"It's not that."

"It will be a dead secret. You leave St. Dolly's with me, with a pass from a prefect. We get back early, nobody the wiser. You're letting a big chance slip."

"Does Arthur know?"

"What does that matter?"

"Answer my question, anyway."

"Well, no," said Ransome; "he doesn't know. He knows I've undertaken—ahem!—that I've thought of putting up somebody to meet the Chicken, but that's all he knows. He hopes to raise some tin on the affair."

"If you told him—"

"I'm not going to tell him. He would be responsible, as a prefect, if he knew. What's the good of adding to his worries? He's got enough at present."

Redfern nodded. He did not believe that Ransome was as considerate as his words implied; the cad of the Sixth had some other motive for keeping the facts away from Redfern major.

"But—but it was only last week that Arthur lost money to Cunliffe and his set," the junior broke out. "You've been taking me up for boxing for weeks. You had this idea in your mind all along."

"Why not?"

The boy did not answer. Ransome was a shady rascal, and there was no doubt that he had something to gain should the boy beat the Chicken.

But twenty pounds was a big sum—the sum that would save Arthur from disgrace!

"Well?" said Ransome impatiently. "Have you made up your mind?"

"Yes. I'll do as you wish—for twenty pounds."

"Twenty pounds if you win—nothing but a licking if you lose," said Ransome, with a grin. "You understand that, of course."

"Of course."

"Good! It's settled, then."

"But do you really think I can face a chap who fights for a living?" said

Redfern, in wonder. "I can't believe it myself."

"I shouldn't risk money on you if I didn't think so."

"I suppose not. When is the fight to take place?"

"This evening."

Redfern started.

"Then you had it all cut and dried ready!" he said bitterly. "I shouldn't wonder if you made Arthur lose that money on purpose."

Ransome shrugged his shoulders.

"You'll be ready to leave the school at seven," he said. "We shall easily be back by your bed-time. You needn't take anything with you. Everything that's required will be on the spot. We'd better not go out together—it might be noticed. I'll meet you on the footpath at the stile at ten-past seven."

"Very good. Where will it take place?"

"At Wyndale."

Redfern minor nodded and left the study. His face was harassed in expression as he went along to his own quarters. He was in for it now, that was certain; yet how could he regret it, when it was the only means of saving Arthur?

CHAPTER 26.

Out of Bounds!

REDFERN MINOR met Ransome in the lane that evening.

They crossed the stile, and plunged into the darkness of the footpath through the wood. Redfern did not know where they were going, but he asked no questions. He was in Ransome's hands now. He knew that the destination was somewhere near Wyndale—perhaps at the Green Man itself. The thought made him shiver. But it was too late for him to think of drawing back from even that now.

Through the wood they came out on to the Wyndale Road. There a trap was waiting, with a man sitting in it holding the reins, and even in the

gloom Redfern recognised him as one of the gambling fraternity he had seen at Mr. Cunliffe's public-house.

The man looked down at them.

"It's all right?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Good! Jump in."

Ransome and the junior entered the trap. The man drove off and, skirting the Wyndale Road, entered a narrow lane that ran at the back of the long garden of the Green Man. At the end of the garden was a little wooden building, screened by thick trees and shrubbery from the inn. Redfern had never seen it before, but it was familiar ground to his companion. In that secluded building, safe from prying eyes, more than one exhibition of the so-called "manly art" had taken place, and rivals bruised and hammered one another for the satisfaction of Mr. Cunliffe and his friends, and the profit of the bookmakers.

The trap stopped in the lane, and Ransome and Redfern alighted. The trap drove away again, and Ransome opened the gate. Then he tapped at the door of the shed.

From chinks in the wooden walls came gleams of light. There was a murmur of voices within.

Redfern caught suddenly at his companion's arm.

"Ransome, have—I've got to face a crowd of them, then?"

The senior looked down at him with a contemptuous smile.

"Did you think you were going to fight in a corner, Redfern? Of course you will meet the Chicken in the ring, with a crowd looking on."

Redfern set his teeth, and said no more. It was only what he should have expected, but it came as a shock to him. The door of the shed opened from within; but, to the boy's relief, the expected glare of light, and the sea of faces, did not burst upon him. The door opened into a part of the building curtained off from the rest by rough canvas, and apparently used as a kind of dressing-room.

It was lighted by a swinging oil-lamp. There were three or four individuals in the room, and the first who met Redfern's eyes was Mr. Cunliffe. The landlord of the Green Man came quickly forward.

"It's you, then!" he said in a tone of relief.

Ransome shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Yes, of course. Didn't you expect me?"

"Yes, after your note; but——"

"Well, here I am!"

"There's many a slip, you know," said Mr. Cunliffe. "But, as you say, here you are. There's a bottle on the table; help yourself. The kid looks all right. Not nervous, youngster—eh?"

"No," said Redfern quietly.

"Over young to meet the Chicken," said one of the others, looking at Redfern very dubiously. "I didn't think of seeing a kid like that!"

"Don't discourage him before the start, Spooner."

"I don't want to discourage him," said Mr. Spooner. "But I think what I think. The Chicken would make two of him!"

"He will make hay of the Chicken," said Ransome irritably. "Do you think I don't know a chap's form? I've seen this kid knock out a chap bigger than himself, and a chap who could use his fists, too, and was as plucky as need be. I've taken him in hand myself, and there's few tricks he doesn't know. I say that he'll make hay of the Chicken!"

"I hope he will," said Mr. Spooner; but his tone indicated that he regarded the hope as very ill-founded.

CHAPTER 27.

Redfern Meets the Chicken!

"YOU can rely on me, if not on Ransome, Spooner," said Mr. Cunliffe. "Didn't I 'ave an eye on the kid the first time I saw him?"

Look at him—pinch him! You'll see that he's alive all over."

Redfern endured it patiently as the men gathered round him and accepted Mr. Cunliffe's invitation to look at him and pinch him. Ransome made him take his jacket and waistcoat off, and he was looked at, punched, and pinched till they were satisfied.

"Look at them muscles," said Mr. Cunliffe. "Pinch 'em. They're the real stuff. He don't mind it, either; he's got grit. It ain't the muscle only, though; he's hard—he's fit! Blessed if the kid ain't trained as hard as I've seen some reg'lar pugs!"

"Well, you ain't far wrong there," admitted Mr. Spooner. "The kid keeps himself fit. How do you do it, youngster?"

"Cricket," said Redfern—"football."

The laconic reply caused a laugh. Rough and unpleasant as they were in many respects, the men in the dressing-room seemed very good-natured, once they had their confidence in Mr. Cunliffe's champion restored. Ransome viewed the whole scene irritably.

The voices on the other side of the canvas hangings seemed to grow louder, and there was a sound of stamping on the floor.

Mr. Cunliffe chuckled.

"They're getting impatient."

"Many there?" asked Ransome.

"Four dozen at least—three bookies."

"Good!"

Ransome passed into the other part of the shed. The canvas dropped behind him, but not before Redfern had caught a glimpse of a brilliantly lighted and crowded room, with a ring roped off for the fight.

Mr. Cunliffe and the others gathered and conversed in low, eager tones. Redfern seemed forgotten for the moment. But Redfern had not come there for nothing, and he approached Mr. Cunliffe and tapped his arm. The landlord of the Green Man looked down at him.

"What do you want, youngster?"

"Ransome says I am to have twenty pounds if I win."

"Oh, he did, did he?"

"Yes. I suppose it's all right?"

Mr. Cunliffe gave a laugh, in which the others joined.

"The kid can look out for himself, for all he looks so innocent," remarked Mr. Spooner. "What do you want twenty quid for, youngster?"

"That's my affair," said Redfern coolly. "I want it, and if I win I'm going to have it."

"It's all right, kid," said Mr. Cunliffe good-naturedly. "There's a purse of twenty thick 'uns for the winner, and if you beat the Chicken it's yours. Look 'ere, if you feel safe about the event, I'll lay a quid or two on for you, if you like, with the bookies. I can get long odds, and you might net a tenner besides."

Redfern shook his head.

"No, thanks, sir."

"You don't feel sure?"

"I don't know yet. I haven't seen the other fellow. But it's not that. I don't want to bet."

"You're willing to prize-fight and not to bet?" said Mr. Cunliffe, with a sneer; and Redfern turned crimson. "Well, have it your own way, it's nothing to me."

"Here's the Chicken," said Mr. Spooner.

A young fellow about three years older than Redfern entered. The junior of St. Dolly's looked at him with quick curiosity.

This was the antagonist he was to meet in the ring.

The Chicken was not much taller than Redfern, in spite of his years, but he was much more broadly built, and his arms looked like legs of mutton. His face was hard and harsh, and bore the marks of previous encounters. There was a cut on his lip that twisted it, and gave his mouth a peculiar expression of being perpetually on the grin. His eyes were small and sunken, but very keen

and quick. He was heavier, and evidently stronger, than Redfern, though hardly taller; and at a superficial glance few would have hesitated to pronounce that the Chicken would prove an easy victor in the coming fight.

He nodded to Mr. Cunliffe, who hastened to introduce him to Redfern. The Chicken grinned good-naturedly at the junior from St. Dolly's.

He was evidently amused at the idea of the schoolboy standing up to him in the ring.

