

CARDEW'S CATCH!



FRANK RICHARDS

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Frank Richards

Cardew's Catch is a story about the delightful and familiar characters who liven up that famous school, St. Jim's—Tom Merry, Ralph Reckness Cardew and, of course, the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The story begins when the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy kicks a football which is unexpectedly and unfortunately stopped by the mild little person of Mr. Wottle, the Head's Secretary. In his fall, Mr. Wottle drops a very strange letter which leads to all sorts of unexpected incidents. After many adventures which include a bank robbery, a chase in the woods, a stranger with bright red hair and a foul on the playing fields, Cardew with the help—and sometimes with the hindrance—of his friends of the Fourth Form, solves the mystery.

Everyone who already knows Frank Richards' famous characters will welcome this book, and those readers for whom Cardew's catch is an introduction to the Fourth Form of St. Jim's have a most enjoyable treat in store.

CARDEW'S CATCH!

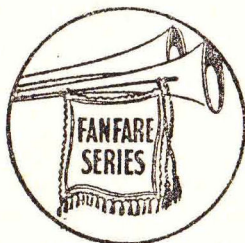
AUTHOR OF
TROUBLE FOR TOM MERRY
THROUGH THICK AND THIN
THE DISAPPEARANCE OF TOM MERRY
DOWN AND OUT!



*From the little gentleman walking under the
elms came a sudden howl*

FRANK RICHARDS

CARDEW'S
CATCH!



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CHAPTER I

AFTER THE BALL

'STOP!'

'Stop him!'

'Collar him!'

Three wrathful and indignant shouts woke the echoes in the old quadrangle at St. Jim's.

Figgins and Co., of the New House, could hardly believe their eyes. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the School House, had taken them quite by surprise.

Figgins, Kerr and Wynn were punting a football in the quad. When the elegant figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy strolled into the offing, the thought naturally occurred to George Figgins to direct the ball at that elegant figure. A sudden bang from a rather muddy footer, on his spotless clobber, was likely to make the swell of St. Jim's jump. And making a School House man jump was amusing, from the New House point of view.

So Figgy whizzed that football, straight as a die, at the elegant figure, and Kerr and Wynn grinned in cheery anticipation of the bang.

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'Look out, Gussy!' shouted Jack Blake, from a distance.

'Look out!' shouted Tom Merry, from another direction.

But Gussy, as it happened, did not need those warnings. He was, as a matter of fact, looking out. He had an eye, and an eyeglass, on the playful New House juniors: and the anticipated bang of the muddy footer on his elegant clobber did not materialise. Arthur Augustus side-stepped in time: and the football whizzed by—a foot from the elegant clobber upon which it was aimed to bang.

It flew on—and Arthur Augustus, rather unexpectedly, flew after it. He reached it and kicked it away in the direction of his own House, and followed it up, dribbling it.

Figgins and Co. for a moment stared blankly. They hadn't expected that. It took them a whole moment to realise that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was capturing their football under their very eyes and walking off with it—or, more accurately, galloping off with it. Then, as they did realise it, they shouted, and rushed in pursuit.

But Arthur Augustus had a good start. Figgy's kick had landed that football a good ten yards in

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the direction of the School House. Gussy's kick had doubled that distance. And now he was dribbling it onward at rapid speed, his elegant trousers fairly flashing as he ran. It looked as if Gussy was going to get away with that football—a prize of war, and a capture from the enemy.

'After him!' panted Figgins.

'Stop him, Pratt!' shouted Kerr. Pratt, a New House junior, darted into Gussy's path. But Cardew of the School House Fourth, darted into Pratt's, collided with him and sent him spinning. Arthur Augustus careered on unchecked with the ball.

'Go it, Gussy!' yelled Jack Blake.

'Carry on Gussy!' shouted Tom Merry.

'Stop him!' roared Figgins. 'Redfern, stop him!'

Redfern of the New House happened to be near the School House doorway. He rushed to intercept Arthur Augustus.

But Arthur Augustus was wary. He swerved to the left and dribbled the ball on under study windows. Redfern could only join in the chase, as Figgins and Co. came panting up.

Other fellows were speeding on the scene. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, Blake and Herries and Digby, Levison and Clive and Cardew, all School House men, ran up from various

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directions, keen to lend Gussy the aid he was sure to need if Figgins and Co. overtook him.

But Figgy's long legs out-distanced all others. Figgins fairly flew: and fast as Gussy dribbled the captured ball he soon heard the New House junior panting behind him.

An outstretched hand from behind just touched his shoulder. As if that touch electrified him, Arthur Augustus put on a spurt and raced. But Figgy put on a spurt also, and the clutching hand touched Gussy's shoulder again, and this time it clutched.

'Got you, you School House tick!' gasped Figgins.

He had 'got' Gussy!

But he had not got the football!

For even as he reeled in Figgy's clutch, Arthur Augustus gave a desperate kick at the ball, and it sailed through the air, high and fast. It was quite a tremendous kick, and it carried the footer a great distance: and in the wild excitement of the moment it was only natural that Arthur Augustus should not observe that Mr. Wottle, the Headmaster's Secretary, was walking under the old elms at just that distance; and that he was directly in the way.

The next second, Arthur Augustus, up-ended in Figgy's clutch from behind, was sitting in the quad.

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But the footer was far out of reach. Figgins, having sat Gussy down, and Kerr and Wynn, panting up behind him, stared after it, prepared to rush before School House reinforcements could come up.

But they did not rush.

They stopped dead—as if frozen—and stared. From the little gentleman walking under the elms came a sudden howl. Figgins and Co. did not need to discover where that footer had gone. The anguished howl from little Mr. Wottle gave them the desired information.

‘Oh gum!’ gasped Figgins.

‘Oh holy smoke!’ breathed Kerr.

‘Oh suffering crocodiles!’ panted Fatty Wynn.

‘Bai Jove! Oooogh!’ gasped Arthur Augustus, breathlessly. ‘Wally wound, you fellows! Wally wound! Don’t let those New House boundahs get that ball! Wally wound, deah boys.’

Groping for his eyeglass, and jamming it into his eye, Arthur Augustus staggered to his feet.

‘You blithering chump—!’ hissed Figgins.

‘Weally, Figgins—’

‘Look what you’ve done! Cut!’

‘Bai Jove! What—!’

‘You’ve up-ended Wottle, you dummy, with that

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footer! Cut!' hooted Figgins, 'Want him to take you to the Head? I don't!'

Figgins 'cut' promptly. Kerr and Wynn 'cut' with him. Little Mr. Wottle was sprawling headlong under an elm, emitting squeaks of surprise and pained bewilderment. What was likely to happen to fellows larking with a football in the quad, and flooring the Head's Secretary, Figgins and Co. did not know—and did not want to find out. They 'cut' promptly.

A crowd of fellows had been rushing towards the spot. But they ceased to rush when they beheld that awful happening.

'That ass Gussy—!' hissed Blake.

'That Chump—!' said Dig.

'That image!' gasped Herries.

'Gussy all over!' said Monty Lowther. 'Better get out of this before Wottle gets on his pins again and starts asking questions.'

'Much better,' said Manners.

'Cut!' said Tom Merry. He shouted to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, 'Gussy, you ass, cut!'

'Weally, Tom Mewwy—'

'Cut!' shrieked Manners.

Everybody 'cut'. Even the aristocratic brain of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy absorbed the fact that

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it was prudent to 'cut', with little Mr. Wottle sprawling and squeaking under the elm, not yet aware of what it was that had up-ended him like a whizzing cannon-shot. Everybody was sorry for poor little Mr. Wottle: but nobody wanted to be walked into the Head's study by him, to interview Dr. Holmes. The crowd of juniors followed the example of the guests in Macbeth: they stood not upon the order of their going, but went at once. In fact ghosts at cock-crow could hardly have vanished more suddenly than the crowd of School House and New House juniors.

By the time little Mr. Wottle tottered to his feet, there was not a junior to be seen anywhere in the offing. But it was some minutes before Mr. Wottle tottered up. He sat rubbing his head, with an expression on his face of almost idiotic surprise and bewilderment: till Kildare of the Sixth came along, and gave him a hand up, and then he tottered off to the House, leaning on the sturdy arm of the captain of St. Jim's, still in a state of bewilderment, and to judge by the glint in his eyes and the frown on his brow, in a very bad temper also.

CHAPTER II

ASKING FOR IT!

'LEAST SAID, soonest mended!' said Blake.

'Weally, Blake—'

'Keep it parked!' said Herries.

'Weally, Hewwies—'

'Mum's the word!' said Digby.

'Weally, Dig—!'

Tom Merry smiled. So did several other fellows. Ralph Cardew of the Fourth, chuckled.

In the group of juniors on the study landing, only one face was quite serious: that of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. But D'Arcy's face was very serious indeed. In fact it was almost solemn!

The matter was, from Gussy's point of view, serious enough. Little Mr. Wottle had been spun over by a football banging on his unoffending head. It was an hour since the unfortunate occurrence, but Mr. Wottle had not recovered from the effects—far from it. Nobody knew who had kicked that football, so that was all right, so far as it went. But it did not seem quite all right to the particular

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and punctilious mind of the Honourable Arthur Augustus.

'What do you think, Tom Mewwy?' he asked.

'Same as Blake,' answered Tom. 'Least said, soonest mended, Gussy.'

'It won't do Wottle any good to tell him you buzzed the footer,' said Manners. 'What's the good of going to see him?'

'Might make him worse,' said Monty Lowther.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass on Monty in surprise.

'Bai Jove! I fail to see that, Lowthah,' he exclaimed. 'How could it make Mr. Wottle worse if I called on him about it?'

'Well, if you go to see him, he will see you—' explained Monty Lowther, 'And your features, you know—'

'You uttah ass!' hooted Arthur Augustus. 'This is not a mattah for your idiotic jokin', Lowthah! I weally think, Blake, that I ought to go and see Mr. Wottle. I heah that he is lyin' down in his room, takin' a west, as he feels wathah bad aftah that bang. It was, of course, entiahly an accident, and I feel that it is up to me to apologise for that accident.'

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'Give your chin a rest instead!' suggested Blake.

'Does Gussy ever give his chin a rest?' asked Cardew.

'Weally, Cardew—'

'Chuck it, old man,' said Blake. 'I've heard that Wottle isn't a very good-tempered man, and that bang on the napper can't have improved his temper. Give him a miss.'

'Whethah he is a good-tempered man or not is immatewial, Blake, if I owe him an apology. And I wathah think I do. A fellow must wemembah his mannahs. It was vevy unfortunate that that footah banged on Wottle's nappah: and I feel bound to expwess my wegwet.'

'Fathead!' said Blake.

'Ass!' said Digby and Herries simultaneously.

'And then some!' remarked Monty Lowther.

'Wats!' said Arthur Augustus, 'I am goin' to see Wottle now, and chance it. I owe it to him to expwess my wegwet and I am goin' to do so.'

And with that, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked away, with his noble nose in the air. His mind was made up. Good manners came before all other considerations with the swell of St. Jim's, and surely good manners required an apology to be rendered for so unfortunate an occurrence? That,

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at all events, was Arthur Augustus's opinion, and he was acting on it.

The juniors watched him as he went, most of them grinning. If Mr. Wottle was lying down with a headache after that bang, they did not think it likely that he would find a visit from Arthur Augustus either grateful or comforting. And as he was known to be a rather tart little gentleman, most fellows would have preferred to give him a miss when he was not feeling his bonniest. But Arthur Augustus, like Gallio of old, cared not for these things: he marched off to Mr. Wottle's quarters.

The Head's Secretary had rooms on a passage which opened off the study landing. Arthur Augustus marched up that passage, and tapped at the door of Mr. Wottle's sitting-room.

'Come in!' said a sharp voice.

Arthur Augustus opened the door and walked in. Little Mr. Wottle was lying on a settee by the window, which overlooked the quadrangle. His head rested on cushions, and there was a scent of eau-de-Cologne. He turned his head and stared at the Fourth-Form junior.

'What is it?' he snapped.

'I twust you are not feelin' vewy bad, sir,' said Arthur Augustus, with polite sympathy.

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Little Mr. Wottle gave him what could only be described as a glare.

'I am feeling very bad indeed!' he snapped. 'I have a severe headache.'

'I am vewy sowwy, sir—'

'If that is what you came to say to me, D'Arcy, you may leave my room, and shut the door after you.'

It was not encouraging. Arthur Augustus realised that. But he was not the fellow to be discouraged. He had come there to say his piece, as it were, and he was going to say it.

'I am vewy sowwy indeed, sir, that you feel vewy bad,' he said. 'I assuah you sir, that it was a very unfortunate accident—the football was not intended to go anywhah neah you, sir—'

'Perhaps it was you who kicked it!' yapped Mr. Wottle, his glare at the swell of St. Jim's intensifying.

'Yaas, sir—'

'You!' Mr. Wottle sat up. 'You!'

'Yaas, wathah. I have come heah to expwess my deep wegwet—'

'You clumsy young donkey—'

'Weally, Mr. Wottle—'

'You clumsy, stupid, absurd dunderhead—'

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'Bai Jove!'

'You kicked a football, without seeing where you were kicking it, and knocked me over!' hooted Mr. Wottle. 'It has completely upset me! I have been unable to attend to my duties as the Headmaster's Secretary since.'

'Bai Jove!' repeated Arthur Augustus.

He gazed at the little man on the settee. Sympathetic as he was, he could not help thinking that Mr. Wottle was somewhat exaggerating the effect of that bang from the footer. Plenty of St. Jim's fellows had had a bang from a footer, without following it up with a song and dance, so to speak. No doubt he was feeling rather bad, and probably he fancied that he felt worse than he actually did.

'I am weally and twuly vevy sowwy, sir!' faltered Arthur Augustus.

'Are you?' snapped Mr. Wottle. 'Do you think that makes me feel better?'

'Pewwaps not, sir, but I apologise most pwo-foundly for the vevy wegwetable accident—'

'Come here, D'Arcy.'

'Yaas, certainly, sir.'

Arthur Augustus approached the little gentleman sitting on the settee. He did not guess what was coming next. But he soon learned.

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Smack! It rang like a pistol-shot.

'Yawwooh!' spluttered Arthur Augustus, taken by surprise. It was the first time in his career that his aristocratic ears had been boxed. It was quite a startling and painful experience.

And Mr. Wottle was not finished yet. As the astonished swell of St. Jim's rocked under that smack on one ear, Mr. Wottle landed out with the other hand, and smacked the other ear.

Smack! It was like a rifle-shot this time.

Arthur Augustus, having rocked to the right, now rocked to the left.

A hand was going up for a third smack: but the swell of St. Jim's jumped back in time. He made a backward jump out of reach: and then a bound to the door. Good manners or bad manners, Gussy had had enough of rendering apologies to little Mr. Wottle. The door of Mr. Wottle's sitting-room banged after him, almost before the echo of the smacks had died away. He left Mr. Wottle feeling perhaps a little better, but Arthur Augustus was undoubtedly feeling considerably worse as he departed in haste.

Grinning faces on the study landing greeted him as he returned there—rubbing two ears that were burning red.

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'Had a nice time with Wottle?' asked Blake.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Wats!' was Arthur Augustus's brief reply. And he walked away, rubbing those burning ears and breathing indignation. And his regret for the sad accident in the quad had quite faded out. Indeed, he could have wished that the footer had banged a little harder!

CHAPTER III

CARDEW IS AMUSED

'HA, HA, HA!'

It was Ralph Reckness Cardew, of the St. Jim's Fourth, who laughed. Cardew seemed tremendously amused.

He was alone in his study, No. 9, which he shared with Levison and Clive. Sitting in the window-seat, he had a slip of paper in his hand, and whatever it was that was written on that slip of paper excited his merriment.

What was written on it certainly would not have amused either of his study-mates, had they seen it: but Ralph Reckness Cardew had a rather sardonic turn of humour, and he found entertainment where other fellows might only have been puzzled or shocked.

'Ha, ha, ha!' he laughed. 'That little ass! That dithering little noodle! Who'd have thought it? If the Head knew—ha, ha, ha!'

There were footsteps in the Fourth-Form passage and Levison and Clive came into the study.

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Both of them glanced inquiringly at Cardew's grinning face.

'What's the joke?' asked Levison.

Cardew chuckled.

'Joke of the term,' he answered. 'Funniest thing that ever happened. More than enough to make a cat laugh.'

'Give it a name,' said Clive.

'You never know a man till you find him out,' said Cardew. 'But for that white rabbit to turn out like this—'

'What white rabbit?' asked Levison, puzzled.

'Haven't you noticed that our revered Headmaster keeps a white rabbit?' drawled Cardew.

Levison frowned.

'If you mean poor little Wottle—'

'Exactly.'

'I don't see why you want to slang the Head's Secretary,' said Clive, rather gruffly, 'Especially after that ass D'Arcy has knocked him out with a football. He's done nothing to you, I suppose.'

'Hardly ever noticed the man,' yawned Cardew. 'I believe he's been here only a short time since the old bean before him retired on a pension. All I've noticed about him is that he looks a white rabbit.'

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'Better not let him hear you say so,' grunted Clive, 'Or he might smack your head as he did D'Arcy's.'

Cardew laughed again.

'But is he the white rabbit he looks?' he asked. 'My beloved 'earers, there's more in little Wottle than meets the eye. I've found that out.'

'He's got a temper, if that's what you mean,' said Levison. 'He seems to have landed Gussy some jolly hard smacks.'

'That isn't what I mean! Suppose--' Cardew burst into another laugh, and then went on, 'Suppose that under that white rabbit look of his, little Wottle was a bold bad gambler on the Turf!'

Levison and Clive stared at him blankly.

'What?' grinned Cardew.

'Only a silly ass would suppose anything of the kind,' said Levison, tartly. 'What the dickens have you got into your head now?'

'Your usual rot, I suppose,' said Clive.

'Not at all,' grinned Cardew. 'Suppose—just suppose—that little Wottle was backing a geegee at the Wapshot races—that's a good step from here—and suppose he was backing him to the tune of a hundred quid?'

Levison and Clive could only stare.

CARDEW IS AMUSED

Such a suggestion seemed to them wildly out of keeping with Mr. Wottle, the quiet, respectable, reserved, dutiful Secretary of their Headmaster. St. Jim's fellows saw little of him, his duties brought him very little in contact with them, but so far as fellows observed him at all they would have concurred in Cardew's description of him as a 'white rabbit'. Certainly they would never have suspected him of stepping one inch outside the borders of quiet respectability. The bare idea of little Mr. Wottle backing a horse to the tune of a hundred pounds, or indeed of backing a horse at all, or knowing anything about the backing of horses, seemed simply absurd.

'Mad?' asked Clive, after a long stare.

'Is this one of your silly jokes?' asked Levison. 'I can't see anything funny in it myself.'

'Sober as a judge!' grinned Cardew. 'You see I know!'

'You're the only person that knows, if you do!' said Levison, shrugging his shoulders.

'Quite!' agreed Cardew. 'The white rabbit keeps his little secrets. If our revered Beak knew, I rather fancy he would dispense with Wottle's services. The white rabbit would be going away for good—to stay away. What?'

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'Only it isn't so,' said Levison, 'And if that's your idea of a joke, Cardew, you'd better keep it inside this study.'

'Solid fact, laddie!' said Cardew, 'Look at that!'

He held up the slip of paper in his hand. Levison and Clive looked at it; stared at it, blankly.

ABRAHAMSONS LIMITED
LONDON, E. C. 1.

John Smith Esq.,
14 High Street,
Wayland, Sussex.

Dear Sir,

In accordance with your instructions we have laid you:

ODDS	STAKE	SELECTION	RACE
£1,000	£100	Cauliflower	Wapshot.
			Tuesday, 2.30

All in Run or not.

Yours faithfully,

ABRAHAMSONS LIMITED.

CARDEW IS AMUSED

'What on earth does that mean?' asked Sidney Clive, blankly. Levison, who understood such things rather more than Clive, frowned.

'My dear innocent youth, I'll tell you what it means,' grinned Cardew. 'Abrahamsons are a very well-known firm of bookmakers in London, as I happen to know—'

'You know too much about bookmakers,' grunted Clive.

Cardew chuckled.

'Laddie, my little sporting ventures are as moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine, compared with the white rabbit's,' he answered. 'I may have half a quid on a geegee sometimes with Bill Lodgey at the Green Man. In fact I don't mind admitting, in the privacy of this study, that I'm going to see Bill on Wednesday about a horse!'

'More fool you,' said Clive. 'And more blackguard too!'

'Oh, quite!' agreed Cardew, 'But that's neither here nor there. The white rabbit is a plunger—I can only envy him! A hundred quid! Phew! I've no doubt he gets a good salary here—the Head is a good old boy—but no Secretary's salary could run to backing geegees at a hundred pounds a time. Not if he makes a habit of it, at any rate.

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'I don't see—'

'Look at it,' said Cardew. 'This mysterious document, dear boy, means that a horse named Cauliflower is backed for the 2.30 at Wapshot on Tuesday, at odds of ten to one—£1,000 against £100. The white rabbit's stake is £100. If Cauliflower romps home, Abrahamsons have to pay him £1,000.'

'Oh!' gasped Clive, 'Is that what it all means?'

'That, my innocent young friend, is precisely what it all means!' grinned Cardew. 'This is the official bookmaker's note recording the transaction.'

'I can't see how Wottle's connected with it,' said Clive. 'There's the name on it—John Smith—with an address over at Wayland. What has it got to do with Wottle?'

'I fancy Levison can guess, if you can't,' said Cardew. 'John Smith is a pseudonym, dear boy—a nom-de-plume—an assumed name—things of this kind are generally run under an invented name, by people who wouldn't like to see their own name on a bookie's slip.'

'Oh!' said Clive.

'And the address is what they call an accommodation address,' explained Cardew. 'The white

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rabbit wouldn't like letters from bookies arriving here. Something might come out. The good little man trots over to Wayland for his missives from Abrahamsons.'

'Oh!' said Clive again.

Levison uttered an angry exclamation.

'How do you connect this with Wottle?' he demanded. 'Whether John Smith is the real name or not, what has it to do with Wottle?'

'And how the dickens did you get hold of it, anyway?' said Clive.

'Both questions easily answered,' grinned Cardew. 'It was dropped in the quad by a man who was knocked over by a football.'

'Oh!' exclaimed the two juniors, together.

'I picked it up on the very spot where Wottle sprawled,' chuckled Cardew. 'He never knew he'd dropped anything when he rolled over under Gussy's bang, of course. He was all in a dither till Kildare came along and picked him up. I saw it there a little later and did I jump when I saw what it was? The white rabbit you know, ha, ha, ha!'

Neither Levison nor Clive joined in the laugh. Cardew evidently was immensely amused. His friends did not share his amusement in the very least.

CARDEW'S CATCH!

'How do you know Wottle dropped it?' snapped Levison. 'Anybody might have dropped it, for all you know.'

'On the precise spot where Wottle was floored?' grinned Cardew. 'Don't be a goat, Ernest, you know it's the white rabbit's, as well as I do.'

'I don't know and you don't! And whomsoever it belongs to, it doesn't belong to you and you've no right to it.'

'Think I want to keep it?' grinned Cardew. 'I am ready to hand it over to the owner any minute. But there's a jolly old lion in the path. Think Wottle would feel grateful if I did? Think he'd feel pleased to know that a fellow in the Fourth Form knew that he was a bold bad backer of geegees.'

'You can't keep it.'

'Not at all! Wottle's going to have it back—I fancy he will be in a dither when he finds out that he's lost it. He seems to be lying up with a headache now, but I'll bet he'll stamp on the gas to hunt for this paper when he misses it. He won't want all St. Jim's to learn that John Smith is backing Cauliflower for the 2.30,' Cardew chuckled. 'My dear chap, if I took this to Wottle he couldn't even admit that it was his!'

'Most likely it isn't,' said Clive.