And Redfern, now that he had seen his opponent, understood what a terrible task he had taken upon himself. Defeat was at least as likely as victory, and it was quite on the cards that he had undertaken the whole disgraceful business for nothing—that he would be beaten, and return to St. Dolly's without the power to help Arthur out of his scrape. But at the thought of that his lips set and his eyes flashed. He would be killed before he would give in! He would save Arthur!

Ransome came back from the other room, his face flushed and his eyes sparkling. He had evidently the highest hopes. Mr. Cunliffe looked at his watch.

"Look to the kid, Ransome, and bring him in."

"All right."

Ransome helped Redfern to change. No close chum could have been more careful of him than Ransome was; but the boy was not grateful. Ransome was thinking of himself only; he would net a small fortune if Redfern won—and if he lost— But the cad of the Sixth hardly dared to think of that. With all his cunning and caution, Ransome had plunged deep this time—very deep.

"Feel fit, kid?"

"Fit as a fiddle!"

"You're not nervous?"

"No."

"That's all right, then," said Ransome. "Remember what depends upon the show you make."

"I'm not likely to forget."

"Come on, then."

And they passed the canvas into the crowded room, amid the glare of lights and the buzz of voices.

CHAPTER 28.

In the Ring!

"HERE they are!"
The stamping and growling in the shed ceased, and every eye was turned eagerly upon the two champions.

There was a ripple of raucous laughter as Redfern minor was seen. A red-faced bookmaker waved a fat, red hand with rings on it.

"Anything you like agin the kid!"

And the crowd laughed again.

To their minds it was absurd to pit this lad against the Chicken, who had come through a score of fights with credit, if not always with success. The bookmakers were grinning, and Ransome had no difficulty in getting the odds he wanted. Mr. Cunliffe and his friends were doing very well—if Redfern won!

Redfern flushed red at the insulting laughter.

Nobody there, except his own immediate backers, believed that he had any chance against the Chicken.

But he knew very well that the opinion of a man like Cunliffe, and of a fellow like Ransome, weighed more than the views of this crowd, founded on a hasty survey.

The advantages of the Chicken were apparent to every eye—breadth of shoulder, length of reach, huge strength and endurance, and dogged obstinacy. Redfern's advantages were not so easy to see, but they were there, nevertheless.

Ransome was confident. The bets he was booking showed that. The chuckles of the crowd only brought a quiet smile to his face.

And that smile was very encouraging to Redfern minor.

The Chicken grinned and winked at the people round, as if to enter into the general joke. He took the whole thing humorously. The men there took it humorously, too; and some who would have been disappointed and angry at the sight of Redfern, recovered their good temper when they found that there were persons present ready to take the bets they laid against the schoolboy.

"It's a blooming joke!" said a thick-set, red-faced man. "It's a joke of Cunliffe's."

"Why didn't you bring a kid out of the nursery, Cunliffe?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You might as well set up a jack-rabbit agin the Chicken!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Put your brass on your opinion, then, Mr. Buckle," said Mr. Cunliffe, with a grin.

"You bet!" said Mr. Buckle promptly.

The whole scene, the whole talk, sickened Redfern. He felt as if he had got into a new world—a world of greed and brutality, of vulgarity and sordidness. Was it really he—Redfern minor, of the Fourth Form at St. Dolly's—who was standing here among this crew of gamblers, ruffians, and sharpers? It seemed like some evil dream!

Ransome glanced at him sharply.

"Pul yourself together," he said in a whisper. "What's the matter with you? What are you mooning about?"

Redfern flushed hotly.

"I'm all right!"

The referee, a stout man in a fancy waistcoat, who looked considerably more decent than any of Mr. Cunliffe's friends, glanced quizzically at Redfern minor; but at the second glance his expression changed a little. It occurred to him then that the lad had a chance.

Redfern had stripped for the fight in the dressing-room. It only remained to don the gloves and step into the ring.

Ransome was to be his second. The cad of St. Dolly's had made all preparations. He helped Redfern on with the gloves.

The timekeeper had taken out his watch.

"You're ready, kid?" whispered Ransome.

For one moment his confidence seemed to be shaken, and a tone of anxiety crept into his voice.

Redfern nodded.

"I'm ready."

"Mind, this isn't an easy matter. It's not like fighting Morgan or Skelton at St. Dolly's," whispered Ransome hurriedly. "You'll have all your work cut out to win."

"I know that."

"The Chicken is a hard hitter, and if you let him get in some of his heavy body-blows you are done for. Mind that; and mind you don't get too close, either. I've seen the Chicken fight before, you know. He has the strength of an ox, and he could smash you with one straight blow, if you let him."

Redfern grinned faintly.

"I shan't let him if I can help it."

"Good! Mind, take it easy in the first round. He will try to force the fighting, and you must be on the defensive. Take his measure before you let yourself go."

"Right-ho!"

Redfern cast any depressing feelings from him now. He could not afford to look back. He must think of nothing but the conflict, and victory. He had a terrible task to tackle, and it needed all his energies.

"Good!" said Redfern. "Go it!"

Redfern stepped into the ring. The timekeeper was looking at his watch. The Chicken stepped to meet his opponent with a grin on his face.

"Time!"

They shook hands, and then Redfern stepped quickly back, and was on the defensive in a flash.

The Chicken grinned, and advanced

upon him, and Redfern went back and back, till he had been driven almost round the ring. Ransome's face never moved, but from the crowd came laughter and jeers.

"Licked at the start!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Take him home to bed!"

"Give him some milk!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

And then the rude and ill-natured jests died into sudden silence. The Chicken had made a sudden rush, determined to bring things to a climax. The antagonists were at close quarters, and all of a sudden the fighting became fast and furious.

CHAPTER 29.

Blow for Blow!

REDFERN MINOR set his teeth hard. The whole scene was so new and strange to him that, in spite of his determination, it was not surprising that he was not quite himself at first. He had taken Ransome's advice in keeping on the defensive at the start, and it had served him well; but the Chicken was upon him now like a whirlwind.

Redfern was still upon the defensive. He could do no more, but it looked doubtful whether he would be able to save himself. The Chicken's blows came like lightning, drive after drive that looked capable of felling an ox, and yet were delivered with amazing rapidity.

All Redfern knew of guarding came into play then in resisting that tremendous attack. The Chicken felt humiliated that such an opponent should stand up to him at all, and he was determined to end it in a single round. But Redfern minor was made of sterner stuff than the Chicken and his admirers dreamed of in their philosophy.

His defence was splendid, considering; but the Chicken was putting his beef into it—as Mr. Buckle remarked—

with a vengeance. It seemed as if he would simply sweep Redfern out of existence.

"Ah!" murmured Mr. Cunliffe.

The Chicken had "got home" at last. His heavy fist came upon Redfern's cheek, and the junior staggered.

Crash came the Chicken's left on his chin as he did so, and Redfern went down like a log.

Crash!

The crash upon the boards rang through the place. There was a laugh from the onlookers.

"Haw, haw!"

"Put him to bed now, Cunliffe!"

Cunliffe muttered something under his breath. The timekeeper was counting, and Redfern struggled up. If ten were counted before he was on his feet he was licked; and the mere thought of the shame of being defeated in the first round seemed to imbue him with new life.

He struggled up; but the Chicken was ready, and he was swept down again with a blow that made his head ring. He crashed on the boards.

"Time!"

Ransome drew a long, long breath.

The call of time came most opportunely to Redfern. He could not have gained his feet and stood up under the slogging blows of the Chicken.

The Chicken grinned as he went back to his corner. Redfern was breathing hard. He joined Ransome, who made a knee for him, and sponged his face quietly.

Redfern had expected fault-finding, if nothing more, and he was surprised that Ransome did not say a word.

"Time!"

Redfern minor stepped back briskly into the ring.

There was a hum of surprise from the spectators. They had expected to see him come up staggering and weak, if he came up to the scratch at all. To their surprise, he looked as fresh as when he had faced the Chicken for the

first time, except for the marks of the blows upon his face.

"My 'at!" said Mr. Buckle. "There's something in the kid, arter all!"

"Oh, this round'll finish him!" said another.

Redfern heard the words, which were spoken quite in his hearing. A flash came into his eyes. If only to confound the prophets and disappoint the unfeeling onlookers who cared so little for his feelings, he was determined that the Chicken should never beat him.

The Chicken commenced the second round with the same tactics as before. He wanted to wipe Redfern off the ring, so to speak, and to show that he—the Chicken—was not the kind of pug to be tackled by a schoolboy.

But his attack, though as fast and furious as before, did not have the same effect.

Redfern was at home now; he was quite himself. He was as cool as an iceberg, and his eyes never wavered. His guard was perfect.

Ransome grinned with satisfaction, and glanced at Cunliffe; and the landlord of the Green Man glanced back with equal satisfaction.

Their champion was showing his quality now.

The Chicken, amazed and annoyed, redoubled his efforts. A little more wisdom would have shown him that he had underrated his opponent, and that his game was to draw Redfern, not to waste wind and strength in hammering attacks; but the Chicken, whatever he might be in other respects, was not, as Ransome had remarked, Redfern's equal in sense.

He allowed anger to urge him on, and instead of changing his tactics, he only hammered away more furiously than ever.

"My hat!" murmured Ransome to Mr. Spooner. "It's a bull at a gate business now. He can't touch our man!"

And Mr. Spooner nodded and chuckled. The Chicken slackened down at last in sheer exhaustion, as his rain of blows proved to have no effect upon the boy before him.

Redfern had given way hardly a foot of ground. There was no driving him round the ring this time; and the harder his foe came at him, the more keen he seemed to become, the more steady and cool.

The onlookers were silent now. They realised that they had misjudged Cunliffe's man, and some of them recalled still more keenly that they had been a little hasty in laying reckless bets upon the Chicken. Still, they were far from losing confidence. The schoolboy was putting up an unexpectedly tough fight, but he could never pull it off.

That was the general opinion. But as the Chicken slackened, Redfern was seen to change his game in a flash so quickly that the eye could scarcely follow him.

He had been on the defence all the time. Now, like lightning, he was attacking; and, wonder of wonders, the Chicken was giving ground before him!

Redfern's blows came in thick and fast, and the astonished Chicken guarded them very weakly.

Redfern's right landed on his chin, and his left on the Chicken's brawny chest; then the right again on the side of the jaw as the Chicken swung half-round.

The Chicken simply staggered. Ransome's eyes were blazing now. He shouted aloud in his excitement:

"Go it! Right on the mark, kid!"

But Redfern had no chance yet at the "mark."

He drove in another left-hander, and the Chicken swayed back right to the ropes, and feebly defended himself against a hot attack. The spectators were hushed. Was the Chicken going down—down before the attack of this youngster?

It was incredible, but it was happen-

ing. The Chicken seemed nowhere. Redfern's right was drawn back. In another second the Chicken would have been swept off his feet by a tremendous upper-cut he could not guard.

Knock, knock, knock!

It was a furious knocking at the door of the shed. Redfern started back, and the opportunity was lost. The Chicken dropped his hands in astonishment. The fight stopped of its own accord.

The pugilists and the crowd looked at one another in consternation. Mr. Cunliffe turned pale.

Knock, knock, knock!

CHAPTER 30.

Another Redfern Arrives!

KNOCK! Knock! Knock!
The knocking rang, with a hollow sound, through the silent room. The noisy crowd were silent now—silent and uneasy.

Mr. Cunliffe was startled. Ransome deadly pale. The Chicken, with a grin and a shrug of the shoulders, sat down on a chair at the corner of the ring, and crossed his legs. Redfern minor remained standing where he was, the gloves still on his hands, his face startled and pale.

If it should be someone from St. Dolly's!

That thought was in the minds of both the senior and the junior. Suspicion had been awakened lately at the school, they knew that. It was quite possible that a master, or perhaps Lunsford, had tracked them to the public-house.

To be discovered engaged in a prize-fight! The thought made Redfern's senses swim. That his motive was good, that he was doing this to save his brother, would count for little in the eyes of the doctor—or, rather, would count for nothing, since he would not explain and injure Arthur. For once in his life, Redfern's courage came near

failing him, and he stood mute, motionless in the ring.

Knock! Knock!

Ransome, with a desperate look, stepped quickly through the canvas screen, and hurried to a little window which overlooked the door.

The light in the dressing-room was extinguished now, and he could look out of the window without being seen from outside.

He pressed his face to the glass.

Knock! Knock!

In the dim starlight he caught sight of the figure standing outside the door, knocking upon it with imperious knuckles.

The cad of the Sixth gave almost a sob of relief.

It was Redfern major.

"Arthur!" muttered Ransome; and in a moment he was coolness itself again.

He looked back into the other room.

"It's all right!" he muttered.

"Who is it?" asked Mr. Cunliffe uneasily.

"A friend of ours."

And Ransome made a sign unseen by Redfern minor.

The landlord of the Green Man understood, and breathed more freely.

"All right, Master Ransome! Is he coming in?"

"Better not!"

Ransome drew back again, and went to the door of the outer apartment. He unlocked it, and opened it quickly, and stepped out, closing the door behind him.

Arthur Redfern stepped back, surprised by this sudden action.

But it was only for a moment. He came closer again, his fists clenched, and his eyes gleaming.

"So you're here!"

Ransome nodded coolly.

"Yes. Have you come to see me?"

Arthur made a gesture of rage.

"Where is my brother?"

"Eh? Your minor?" said Ransome, to gain time.

"Yes, Sidney. Is he here?"

"Have you come to look for him?"

"Yes!"

"And why?"

"To take him back if he is here."

"Hold on," said Ransome quietly.

"He's here, but——"

"Let me pass!"

"Wait till I have explained——"

Arthur breathed hard.

"Let me pass, Ransome. I don't want to hit you. But if you try to stop me I'll knock you down. You understand? I told you all along I wouldn't have my young brother mixed up in this. Heaven help me! He shan't grow to be a blackguard, as I am. Let me pass, you cad! I'm going to take him away!"

Ransome did not move.

"Unless you want to be expelled from St. Dolly's to-morrow, and your minor, too, you had better listen to me," he said icily.

"What do you mean?"

"Sidney is here; but you need not be afraid that he is following in your footsteps," said Ransome, with a sneer. "He did not come here to smoke or drink or gamble. He wouldn't, if I wanted him to. He's not that sort."

Arthur winced.

"Then why is he here?"

"To save you."

"What? How?"

"He's fighting the Chicken," said Ransome quietly. "He's fighting him for a purse of twenty pounds, and he intends to hand the cash to you to settle your debts."

"Impossible! I will not accept it! I——"

"Cunliffe will take your paper up to the Head if you don't settle up by Monday. What are you going to do?"

Arthur groaned.

In the haste and excitement of think-

ing about his minor, he had for the moment forgotten his own position.

"I don't know. But I won't sacrifice Sidney——"

"Sidney is all right!" said Ransome, with a sneer. "And your scruples are coming rather late in the day. You can leave Sidney alone."

"But—but you are mad! What chance has a boy like that against the Chicken? You must be out of your senses!" said Arthur hoarsely.

"He is getting the better of the fight after two rounds."

"But—but it can't go on! It shan't go on! Hang it! I'm a prefect of St. Dolly's and to allow this to go on——"

"I told you nothing about it, and you should have kept away. The best thing you can do is to go straight back to St. Dolly's and allow matters to take their course."

"I—I won't!"

It is well said that he who hesitates is lost. Arthur's resolution was already wavering.

After all, the twenty pounds would save him. And then to turn over a new leaf; to have done with all this wretched deceit and lying and prevarication. It was a prospect to tempt him. He forgot that on a previous occasion the same prospect had tempted him, and he had cleared himself by one more sin—that of betraying the Lexham match—and then afterwards had fallen back into the old ways. It is the way of a weak nature to catch at straws.

Ransome was watching him closely.

"Now, be sensible," he said. "The kid is all right. He will lick the Chicken. The twenty pounds is as good as in his pocket. Leave matters alone and you stand clear, able to do as you like."

"You are a demon, Ransome!"

Ransome shrugged his shoulders.

"Leave well alone; that's all I advise."

Arthur wavered.

"Does Sidney know I am here?" he said weakly.

"No!"

Arthur stood silent, thinking—or trying to think. He did not see the bitter sneer on Ransome's face.

"Better get back to the school," said Ransome at last. "You don't want your absence to be noticed."

Arthur started a little, nodded without speaking, and, turning, strode away into the gloom.

Ransome watched him disappear, and gave a low, scornful laugh. Then he re-entered the shed.

The fight had recommenced.

CHAPTER 31.

Well Matched!

REDFERN MINOR did not know that it was Arthur who knocked. From what Ransome said, he imagined that it was one of Cunliffe's set, and, the alarm once over, gave no further thought to the matter. He had no time to think about it, either. The interrupted contest recommenced, and he was called upon to face the Chicken once more.

And the Chicken gave him plenty to think about.

The young boxer had ceased to swagger, ceased to grin and wink at his friends in the audience, as if his contest with the schoolboy was a farce and the joke of the season. He had learned too much of Redfern's quality for that.

It was dawning upon his mind that the contest was far from being a joke, that it was deadly earnest, and that if he wanted to win the purse he would have to put his beef into it.

And as soon as he realised that he became a more dangerous adversary.

In the third round he fought with less swagger and more care, and Redfern found that he had plenty of work to do.

But the junior was in fine form, and there was little doubt that, though younger than the Chicken and less burly, he was the superior in science and in mental quickness, which counts for a great deal in a glove contest.

The audience watched keenly during the round.

They were beginning to see, too, that it had been a little reckness to lay money so lavishly on the Chicken, and there were already murmurs that Redfern was a "dark horse," whom Cunliffe and his gang had sprung upon them.

There were few there who had not laid money against the junior; almost all, with the exception of those who were in the "know"—Ransome and his precious friends.

And they had laid at long odds, too. Hence the keen anxiety with which they began to watch the fight. And Redfern was giving them good cause for anxiety, too.

The third and the fourth rounds were indecisive; but the fact that Redfern was not vanquished and knocked sky-high, showed that the general calculations on the subject were all wrong.

Redfern was fully holding his own against the Chicken, and the Chicken was getting perplexed and angry.

Ransome patted the junior on the shoulder at the end of the fourth round.

"How do you feel, kid?" he asked, almost kindly.

Redfern was going to put a big sum of money into his pockets, and Ransome felt kindly for once.