CARDEW IS AMUSED

'Might be anybody's,' said Levison.

'It's the white rabbit's,' said Cardew, 'And I'm jolly well going to make sure that it's his, and let him have it back. And being the kind-hearted considerate chap I am, I'm not going to let him know that I know anything at all—why shouldn't he keep his secrets? Don't you men say anything about it—'

'Are we likely to?' growled Clive.

'Well, don't! I had to tell you the joke—'

'I don't call it a joke,' said Levison, 'And if you think it funny for a man in Wottle's position to take to gambling and lose more money than he can afford, you've got a dashed queer sense of humour, Cardew.'

'And I think—!' began Clive.

'Speech taken as read!' interrupted Cardew. 'Keep the sermons till I come in to tea. I'm going to be busy for a while getting this jolly old document back to the white rabbit without putting him into a dither. It's no end of a joke, but he's at the wrong end of the joke and I don't suppose he'd laugh. I suppose you agree that he ought to have it back, if it's his?'

'Yes—if!' said Clive. 'If it isn't he'll take it as an insult, and you'll get your cheeky head smacked like Gussy's.'

CARDEW'S CATCH!

'I'll make assurance doubly sure, as jolly old Shakespeare puts it,' said Cardew, and he left the study, still laughing, but leaving his friends with very grave faces.

CHAPTER IV

A TASK FOR TOM MERRY

'WELL?' said Tom Merry, rather abruptly.

Cardew smiled.

He was leaning on the trunk of one of the old St. Jim's elms; the old elm beneath which little Mr. Wottle had sprawled headlong under the impact of the football. Tom Merry came up with an inquiring look, in which there was a trace of impatience. A steady fellow like Tom had, in fact, little use for a light, flippant, volatile fellow like Ralph Reckness Cardew, who seemed to take life as a prolonged joke, with little or nothing serious in it.

'Thanks for coming along,' yawned Cardew.

'Well what's up?' asked Tom. 'You asked Glyn to tell me you wanted to speak to me and that you wanted me to come here. I can't imagine why—'

'All the kinder of you to come,' said Cardew. 'I do want to speak to you, and I do want you here, right on this spot.'

'Get it off your chest, then,' said Tom. 'I've

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plenty to do with my time, without wasting it. If you're leg-pulling, as you generally are—'

'Not the least little bit in the wide world.'

'Well, cough it up!' said Tom.

'Member D'Arcy knocking little Wottle over on this precise spot an hour or two ago?' asked Cardew.

'Of course I do.'

'Wottle was up-ended—!'

'We all saw what happened,' said Tom. 'Have you asked me to come here to tell me about what I saw with my own eyes?'

'I think he dropped something out of one of his pockets when he rolled over under Gussy's goal-shot.'

'Did he?' Tom Merry glanced round. He saw nothing on the ground that looked as if it might have fallen from a pocket. 'If he did, I suppose you could have picked it up and taken it to him.'

'He had gone in before I happened along and saw it,' explained Cardew. 'I did pick it up, but I haven't taken it to him yet.'

'Then you'd better lose no more time about that,' said Tom, 'And I'm blessed if I know what you want to talk to me about it for.'

'There are—reasons,' smiled Cardew. 'It was a

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paper—a sort of note, folded. I hadn't the foggiest idea what it was before I unfolded it and looked at it—'

Tom Merry frowned.

'You needn't have done that,' he snapped. 'Do you mean that it was a private letter?'

'Sort of—and very private,' said Cardew.

'Then it was pretty rotten to look at it,' said Tom, bluntly.

'How was I to know what it was, before I looked at it?' asked Cardew, equably. 'It looked like an odd bit of paper left about—but it occurred to me that Wottle might have dropped it, as he was sprawling here, and I looked to see whether it belonged to him or not. It was folded blank side out, and might have been all blank, for anything I knew.'

'Oh! I suppose so,' admitted Tom. 'I suppose you wouldn't be an inquisitive tick like Baggy Trimble, nosing into other people's business.'

'Thanks!' drawled Cardew.

'But I don't see where I come in,' said Tom. 'It has nothing to do with me, has it? You can take it back to Mr. Wottle—'

'I'd rather not.'

'Why the dickens—'

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'First of all, I can't be absolutely sure that it's his, as his name isn't on it. Second, it's about a private matter—a very private matter—and if it's his, he would be in a flap at the idea of anybody having read it. Suppose he asked me whether I'd looked at it—I couldn't very well say no, as I have—and if I said yes, the fat would be in the fire.'

Tom Merry looked hard at Cardew's smiling face. He never quite knew how to take the dandy of the Fourth, and it was not always easy to tell whether Cardew was in jest or earnest.

'At a pinch,' went on Cardew, 'I might make an effort and tell him a naughty fib, saying I hadn't looked at it. But you wouldn't advise that.'

'I wouldn't advise any fellow to tell lies, if that's what you mean,' said Tom Merry, gruffly.

'Exactly,' assented Cardew, 'And there's the added difficulty that he might not believe me. He mightn't, you know. I haven't your spotless reputation for the frozen truth.'

Tom Merry breathed hard.

'Will you come to the point?' he asked. 'Manners and Lowther are expecting me in the study to tea, and if you've called me here simply to listen to you exercising your silly chin—'

'Bref, as the French say, will you take that

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paper to Wottle and hand it over? You can tell him that you haven't looked at it, if he asks you—as you haven't and won't.'

'Oh!' said Tom, 'But if he asks me how I got it, I shall have to say you gave it to me—'

'Not at all! You will say you picked it up here.'

'What?' exclaimed Tom, reddening.

'Don't go off at the deep end!' said Cardew, soothingly. 'I'm not suggesting that you depart from the strait and narrow path of veracity—I know you wouldn't and couldn't. You can tell him you picked it up under this tree, if you did actually pick it up under this tree, couldn't you?'

'But I haven't—'

'You're going to.'

Cardew shifted his right foot. Shifting that foot revealed a folded paper lying on the earth. Hitherto it had been concealed from sight. Tom glanced down at it.

'Folded blank out, as you see,' drawled Cardew. 'You won't see what's on the written side, unless you look—'

'You know I shan't to that.'

'Quite, and Wottle will know too!' smiled Cardew. 'All you've got to do is to pick it up and take it to Wottle. No need to mention that I put

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you on the track of it at all. That's quite superfluous. See?

Tom Merry hesitated.

'I don't know what's on that paper, and don't want to know,' he said, slowly, 'But you've read it—is it something that would worry the man if he thought others had seen it?'

'It would worry him no end.'

'A really private matter—?'

'Couldn't be more private.'

'It's rather rotten that you've seen it, then,' said Tom, 'And certainly it would be better for Wottle not to know you've seen it, if it's some personal private matter he wouldn't want known.'

'That's exactly what it is.'

'Oh, all right, then,' said Tom, 'I'll pick it up and take it to him, and ask him whether it's his. If it isn't, I'll give it to you, and you can take it to the Housemaster.'

'Oh, gad!' ejaculated Cardew, 'Anything but!'

Tom stared at him.

'What do you mean?' he asked testily. 'If it's a letter, and the owner not known, Railton is the man to say what's to be done with it—'

'For goodness' sake, don't be a goat!' said Cardew, 'I'm as good as certain that it's Wottle's, though

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his name isn't on it, and it would knock him over like Gussy's football, if Railton saw it. For goodness' sake don't let anybody get a squint at it.'

'I don't understand all this—'

'No need to,' said Cardew, 'But I can tell you this—when Wottle misses that scrap of paper he will be in a terrific flap about it. Why not do him a good turn, and set the poor little white rabbit's mind at rest?'

Tom Merry knitted his brows.

'You're speaking as if the man had some sort of rotten secret to keep,' he snapped.

'Perhaps he has—'

'Rubbish.'

'We all have our little secrets,' smiled Cardew.

'I haven't—and I don't suppose you have,' grunted Tom, 'And I don't believe Wottle has either. I suppose it's some letter about some private affair, and if so he wouldn't like a silly ass in the Fourth having seen it, I know that. I'll take it to him.'

Tom Merry stooped and picked up the folded paper. Without another word to Cardew, he walked off to the House with the paper in his hand. Ralph Reckness Cardew smiled after him as we went.

CHAPTER V
MYSTERIOUS

TAP!

'Come in!'

Tom Merry opened the door of Mr. Wottle's sitting-room and entered.

Little Mr. Wottle was still on the settee under the window, where Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had seen him, his head resting on cushions, and a scent of eau-de-Cologne clinging to him.

He glanced round at Tom Merry, with a far from amiable expression on his face. Mr. Wottle had rather small dark eyes, set close together, and they seemed to glitter like black beads at the junior. Obviously, he was not in a good temper, and had no welcome for visitors. Perhaps that was natural, as he had a rather severe headache. But at that moment he did not look, as Cardew had described him, like a white rabbit, but a good deal more like a cat about to claw.

Tom gave a little start as he looked at him. He had never taken any particular notice of the Head's

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Secretary, with whom he had nothing to do, but his impression was that the man was quiet and self-contained, with mild manners. That was not the impression he gave now. 'Mild' was the very last word that would have described his expression.

'What do you want?' Mr. Wottle snapped out the question before Tom had time to speak. 'This is the second time I have been disturbed by a junior boy coming here.'

Tom Merry coloured.

'I'm sorry to disturb you, Mr. Wottle—!' he began.

'That will do! Go away, and shut the door after you.'

'If you please—'

'I have told you to go away.'

'Will you please let me speak, Mr. Wottle?' asked Tom, 'I have a paper here—'

'That does not concern me.'

'That's what I want to ask you, sir,' said Tom, patiently. 'I have just picked it up under the tree where you fell down this afternoon, and you may have dropped it when you fell.'

'What?'

'If you'd look at it, sir—'

'Oh!'

Mr. Wottle sat up abruptly, and his hand shot

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to a pocket. He groped in that pocket with so startled a face that Tom Merry could not doubt that the paper was his, and that it dealt with some very private matter indeed.

The Secretary's hand came out of the pocket empty, and he stretched it out towards the Shell fellow.

'Give it to me,' he said, his voice husky.

Tom Merry handed him the folded paper.

Mr. Wottle clutched it from his hand, unfolded it, and after a second's glance at it, re-folded it. Then the little eyes, glittering like black beads, fixed on Tom, with so penetrating a look that they seemed almost to pierce him. Tom backed to the door. Obviously, that paper was Mr. Wottle's: and Tom was through, and ready to go. But an almost snarling snap from the man on the settee stopped him.

'Stop!'

'Yes, sir,' said Tom, quietly. He stopped.

'Have you looked at this—this note?'

'No, sir.'

'It is a private letter,' said Mr. Wottle, his voice still husky. 'It concerns a—a family matter, which I should not like to be chattered about among the boys. You have not looked at it?'

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'I have said so, sir.'

The black beady eyes scanned him searchingly and suspiciously.

'How did you know it belonged to me, Merry?'

'I did not know,' answered Tom. 'The only reason for thinking so was that it was lying on the ground where you fell. If it is not yours, sir, I will take it to Mr. Railton.'

'It is mine,' said Mr. Wottle, hastily.

'Very well, sir.'

Tom turned to the door.

'One moment, Merry!'

Tom turned back again.

Again the black beady eyes seemed to penetrate his face. He could not help colouring under that piercing inspection. He could not help seeing the doubt in the man's mind. And he could not help feeling a surge of resentment. The man might have doubted Cardew's word; he had no right to doubt Tom's. It was borne in on Tom Merry's mind that there must be something in that folded paper which Mr. Wottle was very, very anxious indeed should not be seen by other eyes. Cardew knew what it was. Tom did not know, and did not want to know. But he could not help realising that it must be something serious.

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He stood silent, looking Mr. Wottle squarely in the eyes, and the obvious honesty of his boyish face seemed to reassure the man. Mr. Wottle spoke at last, in a quieter tone.

'You give me your word, Merry, that you have not looked at this paper?' he asked.

'I have said so twice, Mr. Wottle,' answered Tom, 'And I give you my word if you want it. I am not the sort of fellow to pry into other people's letters, as any man in the School House or the other House could tell you, if you took the trouble to ask.'

'Very well, Merry. Thank you for bringing the letter to me,' said Mr. Wottle. 'I accept your word, of course. I—I am much obliged to you for returning me a letter dealing with—with private family affairs.'

'Not at all, sir!' said Tom.

And he opened the door, glad to get away, and shut it after him as he went. Hitherto, he had never heeded Mr. Wottle, or given him a thought; now he was conscious that he disliked the man. And he could not help wondering, a little, what the dickens could be in that mysterious paper, to cause Mr. Wottle to be so alarmed if other eyes saw it.

However, he dismissed Mr. Wottle and his

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mysterious paper from mind, as he went to join Manners and Lowther at tea in No. 10 Study in the Shell. But as he crossed the study landing, a lazy figure leaning on the banisters detached itself therefrom, and came towards him.

'Hold on a minute, Merry,' drawled Cardew.

'Well?'

'Was it Wottle's?'

'Yes.'

'Then you've given it back to him?'

'Yes.'

'Did he thank you nicely?' grinned Cardew, 'Or did he bite?'

'Oh, rats!' said Tom, and he went on his way. Cardew, laughing, sauntered along to No. 9 in the Fourth, where Levison and Clive were already at tea. They both looked at him inquiringly.

'Okay!' smiled Cardew. 'It was dear little Wottle's, and he's got it back without knowing that it's been seen, so his dear little mind will be at rest. But isn't it the joke of the term?'

'No!' snapped Levison.

'No!' grunted Clive.

'I wonder—!' said Cardew, musingly.

'Well, what do you wonder now?' said Levison, as he paused.

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'I wonder whether the little man's got it right! If he has, it might be worth a fellow's while to add his humble half-quid on Cauliflower for the 2.30 on Tuesday? What do you fellows think?'

'I think you're a fool,' said Levison.

'And I think you're a sweep!' said Clive.

Cardew, apparently amused by those replies, laughed, and sat down to tea.

CHAPTER VI

STOP PRESS!

TOM MERRY paused.

It was Tuesday, after class—a fine clear autumn afternoon, with a crispness in the air that was pleasant and invigorating: just the day for soccer, in Tom's opinion at least. That did not seem to be the opinion of Ralph Reckness Cardew of the Fourth. He was lounging idly against the banisters on the study landing, when Tom came along with Manners and Lowther, on their way down to the changing room. So Tom paused and looked at him.

'Coming?' he asked, rather abruptly.

Cardew glanced round carelessly at him.

'Not at the moment,' he drawled.

The junior captain of St. Jim's frowned. Monty Lowther shrugged his shoulders and Manner's lip curled. Those manifestations did not seem to affect Cardew in the least. He smiled genially.

'Look here, Cardew,' said Tom, 'You're in the team for the House match on Saturday—'

'In which, my dear man, you display more than

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your usual good judgement,' assented Cardew.

'Well, if you want to play for the House you've got to keep in form,' said Tom. 'We've fixed up a pick-up for this afternoon, and you're wanted. So chuck loafing about with your hands in your pockets and come down and change.'

'I'll join you a little later—'

'You'll join up at once if you're going to play in the pick-up—do you fancy we're going to leave the kick-off till you've got tired of loafing about like Baggy Trimble?' snapped Tom.

Cardew laughed.

'I'm not exactly loafing,' he explained, 'I'm waiting.'

'Waiting for what?'

'Trotter!' yawned Cardew.

Tom stared at him. Trotter was the House page in the School House, with whom it was hardly possible that a Fourth-Form junior could have any business.

'Trotter!' repeated Tom.

'Just Trotter,' assented Cardew. 'The useful lad who trots about savin' other people trouble. He may be up any minute now.'

'I don't see why, or why you are waiting for him anyhow.'

'What a lot of things you don't see!' remarked

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Cardew. 'I dare say you've never noticed that little Wottle has his evening paper taken to his room, instead of crooning over it in the Common Room with the Beaks.

'Does he?' said Tom.

'He does, my unobservant friend,' said Cardew. 'And when the evening papers are delivered in the Common Room, it's one of the useful Trotter's duties to take Wottle's to him in his rooms.'

'Well, what about it?' snapped Tom.

'Lots!' said Cardew. 'You see, I happen to want to see the evening paper today very specially, and I'm lying in wait for Trotter on his way to Wottle, to get a peep at it in transit.'

Grunt from Manners.

'Stop Press—latest racing results, what?' he said sarcastically.

'Quick on the up-take, aren't you?' smiled Cardew. 'Might be something of the kind.' He laughed, 'Hang on a minute or two, and I'll come down with you.' He glanced over the banisters, 'I can see Trotter in the distance now.'

'Look here—!' began Tom angrily.

'Oh, let's wait and see his loser,' said Monty Lowther. 'I expect his dead cert has come in tenth or eleventh.'

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Cardew laughed again.

'Shouldn't wonder,' he said, with a nod. 'They so often do!'

'If Railton got on to this—!' said Manners.

'Railton won't!' smiled Cardew. 'Lots of things our revered Housemaster doesn't get on to. But it's really a very special matter today,' went on Cardew. 'I had a tip—'

'You silly ass!' said Tom. 'You and your tips!'

'But this was a very special tip!' said Cardew. 'Suppose I got wind of it that a certain party was laying a hundred pounds on Cauliflower for the 2.30 at Wapshot today.'

'Then you've got wind of a bigger fool than yourself,' said Tom.

'How nicely you put it!' said Cardew, 'And I shouldn't wonder if you're right. But a man going in so deep looks as if he knew something, what?'

'Rot!' said Tom. 'Why can't you keep clear of this kind of rotten thing, Cardew. Doesn't it leave a nasty taste in your mouth? It does in mine.'

'My dear man, I can swallow the nasty taste if I bag five quid from Bill Lodgey along with it,' grinned Cardew. 'Ten to one, you know.'

Tom made a gesture of distaste. Manners grunted again. Monty Lowther chuckled.

'I can see you bagging five quid from Bill Lodgey!' he said. 'Lodgey wouldn't lay ten to one on a geegee likely to get home.'

'Oh, you never know,' said Cardew. 'There's a certain party about who seems to have put his shirt on Cauliflower. Looks as if he knows something.'

'About as much as you do!' said Tom. 'For goodness' sake Cardew, forget that shady rot, and come down—'

'Only a minute or two,' drawled Cardew. 'If I've lost the half-quid I've put on Cauliflower I can stand it—but the johnny I've been speaking of will feel it as a very bad jolt, I fancy. A hundred quid—phew!'

'I don't see how you know anything about it.'

'That's only one more of the many things you don't see, laddie. Patience—here comes the Trotter-lad.'

Trotter's head was visible below on the staircase. The three Shell fellows stayed—Tom Merry looking angry and impatient, Manners openly contemptuous, and Monty Lowther amused.

Cardew, quite indifferent to their opinions, smiled. Cardew knew, if no one else at St. Jim's did, why little Mr. Wottle had his evening paper

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taken to his rooms instead of looking at it in the Common Room. There were always Beaks to see the evening papers in the Common Room, and Wottle did not want other eyes to witness him scanning the Stop Press for winners. Cardew, since he had seen that bookmaker's slip a few days ago, had no doubt that Mr. Wottle was waiting very anxiously in his rooms for the *Evening Express*. With such a sum at stake, he was probably in a 'dither' to learn the result.

Trotter came on the study landing, with the newspaper under his arm. Cardew stepped away from the banisters.

'Just a tick, Trotter,' he drawled, and he coolly jerked the newspaper from under the House page's arm.

''Ere, Master Cardew—!' ejaculated Trotter, in protest.

'Won't keep you a tick, kid,' said Cardew. 'Wottle won't eat you if you're a minute behind time.'

'Look 'ere, Master Cardew, you gimme that paper! Mr. Wottle's always in a 'urry for his evening paper, and he might come out and find you reading it, and I'd be in a row—'

'Give him the paper, Cardew,' exclaimed Tom Merry.

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Cardew heeded neither Tom nor Trotter. His eyes were searching eagerly for the Stop Press column, in which the racing results were given. He was more or less indifferent to the fate of the small stake he had himself placed on Cauliflower with Bill Lodgey, but he was very curious to know the result of the 2'30 all the same.

'Oh, gas!' he ejaculated.

He was not long in finding what he sought. There it was in the Stop Press—

WAPSHOT

2.30: Black Prince, Kind Friend, Orchid.

Cardew whistled.

There wasn't any mention of Cauliflower. That 'gee' on which little Mr. Wottle had staked a hundred pounds, as Cardew knew, was not even placed. Like so many 'dead certs' and 'sure snips', Cauliflower had failed to come up to expectations. Black Prince had won, Kind Friend was second and Orchid third. Cauliflower was evidently nowhere!

'Look 'ere, Master Cardew—!' Trotter was beginning again.

He was interrupted.

There were sudden footsteps from the passage

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on which Mr. Wottle's rooms opened. Mr. Wottle came quickly out on the study landing. He gave Trotter an angry stare! Only too evidently, Mr. Wottle was, as Trotter had said, in a hurry for his evening paper. He gave the page an angry glare.

'Trotter! Where is my paper?' His voice was shrill. 'Why have you not brought me my paper? Where—'

'Master Cardew, sir,' stammered Trotter, backing away from the angry man.

As he spoke, Mr. Wottle's eyes fell on Cardew with the newspaper in his hand. The juniors were startled by the fierce anger that blazed in his face. He made a stride at Cardew, tore the paper from him with his left hand, and with his right, smacked Cardew's head.

'Oh!' panted Cardew.

It was so sudden and savage a smack that it sent the dandy of the Fourth reeling. He lost his footing, and crashed on the landing. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther stared on blankly.

Mr. Wottle did not give the sprawling junior even a glance. With the newspaper clutched in his hand he stamped back into the passage to his rooms, and disappeared.

'Oh, corks!' mumbled Trotter.



He tore the paper from him with his left hand and with his right, smacked Cardew's head

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'Oh, my hat!' gasped Tom Merry.

'What a dashed little wildcat!' said Monty Lowther. 'What on earth's the matter with him, losing his temper like that?'

'Must be crackers,' said Manners, in wonder.

Cardew staggered to his feet. His face was white with rage, save where the mark of Wottle's savage smack burned red.

'The cheeky rotter!' he panted. 'Does he fancy he can smack a fellow's head—?'

'Your turn now!' said Lowther. 'Gussy had it the other day! The little man's a spitfire, and no mistake.'

'You had his paper—!' said Manners.

Cardew's eyes blazed.

'I'll tell him whether he can smack my head or not!' he shouted, and he ran into the passage after the Secretary.

'Stop, you ass!' exclaimed Tom Merry.

Cardew did not heed him. He ran furiously down the passage. Mr. Wottle had already gone into his sitting-room and closed the door. Cardew flung it wide open and stared in.

Angry words were on his lips. But he did not utter them. He stared at the Secretary.

Mr. Wottle was standing by the window, his eyes

STOP PRESS!

glued on that Stop Press column. He did not look round as the door was flung open. He seemed transfixed, rooted, overwhelmed. His face was colourless, his black beady eyes popping. He looked like a man who had received a stunning blow—as, indeed, Cardew knew he had.

And Cardew, as he stared at him, felt his angry resentment fade away. The Secretary did not give him a glance—he seemed unaware that the door had opened at all—he was lost to everything but that crushing blow in the Stop Press column of the *Evening Express*.

Cardew drew the door quietly shut.

His mocking face was serious for once, as he rejoined the Shell fellows on the landing.

‘Let’s get down to the footer,’ he said, and without another word he went down the stairs, followed by Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther.

CHAPTER VII

EXTRAORDINARY

'BAI JOVE!' ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Blake and Herries and Digby glanced round.

It was morning break at St. Jim's. Wednesday morning, bright and sunny. In morning break, which was brief, juniors were not supposed—or allowed—to wander outside the school walls. But at the moment the chums of Study No. 6 in the Fourth were at quite a little distance from the school, deep in Rylcombe Wood.

'Cave!' said Arthur Augustus.

'Oh, my hat!' said Blake.