Redfern grinned.

"Right as rain."

"Wind all right?"

"Sound as a bell."

"Mind you don't let him get too close and slog you; but you know that as well as I do. Keep him on the go, and as soon as he has bellows to mend, wade in and finish him."

Redfern minor nodded.

"That's all right."

"My hat," said Ransome, "you're fresh—fresher than I expected after four rounds! You are in splendid form! Look here, kid, you could pick up a small fortune in this line if you did as I tell you."

Redfern's brow clouded.

"I don't want to pick up a fortune, big or little, at this game," he said. "You know why I'm doing this; it's the first and the last time."

Ransome shrugged his shoulders.

"Time!"

Redfern minor stepped into the ring again.

He toed the line so freshly, so cheerily, that even the most prejudiced partisan of the Chicken could not help observing how keen he was, and glancing doubtfully at the duller and heavier professional.

But the Chicken was game.

The fifth round was marked by punishment on both sides, both letting themselves go a little, and hitting out. Both looked a little groggy at the end of it, but neither could be said to have gained an advantage.

The Chicken was looking savage now. He came up at the call of time with a sullen and angry expression upon his bull face. His attack was sharp and spiteful, but Redfern was "all there" all the time.

The Chicken pressed the attack, and Redfern had to give ground; but the efforts of his assailant to corner him were all in vain. Redfern seemed like an eel to corner. Once the Chicken thought he had him for certain, but Redfern gave him a crack on the ribs, and sent him staggering, and got away again.

The baffled Chicken was slogging now, too angry to be careful. Redfern minor was not the fellow to let a chance like that pass unimproved.

The blind slogging of the angry Chicken gave him his chance, and he took it. He guarded clumsy blows, and

gave a postman's knock in return, which made the Chicken stagger back, dropping his hands.

There was a gasp from the crowd. Ransome shouted in excitement, but Redfern did not need telling.

Right forward he leaped, and his right crashed home with most of his bodily weight behind it, fairly on "the mark."

The Chicken gave a grunt, and dropped upon the boards with a resounding crash. He lay there, fairly gasping.

"Bravo!" yelled Ransome, in delight.

"Hurrah!" gasped Mr. Cunliffe. "Hur—blessed—rah!"

Redfern looked down upon his opponent. The timekeeper was counting, and the Chicken made a heroic attempt to stagger up.

"One—two—three—four——"

The Chicken half rose, and collapsed again.

There were anxious faces looking on now. The bookmakers were grinning. They stood to lose heavily to the persons in the "know," but they stood to win from all the reckless backers of the Chicken. All were thinking of their bets—whether they would win or lose—whether they would yet have a chance of hedging; no one seemed to give a thought to the wretched youth sprawling helplessly on the boards, in pain and exhaustion, striving in vain to rise.

"Five—six—seven——"

There was a hush.

"Eight—nine——"

The Chicken staggered up.

Redfern was quite within his rights—his duties, a pugilist would have said—in waiting for the Chicken to rise, and sending him crashing down again with a blow before he was able to defend himself. Such are the amenities of the prize-ring. But they did not fight like that in the Fourth Form at St. Dolly's.

Redfern stepped back, and allowed the Chicken to gain his feet untouched.

There was a gasp of amazement from the spectators, an exclamation from the referee, a yell of rage from Ransome.

"You young fool!"

Redfern did not even look at him. The Chicken, as much amazed as anyone, sparred feebly up to him, and kept up some sort of a fight until time was called.

Ransome scowled blackly at the junior as he came off for the end of the sixth round. Cunliffe and Spooner and the rest were scowling, too.

"You young idiot!" said Ransome, between his teeth. "You ought to have smashed him—finished him! Do you hear? One blow then, and he was done!"

Redfern tightened his lips.

"I'm fighting that chap," he said, "not you. And I'll fight in my own way, or not at all."

"It's in the rules of the ring——"

"Hang the ring! I'm not a prize-fighter, and I don't care a hang for the ring, or any of its rules. The rules of fair play are enough for me."

"You fool, you've given away a chance——"

"That's my business."

"You may lose the fight over it."

"I don't care!"

"You don't care!" burst out Mr. Cunliffe furiously. "You—you rat! You don't care! What about my money?"

The lad's eyes turned upon him fearlessly.

"Hang your dirty money! I don't care if you lose it. Why should I? How much do you care for that poor chap who's getting slogged to win your filthy bets?"

Mr. Cunliffe spluttered, almost speechless.

"You cub——" he began.

"You've called me some pretty names," said Redfern. "How would you like me to walk out of the place without another round? For that's what I'll do if I don't have more civility."

"Let him alone," said Ransome hurriedly.

And Mr. Cunliffe choked back his rage, and was silent.

Time was called again, and the combatants faced one another for the seventh round. There was a murmur of excitement from the spectators, and every eye was bent eagerly upon the two active forms in the ring.

CHAPTER 32.

Caught!

THE Chicken, though he had been spared in the last round, was decidedly groggy now. That crashing blow upon the "mark" would have knocked out some fighting men; but the Chicken was game. He meant to do his best for his patrons, and he toed the line again with grim determination.

But even upon the Chicken's mind it was borne that the tide of victory was running in his younger opponent's favour.

Redfern's freshness, considering what he had gone through, was wonderful. He seemed tireless. A healthy and careful life and constant exercise had kept him in a state of fitness which stood him in good stead now.

The lad who could stand an hour and a half of hard, slogging football was not likely to give way under any ordinary strain.

The Chicken was still trying his pressing tactics, and he succeeded in getting in one or two body blows that made Redfern grunt; but Redfern put "paid" to each of them, his lightning counters rattling home on the Chicken's jaw or chin.

The most obstinate of the Chicken's backers had to admit that the seventh round was the beginning of the end.

Redfern had the advantage all the time, knocking the Chicken about and driving him round the ring—a reversal of the earlier rounds.

The Chicken was plainly glad when time was called and he had a chance to rest. Ransome grinned with satisfaction as the junior came back to him.

"You'll do it!" he said.

Redfern nodded without speaking.

"Then next round ought to be the finish," said Ransome eagerly. "He's lost his wind now, and you want to see that he doesn't get it back. He was gasping like a porker all that round. Push him hard. Don't give him a moment's rest, and try for the mark again."

"I know what to do!"

Ransome bit his lip.

"Go it, Chick!" came several voices as the Chicken came up to time once more. "Go it, old man. Don't let a kid slog you!"

The Chicken sniffed angrily. The advice was very ill-timed, for it angered the Chicken, and anger excited him. He needed all his coolness to struggle through that round.

But he was not cool. He was exhausted, angry, and half-blinded by swellings round his eyes. He rushed in savagely, feeling that if he did not finish Redfern quickly, Redfern would finish him.

"Go it, Chicken!"

Redfern gave ground at first before the furious assault of the Chicken; but he hooked in a blow that made the prize-fighter's head swim, and the Chicken's attack became still more clumsy.

Rap, rap, came Redfern's fists upon his face in an echoing postman's knock. The thin prize-ring gloves softened the blows but little. The Chicken's nose was already swollen to a great size, and glimmered crimson. Those sharp raps brought the water to his eyes with a rush.

Rap, rap!

The Chicken's defence was nowhere. "It's all over bar shouting!" murmured Ransome in Mr. Cunliffe's ear, and the landlord of the Green Man nodded and grinned.

"Knock him out, Chicken!"

The Chicken did his best. He rushed in desperately, hammering away. The attack was so furious that Redfern had to give ground, and twice the Chicken's fists came home upon his chest and face.

The hopes of the Chicken's backers rose. It was still probable that if the powerful right arm could get in one heavy drive the fight would be ended on the spot. There were encouraging shouts.

"That's the game!"

"Give it him!"

"Right on the mark, Chicken!"

But the Chicken's final furious effort was quite expended now. He slackened the attack, and as he slackened, breathing heavily, Redfern rushed in. The prize-fighter's guard was swept to nowhere, and Redfern's right came crashing in—in a terrific uppercut that caught the Chicken on the point of the chin.

Right back went the Chicken, hurled fairly off his feet by that terrible blow—right back, falling with a crash upon the boards.

"Bravo!" yelled Ransome.

The Chicken lay still, hardly breathing. Redfern, exhausted himself, stood quiet. The timekeeper once more began to count.

"One—two—three—four——"

No movement from the Chicken—hardly a gasp!

"Five—six—seven——"

"He's done!" said Ransome.

"Eight—nine——"

"Buck up, Chicken!" said an anxious voice.

The Chicken did not stir.

"Ten!"

The timekeeper snapped his watch shut.

"Gentlemen, the fight is over," said the referee. "The boy wins!"

There was a deep, hoarse growl from the spectators. The result of the fight was not popular; but there was no get-

ting away from the plain facts and the referee's decision. Redfern minor had won!

The junior took off the gloves. Now that the fight was over, he realised what a strain it had been. He was tired, weak, and aching. He had received plenty of punishment, and his lip was cut, his nose slightly swollen on one side, and bruises were forming on his face and chest. He threw down the gloves, and Ransome drew him into the dressing-room.

"You've won, Redfern! I knew you would! My word, if you hadn't— But never mind that now. You've pulled it off, and earned twenty pounds."

"Well-earned the twenty quid!" said Cunliffe, coming in. "Hark at the boys! They don't like losing the stuff."

Muttered oaths and growls could be heard through the canvas from the adjoining room. Ransome chuckled.

"They can like it or lump it!" he said. "They made their bets with their eyes open. This is a coup for me, and that's all I care about. They grinned when I brought my man in, but he laughs best who laughs last."

"What-ho!" said Mr. Spooner, chuckling. "The kid's a marvel. It seems a pity that he should be wasted in a school. What a pug he would make!"

Redfern was bathing his face. It felt aching and inflamed, and his head was whirling a little. The fight had told upon him more than he had imagined at first. Ransome and his friends were thinking only of their money, and no one even glanced at Redfern.

Rap!

They started round as the sharp rap came on the door—a rap of heavy knuckles.

"Hang it!" muttered Mr. Cunliffe. "Is it that fool back again?"

Ransome grinned.

"Too late to bother us, if it is!"

A voice rang through the door—a voice that made Ransome start and

drove every vestige of colour from his cheeks.

"Open this door!"

"Lunsford!"

It was the voice of the captain of St. Dolly's. Redfern stood with streaming face over the bowl of water. Ransome was transfixed. What in the name of all that was unfortunate brought Lunsford there at that moment?

Had Arthur told him? Impossible! Did he know? What did he know? Ransome's senses swam for a moment, but only for a moment. Then he grasped the money—notes and silver—hurriedly, and thrust it in his pocket. A single bound took him into the adjoining room, where the spectators of the fight stared at his white face and hurried movements in amazement.

Ransome did not give them a look. He ran across to a window, tore away the blind, and threw it open. He plunged out into the gloom, and disappeared among the shrubberies of the garden in a twinkling. In his selfish terror for himself he had utterly forgotten the existence of Redfern minor.

And Redfern? He stood where he was, dazed and bewildered. He was too exhausted to think of following Ransome's example. Besides, he knew that Lunsford must have come there to look for him. Somehow, the captain of St. Dolly's had learned what was going on. There could be no other explanation of his angry summons at Mr. Cunliffe's door.

Redfern was not given many moments to think, either. It was only a few seconds after Ransome had disappeared that there came a crash on the door from outside.

Lunsford, of St. Dolly's, was not the fellow to be trifled with. As the door was not opened, he guessed that it was remaining shut to allow somebody time to escape, and he did not stand upon ceremony.

A heavy wooden garden bench, whirled by Lunsford's powerful hands, crashed upon the door—once, twice—

and at the second blow the flimsy door flew inwards. Lunsford's angry face glared into the shed.

Cunliffe started forward with an oath.

"What does this mean?" he blustered. "What do you mean breaking in my door, you young hound? I'll have the police——"

"Don't talk to me, you cad!" exclaimed Lunsford, in a tone that made Mr. Cunliffe retreat a pace or two. "You've got a junior belonging to St. Dolly's here——"

"Look here——"
"Redfern!" Lunsford caught sight of the junior's white face. "Redfern!"

"Yes, Lunsford!"
"So you are here!"
Redfern smiled bitterly. The game was up now with a vengeance.

"Yes, I am here, Lunsford."
"Get your things on," said the captain of St. Dolly's roughly, "and come with me. Don't waste time!"

"Yes," said Redfern dully.

He towelled his face and donned his clothes. Lunsford watched him grimly. Redfern's appearance, the boxing-gloves on the floor, the money on the table, sufficiently explained what had happened to the captain of St. Dolly's.

Mr. Cunliffe began to bluster again. Lunsford turned on him, and pushed back his cuffs.

"Don't talk to me of the police!" he said. "You know you're afraid for them to know what's been going on here. Don't talk to me at all. I've come to take this boy away. I'll lick anybody who interferes!"

No one interfered. Redfern was not many minutes; but before he followed Lunsford from the shed he turned to Mr. Cunliffe.

"You've got twenty pounds for me?" he said quietly.

Lunsford turned on him like a flash.

"What's that, Redfern?"

Redfern's heart sank.

"I've won the money, Lunsford! I've won the purse, and——"

"You young blackguard!"

Redfern winced.

"Lunsford——"

"Come with me! You shan't take it! You shan't touch a penny of the blackguardly money!" said Lunsford sternly. "If that's what you've disgraced yourself and your school for, you will be disappointed. Come!"

Redfern panted.

"Lunsford, I—I must have the money! I—I tell you——"

The misery in his voice, his look, moved the captain of St. Dolly's somewhat. But he did not relent, or think of relenting.

"You cannot touch such money as that, Redfern!" he said. "Come, we've wasted too much time already!"

His hand fell heavily upon Redfern's shoulder. The boy followed him dumbly, despair at his heart.

It had all been useless, then! He had, as Lunsford said, disgraced himself and disgraced his school. And it was all useless; he could not save Arthur.

They went into the darkness, followed by a jeering laugh from the blackguards in the shed. Lunsford gritted his teeth; but Redfern did not heed it, did not even hear it. He was stunned by the turn events had taken.

"Come!" said Lunsford sharply.

"You are going to take me to the Head?"

Lunsford stared at him.

"Can you ask?"

"No. I suppose you must."

And after that, as they moved on in the darkness towards St. Dolly's, Redfern spoke no word.

CHAPTER 33.

Sacked!

"REDDY!" Skelton and Brown uttered the name together, in blank dismay, as Lunsford and Redfern

minor entered the schoolhouse at St. Dolly's.

Redfern's eyes were on the ground. He did not look up. He was walking like one in a dream.

Skelton tapped him on the shoulder, and then he looked round with a start.

"Reddy, what's the matter? What

"Stand aside, Skelton!" said Lunsford sharply.

"Oh, all right. I only want to speak to Redfern."

"Get back!"

There was an unusual sharpness in the captain's tones. Skelton stepped back in wonder. Lunsford strode on with Redfern minor, who had not spoken a word. Skelton and Brown looked at each other in great disquiet.

"Something's jolly wrong!" said Brown III.

Skelton knitted his brows.

"They've caught him, Brown!" he said gloomily. "I don't know what it was he was mixed up in with Ransome, but he's been caught at it. I wonder if Ransome's caught, too?"

"Not much!" said Brown bitterly. "Trust Ransome! He wouldn't be caught. Reddy will take the blame for the whole biznay."

"He jolly well won't!" said Skelton between his teeth. "Whatever it is, Ransome led him into it. Ransome can face the music as well."

"He won't."

"He may be made to."

Skelton tried to think it out with knitted brows. What was it Redfern had left the school for that evening? What wretched business had Ransome dragged him into? Arthur, too, had followed him to interfere, yet nothing had come of it. What did it all mean, and what was the best thing for Reddy's chums to do?

Skelton was in a cruel uncertainty. He knew too little of what had happened to be able to act. He was as likely to injure Reddy as to help him if he opened his mouth.

While poor Skelton was trying to think out a course to follow, Redfern went on with the captain of St. Dolly's to the Head's study.

He had seen a light burning in the Head's window as they crossed the quadrangle, and he knew that Dr. Cranston was there.

Redfern remembered his last interview with the Head in that dreaded apartment. He had escaped that time. He was not to escape now. He knew that. He had been caught fairly in the act—not doing anything that he thought to be wrong, certainly, but breaking the school laws in the most flagrant manner for another's sake; but he could not say so, and if he did say so it would not help him much probably.

Already, in his mind's eye, he saw the doctor's grim face, and heard the sentence from his lips.

Well, he had risked it for Arthur, and he could face the music. Hardest of all to bear was the thought that he had made the sacrifice for nothing—that the twenty pounds which would have saved Arthur had not come to him after all.

He had won the purse, and had not received it. He might extract the money from them afterwards in time for Arthur, but—

Lunsford tapped at the Head's door. A thrill like the contact of ice ran through the veins of Redfern minor.

"Come in!"

The Head's voice seemed deeper, more solemn and stern, than Redfern had ever known it before. It was but fancy, but it sounded in his ears like a knell.

They entered. Dr. Cranston was seated at his writing-table, a pen in his hand. He looked at Lunsford, and then at Redfern minor, and quietly laid down his pen and turned a little in his seat. He knew at once that something serious had happened.

"What is it, Lunsford?" he asked quietly.

"A very unpleasant matter, sir, which I felt bound to bring to your notice at once," said Lunsford. "It's quite beyond me to deal with it. I—I'm almost ashamed to tell you, but—"

He paused uncomfortably.

"Go on, Lunsford! Is it Redfern minor in trouble again?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am sorry for this, Redfern. I had hoped that your narrow escape would be a warning to you. I had hoped that you would try to lead a straighter life for your brother's sake after he had saved you from expulsion."

Redfern kept his eyes upon the carpet. For his brother's sake! He could not tell the Head of St. Dorothy's what he had done for his brother's sake.

"Go on, Lunsford!"

"You remember, sir, that you directed me to keep my eye on Cunliffe's place in Wyndale since it was discovered that St. Dolly's fellows went there?"

"Yes, and I directed you to report to me at once if you discovered that any person belonging to St. Dorothy's visited the place," said the Head. "It was a great shock to me to find that anything of the sort was going on in the school under my charge, and I am determined to stamp it out. This is a case where masters and prefects and all right-thinking boys are at one."