It was rather unfortunate. Certainly, there was no harm whatever in four cheery juniors taking a little ramble. Even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was very particular in the observance of rules, did not see any harm in such a little ramble. All that was needed, was to get back in time for third lesson, no harm done, and nobody the wiser. But technically, at least, Study No. 6 were out of bounds, and in such circumstances did not want to

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be reported to their Housemaster. That meant lines.

So when Arthur Augustus, glancing along the woodland path, spotted a little figure coming from the distance, he gave warning at once.

'Only Wottle,' said Herries.

'Not a Beak!' said Digby.

'Get out of sight, all the same,' said Blake. 'Wottle's not a Beak, but he might mention it to a Beak.'

'Yaas, wathah!' said Arthur Augustus. 'Of course, it is weally no business of Wottle's, but he might wegard it as his dutay to weport us as bein' out of bounds in bweak. Much bettah not to let him know.'

'Much!' agreed Blake. 'Come on!'

He led the way off the footpath into the wood, through a gap in the bushes. It was Mr. Wottle, the Headmaster's Secretary, who was coming up the path, and whether he would, if he saw them, report them to their Housemaster they did not know, but evidently it was wiser not to run the risk. Prudence indicated seeking cover till he had passed on his way.

The four juniors pushed into the trees and thickets that lined the footpath. But autumn winds

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had stripped many leaves, and they still had a view of Mr. Wottle as he came along the footpath in Rylcombe Wood.

He was walking briskly, and carried a rather large bag in his hand. The footpath led to Wayland and the railway station, and as Mr. Wottle was carrying a suitcase the juniors concluded that he was heading for the station to make a journey, otherwise the suitcase was a little difficult to account for. Not that they were particularly interested in Mr. Wottle and his proceedings—their only interest in him was to see him pass on his way without spotting four Fourth-Form fellows out of bounds.

He came briskly up the path.

The four juniors had moved away from the gap in the bushes, through which they had pushed into the wood. But they could still glimpse Mr. Wottle through interstices in branches and brambles.

To their surprise, and somewhat to their dismay, he came to a halt at the very spot where they had left the path.

Blake breathed hard.

'Has he spotted us?' he murmured.

'He's coming this way!' muttered Dig.

EXTRAORDINARY

'Bai Jove!'

It was very disconcerting. But it was happening. Mr. Wottle turned from the footpath into the gap in the thick bushes, just as the juniors had done a few minutes earlier. But he had not seen them. They could now see his face and its expression showed that he was unconscious of the presence of anyone at hand. He was simply walking into the wood, and evidently he was doing so at that particular spot because there was a gap, for precisely the same reason that the juniors had done so. But why Mr. Wottle should be walking about in a wood, with a suitcase in his hand, was inexplicable. Without the suitcase he might merely have been taking a pleasant ramble like Blake and Co., but carrying it about for no reason was very odd indeed. There was no apparent use for a suitcase in Rylcombe Wood.

Blake made a hurried sign to his comrades, and they backed farther into the wood. At a distance from the footpath, there was a tall, massive oak which soared above the other trees. It was a landmark for a good distance round. The four juniors backed round the massive trunk, still hoping that Mr. Wottle would pass on unseeing.

They heard the brushing of twigs and brambles

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as he came, though they could no longer see him. The four remained as still as mice with the cat at hand. Unless Mr. Wottle came round the massive trunk of the tall old oak, he would pass on and never know that they were there.

But again it was the unlooked-for that happened. Mr. Wottle did not come round the oak, but he stopped under its branches. They heard him dump the suitcase on the earth.

The four exchanged glances.

Mr. Wottle's proceedings were growing more and more surprising. Not only was he taking a morning walk with a suitcase, for no imaginable reason, but he was dumping it down, as if he had reached journey's end. It was quite mysterious.

'This will do!'

They heard his muttering voice.

It sounded as if he had found a suitable spot, though for what purpose the astonished juniors could not begin to guess.

'That thicket—!' They heard him mutter again.

Without seeing him they knew that, having dumped the suitcase, he was looking round him, seeking something. His muttered words showed what he was seeking. A few yards from the big oak there was a thicket of hawthorns, and it was

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to that, evidently, that the muttered words alluded. He picked up the bag again, and moved on towards the thicket.

'Oh crumbs!' breathed Blake.

Mr. Wottle's new movement took him past the trunk of the oak. He had only to glance round, and he must have seen the four juniors behind the tree, their staring eyes fixed on him.

He did not, for the moment, look round.

They did not stir, or make a sound. As he had not seen them yet, they still hoped that he would pass on unseeing. There was, after all, no reason why he should look round, as obviously he was quite unaware that anyone was at hand.

He reached the hawthorn thicket, and parting the hawthorns with his left hand pushed the suitcase forward with his right. In dumb amazement, the juniors stared. Unless they were dreaming, Mr. Wottle had brought that suitcase into the wood to hide it in that hawthorn thicket by the tall oak tree. But that was so utterly inexplicable that they almost doubted their eyes.

The hawthorns rustled and swayed as the suitcase was thrust into them, out of sight. That occupied Mr. Wottle a good minute, with his back turned to the four juniors under the oak.

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Blake and Co. did not waste that minute.

Jack Blake made a sign to the others and stepped softly away. Herries and Digby and D'Arcy stepped softly after him. They made no sound, but Mr. Wottle could scarcely have failed to see them had he glanced over his shoulder. But he was busily intent on his strange task of concealing the suitcase in the hawthorns, and cast no glance over his shoulder. They tiptoed into the wood, and in a few moments the trees hid them—if Wottle had looked round.

'Bai Jove!' breathed Arthur Augustus.

'Quiet!' muttered Blake.

'Weally, Blake—'

'Quiet, you ass! Do you want him to hear you?'

'Certainly not, deah boy. But what on earth is that man up to?' asked Arthur Augustus. 'Is he off his wockah?'

Blake made no reply to that. Stepping softly, the four juniors made their way back to the footpath. They emerged into it, safely out of sight of Mr. Wottle now.

'Bai Jove, you know, this is weally vewy extwa-ordinawy,' said Arthur Augustus, in perplexity. 'Have you fellows the wemotest ideah what it means?'

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'Not the foggiest,' said Herries.

'No business of ours,' said Dig, 'but it's jolly queer! He's walked that suitcase out of the school to hide it in the wood! Why on earth—'

'It is weally vewy wemarkable.'

Blake knitted his brows.

'It's dashed queer,' he said. 'Can't make head or tail of it. But I know one thing—Wottle would go off at the deep end if he knew we'd had our eyes on him and we don't want to be reported to Railton! Cut!'

'Yaas. But—!'

'Cut!' repeated Blake. And he started down the footpath at a run. His friends followed him, and if Mr. Wottle came back to the footpath he saw nothing of the chums of Study No. 6. They kept on the trot back to the school, the four most astonished fellows in the county of Sussex.

CHAPTER, VIII

LEVISON TAKES A HAND

'COMING OUT?'

'No.'

'Look here, Cardew—'

'Looking!' yawned Cardew.

He did not take the trouble to stir, as he looked. He was reclining in the arm-chair in No. 9 Study in the Fourth, when Levison and Clive looked in. It was Wednesday afternoon, a half-holiday at St. Jim's. On a fine, sunny, crisp, autumn afternoon, which was also a half-holiday, most St. Jim's juniors felt the call of the open spaces. But Ralph Reckness Cardew did not seem to feel it. He was loafing idly in his study, and seemed disposed to spend that golden afternoon loafing.

Levison looked impatient, and Sidney Clive frowned. They were great chums in No. 9 Study, but very frequently Levison and Clive found it hard to keep patient with Cardew. There were times when he could be as keen and full of beans as any fellow at St. Jim's; there were other times

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when he was as slack as Baggy Trimble; and still other times when he was deeply interested in the 'sport of Kings', at the risk of being 'sacked' from St. Jim's for his sporting speculations.

'Sticking in the study on an afternoon like this?' growled Clive.

Cardew shook his head lazily.

'No, I'm goin' out later,' he said. 'You get off on your bikes—I'm goin' to be busy.'

'Look here, a crowd of us are going for a spin, Abbotsford way,' said Levison. 'Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther—'

'Go and enjoy their company, then.'

'And Blake and his gang—'

'What a crowd!' said Cardew.

'Well, come and push your jigger out and join up!' said Clive, 'You've got nothing to do.'

'Your mistake!' said Cardew. 'I've got an appointment this afternoon, a bit later. You wouldn't advise me to let a man down, would you?'

'Oh, rot,' said Clive.

'Rubbish!' snapped Levison.

'Honest Injun!' declared Cardew. 'I've got a spot of business to see to and I've got to see a man about it.'

Ernest Levison's brow darkened.

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'If it's what you mentioned the other day—!' he snapped.

'Exactly,' smiled Cardew. 'The fact is, my beloved 'earers, I've got a horse—!'

'Oh, don't be an ass!'

'Honest Injun, I tell you. Not a rank outsider at ten to one, like the white rabbit the other day,' grinned Cardew. 'But if Blue Peter doesn't pull it off I'll eat my hat.' He sat up in the arm-chair, 'You fellows cut off—or would you rather take a little walk with me this afternoon, and meet Bill Lodgey at the oak in Rylcombe Wood—that's the jolly old meeting-place—and if you come along I'll get him to put you on too. You can put your shirt on Blue Peter—'

'Oh, shut up!' said Clive, angrily, and he walked out of the study. Clive, evidently, had heard enough about the 'sport of Kings'.

Cardew laughed.

'Only my little joke, Ernest old bean,' he said. 'I wouldn't lead you innocent youths into my own naughty ways—perish the thought! But cut along after Clivey—that solemn face of yours makes me tired.'

Levison compressed his lips.

'The prefects will spot you at this game some

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day,' he said. 'I believe Kildare has an eye on you already. Don't be a silly ass, Cardew, and a silly sweep too. Chuck it, and come out for a spin.'

Cardew yawned, but made no other reply.

'It's a rotten game,' went on Levison, 'But that isn't all. It's the sack if you get nailed. What would you feel like, meeting Bill Lodgey under the oak, if Kildare or Darrell or Langton came along—or old Railton himself? He might take a walk in Rylcombe Wood.'

'My dear man, the trysting-place is far enough from the school, and deep in the wood,' drawled Cardew. 'And if I heard anybody coming I should disappear like a ghost at cock-crow. Don't try putting the wind up, Ernest old bean—you can't scare me worth a threepenny-bit.'

'When are you meeting that blackguard Lodgey, then?'

'About four.'

'You won't chuck it up and come out for a spin?'

'Not so's you'd notice it.'

'You're a fool, Cardew, with all your cleverness,' said Levison.

'Thanks.'

'And rather a rotter too!' said Levison, sharply.

'Thanks again.'

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'And a bit of a blackguard!' snapped Levison. 'How well you know me!' said Cardew, with a nod.

Levison breathed hard.

'I'd stop you if I could!' he said.

Cardew laughed lightly.

'I know that!' he assented, 'But you can't old bean, so don't worry! Cut off and join the other strenuous youths, and cover ten or fifteen miles in the sun and dust, and leave me to my naughty ways. But I'll tell you what—I'll stand no end of a spread in the study if I win a packet on Blue Peter.'

'Oh, rats!' snapped Levison.

And he turned and walked out of the study, leaving Cardew laughing.

His brow was dark, as he went down the passage and joined Sidney Clive, who was waiting for him on the landing.

'Come on,' said Clive, 'The other fellows will be at the bike-shed. I suppose that ass Cardew won't come?'

'No!' said Levison. He paused, 'But—it's too thick, Clivey. Look here, I'm going to stop that silly ass making a fool of himself this afternoon.'

'No good talking sense to him,' said Clive.

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'I know that—I've tried. But—suppose that racing man didn't turn up to keep the appointment at the big oak?' said Levison in a low voice, his eyes glimmering.

Clive stared.

'No good supposing that,' he said. 'Lodgey will turn up—he makes too much out of Cardew to give him a miss.'

'He might get a telephone-call,' said Levison. 'If a chap could borrow a phone. A phone call would put the stopper on.'

'Oh!' said Clive. He laughed. 'There's Wottle's—he's got a telephone in his rooms. He's gone out.'

'Sure?' asked Levison.

'Quite. I saw him go out of gates.'

'That does it, then,' said Levison. 'Wait here, old fellow.'

'Okay,' said Clive, laughing.

Ernest Levison cut into the passage that led to Mr. Wottle's rooms. As Clive had seen Mr. Wottle go out, it was all clear. But Levison tapped on the door to make sure.

There was no reply from within, and he opened the door. The sitting-room was vacant, and the door into the bedroom was open, and Levison could see that that was vacant also. Mr. Wottle, evi-

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dently, was safe off the scene, and his telephone could be borrowed.

Levison cut across to the instrument, and dialled the number of the Green Man at Rylcombe. It was a risky matter for a junior at St. Jim's to ring up such an establishment, but Levison gave no thought to that. He was going to put the 'stopper' on Ralph Reckness Cardew's recklessness that afternoon if he could, and he thought that he could.

A husky, beery voice came through.

'Green Man! Who's speaking?'

'Message for Mr. Lodgey,' said Levison. 'Is he about?'

'He's in the bar. I'll give 'im a message.'

'Tell him the appointment is off at the big oak this afternoon. He will understand that. Can't mention names on the phone.'

'I understand, sir.'

'Tell him something's happened to stop it,' said Levison. 'He will understand all right.'

'I get you, sir.'

Levison rang off. He was smiling when he rejoined Sidney Clive on the landing. The South African junior gave him an inquiring look.

'Okay?' he asked.

'Quite! Lodgey won't turn up at the big oak this

LEVISON TAKES A HAND

afternoon,' answered Levison. 'The appointment's off—something's happened to stop it. It was my phone call that happened—but Lodgey won't guess that one.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The two juniors went down together to join the crowd at the bike-shed. Ralph Reckness Cardew lounging in his study, pondered on Blue Peter and the 'packet' he hoped to make with Blue Peter's aid, till the time came to walk down to Rylcombe Wood to keep his appointment with Mr. Lodgey under the old oak. And as Bill Lodgey had not left the Green Man and had no intention of leaving that delectable resort, it looked as if Cardew might be booked for a long wait!

CHAPTER IX

VERY RED

'FIRE!' exclaimed Monty Lowther.

'Eh?'

'What?'

'Fire!' repeated Monty.

Eight St. Jim's juniors all looked round, puzzled. They could see no sign of a fire on the wide country road.

It was quite a numerous party of cyclists. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, of the Shell, had joined up with Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy of the Fourth, and Levison and Clive had joined up also. There was a cheery bunch of nine fellows on bikes. They had ridden round by Abbotsford, and were now riding for Wayland on the way back to St. Jim's, taking it easy on their homeward way. Monty Lowther's unexpected exclamation surprised the whole party. It reached all ears and caused all the cyclists to look round, without, however, detecting any sign whatever of a conflagration.

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They had the wide country road almost to themselves for the moment. Just ahead of them was another cyclist: that was all. The juniors had hardly noticed him, but Monty Lowther's eyes were on him.

'What on earth do you mean, Monty?' asked Tom Merry. 'I can't see anything of a fire.'

'Wathah not,' said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

'Where is it?' asked Blake.

'Look ahead!' said Monty. He released one hand from a handle-bar, and pointed to the cyclist in front.

The juniors looked. Then they realised that this was one of Monty Lowther's little jokes. Now that they gave the rider their attention, they observed that he had a head of blazing red hair.

They could see only the rider's back, at the moment. He wore a raincoat of dark green, sunny and warm as the day was, and a Homburg hat slouched low. Under the hat a good deal of his hair could be seen—it was thick and rather long and of an almost startling shade of red. As he swerved at a rut in the road they had a glimpse of his face for a moment, and saw that he had thick eyebrows and a beard as red as his hair.

Tom Merry frowned a little.

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'Is that one of your silly jokes, Monty?' he asked. There was no doubt that the stranger's red hair was a little conspicuous. But that, in Tom's opinion at least, was no reason for remarking on it.

'Fathead!' said Blake.

'Rotten joke—if you call it one,' said Clive.

'Yaas, wathah!' chimed in Arthur Augustus. 'I wegard such jokes as in the vevy worst of taste, Lowthah. Fwightfully bad mannahs.'

'Oh, draw it mild!' protested Lowther. 'The chap couldn't hear what I said—think I'd let him hear me?'

'That does not altah the fact that such wemarks are in vevy bad taste, Lowthah,' said Arthur Augustus, severely.

'Hear, hear!' said Manners.

'It is quite cowwect that the chap's hair is vevy wed,' went on Arthur Augustus. 'It is weally wemarkably wed—'

'Ring off, Gussy,' said Blake. As the juniors were riding faster than the man in front they were drawing within hearing, and the red-haired cyclist, who had not heard Lowther's remark, was quite likely to hear Arthur Augustus. That circumstance did not for the moment occur to the swell of St. Jim's.

VERY RED

'Weally, Blake, it is a fact that the chap's hair is vewy wed,' said Arthur Augustus. 'I have nevah seen hair weddah. But that is no weason for makin' silly jokes about it, even if the chap's hair is as wed as a wose. Certainly it is weddah than any wose I have evah seen—'

'Nice of you to tell him so!' grinned Lowther, as the man ahead, now well within hearing, glanced round.

'Weally, Lowthah, I have not the slightest intention of tellin' the chap that his hair is weddah than any wose I have evah seen—'

'Shut up!' hissed Herries.

'Weally, Hewwies—'

'He can hear you!' hissed Dig.

'Oh, bai Jove!'

Arthur Augustus, at last, shut up. But his remarks had certainly reached the ears of the red-haired man, who was looking round at the bunch behind him, now quite close.

All the St. Jim's juniors felt extremely uncomfortable: and Monty Lowther wished, as he had often wished before, that he had not been quite so funny. No one in the party wanted to give offence to a perfect stranger: and no one would have been surprised to hear angry words from the

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red-haired man. But he gave the party only a glance, and then drew to the side of the road to allow the little crowd of cyclists to pass. He had certainly heard, but he did not seem to heed, which was a relief.

The St. Jim's bunch rode on, dropping the red-haired rider behind. Arthur Augustus had a rather worried look.

'Bai Jove!' he said, 'This is wathah wotten, you fellows. Do you think that chap heard what I was sayin'?'

'Unless he's deaf,' grunted Blake.

'Didn't you expect him to hear you when you shouted in his ear?' inquired Monty Lowther.

'I did not shout in his yah, Lowthah! And it is all your fault for dwawin' attention to the man's wed hair in the first place,' exclaimed Arthur Augustus hotly. 'But if he heard me, I feel that I owe him an apology.'

'Go it!' said Monty. 'I dare say he'll smack your head, as Wottle did the other day—go and ask for it, as you did with Wottle.'

'Wats!' said Arthur Augustus.

He glanced over his shoulder. The red-haired man was plugging on behind, at the same leisurely pace as before. Arthur Augustus slowed down.

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'Come on, ass!' called out Blake.

'Weally, Blake—'

'Least said, soonest mended, as I told you before—'

'Wats! The man may think that I was makin' a wude wemark, and I feel bound to explain and expwess my wegwet—'

'I expect he'll be about as pleased as Wottle was the other day—'

'Wubbish! You fellows push on, and I will wejoin you!' said Arthur Augustus. 'I shall not be vevy long.'

'Fathead!' said eight voices in chorus. And the cyclists pushed on, leaving Arthur Augustus riding at a crawling pace to allow the red-haired man to overtake him. It was still a good distance to the school, and most of them were ready for tea after a long spin in Sussex hills and dales. But tea was a very small consideration, in Gussy's opinion, compared with good manners. If an apology was due, Arthur Augustus was the man to hand it out, though the skies fell. His unfortunate experience with Mr. Wottle at the school made no difference to that.

Although Arthur Augustus was now riding as slowly as was possible, without letting his bike

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curl up, the man behind did not overtake him immediately. He seemed to have slowed down also. However, after some minutes he came level with the swell of St. Jim's.

He did not look at him. His face was turned away as he rode past. But he did not ride quite past. Arthur Augustus gave a push to his pedals and rode on at his side.

'Pway excuse me, sir,' said Arthur Augustus, in his most polished manner.

The red-haired man neither answered nor looked at him. He merely swerved a little to the left, as if all he wanted was to keep the swell of St. Jim's at a distance.

But Arthur Augustus was not to be kept at a distance. He pushed nearer, and resumed:

'I feel bound to offah an apology for a wemark which you may have heard me make on the subject of wed hair, sir. I had no intention of that wemark weachin' your yahs, I assuah you—not the wemotest intention of takin' any notice whatevah of the fact that your hair is vewy wemarkably wed, sir.'

It did not occur to Gussy's powerful brain that, if the cyclist was sensitive on the subject of red hair, he was making matters worse instead of better.

VERY RED

The man gave him a stare but did not speak.

'I twust, sir, that you will excuse me for makin' the wemark that your hair is weddah than any wose I have evah seen—'

Still the man did not speak. But his next action made it clear—painfully clear—that he had had enough of Arthur Augustus's conversation. He reached out and gave the swell of St. Jim's a sudden push.

It was quite unexpected, and it sent Arthur Augustus and his bike tottering.

'Oh, cwikey!' gasped Arthur Augustus.

He made a frantic effort to right his machine. But he failed and it went over, and he sprawled in the dust of the Wayland road as his bike clanged. The red-haired cyclist gave him a look, with hard sharp eyes under his thick red brows, and rode on, leaving him sprawling.

Arthur Augustus sat up dizzily in the dust.

'Oh, cwumbs!' he gasped.

Arthur Augustus, sitting in the dust, groped for his eyeglass, jammed it into his noble eye, and stared after the man in the raincoat.

'The uttah wuffian,' he gasped.

Slowly, gasping, he clambered to his feet. It was quite a startling and painful experience: more

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painful than that in Mr. Wottle's room at St. Jim's. He dusted down his clothes, wrath in his brow.

'The wuffianly wottah!' breathed Arthur Augustus. 'I shall certainly not apologise to him now—I have a gweat mind to hook him off that bike and give him a feahful thwashin'. The uttably wude and wotten wascal!

He picked up his machine.

Clink! clink! clank!

'Bai Jove!

That crash in the road seemed to have loosened things on Gussy's bike. It clinked and clanked more or less musically as he dragged it up. Arthur Augustus breathed very hard.

He stared after the red-headed man again, now disappearing among the first houses of the old High Street of Wayland. With a knitted brow, he put a rather aching leg over a clinking bike, and remounted. He was, as he had remarked, tempted to pursue that disagreeable person, hook him off his bike, and punch him. At the very least he was going to tell him what he thought of him. And with that determination in mind, Arthur Augustus pushed at the pedals once more, and clinked and clanked his way into Wayland town.

CHAPTER X

A SUDDEN SURPRISE

'ITMA!' remarked Monty Lowther.

'Eh?' said Tom Merry.

'What does that mean—if anything?' inquired Manners.

'It's That Man Again!' explained Lowther. And he jerked his head towards a red-headed cyclist coming up the High Street.

The juniors looked round at the man. He had come into the town from the Abbotsford road, where they had last seen him. Of Arthur Augustus, who had lingered to speak to him, they had seen nothing yet. The party of eight had ridden into Wayland High Street, and stopped there to wait for Arthur Augustus to come up, as he had not rejoined them. They had expected him to overtake them coming into the town but he had not done so—apparently there had been a delay.

So they had come to a halt in the High Street, leaned the bikes on a wall round the corner of the Wayland and County Bank, and watched the street

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for Gussy to appear, like eight Sister Annes in a bunch.

Gussy did not appear: but the red-headed man did. He came jogging up the High Street on his bike at the same leisurely pace. His red hair was bright in the shining sun of the early afternoon: and it drew more than one glance from passers in the street. There certainly was no doubt that it was of a very bright and striking hue.

'Red as a rose is he!' murmured Monty Lowther.