"Yes, sir," Lunsford hesitated. "Redfern minor was missing from call-over. Mr. Ford was informed that he had a pass to go to the village; but, in view of—of Redfern's late conduct, I thought I had better look into the matter."

"Quite right."

"I inquired among the prefects, and could not find who had given Redfern a pass. One prefect was absent, and I could not ask him. I decided to walk down to the Green Man, and see whether Redfern minor was there."

"Quite right."

"I could not help suspecting that he was there, especially as—as the only prefect who could have given him a pass was his major, who was the only one likely to give it him without very close inquiry as to what he intended to do."

"I understand."

"I met Redfern major in the lane, coming from the direction of Wyndale—"

Redfern minor started. Had his brother been at Wyndale that evening? Did Arthur know, then, of the prize-fight at Mr. Cunliffe's?

The Head observed his start, and his eyes glimmered behind his pince-nez for a moment.

"Go on, Lunsford!"

"I asked Redfern major whether he had given his minor a pass, and he said he had. I asked him if he knew where the boy was, and—"

"Go on!"

"He looked so distressed, sir, that I asked him nothing further, but I went straight on to the Green Man myself. I thought it hard on Redfern major that he should be forced to say anything against his brother, and I wanted, if possible, to leave him out of the whole matter—if you approve, sir."

Dr. Cranston nodded.

"Quite right, Lunsford. Redfern major shall not be asked to say anything in the matter. He will not appear in it at all."

Lunsford drew a deep breath.

"I am glad of that, sir. It would be hard on him. Well, I went straight to the Green Man and found Redfern minor there. He had been engaged in a prize-fight—"

"A—a—a what?"

"A prize-fight with a fellow put up by Mr. Cunliffe to meet him for a purse of twenty pounds, as far as I could make out. He claimed the money, but I did not allow him to take it."

"Is this possible, Redfern?"

Redfern's eyes were still on the carpet.

"Yes, sir."

His voice was low, quiet, mechanical—more like the tones of some machine cunningly contrived to imitate the human voice.

Lunsford's matter-of-fact report of what he had discovered at the Green Man stripped the whole affair of any guise of chivalry. He realised how brutal, how sordid, it must appear to the Head, for it appeared so to him now.

"You fought with a low ruffian——"

"He was a decent enough chap, sir."

"H'm! Perhaps so. But you fought with a man, then, for money—for a purse of twenty pounds?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am glad to find you so truthful, Redfern," said the Head, after a pause; "although, certainly, falsehood would not help you. Why did you do this?"

"I—I wanted the money, sir!"

"You wanted twenty pounds! What could you possibly want such a sum of money for?"

Redfern was silent.

"The only possible explanation, Redfern, is that you owed money—that you are in debt—that you spoke falsely when you told me that you had never gambled in that place," said the Head sternly.

The junior did not speak.

"Answer me, Redfern! Did you require this money to pay a debt?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"That is enough. Have you anything more to tell me, Lunsford?"

"No, sir."

"You have done your duty, Redfern minor, I will not attempt to express the horror and contempt I have for your conduct. Under a guise of frankness you have concealed a nature that I hope the worst boy of St. Dorothy's would despise if he knew it as it has now been revealed."

Redfern winced.

His lips were white, but no word passed them. He would not, and could not, defend himself. What was he to say?

"I shall remove this canker from St. Dorothy's before it has had time to spread corruption, I hope," said the Head. "Redfern minor, I would expel you with every sign of ignominy before an assembly of the whole school, but for one consideration. I cannot help thinking of your brother—he whose honourable name you have dragged in the mire."

The junior was grimly silent.

"I will not disgrace Arthur Redfern. It shall not be said of him that his minor was expelled from the school in shame and disgrace. He has had enough to bear, I do not doubt, already on your account. I shall save him all I can. You must leave St. Dorothy's! But for Arthur Redfern's sake you shall go quietly, and this matter shall not be made public. I shall explain to your parents, as in duty bound, why you are sent home—that is all. You will pack your box to-night, and leave the school by the first train in the morning!"

Redfern shivered.

"Yes, sir."

The doctor looked at him long and hard.

"I might have hoped to see a sign of repentance in you, Redfern minor. Are you not sorry for what you have done? Do you not regret bringing this shadow upon an honourable name?"

Redfern's lips were closed.

"Well, go!" said the Head. "I won't speak to you further. You are hardened—more hardened than I should have imagined possible in one so young if I had not seen it with my own eyes. You may go!"

Redfern staggered rather than walked to the door.

He hardly knew how he got out of the study. He went along the passage like one in a dream; he found his way

up to the dormitory without seeing where he was going. The great room was dark and empty—dark save for a glimmer of starlight in at the high windows. It was not yet the bed-time of the juniors.

He was to pack his box that night, to leave St. Dorothy's by the first train in the morning!

Was it possible? Was it true, or was it all some ghastly dream? Would he wake up presently and find that it was but a vision?

Alas, no!

It was real enough. He was expelled from the school. Once before he had narrowly escaped it; this time the blow had fallen, and there was no escape.

And as he realised it the unhappy boy threw himself upon his bed, and the long pent-up feelings gave way, and he broke into tears.

CHAPTER 34.

Sidney Receives His Winnings!

REDDY!

It was a whispering voice in the gloom.

Redfern minor started up.

The tears were wet upon his cheeks in the darkness of the dormitory.

"Reddy!"

He recognised Skelton's voice.

"He's here, I think," said Brown III.

"Benson said he saw him. I say, Reddy, are you here, old chap?"

"Yes," said Redfern quietly.

His two chums came quickly towards him in the gloom. Redfern sat up on the bed. He was quite calm again now; that outburst had revived him. He felt that he could look at the future calmly once more, terrible as it was.

"What's the row, Reddy? Has Ransome got you into a fix?"

"Yes."

"You've been before the Head?"

"Yes."

"Licked?"

"No."

His two chums peered at him anxiously. His monosyllabic replies alarmed them.

"Not"—Skelton breathed the word—"not sacked?"

"Yes."

"Sacked?"

"Yes."

"Good heavens!"

And there was silence. Skelton and Brown peered at Redfern, and at one another. Redfern did not speak. What was there to say?

"Sacked!" said Skelton at last, in an awed voice. "Sacked! When are you going, Reddy?"

"By the first train in the morning. I've come up here to pack my box," said Redfern drearily. "It—it can't be helped. My luck's out."

"What have you done?"

"No good telling you, old chap; it's going to be kept dark, and the less said the better. You don't mind my not saying anything?"

"N-n-no! Only, I say, Reddy, you— you haven't really done anything rotten, have you?" faltered Skelton.

Redfern's cheeks reddened in the darkness.

"Hang it, Skelton! I shouldn't think you would think so, anyway."

"Right-ho! I knew you wouldn't. But—but if it's not that it means that you are standing the racket for your major. If so—"

"Arthur wasn't in this; he didn't even know."

"Ransome got you into it?"

"Yes."

"Was he caught, too?"

Redfern smiled bitterly.

"No; he slid out in time. So far as I can make out he wasn't even suspected. Lunsford didn't guess he was there."

"The hound! He ought to own up, and—"

"It wouldn't save me if he did; he would be sacked, too, that's all. It's no good talking, Skelton. I've got to go,

"I'm sorry"—Redfern's voice almost broke again, but he controlled it—"I'm sorry to leave the school and you chaps. I dare say we shall meet again somewhere—"

"Of course we will. But—but you shan't go!" exclaimed Skelton quickly. "Something's got to be done. Brown, you dummy, why can't you think of something?"

"I only wish I could," said Brown, who was very near blubbing, as he would have called it. "It will be rotten without you, Reddy."

There was a sound at the door. The juniors turned quickly.

"Is Redfern minor there?"

"Ransome!"

"I want to speak to you, Redfern. Come to my study," said Ransome, striking a match. "What the dickens are you doing here in the dark?"

Redfern looked at him in the flickering glimmer.

"I won't come to your study."

"What!"

"You heard what I said."

Ransome checked the furious words on his lips. He knew that he could not afford to quarrel with Redfern minor, who held his fate in the hollow of his hand. A word from the junior, and the cad of the Sixth was ruined, and Redfern had nothing to lose by speaking that word, if he chose to speak it.

"Get out of here, Skelton and Brown," said Ransome sharply. He lighted the gas and threw down the match. "Do you hear? Get out!"

Skelton and Brown exchanged a glance, and left the dormitory. They halted on the stairs.

"He wants Reddy to shut up," said Skelton, in a whisper. "That's what he's come for. He's not going to try to help Reddy."

"No; the cad!"

"He's jolly well not going to get off scot-free!" said Skelton, between his teeth. "We've never bumped a Sixth-Former—"

"Eh?"

"But it's time we began. Ransome is going through it!"

"You ass! Why——"

"He won't say a word about it afterwards," said Skelton coolly. "He dare not. We know too much about him. He's not going to get off scot-free, I tell you. The cad has ruined Reddy, and now he's thinking only about his own skin."

Skelton was right there. Ransome had been looking for Ransome minor in an extremely anxious state of mind about his own skin. He shut the dormitory door after the juniors and then fixed his eyes upon Redfern. Redfern had gone to his box and opened it. He had his packing to do.

"Redfern, how has it turned out?" asked Ransome, in a strained voice.

"I'm sacked!"

Ransome drew a quick breath.