'Can it, old chap!' said Tom Merry. 'No more of your fatheaded jokes, for goodness' sake.'

'That's a jolly good jigger he's riding,' said Blake. Jack Blake had an eye for such things. 'It's a Jackson-Racer—he doesn't get much speed out of it, but it's a jolly good jigger.'

'He will pass us here in a minute or two,' said Tom. 'Keep a sock in it, Monty.'

'Dumb as an oyster,' said Lowther.

'Where's that ass Gussy?' grunted Herries. 'What is he keeping us hanging about here for?'

'Goodness knows,' said Tom, puzzled. 'He dropped behind to speak to that chap—but here comes the chap, and no Gussy. I suppose we shall see him sooner or later.'

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'Hallo, that merchant is looking at us,' murmured Manners.

The red-headed cyclist had reached the spot where the group of juniors stood on the edge of the pavement in front of the bank. He slowed and stopped, casting a quick glance at them as he did so.

But he gave them only that one glance and averted his face. Dismounting, he hooked a pedal on the edge of the pavement, a few yards away, and crossed to the bank steps, taking no further notice of Tom Merry and Co.

He went up the steps of the bank, and disappeared into its portals. The swing doors closed behind him.

That was a relief to the juniors. When he had stopped so near them they had fancied for a moment that he might be looking for trouble. However, it seemed that he only had business in the Wayland and County Bank. He vanished into the bank, and they turned their attention to the street again, wondering why the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not appear.

Clink! clink! clink!

Arthur Augustus appeared at last, to a more or less musical accompaniment. There was a grin that spread over eight faces.

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'Here he is!' remarked Levison.

'Looks a bit dusty!' said Clive.

'Something's happened to his jigger,' said Blake.

'Has he taken a tumble or what? Here, Gussy!'

Clink! clink! clink!

'Here we are, Gussy!' called out Tom Merry, 'Waiting for you. Where have you been all this while?'

Arthur Augustus discerned the group on the pavement outside the bank. He came clinking up, and dismounted.

'Have you seen him?' he asked.

'Who, what and which?' asked Monty Lowther.

'That wed-headed wuffian!' said Arthur Augustus, breathing hard. 'Would you fellows believe it—I was tellin' him, in the politest possible mannah, that I wegwetted his heawin' my wemark that his hair was weddah than any wose I had evah seen, and he pushed me ovah—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Pewwaps you fellows are amused!' hooted Arthur Augustus.

'We are!' admitted Blake.

'No end!' grinned Lowther.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I do not wegard it as amusin' for a wuffianly

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wottah to push a fellow ovah on his bike when a fellow was offahin' an apology,' said Arthur Augustus, hotly. 'And I am goin' to tell the bwute what I think of him. That is, if I can find the fellow again. Have you seen him? He wode into Wayland ahead of me, but I don't see him anywhah in the stweet.'

'He's gone into the bank,' said Blake. 'Now let's push on—we want to get in to tea—'

'I am not pushin' on yet, Blake. I am goin' to wait for that wottah to come out of the bank and tell him that he is a wude wuffian.'

'Let him rip, old chap,' said Tom.

'I wefuse to let him wip, Tom Mewwy.'

'We want to get in to tea,' said Herries.

'Weally, Hewwies—'

'Look here, Gussy, don't be an ass,' urged Dig. 'What's the good of kicking up a row?'

'I am not goin' to kick up a wow, Dig. But I certainly am goin' to tell that person that he is a wank wude wottah and wuffian,' said Arthur Augustus, firmly, 'And I weally consider—'

Arthur Augustus was suddenly interrupted.

'Hallo, what's up in the bank?' exclaimed Blake, and the juniors all turned their heads to stare at that building across the pavement. From some-

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where within there had rung out a loud, excited shout.

As they looked round, the swing doors swung wide and a man rushed out. It was the red-headed man in the raincoat.

The juniors stared at him blankly.

He came down the bank steps two at a time, and crossed the pavement to his bicycle, running like a deer. Almost in a split second he threw himself on the bicycle and careered away down the High Street.

'Bai Jove!' ejaculated Arthur Augustus. He stared after the man. He had no time to carry out his fell intention of telling him that he was a rank rude rotter and ruffian! The man was gone in a twinkling.

'What on earth—!' exclaimed Tom Merry.

'Chap seems to be in a hurry—!' said Blake.

'Hallo, here's another.'

The swing doors swung again, and a hatless man dashed out. He stood on the bank steps waving and shouting.

'Stop that man! A red-headed man! Stop him! The bank has been robbed—stop thief!'

'Oh, cwikey!' ejaculated Arthur Augustus, 'A bank wobbah!'



*As they looked round, the swing doors swung wide
and a man rushed out*

CARDEW'S CATCH!

'Bank raid!' gasped Clive.

The red-headed man was riding frantically, already at a distance, whizzing down the High Street like an arrow. He had entered Wayland from the Abbotsford road, like the schoolboys: but he was fleeing in the opposite direction, towards Rylcombe. People were shouting, waving, running—but the red-headed rider vanished in a cloud of dust.

'By gum!' gasped Tom Merry. 'You fellows, we're in on this!' He rushed to the corner of the building where the bikes were stacked.

'Yaas, wathah! Come on, deah boys.'

'Get after him!'

'What-ho!'

The whole little crowd of schoolboys rushed for the bicycles. Tom Merry was the first to get his leg over a machine, but the rest were close behind: and they went streaming down the High Street, pedalling hard, the way the bank-robber had gone.

For the moment there was no other pursuit. People were shouting and calling, the bank clerk on the steps was yelling and waving: a policeman came running—but at the moment, only the St. Jim's cyclists were on the track of the man who

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had fled. Pursuit was likely to be swiftly taken up: but Tom Merry and Co. were first in the field.

They shot down the High Street into the country road beyond, which ran, between green meadows on one side and a dusky wood on the other, to Rylcombe. In a few moments they were out of the town and pedalling hard on the country road, with eyes keenly alert for the fleeing man ahead. On the long white road he was not to be seen. Wayland was left behind: and they scanned the road and the meadows on one side, the dusky wood on the other, as they tore on. But the man was not in sight.

'Hold on!' shouted Blake, suddenly. He braked.

'Weally, Blake, you are losin' time—'

'Fathead! Hold on—there's his jigger.'

'Oh, bai Jove!'

The crowd of cyclists braked to a halt, and jumped down. On the grass verge between the road and the dusky shades of Rylcombe Wood a bicycle lay—evidently abandoned by the rider. They recognised the machine at a glance—it was the Jackson-Racer ridden by the red-headed man in the raincoat. But of the red-headed man there was no sign.

'That's his jigger,' said Blake, breathlessly.

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'Yaas, wathah.'

'His jigger all right—but where is he?' said Tom Merry. He wrinkled puzzled brows. 'He must be crackers to leave his machine—he won't have much chance of getting clear on foot.'

'There'll be cars after him soon if he kept to the road,' said Manners. 'Looks as if he's dodged into the wood—'

'Must have,' said Levison. 'But he hasn't a dog's chance. They'll jolly soon hunt him out of the wood—'

'He can't get clear,' said Tom. 'That mop of red hair would give him away anywhere.'

'Yaas, wathah!'

'Hallo, here they come after him!' exclaimed Blake. There was a whirr of a car on the road.

It dashed up from Wayland, and Inspector Skeat, of the Wayland Police, leaned out:

'Have you seen?' he began.

'Here's his bike, Mr. Skeat,' answered Tom Merry. 'He's left it here—looks as if he's taken to the wood.'

The Inspector jumped from the car. He gave the Jackson-Racer a stare, and nodded. Then he gave the schoolboys a sharp glance.

'You boys keep out of this,' he said.

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Tom Merry laughed.

'All right, Mr. Skeat—we don't suppose you want our help,' he said.

'You wouldn't like us to lend a hand rooting that red-headed johnny out of the wood, Mr. Skeat?' asked Monty Lowther, with a grin.

Inspector Skeat did not take the trouble to answer that question.

'Come on,' said Tom Merry, laughing.

And the schoolboys remounted their machines, quite content to leave the affair in official hands: considerably excited, and with a spot of quite interesting news for other fellows in the junior day-room in the School House.

CHAPTER XI

THE MAN IN THE WOOD

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW glanced at his elegant wrist-watch.

He stood under the branches of the tall old oak in Rylcombe Wood, leaning idly on the massive old trunk.

Round him the deep wood, rich in its autumn tints, was very quiet and still.

The old oak was at some little distance from the footpath that led from Rylcombe Lane to the Wayland road. It over-topped other trees and could be seen from a distance, which made it a convenient spot to assign for a meeting. Still more to Cardew's purpose, it was deep in the wood, surrounded by thickets of undergrowth, affording ample cover for a fellow who might want to dodge observation. And a fellow of Cardew's peculiar manners and customs had always to be alert. He was reckless, often taking risks that more level-headed fellows would have been careful to avoid: but he was wary. Only too well he knew what would happen if his

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sporting speculations came to the knowledge of his Housemaster or his Headmaster. There was no room at St. Jim's for fellows who 'backed their fancy' with disreputable acquaintances outside the school.

On this particular afternoon, Cardew had been very wary. He had strolled out of the school with the most casual air, and sauntered up the footpath as if bound for Wayland. At the very gap where Blake and Co. had dodged out of sight of Mr. Wottle in break that morning, he had left the footpath and wound his way among the underbrush to the tall old oak. He was satisfied that no eyes had been upon him, and that all was secure. He had allowed himself plenty of time: and his wrist-watch showed him that it was still twenty minutes to four. Bill Lodgey was scheduled to turn up at four o'clock, to put through the urgent business of backing Blue Peter: Cardew had to wait: if Mr. Lodgey was coming. On that point he had no doubt: having not the slightest suspicion of the telephone-call Levison had put through on Mr. Wottle's telephone at the school.

But though all was secure, he was still wary: and he listened as he stood under the old oak, leaning on the trunk. It was unlikely—at least it

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seemed very unlikely—that any wayfarer would come along by that lonely spot in the wood: but it was possible, and Cardew did not intend to be seen if anyone but Bill Lodgey chanced to appear on the spot. At the sound or sight of anyone but Bill he was ready to dodge into cover and wait till the place was solitary again.

Leaning on the oak, his hands in his pockets, his thoughts ran on Blue Peter, his selected 'gee'. Cardew's feeling towards Mr. Wottle, since he had made the discovery that the Head's Secretary was a secret plunger on the Turf, was one of contemptuous amusement, mingled with pity for the man's insensate folly. But he could not apply that lesson to himself. The wretched man lost his money on losers: Cardew, on the other hand, was going to back winners! Quite a stream of his too ample pocket-money had flowed into the frowsy pockets of Mr. Lodgey: but he was still going to make a 'packet' on a winner spotted by his own sagacity!

But Blue Peter, and making a packet, were driven out of his head suddenly by a sound from the wood. He started, and listened intently.

It was the sound of someone running: he heard the swaying and rustling of thickets, and of panting breath.

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His brows contracted.

'That's not Bill!' he muttered.

It was not likely to be Bill Lodgey, running, on a warm afternoon. Mr. Lodgey was too plump and beery for running: neither was there any occasion for him to do so. Besides, the sounds did not come from the direction of the Green Man at Rylcombe: they came from the opposite direction. Someone, evidently in hot haste, was hurrying through the wood from the direction of the distant Wayland road. And, so far as Cardew could judge by the sounds, he was heading directly towards the old oak tree under which the St. Jim's junior was lounging.

Cardew's eyes gleamed under his knitted brows. Whoever it was that was coming, Cardew did not want to be seen. Levison had said that Kildare had an eye on him. If suspicion had been aroused, and if a St. Jim's prefect was 'after' him—with all his coolness and nonchalance, Cardew felt a very unpleasant chill at the thought. True, Bill Lodgey was not yet on the spot, and there was no rule against a junior rambling in the wood on a half-holiday: still, it was safer not to be seen: and Cardew lost no time. Stepping away from the trunk of the oak, he backed into a mass of

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hawthorns hear at hand: and there, screened from sight, he stood silent and watchful, wondering who the breathless runner could be, and anxious to see him pass and see the last of him.

Through interstices in the thicket, he watched the more open space round the big oak, the spot for which his ears told him that the runner was directly heading. The hurrying footsteps and panting breath were now very close at hand.

A figure suddenly emerged into view, and stood under the branches of the oak, panting and panting.

Cardew, from his cover, stared at him.

He saw a man in a dark green raincoat, with a Homburg hat pulled low over his brow. Under the hat showed red hair—redder hair than Cardew had ever seen on a head before. Two sharp rather small eyes gleamed and glistened under thick red brows: and the lower half of the face was almost hidden by a thick red beard.

Who he was, what he was, the St. Jim's junior had no idea. He had never, so far as he knew, seen the man before: certainly, if he had, he would have remembered that striking red hair. But whoever and whatever the man was, Cardew did not need telling that he was in flight—in hurried and desperate flight: which could hardly imply that

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he was anything but a law-breaker of some sort.

The junior suppressed his breathing.

He had taken cover from the danger of being seen by someone from the school. But he realised now that there might be another danger, and a more serious one, in that solitary spot in the deep wood. He was glad that he was safely out of sight of the panting fugitive. He stood quite still, making no sound that could possibly draw attention to him. He waited, with beating heart, for the red-haired man to pass on.

But the man did not pass on.

He stood panting and panting, but it was not only to recover his breath that he had stopped. As he panted for breath his head was bent, listening—for sounds of pursuit, as Cardew easily guessed. But there were no such sounds. If there was pursuit on his track it was as yet nowhere at hand.

For a long minute the man stood there, his breathless panting gradually subsiding. Then he stirred, and the junior expected to see him pass on. Instead of that he came directly towards the thicket of hawthorns in which Cardew was hidden.

Cardew's heart gave a jump.

For a second he supposed that the man had

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guessed that someone was there, watching him. But it was not that. The man's look did not indicate that he suspected anything of the kind.

But he was coming directly towards Cardew, apparently about to plunge into the hawthorns as the junior had done a few minutes earlier. Possibly he was, like Cardew, seeking a hide-out. Whatever his object, he was coming straight at the thicket that hid the St. Jim's junior, and he was coming swiftly. Cardew had no chance of retreat. The hawthorns swayed and rustled as the red-haired man plunged into them, and the next moment he saw Cardew.

The blaze that came into the sharp eyes under the thick red brows was startling. If Cardew had not guessed it already, he would have known then that he was in the presence of a desperate hunted man.

He made a backward spring: but the hawthorns caught him and stayed him. The next second, the man's grasp was on him.

Cardew struggled fiercely in that savage grip. He struck at the man's face, his fist crashing into the thick red beard. Even in that moment of terror and wild excitement he was amazed at the result of that blow—it dislodged the red beard, which slid

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from the man's chin—it was a false beard, evidently a disguise. He had a glimpse of a smooth-shaven chin.

But it was only for a moment that the junior was aware of that, or of anything else. The man's right hand had darted to the raincoat pocket, and reappeared with something in it. Cardew gave one cry as the cosh descended on his head, and fell like a log. He knew nothing more—for the blow had stunned him, and he lay senseless and inert in the hawthorns.

CHAPTER XII

HARD HIT!

'WALK!' said Manners.

'Wats!' said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Nine cyclists had stopped at the gate on the Wayland road that gave access to the footpath through the wood to Rylcombe Lane. Monty Lowther had opened the gate for the party to pass through. Eight fellows were ready to remount: one, it seemed, was not. Manners of the Shell walked his machine through the gateway, and called a halt there. Eight juniors stared at him.

'Why walk?' asked Tom Merry.

'We want to get in to tea, you know,' said Levison, 'And we've had a pretty long spin. What do you want to walk it for?'

'I don't want to,' said Manners.

'Weally, Mannahs—!'

'Look at that!' said Manners, pointing to a notice-board on a tree close by the gateway.

The juniors looked. It was no new sight to them. That notice-board, forbidding the use of bicycles

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on the footpath, was quite familiar to their eyes. Undoubtedly there was a local by-law on the subject. But that law was generally more honoured in the breach than the observance. Few cyclists paid it much heed: and St. Jim's juniors as often as not pushed their bikes along that footpath, oblivious of notice-boards. Manners, in fact, had done so as often as any other fellow.

'What about it?' asked Clive, staring.

'Local by-law—' said Manners.

'Oh, bless the local by-laws,' said Clive, and he put a leg over his machine, 'Coming, Ernest?'

'Coming,' answered Levison. And he remounted his bike and followed Clive up the footpath.

'Weally, Mannahs, you seem to have become vewy particulah all of a sudden,' said Arthur Augustus. 'I wegard it as up to a fellow to pay pwopah wegard to the wules, but weally—'

'Rot!' said Blake.

'Rubbish!' said Herries, 'I'm biking it.' And George Herries put a leg over his machine.

'Manners, old chap—!' said Tom Merry. Tom, like Gussy, had a proper regard for rules: but the juniors had stretched a point so often with regard to that footpath that Tom was prepared to stretch one more.

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Manners shook his head.

'The Head's had a complaint from Wayland about fellows biking here,' he said. 'That ass Grundy ran into somebody on his bike last week--'

'We're not asses like Grundy!' Tom pointed out.

'We shall get lines all the same if we get caught out,' said Manners, 'And didn't Railton tell the whole House bikes must be walked on this path, according to the rules.'

'Um! Yes! But--'

'Well, have a little sense,' said Manners. 'I don't want a prefect to walk me into Railton's study, if you do.'

'Bow-wow!' said Jack Blake. Herries had started: and Blake in his turn put a leg over his machine.

'Bosh!' said Digby, following Blake's example.

Arthur Augustus paused.

'Pewwaps there is somethin' in what Mannahs says,' he remarked, thoughtfully. 'Pwobably some of the pwe's have been told to keep an eye open, and we don't want a wow with Wailton--'

'Are you coming, fathead?'

'I wefuse to be called a fathead, Blake, and I considah--'

'You won't find anything left for tea if you don't

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follow on, ass! Blake shouted over his shoulder.

'Weally, Blake—'

'Oh, give your chin a rest, and come on!' called out Dig.

'Weally, Dig—'

Blake and Herries and Digby disappeared up the footpath after Clive and Levison, who had already disappeared. Arthur Augustus hesitated: but finally he put an elegant leg over his bike.

'I wathah think you are wight, Mannahs,' he said, 'But as Blake and Hewwies and Dig are widin' it I wathah think I will wide too.'

And Arthur Augustus shot off after his comrades.

The 'Terrible Three' of the Shell were left at the gateway. Tom Merry and Lowther were smiling, but a little impatient with their chum at the same time.

'Look here, Manners, they've all gone on,' said Monty Lowther. 'Jump on your jigger and chance it, see?'

'We want our tea,' said Tom.

Manners gave another shake of the head. Manners was often a more thoughtful fellow than his two chums.

'Walk it!' he said.

'Oh, rot!' said Lowther.

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'Oh, let him have his way,' sighed Tom Merry. 'He will argue our heads off if we don't. Walk it.'

'You'll be glad we're walking it if we happen to meet up with Kildare or Darrell, or a Beak,' remarked Manners.

'Not likely,' said Tom, 'But walk it if you like—anything for a quiet life! Come on.'

And the three Shell fellows pushed on the bicycles, on foot. Not one of the three wanted a walk, after a good many miles on wheels: and all three did want their tea. But Manners had his way, and they walked the machines by the leafy, shady footpath. The fellows ahead on bikes had been long out of sight when the point was settled at last, and they started.

'Sounds as if they're after that red-topped johnny!' remarked Monty Lowther, as a distant shout came echoing through the wood. 'I expect Inspector Skeat and his merry men are combing the wood for him.'

'Queer that he took to the wood at all,' said Tom. 'There's lots of cover: but he's bound to be rooted out. Might hide for a few hours, perhaps—not more than that.'

'And the minute he pokes his head out he will be recognised,' said Manners. 'I'll bet the telephone

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has been at work before this: and everybody will be looking out for a man with a red head.'

There was another shout, from a different direction. It died away in silence. If the hunt for the bank-raider was going on in Rylcombe Wood, as no doubt it was, it was nowhere near the foot-path, so far.

But about half-way through, near a gap in the bushes by the path, the three Shell fellows suddenly looked round. A rustling from the wood caught their ears. They exchanged rather startled glances.

'That's somebody!' muttered Lowther.

'Coming this way!' murmured Manners.

Tom Merry gave a low whistle.

'If it's that man—!' he breathed.

They halted with the bikes, staring at the gap beside the path. The rustling sound was nearer and clearer. The thought was in all their minds that the bank-raider, who had taken to the wood, might be heading that way, in his flight from pursuing police. Certainly some person, as yet unseen, was pushing through the undergrowth towards the footpath.

Then suddenly, from the green thickets, came a startling sound. It was a groan of pain. The three juniors jumped almost clear of the ground.

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'What on earth's that?' exclaimed Lowther.

'Somebody hurt—!' breathed Tom.

'Listen!' muttered Manners.

They listened. The rustling had stopped: whoever had been pushing through the wood had come to a halt. But the low painful groan was repeated. Then there was a rustle again: and a few moments later a figure appeared in the gap in the bushes and staggered out into the footpath.

'Cardew!'

The three gasped out the name together.

They stared at Ralph Reckness Cardew, of the Fourth Form, in amazement and horror.

It was Cardew: but he was looking far from his normal self. His face was colourless and wrinkled with pain. His hand was to his head. He staggered as he walked, as if he could barely keep going: as, indeed, he hardly could. He did not seem to see the Shell fellows for the moment, as he reeled out of the wood into the footpath.

'Cardew—!'

'Good heavens—'

'What—'

Leaving the bikes to reel against the trees, they ran to him. Cardew gave them an almost stupefied stare. He tried to speak.

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'Help me! I-I've had a knock—I-I-I-oh, help me!'

His voice failed, and he staggered and would have fallen into the grass but Tom Merry caught him in time. His cap was gone, and the Shell fellows could see a great bruise on his head. Evidently Cardew, as he had said, had had a 'knock': and a very severe one. He leaned heavily on Tom Merry, unable to speak: and Tom's strong arm supported him.

'What on earth can have happened?' muttered Lowther.

There was a faint mutter from Cardew.

'He knocked me out—a cosh, I think—he got me—'

'Who did?' exclaimed Tom.

'I don't know—a-a man—a man with red hair—'

His voice faded out again.

But he had said enough to enlighten the juniors. They knew now what must have happened: Cardew, in the solitary wood, had fallen in with the fugitive bank-raider and had been cruelly struck down. But he could tell them no more: he had slipped into unconsciousness again, and he hung, a dead weight on Tom Merry's arm.

CHAPTER XIII

COPPED!

KILDARE OF THE SIXTH smiled—rather grimly.

He was standing by the stile in Rylcombe Lane, where it gave on the footpath through the wood. He was on the inner side of the stile, leaning on it, his eyes on the footpath winding away through the trees and thickets. He had been there quite a little while, and was yawning as if tired of the post: but he ceased to yawn, and smiled, as two cyclists came in view, riding towards him from the depths of the wood.

They saw him almost at the same moment, and braked. But it was rather too late for that.

'Oh!' ejaculated Levison.

'Oh!' repeated Clive, like an echo.

'Copped!' added Levison.

'Old Manners was right,' said Clive.

They pushed on to the stile under the Sixth-Form prefect's eyes. They dismounted there. They were, undoubtedly, 'copped': and equally undoubtedly, old Manners had been right! Evidently Mr.

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Railton had said a word to the prefects on the subject, and an eye was being kept on that footpath for fellows disregarding the rules.

'Levison! Clive!' said Kildare. 'Did you happen to hear Railton mention, the other day, that cycling on this footpath was to stop?'

'Um!' said Clive.

Levison laughed.

'I seem to remember something of the sort, Kildare,' he said. 'You've nailed us—it's a fair cop. But really, we're not likely to run into anybody like that fathead Grundy.'

'Housemaster's orders are housemaster's orders,' said Kildare, 'And local by-laws are something, too. You can lift your bikes over the stile, and keep on to the school. You will go to Mr. Railton's study and report yourselves for riding bicycles on the footpath.'

'Anything to oblige!' said Levison. He paused, 'Mind if we don't go on to the school at once, Kildare? No law against taking a stroll in the wood is there, so long as we do it on foot?'

'Not at all—on any other occasion,' said Kildare. 'But I suppose that means that there are more of you and you'd like to give them a tip that a prefect is waiting for them here. Is that it?'

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Levison shrugged his shoulders.

'You're too quick on the uptake for us, Kildare,' he said. 'Come on, Clivey—we're for it.'

The two juniors lifted their machines over, and remounted in Rylcombe Lane. Levison would have been glad to slip back and warn the others who were coming on: but the prefect was too wary for that. They rode on by the lane to St. Jim's, heading for an interview with their Housemaster.

Kildare leaned on the stile again and waited. He was there to 'cop' any thoughtless youths who might be disregarding the Housemaster's order on a half-holiday: an uncongenial task, but one that fell to the lot of a prefect. But this time he had not long to wait.

There was a whirr of bicycles on the footpath, and Jack Blake of the Fourth came in sight, pedalling cheerily for the stile. Just behind him was George Herries: and just behind Herries, Robert Arthur Digby and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Kildare's next 'cop' was a batch of four.

Study No. 6 were almost at the stile before they observed the Sixth-Form man leaning on it. Then they jumped down, staring at him.

'Bai Jove!' ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

'Kildare!' grunted Herries.

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'Oh, crumbs!' said Digby.

'Blow!' said Blake.

'Blake! Herries! Digby! D'Arcy! Get over the stile and get on and report yourselves in Railton's study for this,' said Kildare.

'Not letting us off with a caution?' asked Blake.

'Cut on!' said Kildare.

'Bai Jove, we have weally asked for it, you fellows,' said Arthur Augustus, sadly. 'Mannahs gave us the tip—'

'Shut up, ass!' hissed Blake.

'Weally, Blake—'

'More of you coming along?' asked Kildare.

'Pewwaps you will excuse us if we do not ansawah that question, Kildare,' said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head. 'Of course it would not mattah if they are walkin' the bikes, as old Mannahs suggested: but if they are widin' aftah all, I would wathah not mention that there are any othah fellows comin' along. Bai Jove! What are you laughin' at, Kildare?'

Kildare chuckled.

'Cut on,' he said. 'I'll wait here for Manners and Lowther and Tom Merry—I expect they're all in a bunch as usual. You can cut.'

Four bikes were lifted over the stile. Four juniors

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rode on to the school up Rylcombe Lane. Three of them gave the fourth expressive looks.

'Gussy, you ass—!'

'Weally, Blake—'

'You had to tell Kildare that those Shell chaps were coming on behind!' hooted Blake.

'Bai Jove! I told him nothin' of the kind, Blake! I distinctly said that I would wathah not mention whethah there were any othah fellows coming along,' exclaimed Arthur Augustus, warmly. 'I was keepin' that dark.'

'Fathead!' said Blake.

'Ass!' said Herries.

'Ditherer!' said Dibgy.

'Wats!' said Arthur Augustus.

And they rode on to St. Jim's to report themselves to their Housemaster.

Kildare of the Sixth leaned on the stile again, and waited. With a 'bag' of six delinquents he might have been disposed to call it a day: but from the ineffable Gussy's remarkable way of keeping things dark, he was aware that other fellows were following on the footpath.

So he waited, to add them to the 'bag'.

This time he had a longer wait. In fact, he began to wonder whether the Shell fellows, more prudent

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than the Fourth-Formers, were after all walking their bikes, according to Housemaster's instructions: in which case he was waiting for nothing.

However, he waited, and he was still waiting when there was a footstep in the lane behind him, and a voice called his name. He looked round, and his eyes fell on little Mr. Wottle, coming along the lane from the direction of the village of Rylcombe, carrying a suitcase in his hand.

'Yes, sir!' said Kildare, looking at him across the stile, and wondering what the Head's Secretary wanted with him.

'If you are going into the wood, Kildare, perhaps you had better not,' said Mr. Wottle. 'No doubt you have not heard the news yet—'

'The news, sir?' repeated Kildare, 'I've heard no news! Has anything happened?'

'I have just heard it in the village,' explained Mr. Wottle. 'It appears that it came through by telephone to the village constable, and he and others are now looking for the man on this side of the wood—'

'The man?' said Kildare, puzzled. 'What man, Mr. Wottle?'

'The village is quite agog with it,' said Mr. Wottle. 'From what they say, there has been a

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bank raid at Wayland, and the desperado escaped into the wood, where he is being searched for, I believe.'

Kildare whistled.

'That's news,' he said. 'I'd heard nothing of it, sir. Have they got a description of the man?'

'Yes—his description is already posted up,' said Mr. Wottle. 'A man in a dark green raincoat, with a Homburg hat, and very red hair. From what they say his hair and beard are very red—remarkably so—and he should be easily recognised. No doubt he will soon be caught, Kildare, but in the meantime it can scarcely be safe for schoolboys to venture into the wood—he appears to be quite a desperate character—they say he used a cosh at the bank, and knocked a man out—a very dangerous person to meet, Kildare.'

With that, and a nod, Mr. Wottle walked on towards the school. Kildare whistled again. It was rather startling news—such an episode was rare, if not unknown, in that quiet Sussex countryside. And it was certainly true that, if such a character was at large in Rylcombe Wood, it was scarcely a safe quarter for schoolboys to ramble in. His glance returned to the footpath, and it was a little anxious now. If, as he judged from Arthur

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Augustus D'Arcy's remarks, there were other juniors coming up the footpath, he was anxious to see them—not to 'cop' them but to see them safe. And, after a moment or two of thought, he left the stile and started down the footpath to meet them as they came. Whether they were riding the bikes or walking them, the sooner they were out of the wood the better: and the captain of St. Jim's lost no time: he did the footpath at a rapid trot, and came suddenly and unexpectedly on a startling scene.

CHAPTER XIV

WHAT CARDEW KNEW

'CARDEW—!'

'Hold him!'

'He's fainted!'

'No wonder!' said Tom Merry. He held the unconscious Fourth-Former, and Manners lent a hand in support. 'Look at him—look at that bruise! He's been hard hit!'

'The bank robber—!' muttered Lowther.

'Must have been, from what he said. The brute must have coshed him,' said Tom. His eyes gleamed. 'By gum, I'd like to be within hitting distance of the brute who'd knock a fellow out like that.'

'We've got to get him to the school somehow,' said Manners. 'He needs a doctor to see to him. He's had an awful crack, and no mistake. Must have been stunned, I should think.'

'The brute!' repeated Tom.

That Cardew had been stunned by the blow that had raised that great bruise the juniors could not doubt. How long he might have lain insensible

they could not tell: but it appeared that he had recovered consciousness at last, and striven to crawl and totter out of the wood. They were thankful that they had, after all, walked the bikes: and so were on the spot when he staggered out into the footpath. Had they ridden on with the rest they would have passed the spot long before Cardew appeared there, and there would have been no helping hand for him.

'I expect the man came on him, and got a scare at being seen!' said Manners. 'Rotten luck for him that he was rambling in the wood at the time—but of course he couldn't have known anything about the bank raid at Wayland, or that red-headed blighter bolting into the wood. No sign of the brute coming this way.'

'I'd like him to,' said Tom. 'We three would handle him all right, cosh and all. But we've got to look after Cardew now. How the dickens are we to get him to St. Jim's? Might be able to hold him on a bike—and wheel him along—he's got to be seen to as quickly as possible. We—'

'Hallo, look out!' exclaimed Lowther, suddenly. 'Here comes somebody down the footpath—if it's that man—!'

Footsteps could be heard on the winding path—

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running footsteps. The Shell fellows looked round. The thought was in their minds that it might be the hunted man—the brute who had struck down Cardew—and they were on their guard. But a moment or two later they were relieved by the sight of a familiar face. It was Kildare, of the Sixth Form, the captain of St. Jim's, who came into sight.

'Kildare!' exclaimed Tom.

'Good luck!' said Lowther, 'He can help with Cardew—'

Kildare came to a stop, staring blankly at the group.

'What on earth's happened here?' he exclaimed. 'Is that Cardew of the Fourth? What's the matter with him?'

'He's had a knock,' answered Tom. 'There's been a bank raid at Wayland, Kildare—'

'I've just heard about that from Mr. Wottle. Good heavens,' exclaimed Kildare, 'Wottle said that the bank-raider had escaped into this wood—is it possible that Cardew—'

'That's it,' said Tom. 'Cardew's fainted, but he told us he was knocked out by a red-headed man—and it was a red-headed man who robbed the bank and got away on a bike, and dodged into the wood.'

He must have come on Cardew, in the wood and coshed him.'

'The villain!' breathed Kildare.

'We've got to get Cardew to the school, Kildare—'

'Leave him to me,' said the captain of St. Jim's. 'I'll manage that. The poor kid—he looks as if he's had it hard. I can carry the kid easily enough. You three get out of the wood sharp—I came to tell you that there's a dangerous character loose here. Cut off to the doctor's in Rylcombe, and ask him to come up to the school as fast as he can.'

'Right-ho,' said Tom. 'Hallo, he's coming to, Kildare.'

Cardew's eyes opened dizzily.

He stared at the faces round him with a dazed stare. Then, as he remembered, he shivered.

'He got me,' he muttered. 'That brute with the red hair—coshed me! Oh, my head! Look out for him!'

'Safe now, old man,' said Tom. 'The brute's now-here about here. By gum, I wish he was—I'd like to give him something for what he's given you.'

'I don't know who he was or what he's done—but he was on the run—I could see that—'

'He had robbed the bank at Wayland, and the police are after him,' said Tom. 'It must be the same man.'

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'Oh! Is that it? I knew he was on the run,' muttered Cardew, 'I've got something to tell the police, too—'

'Never mind that now, kid,' said Kildare. 'We've got to get you to the school to be looked after—'

'I've got to tell them!' said Cardew, 'It will help! He had a red beard—a red beard as well as red hair—'

'Yes, we know: we saw the man in Wayland High Street,' said Tom, soothingly. 'His description's circulated already, Cardew.'

'You don't know what I know,' panted Cardew. 'I struggled with him and hit him, when he grabbed me, and his beard came off—'

'Wha-a-t?'

'It was a false beard—a disguise! If the police are looking for a man with a red beard they can go on looking for him for ever without finding him. He won't keep that beard on when he breaks out of the wood to run.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Tom. 'If you're sure—'

'Of course I'm sure! I tell you the beard came loose, and I saw his chin—clean-shaven! That will help the police to look for him. I tell you he was in disguise—and I'll bet his red hair would come off as well as his beard—can't you see? They won't

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find a man looking anything like the man who robbed the bank. Oh, my head!' Cardew put his hand to his head, suppressing a groan of pain.

'We can pass that on to Inspector Skeat by telephone from St. Jim's, Cardew,' said Kildare. 'I've got to get you to the school now. I shall have to carry you—you can't walk.'

'Oh, rot!' Weak, limp, with a blinding headache, Cardew was his old self for a moment. 'Think I'm a baby to be carried? I can walk all right.'

He made a step, lurched, and stumbled. Kildare caught him, and with the same movement, heaved him to his stalwart shoulders.

'Look here—!' muttered Cardew faintly.

'That will do!' said Kildare, briefly. 'Cut off, you kids—get out of the wood and get to the doctor's. You had better keep with me—that brute might turn up before you're out of the wood: you'll be safe with me.'

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther had no doubt that they would have been quite safe on their own if the red-haired bank-robber had turned up. However, the word of the head prefect of St. Jim's was law. They wheeled the bikes on to the stile. The big Sixth-Form man carried the slim Fourth-Former on his shoulders as easily as if he

CARDEW'S CATCH!

had been, indeed, a baby: and he strode along the footpath at a pace that gave the three Shell fellows plenty to do to keep up with him.

At the stile Kildare turned in the direction of St. Jim's: and the Shell fellows mounted their bikes and rode in the opposite direction, to the village of Rylcombe. They found the usually quiet village street in a buzz of excitement, with the news of what had happened at Wayland: evidently the telephone had been at work. There were several St. Jim's fellows about—among them, Figgins and Co. of the New House. Figgins gave the three a shout as they came riding in.

'You fellows heard?'

The 'Terrible Three' smiled. Figgy had the news: but they, certainly, had had it a good deal earlier than Figgy.

'Heard what?' asked Tom.

'Front-page news!' said Figgins. 'Hop off that jigger and I'll tell you.'

'We've got a date,' answered Tom. 'Trot along and tell us!'

'Oh, all right.' The cyclists slowed, and Figgins trotted along to tell them the news! 'I say, there's been a bank robbery over at Wayland—'

'You don't say so!' ejaculated Monty Lowther.

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'I jolly well do!' declared Figgins. 'Man with a red head coshed a cashier and got away with oodles of money. But I say, the exciting bit is that he's still around—he dodged into the wood on the Wayland side and he's still there, or thereabouts—everybody's looking for him, and from his description they'll know him at a peep—he just can't get away. I say, have you fellows seen anything of a man with a red head and a red beard this afternoon?'

'Sort of!' said Lowther, with a nod.

'Honest Injun?' exclaimed Figgins.

'Certainly.'

'Then you jolly well ought to let old Skeat know, over at Wayland,' said Figgins. 'Might have been the very man they want.'

'I'm sure it was!' said Tom Merry laughing.

'Eh? I don't see how you could be so jolly sure,' said Figgins. 'Where did you see him, anyway?'

'In Wayland High Street, just before and just after he raided the bank,' grinned Tom. 'You see, we were there, on the spot! You New House men are always late with the news!'

And the School House trio, grinning, rode on to the doctor's house, leaving George Figgins staring.

CARDEW'S WAY

'NOT FEELING up to footer, I suppose?'

'Yes!'

'Oh!' said Tom Merry, dubiously.

Cardew sneered.

It was Saturday afternoon. That day the junior House match was due: and Ralph Reckness Cardew's name was in the School House list. After what had happened on Wednesday, most fellows had expected to see it taken out. But it was still there, as yet.

Cardew, not always a reliable man, had lately been at the top of his form, and keen on soccer: and when he was at his best and keen, he was very good indeed. On his form up to Wednesday, the junior captain was not only willing but eager to play him for the House. But since, Tom had very natural doubts. A fellow who had been knocked out and stunned by a 'cosh' on Wednesday was little likely to be in soccer form on Saturday.

It was true that Cardew was hard as nails under

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all his slack ways, and he looked, at least, as if he had recovered from that painful experience. Except for a slight pallor his aspect was normal. But Tom was feeling doubtful. He was sincerely concerned for Cardew: but he did not want to play a dud in a tough match against Figgins and Co. of the New House.

Cardew still had a dark bruise under his hair, and was likely to have it for some time. He had been under the school doctor's care after Kildare had carried him in. But the next morning he was up again, looking, or at least trying to look, as if nothing was the matter with him. To be regarded as a 'lame duck' and an object of sympathy, was gall and wormwood to him. He had no use for sympathy, even from his own pals, Levison and Clive: and a word of condolence was likely to draw only a sneer from him, if not an insult. His Form-master, Mr. Lathom, gave him leave from lessons as a matter of course: but Cardew, though certainly by no means keen on Form work, coolly refused to accept leave and turned up in form with the rest of the Fourth. Nothing would have induced him to admit that he was a 'lame duck'. The merest hint that he was on the sick list was enough to bring an angry glitter to his eyes.

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Certainly, if he was in a fit state to play in the House match Tom Merry was ready to play him. And after all, a fellow was supposed to know whether he was fit or not. On Saturday afternoon, shortly before the match was due, Tom found him in his study. He was leaning back in the arm-chair there when Tom arrived, with his hand to the bruise on his head: but at Tom's footstep he sat bolt upright, and hummed a tune as the Shell fellow came in. If he had a lingering headache he gave no sign of it—neither would he have given a sign if he had been racked with pain. A supercilious pride was Ralph Reckness Cardew's long suit: and everything else had to give place to that.

His lip curled bitterly as he met Tom's dubious look.

'Afraid I shall let you down if you play me?' he sneered.

'Oh, no,' answered Tom, 'I know you wouldn't play if you were going to let us down, Cardew. But—'

'But you think I'm made of putty and can't stand up to a tap on the napper?'

'It was more than a tap, old chap.'

'Was it?' yawned Cardew. 'Yes, I remember it felt a bit painful at first. I had a spot of headache.'

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Tom Merry smiled. He remembered, if Cardew did not, how Cardew had reeled out into the footpath in Rylcombe Wood, looking utterly limp and sick, and at the end of his tether.

'Look here, Cardew,' he said, 'You had a bad knock only three days ago, and soccer isn't croquet, you know. If you're not up to the mark I'll scratch you and put in Manners.'

'I've said that I'm up to the mark.'

'Yes: but—' Tom hesitated.

'If you mean that you want to leave a man out to make room for your own pal, say so, and have done!' snapped Cardew. 'I've no use for beating about the bush.'

Tom Merry coloured.

'It's not that, and you know it—or ought to know it,' he said, quietly. 'I'd be glad to play old Manners: but you're twice his form when you're fit—and the question is whether you're fit.'

'You can't take my word for it?'

'Well, yes, if you're sure—'

'Think I want a nurse and bottles of medicine, and grapes on a dish, and the whole dashed outfit?' snapped Cardew. 'There was no need for Kildare to lug me home on Wednesday—I could have walked, but he fancied he knew best.'

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'Well, never mind that,' said Tom. 'You're still down to play, and if you feel fit, okay: you play.'

'That's that, then!' grunted Cardew.

'Leave it at that,' said Tom, and he quitted the study: not sorry to get away. Cardew always jarred on him, more or less.

The door closed after him, and Cardew sank back in the arm-chair again, and again he pressed his hand to his head, where it throbbed. At the back of his mind he knew perfectly well that he was not fit for a slogging game of soccer: but even to himself he would not admit it. He was going through that game if only to show how unconcerned he was by what had happened to him. Nobody was going to feel sorry for Ralph Reckness Cardew!

Once more he sat up and assumed unconcern as the door opened again. This time it was Levison who came in.

'Not time to change yet?' asked Cardew, lightly.

'Not yet,' said Levison. His face was grave, and he gave his chum a searching look. 'How do you feel?'

'Right as rain.'

'You were rather an ass not to let Lathom let you off form.'

'Think I want to mooch about as an interesting invalid with fellows pitying me?' sneered Cardew.

'Oh, rot,' said Levison. 'Look here, Cardew, you can't be fit for the House match—why not cut it?'

'Might watch it in a deck-chair, with a cushion under my poor little head, and a hot-water bottle at my feet! What?' jeered Cardew. 'Nice little crowd of sympathetic friends round me, all kind and compassionate? It does sound attractive.'

'I know how you feel about it, but—'

'Well, don't talk rot, then,' said Cardew, 'I'm playing in the House match—I've just settled that with Tom Merry.'

'Oh, all right,' said Levison. 'A wilful man will have his way—no good talking sense to you, I can see that. I fancy the doctor would tell you not to play if you asked him.'

'I'm not thinking of asking him.' Cardew breathed hard. 'Will you shut up talking rot, as if I'm a baby that can't stand a smack? I tell you I'm as fit as a fiddle, and if you don't take that solemn look off your face I'll buzz this cushion at you.'

Levison laughed.

'That's better,' said Cardew. 'If there's one thing I can't stand it's solemn, sympathetic faces.' Even as he spoke he felt a painful throb, and his hand

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went involuntarily to his head. 'By gad! That brute did give me a knock—I shan't forget it for some time to come! I shan't forget him, either.' A gleam came into his eyes. 'That old ass Skeat has let him get clear, of course.'

'Looks like it,' said Levison. 'There's been no news of him so far, at any rate.'

'Clear—with five hundred pounds from the bank in his pockets—and this bruise on my napper!' said Cardew. 'But he may not be quite so clear after all—I don't believe he's far away.'

Levison stared.

'Hundreds of miles, if he's got any sense,' he answered. 'There isn't a clue. Nobody knows what he's like.'

'They'd still be looking for a man with red hair and a red beard, but for what I was able to tell them,' sneered Cardew. 'Now they know at least that he was in disguise when he raided the bank.'

'That doesn't help much. Under that disguise he might be anybody,' said Levison. 'If he'd really been what he looked like when he was seen they'd trace him all right: but that was all a fake. Once he got rid of the disguise he could step on a train and travel, and nobody the wiser.'

'He could—but he didn't.'

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'Eh?'

'You see, I've been thinking it out,' said Cardew. 'He left his bike, and dodged into the wood, to get his disguise off in some solitary spot—that's clear, isn't it?'

'Clear enough, now it's known that his red hair was a fake. Dozens of people might have seen him stroll out of the wood afterwards, and never dreamed that he was the man who had raided the bank. May have taken a ticket at Rylcombe Station while they were hunting for him in the wood.'

'Thing a bit further!' sneered Cardew. 'He was on a bike and had a good start. It was a good bike—it's come out that he hired it at Abbotsford, and was very particular about it. He could have taken any of a dozen turnings, and covered miles and miles before he stopped to shed his red hair—but he chose to stop within a mile of Wayland, with the chase fairly at his heels—well, why?'

'Blessed if I know,' said Levison. 'I suppose it would have been safer for him to put more distance between him and Wayland—'

'Much safer, if he was going to travel,' said Cardew, in the same sneering tone. 'The answer to that one is that he wasn't.'

'I don't see—'

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'Any more than old Skeat does?' jeered Cardew. 'Well, if you don't know I'll tell you. He never intended to go far: because he's a local man.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Levison.

'Look at it!' said Cardew. 'He knew his way about Rylcombe Wood—well, a stranger in the locality wouldn't. He took the risk of stopping so near Wayland to get rid of his disguise because, when it was off, he only had to walk home. If he was some crook from London, how the dickens could he have headed for the old oak in the wood like a homing pigeon? He knew the spot as well as I did.'

'Oh!' repeated Levison.

'He had it all cut and dried,' said Cardew. 'I'll bet he rigged himself up in that raincoat and red hair on that very spot, and came back to it after the raid to shed his disguise. Meeting me there was one thing he hadn't reckoned on—but he took care that I shouldn't see too much, or give the alarm.' Cardew rubbed the bruise on his head. 'Finding me there, he knocked me out—using the cosh he'd used at the bank—and carried on. May have had a change of clothes there—most likely he had. He left me stunned, and walked off—as likely as not right under the noses of the policemen who were

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looking for a man with a red head—and now he's walking about Wayland or Rylcombe laughing in his sleeve.'

Cardew gritted his teeth.

'Well, I suppose it may be as you think,' said Levison, 'But it doesn't seem to help much, even if he is a local man, as you fancy. If you're right, we may have seen him ourselves since Wednesday, and none the wiser. Nothing's known of his real looks—'

'Except that he's a short man, with a clean-shaven chin!' said Cardew.

'Plenty of them about,' said Levison.

'I know! But I'm going to keep my eyes open,' said Cardew. 'If I get a spot of a chance of putting paid to the brute who gave me that cosh—'

'Not likely, old fellow. You—'

Levison was interrupted as Sidney Clive came into the study. He gave Cardew a rather anxious look.

'Tom Merry says you're playing this afternoon, Cardew,' he said.

'Quite!'

'Well, it's time to change, if you're playing. But—'

'You can wash out the butts. I'm playing.'

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'Much wiser not,' said Clive.

'Never had any use for wisdom,' drawled Cardew, getting out of the arm-chair. 'I'm going down to change now. You fellows coming?'

'Look here,' said Clive, 'You can't be fit, and it won't do you any good—'

'Oh, rats!'

'If you conk out—'

'Don't be a silly ass! I mean, if you can help it.'

'Look here, Cardew—'

'Oh, give us a rest.'