"Did you mention my name?"

"No," said Redfern, with a curling lip. "You need not be afraid."

"Then they don't suspect me?" said Ransome, unheeding the taunt.

"Not so far as I know."

"Good!"

Redfern was pulling the things out of his trunk to pack them. Ransome watched him in silence. He was deeply uneasy; but Redfern was not inclined to help him. The cad of the Sixth broke the silence at last.

"Look here, Redfern, you haven't given me away, and that's decent of you. I suppose you mean to keep your mouth shut?"

"Yes."

"Good! You're—you're a little brick! It wouldn't do you any good to get me into a row with the Head."

Redfern looked straight at him.

"You owe me twenty pounds!" he said. "Where is the money?"

"I don't owe it, Redfern. I——"

"I expect it from you. I want the money. You know why I want it. I fought the Chicken and licked him. You've got to pay the money."

"Got to?" said Ransome, gritting his teeth.

"Yes."

Ransome's eyes sank before Redfern's.

"It's all right," he said. "You shall have it. Nobody wants to do you out of it, as far as that goes. You shall have it—to-morrow."

"To-morrow will be too late. I want it to-night." Redfern's lips curled into a bitter smile. "You can make your own arrangements with your friends at the Green Man to-morrow. You know you won more than twenty pounds over the fight—double that, I should think. Give me the money now."

Ransome forced a laugh.

"You are a young Shylock! But you're right. Here's the money."

He took four crisp, rustling banknotes from his pocketbook, and handed them to Redfern.

The junior thrust them into his pocket. They were the price of his ruin; but they would save his brother.

CHAPTER 35.
No Weakness!

TAP!

Arthur Redfern started as the tap came at his door. He was walking up and down his study; he had been doing so ever since he returned from Wyndale. He was in a desperate mood. What to decide, what to do, he did not know. He had left his minor at the Green Man. Again his good resolution had been foiled, baffled, by circumstances. Whenever he strove to follow a new path some wretched result of a former transgression started up to block the way, and to throw him back into his old ways. His resolution that his young brother should never be mixed up with the Cunliffe set had been as fixed as anything could be in his wavering breast, and that resolution was broken now. What was to be the end of it all?

The door opened, and Redfern minor came in.

"Hallo, Sid!"

Redfern minor closed the door.

"I've got something for you, Arthur."

"For me?"

"Yes. You remember what you told me—if you had the money to square Cunliffe, and get rid of him, you'd break with that gang for ever, and with Ransome?"

"Yes."

"I've got the money!"

Arthur's eyes glistened. He watched the junior breathlessly as he laid four five-pound notes on the table. He could hardly believe his eyes.

"Sid! Twenty pounds!"

"There it is!"

Redfern minor expected his major to ask him where he had obtained it. But he did not, and Sydney wondered if he knew.

Arthur took up the banknotes. The crisp rustle in his fingers was delightful to him. The door was open at last for escape from all his troubles—that misery was over for good. He crumpled the notes in his eager fingers.

"Sidney, you've done a lot for me! This—this saves me! I should have to leave St. Dolly's. Sid, you're a brick! I—I haven't treated you as I should—have done since you've been at St. Dolly's."

It was clear that Arthur knew nothing of Lunsford's discovery at the Green Man—that he had not been told that his minor had been expelled from St. Dolly's. Redfern did not speak, and Arthur went on cheerily:

"It'll be different for both of us after this, Sidney. You'll find me different with that horrible worry off my mind. They have asked me to be football captain this season, as Lunsford is leaving at the end of the term. I shall go in for the footer hot and strong. Better than loafing round pubs, my boy, and running up debts, and staying awake at nights thinking of them—eh?"

Redfern could not speak. The happy prospect his brother was sketching made his heart ache.

Happy enough it was, but it was never

to be realised for him, at least. He was to leave St. Dolly's by the first train in the morning.

"How I'm running on," said Arthur, with a laugh. "The fact is, I feel ten years younger. How I ever got into this fix I don't know. I was a silly ass, I suppose. I don't blame Ransome, either. I was old enough to take care of myself, or ought to have been. The mater wrote me when you first came, Sid, to take care of you. Ha, ha! The boot's been rather on the other foot, hasn't it?"

Sidney did not speak. His silence struck his brother. Arthur looked at him rather anxiously.

"Sid, why don't you speak—what's the matter?"

What could he say?

"Is there anything wrong?" said Arthur apprehensively. "Look here, Sid, I won't humbug you. I know where you got this money. You fought the Chicken at the Green Man!"

Redfern minor started.

"You knew?"

"Yes. I—I came to fetch you away," said Arthur, colouring. "You must have heard me knocking at the door."

"That was you?" said Redfern, with a start.

"Yes. I—I was going to make you chuck it up and come away. I—I ought to have done it. It was my duty as a prefect. But—but Ransome put it to me—hang it, I won't blame Ransome, but—but he thought you had a chance of winning, and the stakes would clear me. He told me what you wanted the money for, Sid, old man. I felt like a scoundrel all the time. But I made up my mind to one thing. I don't know why you should care so much about me, but I swore to myself that I'd do my best to deserve it. But all's clear now, Sid, isn't it? There's nothing wrong?"

Arthur's tone was appealing. It went to Sidney's heart to tell him differently; but he had to know the truth, if not from one, then from another.

"I—I'm afraid there is, Arthur," he

said slowly. "Not for you, though; that's all right. You're clear, thank goodness."

"But you?"

"Lunsford collared me, but I can stand it."

Arthur grasped him by the shoulder.

"What do you mean?" he cried.

"What—what can you stand?"

"I've been before the Head——"

"Yes, yes."

"I'm sacked!"

Arthur staggered back.

"Sacked?"

"Yes. For Heaven's sake, don't look like that, Arthur! I—I can stand it. I'm willing to face it. Yes——"

Arthur grasped the edge of the table convulsively. His face was as white as chalk.

"Did Lunsford find you at the Green Man?"

"Yes."

"Ah! He did not tell me. I—I thought—oh, I might have guessed! He took you to the Head. The Head knows about the fight—knows everything?"

"Yes."

"About me?"

"Oh, no!" cried Redfern. "Do you think I would betray you? Nothing about you."

"But—but you——"

"It's all right. I can face the music," said Redfern.

Arthur shook his head.

"Never! I'll go to the Head——"

"Hold on! Don't! You can't help me! I'm sacked for the fight!" said Sidney, in distress. "You can't help me by getting sacked, too. You——"

"I'm going to the Head, though. You've done too much for me!"

"Arthur, think first."

"I won't think first. If I stop to think I shall be a coward again. There's been enough of that. No weakness this time."

And before Redfern could detain him, Arthur strode from the study. Redfern hardly dared think of it; and

Arthur did not give himself time to think of it. He ran rather than walked to the Head's study, and knocked at the door. Dr. Cranston's voice bade him enter. The Head looked distressed as Arthur Redfern came in. He naturally concluded that he had come to plead for his brother as he had done before.

"Redfern, you have heard——"

"Yes, sir, I——"

"I am afraid it is useless to say anything, Redfern. The thing is too flagrant, too disgraceful, and I am afraid that there is more behind than Redfern minor has cared to tell. Redfern minor must leave St. Dolly's!"

"He must not, sir! Sidney is innocent. Only one person is guilty!"

"And who is that?"

"Myself!"

Arthur Redfern stood with bowed head as he faltered out the word. Dr. Cranston looked at him in blank amazement. Arthur's reply took him utterly by surprise, and for the moment he thought the prefect was out of his senses.

"You, Redfern? What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say, sir."

"Come, Redfern! You are talking nonsense! You have been troubling too much about your worthless brother, and you take the matter too much to heart," said the Head kindly. "You are not to blame. You could not help——"

"You don't understand me, sir," said Arthur in a low voice. "I—I have a confession to make. You must not expel Sidney. He is not to blame. It was I—I all the time—I only who was to blame. What he did, he did for my sake—to save me!"

Dr. Cranston's face changed.

He could see now that there was something more than morbid self-reproach in this. He sunk into his seat, his eyes fixed upon the prefect's white, shamed face.

"I—I was in difficulties, sir. I was a fool. I was mixed up with Cunliffe and his set—the betting set at the Green Man——"

The Head started violently.

"You, Redfern? You—a prefect?"

Arthur winced.

"Yes, sir."

"I can hardly believe it, though you tell me with your own lips," said the Head, after a pause. "You know the opinion I had of you. You know, too, the inevitable result of this confession you are making?"

"I know I shall be expelled."

"Naturally, but go on!"

"I—I owed the man money," said Arthur drearily. "I don't know how I let myself get connected with the rotters at all, but I suppose I was a fool. I've always been a fool, I suppose. I could never say 'No' when it was easier to say 'Yes.' I owed Cunliffe money, and—and he had to be paid. That was the beginning of the trouble. He threatened to come to you—and show me up, as he called it."

Arthur's voice broke for a moment.

"But I got clear then; and then, like

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a fool, I plunged into it again. When my minor broke bounds that night, he went to the Green Man, in Wyndale—but it was to warn me to leave and to get in time to escape discovery.”

“Good heavens! And he said no word!”

“He would not betray me.”

“And I—I nearly expelled him for that act of devotion,” said Dr. Cranston, in a moved voice. “Redfern, you have much to answer for!”