Cardew walked out of the study. Clive grunted, and Levison shrugged his shoulders, and they followed him down to the changing-room.

CHAPTER XVI

FOUL!

'FEELIN' FIT, deah boy?'

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy asked that question sympathetically. As a rule Arthur Augustus had little to say to Cardew, though they were related. He did not approve of Cardew's manners and customs: and made no secret of his disapproval. But circumstances alter cases: and the benevolent Gussy was quite concerned about his relative now. He came across to Cardew in the changing-room benevolently and sympathetically.

Cardew's eyes gleamed. But he answered nonchalantly:

'Why not?'

'Well, you had wathah a knock, you know, the othah day,' said Arthur Augustus, 'I don't think—'

'You don't!' agreed Cardew. 'Did you ever?'

'Weally, Cardew—'

'Don't begin now,' advised Cardew, 'It might give you a pain.'

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy breathed rather hard.

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'I was goin' to say, I don't think that I would play soccah, only a few days aftah gettin' such a knock,' he said.

'Oh, quite,' said Cardew. 'But I'm not soft, you see.'

'Bai Jove! If you are implyin' that I am soft Cardew—!' began Arthur Augustus, hotly.

'Quite!'

'I wegard you as a wude wottah, Cardew.'

'If that's the lot, take your face away. It worries me.'

Arthur Augustus took his face, and himself, away, breathing very hard indeed. As he explained afterwards to Blake and Herries and Dig, he could not punch a head that had so recently had so hard a knock. So he swallowed his indignation and turned a disdainful back.

If other fellows had been disposed to sympathise, they refrained, after hearing that brief colloquy. It was clear that they had only the sharpest edge of Cardew's tongue to expect in reply.

Cardew changed for soccer, looking his usual airy unconcerned self. Tom Merry gave him a very keen and searching look: but he had to take Cardew at face value, as it were. Cardew strolled out of the changing-room with his hands in the pockets

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of his football shorts, and if he was not feeling fit, at least he contrived to look it.

But Kildare of the Sixth, who was refereeing the junior House match, came across to him, with a slight frown.

'You playing?' he said. 'I shouldn't have expected to see you here, Cardew.'

Even Cardew could not venture to make an insolent answer to the captain of the school. But he had to bite his lip to keep it back.

'Oh, I'm all right,' he drawled.

'Sure of that?' asked Kildare, doubtfully.

'Well, a fellow knows how he feels, doesn't he?' said Cardew, lightly. 'Never keener in my life, Kildare.'

'Oh, all right, then,' said Kildare, and he left it at that.

Manners of the Shell also had an eye on Cardew—a very keen eye, and he tapped Tom Merry on the elbow.

'I'm not asking you to turn a man out to make room for me, Tom,' he said, 'You know that—'

'Of course,' said Tom.

'But if you play that man there'll be a hole in the front line for the New House to come through,' said Manners.

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'Think so?' said Tom.

'I'm sure of it.' Manners' lip curled. 'He's going through it, just to show off—not the man to give in to anything and all that—takes it all in his stride—poof! If he doesn't conk out I'll eat the football when you've done with it.'

'He wouldn't be fool enough to play and let us down—!'

'He would be cocksure conceited ass enough!' said Manners. 'It's not too late, and I'm not asking you to play me—play Hammond, or Glyn, or Gore, or Roylance—you'll be sorry if you play Cardew.'

Manners walked away without waiting for a reply to that. He left Tom looking, and feeling, uneasy: and once more he scanned Cardew keenly. But if it was not, as Manners said, too late, it was certainly very late to make a change, with the teams in the field: and Tom made up his mind to it. And if he had lingering doubts he had to dismiss them when Kildare blew the whistle, and the ball was kicked off by the New House.

And the first exchanges relieved his mind a good deal. Figgins and Co. followed up the kick-off by coming down like wolves on the fold, and it was Cardew who trapped the ball and took it into the New House half with a sudden sprint that left the

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New House almost standing, and caused Fatty Wynn to jump to attention in the New House goal. The New House halves, for the moment, seemed nowhere: the backs were too late: and Cardew had only the plump goal-keeper to beat.

But David Llewellyn Wynn was not called upon to save: for at the psychological moment, Cardew mis-kicked. He had no time for more, for the New House backs were upon him and the ball was cleared to mid-field.

It was a narrow escape for the New House: neither was it like Cardew to mis-kick, even in the hurry of a split second. His face was set and savage for a moment. Nearly, very nearly, had he scored for the School House: and a score would have been like meat and drink to him: indubitable proof that he was the man to carry on regardless, after an experience which would have knocked many other fellows out. But his chance was lost, and did not recur.

The first half went on, hard and fast, no more such chances coming Cardew's way. It was Tom Merry who scored first for his House: and just before the whistle, Figgins equalised for the New House. It was one to one at the interval. By that time even Cardew, with all his stubborn obstinacy

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and doggedness, had to realise that he was 'groggy'. Nothing would have induced him to admit it, however. He was going on to the finish, and he was going to walk off the field with his chin up, 'serene, indifferent to fate!'—if he could! And he was savagely sure that he could—and he would, whether he could or not! And he contrived to keep up his airy manner when the sides lined up for the second half.

But what Cardew would not admit to himself was becoming clear to other eyes, when Redfern of the New House took the ball fairly from his foot, and Cardew stumbled and fell. He was up again in a second: but Redfern was away with the ball, and Cardew was out of the tussle that followed in front of the School House goal. And even when the ball came out to him, and Tom Mery shouted 'Cardew', he stumbled, and the ball went to a New House man. At which Tom compressed his lips, and wished that he had listened to Manners' sage advice, even at the last moment.

'Bai Jove!' Arthur Augustus murmured in Blake's ear. 'We're cawwyin' a passengah in this game, Blake.'

'Looks like it!' grunted Blake.

Cardew's face was hard and set. He knew now

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that he should not have been on the field at all: as he had known at the back of his mind from the start. He would have given anything—except his stubborn pride—to be out of the game. His head was throbbing, and his legs seemed uncertain. But he was fiercely determined not to give in: he was going, somehow, to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

And then it happened.

Cardew, with a flash of his old form, robbed a New House forward of the ball, dodged another, and was well placed to give a centre shot to Tom Merry, who was ready for the pass and a run up. In that instant Figgins of the New House, moving like lightning, tapped the leather away. It rolled hardly a yard, and both Figgins and Cardew leaped for it. Figgins was a split second the first, Cardew, a second late, kicked Figgins instead of the ball. It was as open and deliberate a foul as had ever been seen on the soccer field: the crack on the unlucky Figgy's ankle sounded like a pistol-shot and louder still sounded Figgy's yell of surprise and pain.

The whistle shrilled out.

Figgins was hopping on one leg. Kerr ran up to him. All round the field New House men were yelling 'Foul!'

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Cardew stood with a white face. He had utterly lost his temper, and lost his self-control: he had been guilty of an act of hooliganism, palpably, under the eyes of all. Tom Merry came running up with a crimson face.

'You rotter!' he shouted. Tom had seen it, scarcely believing his eyes. 'Cardew—you rotter—you cad—get off the field!'

Cardew caught his breath.

'I-I never meant—'

'Sorry, Figgy old man,' panted Tom. 'Cardew, get off the ground before you're kicked off.'

'I-I never meant—'

Kildare was on the spot now.

'Go off the field, Cardew,' he said. 'Not a word—get out! I'll see you later about this! Now get out, sharp.'

'Cardew couldn't have meant—!' faltered Levison.

'That will do, Levison. Get off the field, Cardew.'

Slowly, Cardew turned and went. Hisses from the crowd round the field accompanied him, from School House as well as New House. He disappeared—and was glad to disappear.

'Bai Jove!' said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. 'Of all the uttah wottahs—foulin' a man like that—bai Jove!'



Cardew, a second late, kicked Figgins

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'Feeling bad, Figgy?' asked Tom Merry, anxiously.

Figgy, standing like a stork on one leg, leaning on Kerr, made a grimace.

'I can't go on,' he said. 'Can't stand on that peg! Cardew must have been out of his senses, I think. Help a chap off, Kerr—I've got to go dot-and-carry-one!'

Figgins was helped off the field. The House match finished a man short on either side, with no further score for either: and afterwards, in the changing-room, the name of Cardew was on every lip: and the adjectives attached to it were numerous and very expressive.

CHAPTER XVII

AFTER THE MATCH

'THAT RAT!' muttered Cardew.

He was pacing his study, as the dusk fell.

His brow was dark, his lips set bitterly. His cheeks were pale: but every now and then a flush came into them, as he thought of the scene on the football field. The utter shame he felt for his action there was overwhelming. The scorn and contempt he had read in every face galled him to the quick. Yet how could he resent that scorn, when he would have felt exactly the same towards any fellow who had acted as he had done?

He could hardly believe, at moments, that he had done it. It was not like him—it was quite unlike him. Sardonic, sneering, supercilious, he might be—but he was a sportsman: he had never fouled an opponent before: even when he had let his temper rip he had never let it rip to such an extent. He was not himself, that was the explanation—he was still feeling the effects of that cruel blow in the wood, and the exertion and excitement of the

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game, beyond his condition and beyond his strength, had done the rest: he had been reduced to a mere bundle of nerves, and so it had happened. Figgins had said that Cardew must have been out of his senses: and it had amounted to that, for that wild savage moment. He had been making his last effort to make good, and Figgins had intervened and put paid to it, and then—for that one moment he had been utterly out of control. The next, he would have given worlds to recall the action—but the next, it was too late.

He had changed in a daze, and gone up to his study.

That was a couple of hours ago: but he had seen no one since. No one had come there.

He had half-expected scornful faces and scornful voices at the door: but there had been no one. He was ready to hurl angry defiance: but it was not needed. He was left severely alone. Even Levison and Clive had not come up. He knew that they must be feeling as sick with him as everyone else: ashamed of him even as he was ashamed of himself. He had disgraced his study, disgraced his House, let down his side—he had done everything that he should not have done. And for what? From a motive of stubborn pride and supercilious superiority

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he had been determined to play—and this was how it had ended—in failure, disgrace and shame. Humiliation was a bitter experience for the arrogant dandy of the Fourth: and now he tasted the cup of humiliation, and swallowed it to the very dregs.

He paced the study.

Figgins—old honest Figgins, whom Cardew, who liked few, rather liked—who could help liking simple old Figgins? Figgins had gone limping off the field in pain: and what was he thinking of the fellow who had given him that savage, cruel kick? He was not himself when he had done it—he clung to that: and why was he not? That rat—that skulking thief in the wood—the man who had robbed the bank at Wayland—he was the cause of it. Possibly it was some relief to the wretched fellow to find an object on which he could lay at least some of the blame.

But it was true. He had not realised how unfit he was for a strenuous game: or at all events had been obstinately determined not to realise it. But why was he unfit? Because a thieving rascal had struck him a cruel and cowardly blow—a thief fleeing with his plunder from the officers of the law. That was why.

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'That rat!' muttered Cardew, again and again.

He was scorned by his House. It would be long before he played soccer for the School House again—if ever. His own friends despised him. And it was all due to that man—that rat who had knocked him out in the wood. But for that he would have been his normal self in the House match: it might have been—it would have been—a triumph for him instead of—this!

This! He heard footsteps in the passage, and his eyes turned fiercely on the door. If they came to taunt him—He heard a voice—that of Hammond of the Fourth.

'Beastliest foul I've ever seen! Couldn't even pretend it was an accident. Old Figgins was hurt.'

'Rotten tick!' came Roylance's voice.

'I say, he's in his study!' That was Baggy Trimble's squeak. 'I say, let's tell him what we think of him.'

'Oh, leave him alone!' said Hammond. 'I fancy he's feeling pretty sick without being told.'

The footsteps passed on.

Cardew had stood still, watching the door, as he listened. Every word came to him like a lash. He bit his lip till the blood almost came. Now he resumed his restless pacing.

'That rat!' he breathed. 'That skulking thief! He's the cause of it all—and they've let him slip through their fingers. And I believe—I'm sure—that he's hanging about—walking past the police-station every day, for all old Skeat knows! If a fellow could run him down—oh, I'd make him pay scot and lot for all this!'

He ground his teeth.

His head was aching, partly from the lingering effects of that blow in the wood, partly from the stress he was under. He had suffered bitter pain, and now shame and self-contempt were added: and why—because a skulking thief had been fleeing with money not his own, and had struck him a cruel and cowardly blow. He ran his fingers over the bruise under his hair. If only he had a chance of making that dastard pay scot and lot—!

The door opened at last, and Ernest Levison came in. His face was very grave and set.

Cardew looked at him with a sneer. But he did not speak.

'You've cut tea,' said Levison.

'Have I?' Cardew had forgotten tea. 'Yes. Why didn't you and Clive come up to tea in the study? The game has been over a good while.'

'Yes, it's over,' said Levison.

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'Licked?' sneered Cardew.

'It was a draw.'

'I suppose the whole House is down on me?' muttered Cardew.

'Did you expect anything else!'

'No! What have you come up for?' snapped Cardew. 'Think I'm coming down to face the mob in hall?'

'Better not, perhaps,' said Levison, 'But there's one thing you can do, Cardew—you can walk over to the New House and tell Figgins you're sorry for what you did.'

An angry reply leaped to Cardew's lips. But he did not utter it. His face was almost haggard.

'I'd tell him so, on my bended knees, if it would do any good,' he muttered. 'Think I'm not feeling sick about it?'

'I know you are,' said Levison. 'You must have been mad to do such a thing—you oughtn't to have played—'

'I know that—now.'

'At least you could have kept your temper. Why couldn't you?'

'Why couldn't I?' muttered Cardew. 'I couldn't, I suppose. I don't know what made me go over the edge—but I did. It's that man's fault—'

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Levison stared.

'What man's?' he asked.

'That man in the wood,' said Cardew, between his teeth. 'I must have been jolly near hysterical—hardly knowing what I did—but whose fault was that? Have I ever fouled a man before? Would it have happened but for what happened to me on Wednesday?'

'No! But—'

'And they're letting him run!' breathed Cardew. 'He left me stunned, and they're letting him run. And all the while I believe he's not a mile away. He's done this to me—and he's getting off!'

Levison made no answer to that. There was truth in what Cardew said: the skulker in the wood was the prime cause of what had happened. But it was Cardew's own arrogant pride that had done the rest.

Cardew gave him a savage look.

'Why hasn't Clive come up?' he jeered.

'I don't think he feels much like your company at present,' answered Levison.

'No more do you, I dare say?'

No reply.

'Did I ask you to come up?' sneered Cardew, 'Or Clive either? If you want to keep your distance,

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keep it. I shall get the stony eye from most of the House, I expect—I shan't notice yours among the rest.'

'You'll have enough on your hands without quarreling with your friends, Cardew,' said Levison, drily.

'Oh! rats!'

'If you don't want me in the study—'

'I don't.'

'Look here, Cardew—'

'Leave me alone, will you?'

Levison gave him a look, turned, and left the study without another word. Cardew kicked the door savagely shut after him. Then he resumed his moody pacing: left alone with his reflections, which were black and bitter enough.

CHAPTER XVIII

GUSSY, TOO!

ARTHUR Augustus D'Arcy removed the eyeglass from his noble eye, polished it methodically and replaced it in that noble eye. There was a shade of thoughtfulness on his aristocratic brow: and perhaps the polishing of the monocle was an aid to thought. Six fellows, in a group in the quadrangle after class on Monday, grinned. Perhaps they were curious to know what profound cogitations were passing in that aristocratic brain: or perhaps they were amused by the performance.

'Penny for 'em, Gussy,' said Tom Merry.

'Eh?'

'Give it a name!' said Blake, encouragingly.

'What?'

'Cough it up!' said Monty Lowther.

'Weally, you fellows—' Arthur Augustus seemed to emerge from his brown study, 'The fact is I was thinkin'—'

'I knew something unusual was happening!' said Digby, with a nod.

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'Weally, Dig—'

'Better cut off to the matron,' said Manners.

'Bai Jove! Why should I cut off to the Matwon, Mannahs?'

'First aid!' said Manners.

'Weally, Mannahs—'

'Hasn't it given you a pain?'

'Wats!' said Arthur Augustus, while six fellows chuckled. 'The fact is, deah boys, I weally have been thinkin'—'

'Friends, Romans, and countrymen, lend him your ears!' said Monty Lowther. 'Gussy has started thinking! What's it like in that new line of country, Gussy? Tell us the result.'

'Weally, Lowthah—'

'If any!' said Herries.

'Weally, Hewwies—'

'Get it off your chest, Gussy,' said Tom Merry, laughing.

'It's about that fellow Cardew,' said Arthur Augustus. He gave a nod in the direction of the gates, 'He's goin' out—'

'Good riddance to bad rubbish,' grunted Herries.

'Hear, hear!' said Dig.

'Bother Cardew,' said Blake.

'He is goin' out on his own,' continued Arthur

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Augustus, unheeding. 'He seems to be wathah a Wobinson Cwusoe the last day or two—'

'I think most fellows are fed up with him,' said Tom, frowning. 'What he did in the House match on Saturday was the limit.'

'Yaas, wathah,' agreed Arthur Augustus. 'But pewwaps it is some excuse for him that he was in a vevy upset and nervy state. You wemembah that I advised him, when we were changin', not to play so soon aftah gettin' that knock on the nappah, and he answered me vevy wudely. If he had taken my advice it would have been all wight. He was vevy jumpy—'

'I wish I'd listened to old Manners and left him out,' said Tom. 'But he looked okay, and said he was feeling okay, bother him. Fouling a man like that—'

'He has done all he could since, Tom Mewwy. I have heard that he has been ovah to the New House to tell Figgins he is sowwy.'

'The least he could do, I imagine!' growled Blake.

'Well, he is wathah an awwogant chap, and apologisin' doesn't come easy to him,' said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head, 'So pewwaps it is all the more to his cwedit that he made the effort and did it.'

'Stuck-up ass!' said Herries.

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'Pewwaps you are wight, Hewwies, though that is not pwecisely how I should expwess it,' said Arthur Augustus. 'But I have been thinkin'—'

'Thinking again!' ejaculated Monty Lowther. 'Twice in one day!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I wepeat that I have been thinkin' that pewwaps Cardew has had enough of the cold shouldah,' said Arthur Augustus.

'Oh, it will blow over,' said Tom. 'He can't expect fellows to forget it all at once—a dirty trick, and letting the House down—'

'Quite so, deah boy, but a civil word costs nothin',' said Arthur Augustus. 'He seems wathah off with his own fwriends in his own study—'

'He couldn't expect decent fellows to stand for what he did, could he?' snorted Jack Blake.

'I am suah that he wegwets that vevy wotten action, just as he said to Figgins,' replied Arthur Augustus, 'And if a fellow does w'ong, he can't do more than wegwet it and apologise to the injahed party. But what I am comin' to is this—'

'Oh! You're coming to something?' asked Monty Lowther.

'Yaas, wathah! I—'

'Oyez! oyez! oyez!' called out Lowther, in the

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manner of a town crier, 'Oyez! oyez! oyez! Take note, all good people. Gussy is coming to something.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Weally, Lowther—'

'Come to it, old man!' urged Lowther. 'It's only five or six hours till dorm. Hurry up! If you haven't come to it by the time the bell rings for dorm—!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I wegard you as an ass, Lowthah. This is what I was comin' to—I don't like seein' the chap mooch off on his own, and I pwopose that as we have nothin' particulah to do, we go aftah him and join him in a walk.'

Six juniors stared at Gussy. This, it seemed, was the outcome of those deep and unaccustomed cogitations. Gussy's kind and tender heart moved him to sympathy with the fellow who had been a good deal of an outcast in his own House since the soccer match on Saturday.

'Fathead!' said Blake.

'Ass!' said Herries.

'Ditherer!' said Digby.

Study No. 6 were quite clear and emphatic in their opinion. Not one of them, evidently, had any use for D'Arcy's benevolent suggestion.

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'Weally, you fellows—!' remonstrated Arthur Augustus.

'Rats!' said all three together.

'What do you think, Tom Mewwy?'

'Leave me out,' said Tom, 'I've had enough of Cardew to last me for some time, thanks.'

'Same here,' said Manners.

'The samefulness, as that Indian chap at Greyfriars would say, is terrific,' concurred Monty Lowther.

'Weally, you fellows, I think—!'

'Thinking again!' exclaimed Lowther. 'Dash it all, Gussy, don't over-do it—something will go bust if you keep on like that. Remember you're not used to it.'

'Bai Jove! You uttah ass, Lowthah—'

'Hallo, there's old Talbot with a footer!' exclaimed Blake. 'Anybody feel like a punt-about?'

'Yes, rather.'

'In the group of seven juniors, six evidently felt more like punting a footer with Talbot of the Shell than taking a walk with Cardew of the Fourth. They rushed off to join up with Talbot, leaving Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to follow them or to follow his own devices, just as he liked.

Arthur Augustus hesitated a moment or two.

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Probably he would have preferred joining in the punt-about to joining his relative out of gates. But what he might prefer was by no means always what Arthur Augustus was likely to do. Had Cardew been his usual flippant, sarcastic, mocking self, Arthur Augustus certainly would not have sought his company—he would have steered clear of it. But Cardew was down on his luck: and that was more than enough for the benevolent Gussy. He hesitated: but he turned at length in the direction of the gates, and walked gracefully out.

Cardew was already at a distance, in the direction of Rylcombe. Apparently he was heading for the village. Arthur Augustus followed on, hastening his steps to overtake the fellow in front.

Half way to the village he was quite near Cardew, who had not looked round once, and was quite unaware of benevolence on his track. At that point Cardew stopped and turned to the stile that gave access to the footpath through the wood.

It was as he clambered over the stile that he caught sight of the swell of St. Jim's in the lane. He stared at him for a moment, and then, dropping on the inner side of the stile, disappeared up the footpath.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy broke into a little trot.

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He reached the stile and climbed over it: but the winding footpath already hid Cardew from sight. He trotted up the path.

Once more Cardew came into view—Arthur Augustus had a view of his back. He was walking quite quickly, and D'Arcy had to accelerate.

'Cardew!' he called out. 'Pway hold on a minute, deah boy.'

Cardew glanced back over his shoulder. He gave his relative another cold stare and walked on again. But Arthur Augustus stamped on the gas, as it were, and overtook him just as Cardew reached the gap in the thickets where, nearly a week ago, he had staggered out into the footpath under the eyes of the 'Terrible Three'. He was turning through that gap as Arthur Augustus reached him.

'Pway stop a minute, Cardew,' said Arthur Augustus, rather breathlessly.

Cardew stopped, staring again.

'What do you want?' he snapped.

'Nothin' deah boy.'

'Take it and go, then,' said Cardew.

'Weally, Cardew—'

'What the dooce have you followed me for?' asked Cardew, puzzled, and not pleased. 'Do you fancy I want your company, D'Arcy?'

GUSSY, TOO!

'I twust, Cardew, that my company is not un-welcome!' said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. 'If you are goin' for a wamble in the wood I should be vevy pleased to accompany you in the wamble.'

Cardew stared at him harder. A sneer was on his lips. But perhaps something in Arthur Augustus's kind and good-tempered amiable face disarmed him. Perhaps, too, after a rather grim weekend a friendly voice was welcome to his ears for once. Instead of making a jeering reply he burst into a laugh.

'You're a good little ass, D'Arcy,' he said.

'Weally, Cardew—'

'We're relations,' said Cardew, 'But we're not much alike. I've wished more than once that we were.'

'Bai Jove!'

'Come on, if you like,' said Cardew, 'But I'm not going rambling. I've come here for a special reason—I'm going to the spot where that brute knocked me out last Wednesday by the old oak tree. I've been wondering—!'

'Yaas?' said Arthur Augustus, inquiringly, as he paused.

'Old Skeat and his bobbies have let him run,' said Cardew, 'But I've been thinking a lot about it.'

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'They've been all over the spot, of course—must have been. But I dare say they did it with their eyes shut.'