“I should not have let you expel him, sir,” said Arthur, with a groan. “I should have owned up rather than that. He kept it all dark to save me, and I swore I would run straight in the future. I think I should have kept to it this time, sir, but luck was against me. They held the same old threat over my head, and I—”

“Do you mean to say that this latest disgraceful affair was on your account, too?” asked the Head, in a hard voice.

“Yes, sir.”

“You allowed your young brother to enter into a prize-fight—”

“No, no!” cried Arthur. “I knew nothing about it then. Sidney had found out that I needed twenty pounds to save me, and Ran—and he was offered that sum to fight the Chicken at the Green Man. I knew nothing. I would have stopped it, whatever it cost me—they knew that. He did it to save me, sir. He was always a plucky kid. I did not know. But it was my fault. He knew that I should be expelled if I did not raise the money.”

“I am glad you did not know it, Redfern.”

“But—but I haven’t told you all, sir,” faltered Arthur. “Some of Sid’s friends in the Fourth were alarmed about him. They knew he was with—with a chap who never does his friends any good—and they came to me to ask me to interfere. When I guessed that he was gone to the Green Man, I hurried there after him. I was determined to bring him away, if I had to defy Cunliffe to do his worst at once.”

“Very good!”

“Then—then I got there, and—and I found it was a fight, and it had already begun, and Sid was getting the best of it. Then—”

“You were weak again.”

“I—I thought it would be best to let it finish, as it had started, and let Sid win the money to clear me,” said Arthur wretchedly. “I know how wrong it was, but I won’t try to make excuses for it, sir. I went away without letting Sid know I had been there, and came back to St. Dolly’s.”

“Then Sid came into my study with the twenty pounds,” said Arthur miserably. “I thought it was all right. I was so relieved. And then he told me that he was to be expelled in the morning.”

The Head looked at him curiously.

“And you, Redfern?”

“I came here, sir.”

The Head was silent for a minute.

“You are harder upon yourself than I should be upon you, Redfern,” he said slowly. “You have done wrong—great wrong. Your brother has done wrong, too.”

“It was for my sake, sir.”

“That does not wholly excuse breaking the rule of the school and disregarding the authority of his headmaster.”

“But—but—”

“But, since your explanation, I shall certainly not expel him,” said Dr. Cranston, in a softer voice. “He has acted from a mistaken sense of devotion; but such devotion is too noble and too rare for me to punish it heavily. Redfern minor will remain at St. Dorothy’s.”

Arthur drew a breath of relief—a breath that was almost a sob.

“Thank you, sir!”

“As for you—”

“I know what must happen to me, sir,” said Arthur in a low voice. “There’s no chance for me. But I knew it when I came here. I’m—I’m almost glad it’s over. I have felt such a cur ever since that other night. I may be able to make a fresh start somewhere. I’ve had a lesson that will last me for life, I think.”

"You may be able to make a fresh start here," said the Head quietly.

"Oh, sir!"

"As I have said, you have done great wrong. You cannot remain a prefect. But I think I know enough to be able to see when a repentance is sincere," said Dr. Cranston; "and, indeed, your making of this confession is proof enough. I should be sorry to see your whole career ruined while there is a single chance left to save you, Redfern. It is very clear to me, also, that you have not fallen into these temptations and difficulties alone. There has been a tempter, who has taken advantage of the weakness of your character."

Arthur was silent. He had betrayed himself, but he would not betray Ransome.

"I will not ask you for the name of this false friend, Redfern; but I will ask you to have nothing more to do with him."

"I have already promised that, sir, to Sidney."

The Head smiled slightly. Arthur's reply unconsciously admitted the truth of his surmise.

"Very well, Redfern. Keep that promise. You say that you have had a lesson which will last you for life. I think that is very probably so. In any case, I cannot forget that you stand before me self-accused—for the sake of one who is innocent. I shall give you another chance, Redfern. Make the best of it."

The tears were running down Arthur's cheeks.

"Oh, sir, you—you allow me to—to—"

"To remain at St. Dorothy's? Yes. I think you will try to do better. I know you will succeed if you try. As for this money—this twenty pounds which has been paid to your brother for that wretched fight—it cannot be retained. It may be sent to some charity."

"But—but I owe—"

"Exactly. I shall see Cunliffe; I shall settle with him. And I shall speak to him in a way that I think will prevent

him from meddling with St. Dorothy's boys again."

The doctor's face grew very grim for a moment. "You can repay me another time, Redfern, for this money. You are willing to do this?"

"Oh, sir, I can never thank you enough! You have saved me from misery."

"You can thank me by leading a straight life in the future, and justifying the opinion I formerly held of you," said Dr. Cranston.

"Oh, I will—I will. Heaven help me!" said Arthur.

"And in case of a fresh difficulty, especially of one arising out of this affair, come straight to me," said the Head kindly. "Remember, I am your friend as well as your headmaster."

"I am not likely to forget that, sir," said Arthur. "Oh, you shall see, sir—you shall see that I am not fool enough to lose a chance like this."

And Redfern major, when he left the Head's study, seemed as if he were walking on air.

CHAPTER 36.

All Scene!

"ARTHUR!"

Redfern minor started up as his brother came into the study. Redfern minor had waited there—waited with a horrible anxiety tugging at his heart. The last quarter of an hour had been the blackest in Redfern's young life.

Would Arthur never return? What was happening—what had happened in the Head's study? Redfern paced about the room with restless steps as the minutes slowly passed and then flung himself at last into a chair. What had happened? Why did Arthur not come back?

He came at last. And Redfern could not believe his eyes as Arthur came in. The flush of joy, the sparkle in the eyes—what did that mean? Redfern started up, gazing at his brother in blank astonishment.

"Arthur!"

The Sixth-Former smiled.

"It's all right, Sid!"

"All right! How do you mean? Have you—have you told the Head?"

"Every word!"

"Then you're expelled!" muttered Sidney.

"No," said Arthur. "Sidney, the Head's the finest fellow in the world, and the keenest, too, I think. He—he believed that I really meant to keep straight after this, and he's given me another chance—another chance, Sid!"

"My hat!"

"I couldn't believe my ears when he said so at first," said Arthur soberly. "I didn't deserve it; of course, I knew that. But it's all right. You're pardoned, of course; but the wonderful thing is that I've got another chance, and I'm going to make the most of it, Sid!"

"Thank Heaven!"

"Not a word of it outside this study, of course, but—but there's going to be a change—a big change."

There were tears in Redfern's minor's eyes, seldom so moistened.

"It's jolly," he said—"it's jolly. Arthur, the Head's a brick! My hat! Won't Skelton and Brown yell when I tell them I'm not going to be sacked, after all!"

"Better go and tell them at once," said Arthur, with a smile.

"Right-ho!"

Arthur gripped his brother's hand for

a moment, and Redfern minor ran from the study, his face bright, his heart light, and happy.

He burst into the study in the Fourth Form passage like a cyclone.

Skelton and Brown were sitting by the fire, which was dying down, looking very depressed. Taffy & Co. were in the study, looking decidedly miserable, too. The Modern youths seemed to feel the ill-luck of the Classics as keenly as they felt it themselves.

"Hallo!"

The five juniors jumped round as the door burst open and Redfern minor burst in.

"What the dickens——"

"Why——"

"What——"

"It's all right!" shouted Redfern. "The Head's a brick! It's all serene. Everything in the garden is lovely! This is where we chuckle. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, what——"

"It's all serene!" trilled Redfern; and he grasped Skelton with one arm, and Brown with the other, and waltzed them round the study, in his exuberant joy. "It's all serene! Hurrah!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

And the voices of the Moderns and Classics blended in a shout that reached over nearly all St. Dolly's, and announced to all who were interested in the matter that the old school was not, after all, to see the last of Redfern minor.



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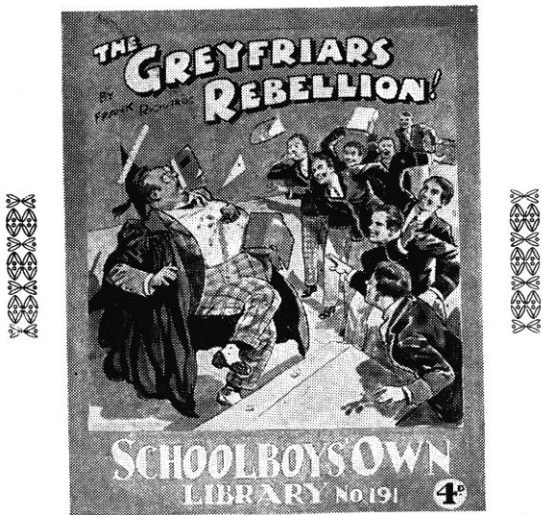
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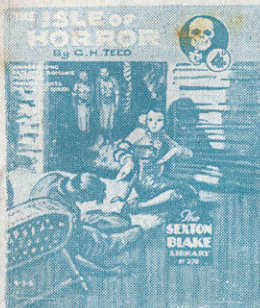


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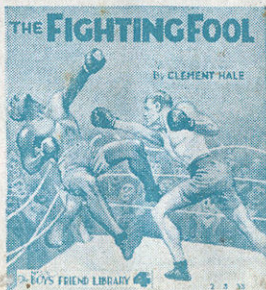


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