'I believe Inspectah Skeat is a vewy capable officah, Cardew—'

'Looks like it!' sneered Cardew. 'Anyhow, if that brute left any sign behind him, ten to one they missed it. That's what I'm going to look for—a chance in a thousand, I suppose—but a fellow with his eyes open might spot something.'

'Bai Jove!' repeated Arthur Augustus.

He blinked at Cardew. That there was the remotest chance of picking up any clue to the bank-raider that the police had missed, and after the lapse of so many days, seemed to Arthur Augustus quite a fantastic idea. Still, he was quite willing to join in, if that was Cardew's object in coming to the wood. Certainly he did not expect anything to come of it.

'Come on, then,' said Cardew.

He turned into the wood, and Arthur Augustus followed him cheerfully. They arrived together under the branches of the tall old oak where Cardew had waited for Bill Lodgey on Wednesday, with such unexpected and dire results to himself.

CHAPTER XIX

AN UNEXPECTED CLUE

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS smiled.

He leaned gracefully on the trunk of the massive old oak, with his hands in the pockets of his elegant trousers, and watched Cardew. That, it seemed, was going to be Gussy's contribution to that spot of amateur detective work.

But really, there seemed little else that he could do. Traces of the bank-raider, if any, seemed likely to be as easy to find as a needle in a haystack. Certainly there was 'sign' of trampling feet in the grass—no doubt left by Inspector Skeat and his men in their search days earlier. Probably no other foot had trodden in that solitary spot since. But such sign did not seem likely to lead anywhere. Cardew's idea that he might chance to pick up some sort of a clue seemed to Arthur Augustus the wildest of fancies. He watched, and could not help smiling.

Cardew, at any rate, was in deadly earnest. He was passionately, savagely determined to find anything that was to be found. He did not hesitate

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for one moment to fancy himself keener than the experienced police-inspector, capable of picking up something that Mr. Skeat had missed. If anything was to be found he was going to find it, whether Mr. Skeat could or not.

But it did not seem that anything was to be found.

He did not hope, like a detective in a novel, to find a spot of cigarette-ash, or a fragment of a torn letter, or a broken cuff-link. Any such easy clue would certainly have been snapped up already by Inspector Skeat. But there might be something—he hardly knew what—but something the police had overlooked—something that might give a line on the man who had struck him that cruel blow, and caused all the trouble that had followed.

Cardew, in his more energetic hours, had sometimes turned out with the St. Jim's Scouts: and he was keen and intelligent and knew how to look for 'signs'. But in the open space round the big oak there was no 'sign' apart from the vague traces of many footsteps. From the open space he passed into the thicket of hawthorns where he had taken cover that day, and where the red-headed man had found him and struck him down.

In that thicket he disappeared from Arthur

Augustus's sight, but the swell of St. Jim's could hear the rustling of the bushes and the sound of the eager junior rooting about. And his smile widened. Obviously Inspector Skeat and his men must have searched that thicket of hawthorns for possible traces: and what could Cardew hope to find that they had not found?

'Bai Jove! He is a stickah!' murmured Arthur Augustus. 'I wegard him as an ass for thinkin' that he can play at Sherlock Holmes: but he is a stickah! Those hawthorns are wathah wuff on a fellow's clobbah—he will be in wags and tattahs if he keeps this up much longah.'

Cardew did not keep it up much longer. He emerged from the thicket, a little breathless, and with a black brow. Arthur Augustus was careful not to smile as Cardew came back under the oak. Gussy was not perhaps very quick on the uptake: but he could see that Cardew was in no mood for smiles.

'No luck, deah boy?' he asked, with all the seriousness he could muster.

Cardew shook his head.

'Not so far,' he muttered.

'Goin' on?' asked Arthur Augustus. 'Anythin' more you can do?'

'I'm going on till I find something, if there's

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anything to be found,' snapped Cardew. 'That brute isn't getting away with cracking my head if I can put a spoke in his wheel.' He gritted his teeth. 'I'm certain that he changed in that thicket—there might be something—. He must have got rid of that green raincoat at least, and the red beard and hair and the rest of it. But—'

'If he did, he would be vewy careful not to leave anythin' about,' remarked Arthur Augustus. 'He'd take them away with him.'

'I suppose so!' admitted Cardew. 'But something—anything—I've figured it out, D'Arcy. That day—I fancied I was in good cover in those hawthorns—and I was taken by surprise when he came straight at me there—but he had a reason for it—must have had. If it was only getting rid of his disguise, he was alone here—no need to poke into a tangle of hawthorns for that. There was something there that he wanted—must have been.'

Arthur Augustus nodded. He had not thought of it: but now that Cardew remarked on it, it seemed probable. The man must have had some motive for plunging into the thicket of hawthorns where he had found Cardew.

'He did not guess you were there?' asked Arthur Augustus.

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'I know he did not! He was startled—and I could see that he was frightened, too, when he came on me so suddenly. Up to that moment he hadn't the foggiest idea that there was anybody on the spot.'

'If you are suah of that, deah boy—'

'Of course I'm sure,' snapped Cardew, irritably.

'All wight, all wight,' said Arthur Augustus, soothingly. 'Then he must have had some weason for pushin' into the hawthorns—but what?'

'Something there,' said Cardew, with conviction.

'As I figure it out he made himself up in that red hair and green raincoat on this spot. He had to have some hidden spot to leave his own coat and hat when he put on that green raincoat and Homburg that he was seen in—they were only a part of his disguise—a quiet spot where he could change back in a hurry. I tell you, he had that disguise—green raincoat, Homburg hat, wig and beard, all parked ready in that thicket before the raid—he must have had them parked somewhere, and that was the spot. I'm certain of it. He changed back there, and took the fixings away with him when he went, while I was stunned and could see and know nothing.'

Cardew spoke with conviction.

'Um!' said Arthur Augustus, dubiously.

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'Don't you agree with me?' snapped Cardew, irritably. His own theory seemed convincing to him: and doubt from anyone else was irritating.

'Pewwaps you are wight, deah boy,' said Arthur Augustus, 'But it would be wathah wisky for a bank wobbah to leave things about like that—suppose somebody had come on them and found them?'

'Fathead!'

'Weally, Cardew—'

'Oh, don't be an ass!' said Cardew. 'Hardly anybody was likely to come by this spot at all: and nobody who came by would think of pushing into a mass of hawthorns—why should he?' He scowled as Arthur Augustus smiled. 'What are you grinning at?'

'As a mattah of fact, deah boy, four fellows did come along here on that vevy day,' answered Arthur Augustus. 'It was in the mornin', and they certainly came along to this vevy spot.'

Cardew stared at him.

'How do you know that—if you do?' he snapped.

'Because I was one of them,' said Arthur Augustus, cheerfully. 'You see, Blake and Hewwies and Dig and I took a little wamble in bweak that Wednesday mornin', and we dodged out sight when

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little Wottle came along as he might have weported us to our Housemastah for bein' out of bounds in bweak. We dodged wound this vevy oak.'

'Oh!' said Cardew. 'Well, even if you came round this oak you didn't poke your silly noses into those hawthorns, I suppose?'

'Not at all. But—'

'Nobody would!' said Cardew. 'If the bank-raider had his fixings there they were as safe as houses.' He gave the swell of St. Jim's an exasperated glare. 'Grinning again? What is it now?'

'We certainly did not poke our noses into those hawthorns, Cardew, but somebody else did,' answered Arthur Augustus.

'Who did, then?' snapped Cardew.

'Little Wottle.'

'Wottle?' repeated Cardew. 'Are you talking out of the back of your neck or what? Why on earth should Mr. Wottle poke into a thicket of thorns?'

'Weally I don't know the answah to that one,' said Arthur Augustus. 'I wemembah that we were all vevy much surprwised to see him. You see, we were keepin' doggo and he nevah knew we were about—and we cleahed off without bein' seen, so what he was up to I weally don't know. I couldn't say whethah he left the suitcase there or not—'

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'The suitcase?' repeated Cardew, staring.

'Didn't I mention that he was cawwyin' a suitcase—?'

'You did not!' breathed Cardew. 'Was he?'

'Yaas, wathah, and he pushed into those vewy hawthorns where you have been searchin', and it looked as if he was stickin' the suitcase there—though why, goodness knows.'

Cardew stood very still, looking at the swell of St. Jim's. His heart was beating in jumps.

'So you see,' went on the innocent Arthur Augustus, 'That thicket is not the safe hidin'-place you fancied, Cardew. If the bank-wobbah had his fixin's hidden there vewy likely Mr. Wottle would have spotted them when he was foolin' awound with that suitcase.'

Cardew did not answer.

His mind was almost in a whirl.

What Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had told him seemed to have let in a flood of blinding light where all had been dark. Arthur Augustus had been puzzled at the time by Mr. Wottle's curious actions: but he had dismissed the matter as a puzzling incident that did not concern him in any way: and probably would have forgotten it altogether had not Cardew's words recalled it to

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his mind. But though the incident meant nothing to the unsuspecting Gussy, it meant much to the keen-witted fellow who now heard it for the first time.

Cardew had worked it out, to his own satisfaction at least, that the red-headed bank-robber had had his 'fixings' hidden in that hawthorn thicket: and had come back to the same spot, after the raid, to get rid of his disguise and resume his normal attire. It was as safe a spot as could be found in the vicinity for such a purpose. Now he heard of a man who had penetrated into that thorny thicket on the very morning before the raid—with a suitcase!

The Head's Secretary! It seemed wildly impossible. Indeed, Cardew might have dismissed it as wildly impossible but for what he knew of Mr. Wottle's secret. But he had not forgotten the paper he had picked up in the quad, and which Tom Merry had returned to the Secretary. The outward Wottle was the quiet, respectable Secretary. The inward Wottle was a desperate plunger on the Turf, and a very unlucky one. It seemed to Ralph Reckness Cardew that the pieces fitted together like a jig-saw puzzle.

He could not speak. He could only stand and

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stare at the happy Arthur Augustus, who stood smiling, quite unconscious of the startling thoughts racing through Cardew's mind.

Wottle—the man whose racing losses totted up to a hundred pounds a time: which his salary could hardly cover. Wottle, who under his mild general aspect had a fierce and savage temper, as Cardew had reason to know. Wottle, who had hidden a suitcase in that thicket, where Cardew already believed that the bank-raider had hidden his 'fixings': on the very morning of the raid! Already Cardew had worked it out that the bank-raider was a local man—never dreaming how near at home he was. Wottle—!

Arthur Augustus regarded him with a smile.

'Wathah knocks out your theowy, what, old boy?' he asked.

'Eh?'

'I mean to say, if there had been anythin' hidden in those hawthorns, ten to one Wottle would have spotted it.'

Cardew laughed.

'Oh, quite!' he said.

'Sowwy to knock your theowy on the head when you were gettin' on so fine as Sherlock Holmes,' grinned Arthur Augustus. 'Howevah, keep it up,

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deah boy—I'll wait as long as you like while you're searchin' for a clue.'

Cardew laughed again.

'I fancy I'll chuck it,' he said. 'Nothing to be found here, I'm afraid. Let's walk back.'

'Yaas, wathah!' agreed Arthur Augustus.

They walked back to the school. It seemed to Arthur Augustus that Cardew was acting very sensibly in giving up a search for a clue that was never to be found. Not for one moment did it occur to his aristocratic brain that he had himself furnished Ralph Reckness Cardew with the clue he wanted.

CHAPTER XX

QUITE A COMEDY

MONTY LOWTHER chuckled.

'Watch this game!' he murmured.

'Eh?' Tom Merry glanced round, 'What game?'

'What the dickens—?' asked Manners.

Neither of Tom Merry's chums could see any 'game' in progress. Neither could Ralph Reckness Cardew, who was leaning on one of the old elms, quite near the 'Terrible Three'. They were seated on one of the benches under the elms: but near as they were, they were not looking at Cardew or speaking to him, or taking any heed of his presence. No doubt, in the course of time, Cardew's performance on the football field on Saturday would 'blow over': but it had not blown over yet: and every fellow was not quite so benevolently amiable as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. For the present, at least, the less the chums of the Shell had to do with Ralph Reckness Cardew the better they liked it: and they seemed to be oblivious of his existence as he leaned on the

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elm near at hand and regarded them with a sneering glance.

Cardew had returned from his 'ramble' with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who had gone up to tea with Blake and Herries and Dig in Study No. 6. Gussy would probably have carried his benevolence to the extent of asking Cardew to tea in that study if he could have relied on equal benevolence from Blake and Herries and Dig. But as he was well aware that he couldn't he had left Cardew in the quad. Cardew was debating in his mind whether to go up to No. 9 and join Levison and Clive there, or whether to join the 'mob' in hall, when Monty Lowther's grinning remark caused him to glance round for the 'game' to which Monty alluded.

He was as puzzled by that remark as Tom Merry and Manners. Plenty of fellows, from the Sixth Form down to the Second, were to be seen, and several masters, among them the majestic Head, Dr. Holmes himself: but there was not the slightest sign or symptom of a 'game' visible to any eyes but those of the grinning Monty.

Dr. Holmes was standing at a halt, in conversation with his Secretary, Mr. Wottle, and Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House. What they were discussing the juniors, at the distance, could

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not hear: the Head seemed to be doing most of the talking, and Mr. Wottle and Mr. Railton were giving attention with the attentive deference due to their respected Chief. A conversation between the Hand on one side and his Secretary and the Housemaster on the other, was hardly a matter of interest to Tom and Manners, and certainly they would never have regarded it as a 'game' to watch.

But it seemed that Monty Lowther did.

His eyes had been on the group for some minutes, and the grin had widened on his face as he watched. Cardew, too, had been looking at Mr. Wottle: that little gentleman was an object of unusual interest to him since his discovery from the artless Gussy in the wood.

The 'Terrible Three' had come out after tea, and two of them were talking, while Lowther watched the conversing group. Tom was talking soccer, thinking of a coming match with Rookwood School: and Manners was talking about some recent shots with his camera: the two subjects alternating, as it were. Lowther, which was rather unusual for him, was silent—until at length he made the remark that caused his companions to cease for a moment to talk football and photography, and stare round.

'Is that a joke, Monty?' asked Tom after a survey

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of the quad which failed to pick up any signs of a 'game', 'I don't see any game going on.' He turned back to Manners. 'As I was saying, old chap, I fancy old Figgins will be all right for the Rookwood game when it comes round, but I wish I could feel sure—we want Figgins in the front line in a School match—'

'Oh, quite!' said Manners. 'I expect he will be okay by then. I was telling you about that shot I took of the old abbey at Abbotsford—'

Monty Lowther chimed in again.

'Aren't you going to watch the game?'

'Oh, bother,' said Tom. 'What do you mean? You seem to be staring at the Head talking to Railton and Wottle. Is that a game?'

'Exactly,' said Lowther.

'Fathead,' said Tom.

'Do watch!' urged Monty. 'I've been watching them for some time. Little Wottle wants to escape and can't. Ain't it funny? He's twice tried to edge off, and each time the Head's said something and he had to pull in. I wonder what he wants to get away for? It's rather an honour to be talked to by the Head, under everybody's eyes. But Wottle has had enough, and some over. Do watch the game—I tell you he's like a hen on hot bricks.'

'What rot,' said Tom.

'Bosh!' said Manners.

'I tell you, watch him,' said Lowther. 'You'll see!'

Tom Merry and Manners at last gave the group their undivided attention. And having done so, they smiled. There was, as Monty declared, a 'game' going on: a most peculiar game. Little Mr. Wottle undoubtedly was trying to get away from the group: and failing to do so. Why the Secretary should desire to escape from a conversation with his employer, and that employer the majestic Headmaster himself, was rather a puzzle: but now that they gave him attention they could see that he did: though no such idea could possibly have occurred to Dr. Holmes himself.

Dr. Holmes, at the moment, was addressing his remarks, no doubt weighty and interesting, to Mr. Railton. The Housemaster, who had a real liking and respect for his Chief, listened attentively. But Mr. Wottle, while keeping up an attentive aspect, was slowly, gradually, but surely, moving back: and that operation, if continued, would take him beyond hearing of the Head's voice and leave him out of the conversation. Obviously the Secretary could not venture to let the Head suspect

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that he wanted to get away: he had to be extremely careful and tactful in doing so. But as it happened, the Head glanced round at him and included him in the conversation once more: which made it impossible for Mr. Wottle to back away further: he had to brace up, and assume an air of attentive interest in the Head's remarks.

This curious incident happened twice while the juniors watched from the bench under the elm. Each time Mr. Wottle seemed almost to have succeeded in backing out of the group: but each time a remark from the Head called him to order again, as it were, and he had to play up. Then, as if resigned to his fate, he stood still. He stood with his hands behind him: and the juniors could see that his fingers were twitching.

Monty Lowther winked at his chums.

'Is it funny?' he asked.

Tom Merry laughed.

There was, in fact, something comic in little Mr. Wottle's predicament. For some reason known only to himself, he was anxious to go, and the nervous twitching of his fingers showed how hard he found it to suppress his impatience. But he could not, of course, betray any such desire in the majestic presence of his Chief: he had to affect to

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be as interested in the Head's observations as Mr. Railton genuinely was.

'Like his cheek!' said Manners. 'If the old boy wants to chin why shouldn't Wottle listen in? That's part of a Secretary's job.'

'By gum!' said Lowther, 'If the old boy suspected for a single tick that Wottle was bored and wanted to be shut of him—'

'He couldn't!' said Tom.

'Not likely!' grinned Manners. 'Why he's honouring little Wottle by letting him into a pow-wow with a Housemaster. I'll bet he thinks Wottle is enjoying it no end.'

'There he goes again!' breathed Lowther.

Once more Mr. Wottle was backing. The juniors noticed Mr. Railton give him a somewhat sharp glance. Perhaps the Housemaster discerned something that was very unlikely to occur to the Head himself. But once more Dr. Holmes included Mr. Wottle in his remarks, and the Secretary had to play up again—though his fingers were twitching more than ever behind his back.

'But what the thump does the little ass want to get away for?' said Tom Merry, puzzled. 'It's pretty plain that he does—but why? The Old Man can't be boring him so badly as all that.'

'Goodness knows,' said Lowther, 'But I'll bet that little Wottle would give a lot to dodge the Old Man.'

There was a low laugh close at hand. The 'Terrible Three' all looked round at Ralph Reckness Cardew. Since Lowther had drawn attention to the group Cardew had been watching them: all the more keenly because of his own personal and particular interest in Mr. Wottle.

'A game, and no mistake,' said Cardew. 'Wottle won't get away with it—he's got to listen-in. The dear little man's on tenterhooks.'

None of the Shell fellows replied. They did not desire to speak to Cardew: but he had forgotten, for the moment, the cold shoulder that he was getting among the fellows in his House.

'Amusin', isn't it?' went on Cardew.

'Oh, very,' said Tom, feeling that a civil reply was called for. But his curt tone recalled to Cardew that he was cold-shouldered.

His lip curled in a sneer.

'You wouldn't guess why the little beast is squirming like that to get away from the old boy,' he said. 'I could tell you.'

'I don't see why you want to call him names,' answered Tom, coldly. 'Is it because he smacked

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your head last week when you bagged his newspaper from Trotter? You should have let it alone.'

'There's quite a lot of names I could call him,' said Cardew, his eyes gleaming. 'Humbug, hypocrite, spoofer, and a good many more.'

'Oh, rats,' said Tom.

'What bosh,' said Manners. 'The little man's got a temper, but he's not a bad little man, so far as I can see.'

'Is that as far as the end of your nose?' asked Cardew.

'Oh, go and eat coke!' was Manners' reply to that. And he and Tom Merry turned their backs on Cardew.

But Monty Lowther gave him attention. From Cardew's words it seemed that he guessed why Mr. Wottle was performing all those manoeuvres to get away from his Chief: and Monty was curious.

'Why do you think Wottle is trying to dodge the Beak, Cardew?' he asked. 'I can see that he is—but why, if you know?'

'Easy,' answered Cardew. 'The evening papers are delivered in Common Room by now.'

'The evening papers?' repeated Lowther, blankly.

'Yes: and Trotter will have taken Wottle's *Evening Express* to his rooms by this time.'

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Monty Lowther stared.

'You think that Wottle is awfully keen to see his evening paper?' he asked.

'I don't think—I know.'

'Anything special in the papers?' asked the puzzled Monty. 'I haven't heard of any front-page news myself.'

Cardew laughed again.

'The races are on at Abbotsford this week,' he said.

'The races?' stuttered Lowther.

'You spotless youths wouldn't know,' sneered Cardew, 'But I happen to keep up with that kind of news.'

Tom Merry looked round at him.

'You'd better chuck that, Cardew,' he said. 'It was rather the limit for Wottle to smack your head, as he did, on the landing last week: but it's over the limit for you to make out that he knows or cares anything about horse-racing—he, the Headmaster's Secretary.'

'You certainly never looked at that paper I gave you to take to him a week ago,' said Cardew.

Tom flushed.

'Of course I didn't!' he snapped. 'I'd forgotten all about it. What the dickens do you mean?'

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'Oh, nothing,' said Cardew, airily. 'But why do you think he was so excited when he was kept waiting a few minutes for his evening paper last Tuesday? He went right off at the deep end—why?'

'Haven't the foggiest,' grunted Tom.

'Well, why?' asked Lowther.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

'Think it out for a week or two, with wet towels round your heads, and perhaps you'll guess,' he answered. And with that he walked away in the direction of the House, humming a tune.

Tom Merry compressed his lips.

'What the dickens does Cardew mean?' he muttered.

'If he means anything,' said Manners, quietly, 'He means that last Tuesday Wottle was in such a bait because he was in a hurry to see the result of some race in that paper Trotter brought up—and that he's now trying to get away for the same reason.'

'What utter rot!' said Tom.

Monty Lowther whistled.

'I wonder—!' he murmured.

'Rot, I tell you,' said Tom. 'The Head's Secretary—mixed up in racing, like Cardew with that blackguard Bill Lodgey! Rot!'

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'But after all, why did he go off at the deep end that time just because Cardew had his paper for a minute or two—?' said Lowther, slowly.

'Ask me another.'

'Must have been something in it he was anxious about—'

'Cardew's pretty keen,' said Manners, with a nod, 'And we can see that Wottle is trying to squirm off—and it's time for the evening paper now—'

'Rubbish!' said Tom. 'Now look here, we were talking about the Rookwood match. If Figgins's leg is all right again—'

Tom Merry dismissed the matter. He was not in the least interested in little Mr. Wottle, or in Cardew's ideas about that gentleman. Manners was content to dismiss it too. But Monty Lowther, as he continued to watch the comedy in the quad, wondered. The Head was still going on, never dreaming that his majestic conversation could have palled on one of his hearers: and Mr. Wottle's nervous fingers were twitching more than ever behind his back. It was not till Dr. Holmes, at long last, ceased to discourse, gave Mr. Wottle a gracious nod, and walked away with Mr. Railton, that the Secretary was able to escape at last. And then

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Monty, watching him, grinned at the speed with which he walked away to the House—he almost ran. And Monty Lowther wondered whether Cardew had it right, as the little figure of the Secretary whisked into the House and disappeared.

CHAPTER XXI

ON THE WATCH

'TROTTER!'

'Yes, Master Cardew.'

'Have you taken up Mr. Wottle's paper?'

The House page grinned.

'I jest 'ave,' he answered. 'I've left it on his table, as he's out, sir—I see 'im in the quad talking to the 'Ead! 'Fraid you can't look at it this time, Master Cardew, and get your 'ead smacked.'

Trotter, grinning, went down the stairs: evidently he had not forgotten the startling incident of a week ago. Cardew smiled sourly. That angry smack on the head he could have forgotten and forgiven, after what he had seen later in Mr. Wottle's room. But the crack from the cosh in Rylcombe Wood he could neither forget nor forgive: and if Wottle was the same man—and he was convinced that he was—

From the window on the study landing he glanced down into the quad: and smiled again. He knew, if the "Terrible Three" of the Shell did not choose to think so, why Mr. Wottle was like a 'hen

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on hot bricks': detained there by the Head when he was burning with eagerness to see his *Evening Express*. It was obvious, to Cardew, that the man had been plunging on the races again, and was in a twitter to know the result: he had been caught by the Head at a very unfortunate moment. Knowing what he did, and suspecting what he did, it was amusing to Cardew. That man, if his suspicions were well founded, had knocked him out, with all the miserable results that had followed, as he had knocked out a man at the bank at Wayland. Under that mild exterior he was a relentless brute, as savage as a wildcat. He played his part well: but Cardew knew. The Head, all unknowing, was sheltering a man who had slid from gambling to crime, and who was capable of more. And only Cardew knew: and of what he knew, what could he prove?

His lips set hard.

He was going to prove it: now that he had a clue, an unmistakable clue, to the man who had 'coshed' him, he was going to fix it on him. Little Mr. Wottle, the mild-mannered Secretary, was going to be shown up in his true colours and taken away to where he belonged. Cardew's mind was very firmly made up on that.

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He moved away from the window, crossed the landing, and hurried up the passage to Mr. Wottle's rooms.

How many minutes he had he did not know: but he knew that he had some minutes at least. And moments were enough for what he now had in mind.

He stepped into Mr. Wottle's sitting-room. On the table were a good many books and papers: prominent among them the newspaper that Trotter had laid there, ready for the Secretary when he came in.

Cardew picked up the *Evening Express*, and his eyes turned at once to the racing results in the Stop Press column.

There had been racing at Abbotsford that day, and the results were given up to 3.30: later results came in too late for the evening papers. From which Cardew knew that Wottle had banked on an earlier race: otherwise the evening paper would have had no interest for him. Results were given of the 2.30 and 3.0. Wottle's money—or rather, as Cardew looked at it, the Wayland and County Bank's money—was on one or both of those races.

Cardew took a pen-knife from his pocket and slit

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the newspaper round the racing results. He picked out the fragment and put it in his pocket. Then he folded the paper to conceal the cut-out.

That was all he had to do in Mr. Wottle's sitting-room. Leaving the newspaper where Trotter had left it, he quitted the room and walked back to the study landing.

He leaned on the banisters there, his hands in his pockets, and a smile on his face, waiting for Mr. Wottle to come up. He was curious and interested to know the Secretary's reactions when he discovered that the single spot of interest in his newspaper had vanished. Possibly the man, in his surprise and disappointment and angry excitement, might give himself away, which was all to the good from Cardew's point of view. In any case, this was a jolt back for that 'cosh' in the wood. A week ago Cardew had felt pity for the wretched man, not knowing what he really was. Now that he knew, his only feeling was utter scorn and an implacable determination to bring him to justice, if he could.

He was still waiting for the Secretary to come up when four fellows came out of the Fourth-Form passage and passed him on the landing. Three of them—Blake and Herries and Dig—walked on

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to the stairs, but the fourth, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, paused.

'Pway don't huwwy off, you fellows,' said Arthur Augustus.

Blake glanced round.

'What's on?' he asked.

'I was goin' to speak to Cardew--'

'Oh, rats!'

Blake and Herries and Dig went down the stairs. Evidently they did not share the benevolent Gussy's desire to speak to Cardew.

'Weally, you fellows--!' exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

But Blake and Co. were gone.

Arthur Augustus turned to the junior lounging on the banisters. Cardew coloured a little. He did not care two straws whether Blake and Co. gave him a word or not: but cold-shouldering was unpleasant enough: he could hardly like the continual reminders that he was looked on as an outsider. But it was all going down to Mr. Wottle's account!

'Comin' out, deah boy?' asked Arthur Augustus, agreeably. Gussy, at any rate, was going to make things easier for the outcast, if he could.

'Not at the moment,' yawned Cardew. He glanced

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over the banisters. 'Hallo, is that Wottle? He seems in a hurry.'

Arthur Augustus glanced over the banisters, too.

'Bai Jove! He does!' he concurred. 'I wondah what's up? He's stampin' on the gas and no mistake.'

Mr. Wottle was, in fact, putting on speed. Monty Lowther had watched him almost run into the House. Now Cardew and D'Arcy watched him quite run up the stairs. Not even aware of the two juniors looking down, Mr. Wottle did those stairs at speed, coming up two at a time. Really it was surprising, to Arthur Augustus at least, to see a usually quiet and reserved man putting on such speed, for no apparent reason.

Mr. Wottle was a little breathless when he reached the study landing. The two juniors glanced at him curiously—one of them very curiously. He did not give them a look. He passed them in a moment and disappeared up the passage that led to his rooms.

'Bai Jove! Mr. Wottle seems wathah pwessed for time!' remarked Arthur Augustus, in wonder. 'Anybody might think his quartahs were on fiah. Why is he wushin' about like that, Cardew?'

'I wonder,' smiled Cardew.

'He is wathah a queeah little man,' remarked

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Arthur Augustus. 'He has a vewy unweliable tempah. Actually smackin' a fellow's head when a fellow was apologisin' to him for an accident, you know. You wemembah he was knocked ovah by that footah one day last week—'

'I remember!' assented Cardew. He remembered—and he remembered, too, the paper that Mr. Wottle had dropped when he was knocked over.

'A fellow couldn't do more than apologise, could he?' continued Arthur Augustus. 'It was up to Wottle to accept the apology in the spiwit in which it was made. And instead of that he went off at the deep end and smacked a fellow's head, you know, and—Bai Jove! What's that?'

Arthur Augustus gave quite a jump at a sudden sound from the direction of Mr. Wottle's rooms. Cardew had been expecting something when Mr. Wottle discovered that the racing results had been cut out of his evening paper. But Arthur Augustus was quite surprised to hear a sudden loud, savage, angry exclamation—loud, even at the distance down the passage.

The swell of St. Jim's stared blankly towards that passage.

'Bai Jove!' he repeated. 'What's that? Was that Wottle, Cardew?'

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'Sounded like it,' grinned Cardew.

'But whatevah can be the mattah, to make the man shout out like that?' exclaimed Arthur Augustus. 'He sounds vewy excited. Bai Jove, heah he comes! I weally cannot imagine what is the mattah.'

There were hurried footsteps in the passage and Mr. Wottle came out on the landing with a newspaper crumpled in his hand. That he was excited was only too clear from his face: though at the sight of the two staring juniors he made an effort to control himself.

'Is anythin' the mattah, sir?' asked Arthur Augustus.

The Secretary panted.

'Yes—no! D'Arcy, will you be kind enough to go down to the Common Room and fetch me one of the evening papers there?'

'Certainly, sir!' answered Arthur Augustus, politely, but his eyes were on the *Evening Express* crumpled in Mr. Wottle's hand, and his face revealed his surprise at Mr. Wottle wanting an evening paper fetched up, when evidently he already had one.

'I—I—my newspaper seems to have been accidentally torn by that careless boy, Trotter, and

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I am very anxious to read the—the report of the Ambassadors' Conference. Please oblige me, D'Arcy.'

'I will huwwy up with it at once, sir.'

The obliging Gussy cut down the stairs at unusual speed. How Mr. Wottle, or anyone else, could possibly want to read the report of the speeches at an Ambassador's Conference was quite a mystery to Arthur Augustus: he would as soon have read a Georgic himself. But if Mr. Wottle wanted that report, the obliging Gussy was the man to help out. He went down the stairs even more quickly than Mr. Wottle had come up.

The Secretary, without even a look at Cardew lounging on the banisters, waited at the top of the stairs for D'Arcy's return. Cardew watched him with a faint sarcastic smile. Wottle was feverishly anxious to see that paper—certainly not because of a deep interest in the Ambassadors' Conference. It was the missing Stop Press news that he wanted, little as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy would have dreamed of suspecting it. He had plunged again—there was no doubt of that now—but eager as he was to learn the outcome, he dared not let the Beaks in Common Room see him scanning the racing results. However, he had not long to wait.

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Arthur Augustus reappeared on the staircase with a paper in his hand. He had not reached the top when Mr. Wottle stretched out an eager hand for it.

'Give it to me,' he snapped.

'Weally, Mr. Wottle—'

'Don't waste time, you foolish boy.'

'Bai Jove!'

Arthur Augustus handed over the newspaper with an air of dignity. Mr. Wottle snatched it from his hand and, without a word of thanks, hurried away across the landing and up the passage to his rooms.

'Bai Jove!' said Arthur Augustus, breathing very hard. 'Did you evah see such mannaahs, Cardew?'

Cardew laughed.

'The little man seems quite excited,' he drawled.

'Yaas, wathah! Though I quite fail to see what there is to get excited about in an Ambassadors' Confewence. I would not wead such wot at any pwice. He is a vewy queeah fish!' said Arthur Augustus, shaking his noble head. 'I must say that his mannaahs are deplowable. Comin' out, deah boy?'

'See you later,' drawled Cardew.

'Wight-ho!'

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Arthur Augustus went down the stairs. Cardew remained where he was, a sneering smile on his lips. A few minutes later he left the banisters and walked up the passage to Mr. Wottle's rooms. He tapped at the door of the sitting-room and opened it without waiting for an answer from within.

'If you please, sir, might I see one of the evening papers, if you're done with one of them!' he said, meekly. 'I'd like to see the football results—'

It was, of course, merely an excuse for looking in on Mr. Wottle. Cardew wanted to know—and one glance told him all that he wanted to know. The man's face was as white as chalk, his black beady eyes staring. Obviously he had not seen good news in the Stop Press column. He turned an angry glare on Cardew at the door.

'Go away!' he snarled. 'How dare you come here, disturbing me? Go away this instant.'

'Very well, sir!' said Cardew.

He shut the door and went. He had seen enough—more than enough. The man who had struck him down in Rylcombe Wood was in deep waters—very deep waters indeed.

CHAPTER XXII

WHAT NEXT?

'FOOL!' said Cardew.

Tom Merry gave a little start.

He had come into the junior day-room in the School House after class the next day. As it happened, only one fellow was in the room—Cardew of the Fourth. He was lounging idly in the window-seat, where the autumn sun was shining: and he uttered that uncomplimentary epithet suddenly and emphatically, as Tom Merry came in. Tom looked across at him with a knitted brow.

'Thanks!' he said, drily.

As he was the only other fellow in the room he could hardly suppose other than that Cardew's remark had been addressed to him. But Cardew, in his turn, gave a little start and stared at Tom.

'Eh? What?' he ejaculated.

'I said thanks,' answered Tom, 'But I've half a mind to jam your cheeky head on the wall to teach you better manners.'

'Mind telling me what you're talking about?'

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inquired Cardew, staring. Then he burst into a laugh. 'Oh! Did you think I was speaking to you?'

'As there's nobody else here, I suppose so,' answered Tom. 'What do you mean?'

'Keep your wool on,' said Cardew. 'I was talking to myself—I never noticed you come in till you spoke. I suppose a fellow can call himself a fool if he likes, without having his head jammed on the wall to teach him manners?'

'Well, if you were talking to yourself you found the right word,' said Tom, curtly. 'You've played the fool pretty thoroughly lately.'

'Admitted! I suppose I shall never hear the end of what happened last Saturday.'

'You can't expect to hear the end of it soon.'

'No!' said Cardew. 'According to dear old Gussy an apology sets a matter right—but it hasn't mended poor old Figgy's ankle. I've told Figgins I'm sorry—I'd have let him boot me all round the New House if he'd wanted to. He's a good chap, old Figgy—he's ready to wash it all out, if other fellows are not. I suppose you wouldn't understand that I feel as sick about it as any other fellow can or could.'

Tom Merry's face softened a little.

'Well, it was rotten,' he said. 'Why couldn't you keep your temper? Kicking a man in soccer—'

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'Why rub it in?' said Cardew with a grimace. 'But I'll tell you why. That knock on the head last Wednesday gave me a bigger jolt than I understood myself. I think my nerves were in rags. I know that's no excuse—but it's a sort of explanation.'

'You needn't have played,' said Tom.

'Oh, quite! But that was my way,' said Cardew. 'I wasn't going to admit that I couldn't—I was going to carry on and show off, just as if nothing had happened— a mixture of conceit, pride, arrogance, and sheer fatheadedness.'

Tom almost blinked at him. He never quite knew how to take Ralph Reckness Cardew, with his volatile ways and changing moods. He knew less than ever how to take him now.

'Well, that's frank, at any rate,' he said at last, 'And if that's why you were calling yourself a fool a minute ago, you had it right.'

'Oh, no, I was thinking of something else,' said Cardew. 'I'll tell you what, as I know you're not interested.' He grinned. 'Guess what I was thinking about when you trickled in!'

'Well, what?' asked Tom. He was, as Cardew said, not interested. But he was feeling less inimical now: and perhaps a little inclined to follow the noble example of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

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'Horses,' said Cardew. 'I've had a tip—a sure thing, practically straight from the horse's mouth: a better thing than Blue Peter, who never came in after all: lucky I had nothing on him, as it turned out. But Soapy Sam is sure to romp home at Abbotsford.'

Tom Merry gave a sniff.

'You'd better tell all that to Racke or Crooke,' he said. 'They might like to hear it. I don't.'

'I'm sure you'd like to hear the rest.'

'Well, what's the rest, then?' said Tom, restively.

'I'm not going to back Soapy Sam, even if he's the chance of a lifetime. I was thinking of taking a walk down to Rylcombe to see Bill. That's why you heard me calling myself a fool.'

Tom laughed.

'I'm glad to hear that, at any rate,' he said. 'Ten to one you'd lose, and if you won I should think it would leave a nasty taste in the mouth.'

'Well, a win is a win, and cash is cash,' said Cardew. 'What was it jolly old Juvenal said—?'

'Blessed if I know.'

'He said "*Lucri bonus est odor ex re qualibet*,"' said Cardew, with owl-like gravity, 'Which being interpreted, dear man, means that the smell of all money is sweet, wherever it comes from.'

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'Then I don't agree with Juvenal,' said Tom, 'I shouldn't care for the smell of money that came from backing horses.'

'But win or lose, I've chucked it,' said Cardew, 'I can see that I'm boring you, so I'll tell you why. I've had a lesson. That's why I was callin' myself a fool, for even thinkin' of going to see a man about a horse. What do you think it might lead to, in the long run, my young friend?'

'Nothing good,' said Tom.

'Something quite bad, perhaps,' said Cardew. 'Something awfully, fearfully bad. Suppose a man who fancied that he could spot winners started by losing his money. Then he goes on, losing more money than he's got. Then he finds himself in a fix, what?'

'I should imagine so,' said Tom.

'He would have to meet the difficulty somehow,' went on Cardew, 'And the man I'm thinkin' of met it by holdin' up a bank.'

'What rot!' said Tom, staring.

'Fact!' said Cardew.

'Do you mean that you've read something of the kind in the newspapers?' asked Tom, puzzled. 'I suppose such things happen.'

'They do!' said Cardew, shaking his head. 'Sad

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to relate, they do! With such an example under my very eyes, shouldn't I be a fool if I didn't chuck the elusive geegees in time, and steer clear of dead certs and sure snips and tips straight from the horse's mouth?

'No doubt about that,' said Tom. 'If there's any meaning at all in what you're saying you'd be the universe's prize fool to have anything to do with such muck.'

'Exactly!' said Cardew. 'No more for me—I've washed it out.'

'I hope that will last,' said Tom.

'Ah! One never knows!' sighed Cardew, 'But I share your hope, dear man. Just at the moment I couldn't care less for geegees and dead certs. But don't run away for a minute,' he added, as Tom made a movement towards the door. 'It rather amuses me to bore a fellow—'

'Oh, don't be an ass,' said Tom, good humouredly, 'If you've got anything to say, cough it up. You don't want any advice from me, I suppose.'

'Your mistake—I do,' said Cardew.

'Oh, carry on, then—and be serious if you possibly can,' said Tom.

'Sober as a judge!' said Cardew. 'Suppose the man I've mentioned got away with holdin' up a

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bank, and wasn't found out, and felt quite safe and sound in his little nest. Then suppose he plunged again on the bank's money and lost that, too, and was clean bowled. Suppose a fellow found out—never mind how—that he had had something like the K. O. from his precious plunging and was down to zero again.'

Tom could only stare.

'Then,' continued Cardew, in the same airy tone, 'Our friend the plunger has to think of ways and means, doesn't he? The question would be, what next? Another bank hold-up? He would think of that, wouldn't he, having got away so well with the first go? On the other hand, suppose that he had had a narrow escape that time that put the wind up him? Mightn't have the nerve for another go. But what else? Fancy him sittin' with a wet towel round his head, thinking out whose money to lay his hands on, to keep on his potty game of spotting winners and backing losers.'

'Did you see all this on a film?' asked Tom, 'Or are you making it all up out of your own head? Anyhow, you're talking rot, Cardew, and if you don't mind I'll cut—I'm going over to the New House to see how Figgy is getting on—we want him to play Rookwood if he's fit.'

WHAT NEXT?

'Not interested in my thriller?' asked Cardew.

Tom laughed.

'Not in the least,' he answered. And with that, he walked out of the day-room, leaving Cardew laughing.

But Ralph Reckness Cardew ceased to laugh when he was left alone. A deep pucker of thought came into his brow. He was not thinking of Soapy Sam for the race at Abbotsford: for the present, at least, the sportsman of the Fourth was sick of that kind of thing. The case of Mr. Wottle had jolted him into serious reflection for once: it was in all sincerity that he had called himself a fool for giving Soapy Sam a thought at all. What he had said to Tom Merry was in fact an outline of the Wottle affair as it now stood: though Tom, not knowing what Cardew knew, could not make head or tail of it, and had dismissed it all from his mind before he arrived at the New House to talk soccer with George Figgins. Cardew did not think of dismissing it from mind. It amused him to puzzle and perplex Tom Merry: and he knew that Tom would recall his words if, or when, the truth came out about Mr. Wottle—as he was determined that it should. But he had no intention of confiding to a single soul what he knew of the Head's Secretary:

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not till the time came! How and when that time would come, he could not yet tell: the next move was up to Wottle, and Cardew could only wait, and watch, and wonder 'what next'?

CHAPTER XXIII

STARTLING!

CRACK!

Clatter!

Mr. Railton jumped, almost out of the chair in which he sat at his study table.

He spun round in that chair, staring at his window.

It was long after lock-ups: St. Jim's fellows were all in their Houses, and no one should have been abroad in the quad, unless a master happened to be out. It was a clear fine autumn evening, with a faint glimmer of a rising moon. The School House master, at his table, was deep in House accounts, while most of the other inhabitants of the School House were at prep in their studies. But Victor Railton forgot all about House accounts, as that crack and clatter came at his study window.

'Upon my word!'

Mr. Railton fairly gasped.

A pane of the window had been knocked out in fragments. Amid the splinters of glass on the floor

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lay a large stone—evidently the missile that had crashed through the window.

The Housemaster could scarcely believe his eyes.

A stone had been flung through his window, smashing out a whole upper pane. Obviously the act had been done deliberately: it could not possibly have been an accident. Someone, out in the shadowy quad, had flung that stone, smashing through the glass: such an act as had never happened before in Mr. Railton's memory at St. Jim's—so wildly reckless and outrageous an act that he could scarcely believe what he heard and saw.

'Upon my word!' repeated Mr. Railton.

For a moment or two he was blankly astonished. But astonishment speedily gave place to anger. He made a stride across to the window and stared out into the shadows of the quadrangle.

But there was little chance of spotting the perpetrator of that outrageous act. Whoever he was, there could be no doubt that he had fled the instant the stone had left his hand. Mr. Railton had a view of dim trees and buildings, and the lighted windows of the New House in the distance: but he saw no sign of any living form.

His brow grew darker and darker. Whoever had

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flung that stone had vanished: but he was going to be found and severely punished, if Victor Railton could find him out. Some utterly reckless junior, the Housemaster supposed it must be: possibly some fellow who had recently been punished and nursed a grudge: he could think of no other explanation. But all the juniors were, or were supposed to be, in their studies at that hour: it should be possible to ascertain whether any had been absent if no time were lost. Mr. Railton intended to lose no time.

He turned from the window with set lips, and strode across to the door. But he paused and turned back to his table. There was a drawer in that table in which cash was kept, sometimes a large sum: and it was at the moment unlocked as the account books were kept in the same drawer. Railton was a careful and methodical man, even in moments of haste. He paused to lock the money-drawer and to return the key, on his key-ring, to his pocket, before he left the study.

Then he hurried to the door and out into the corridor. Two masters were looking out of their doorways: Linton, master of the Shell, and Lathom, master of the Fourth. Both, evidently, had heard the crash of the breaking glass.

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'Is anything the matter, Mr. Railton?' asked Linton.

'I heard a crash—!' said Lathom.

'A stone has been flung through my window,' said Mr. Railton, breathing hard. 'Some boy must be out of the House. He must be found immediately, and perhaps you will help—'

'Goodness gracious!' exclaimed Mr. Lathom.

'Is it possible?' ejaculated Mr. Linton.

'I have never heard of such a thing, but it has happened,' said the School Housemaster. 'If you would see to the Fourth Form, Mr. Lathom—and you to the Shell, Mr. Linton—'

'Certainly!'

'At once.'

'I will speak to the prefects and search will be made immediately,' said Mr. Railton, and he hurried away to the Sixth-Form quarters, while Mr. Linton and Mr. Lathom proceeded to the staircase to go up to the junior studies and make investigation there.

Mr. Railton stayed only to speak to Kildare, who at once called up the other prefects: and then hurried out into the quad. It was still only a matter of a few minutes since the smashing of the study window, and he had a hope, if a faint one, of

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catching the young rascal before he could get back into the House. A moving shadow in the shadows caught his eye, and he ran towards it.

'Who—?' he began. The he recognised the walker in the quad. 'Oh! Mr. Wottle—'

The Secretary blinked at him.

'Is anything the matter, Mr. Railton?' he asked. 'I heard a noise—it sounded to me like breaking glass—has anything happened—?'

'Something very serious, and very startling, has happened, Mr. Wottle,' answered the Housemaster. 'Some reckless young rascal has flung a stone through my study window, breaking a pane—'

'Good heavens!' ejaculated Mr. Wottle. 'Your window—a Housemaster's window—!'

'Have you seen anyone out of the House, Mr. Wottle?'

'I think I saw a boy—I am sure I saw someone running—and I was wondering who it could be,' said Mr. Wottle. 'Are not all the boys at preparation in their studies now, Mr. Railton?'

'They certainly should be,' said the Housemaster, 'But it is clear that some boy is out of the House without leave—or was a few minutes ago. You saw a boy running—you did not recognise him?'

'He was gone in a moment, and it was little more

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than a shadow that I saw,' answered Mr. Wottle. 'Indeed I wondered whether I might be mistaken—'

'You were not mistaken, sir—I have no doubt that the young rascal was running, after such an act. It was fortunate that you were taking a walk now, Mr. Wottle—you may be able to describe him, even if you did not recognise him. A junior boy, I have no doubt—I can hardly imagine that it was the act of a senior boy.'

'A junior boy, certainly, from his height,' said Mr. Wottle. 'But I fear that that is all I can say—any boy in the Fourth Form or the Shell, or perhaps a well-grown boy in the Third Form—I cannot say more. I merely glimpsed him as a running shadow—all I can say for certain is that it was a boy running, and not a senior boy.'

'Which way was he running?'

'Towards the corner of the House, as if to go round the building. He may have left a back window open—I have heard of such tricks—'

Mr. Railton stayed for no more: he had extracted all the information Mr. Wottle was likely to give. He dashed off at a run in the direction indicated by the Secretary's pointing finger. It seemed quite likely that the young rascal had left a back window open for his return: and more than likely that he

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was already back in the House, the window shut after him. But the Housemaster would leave no stone unturned.

His search was futile, however. There was no sign of an unfastened window to be found in the rear of the building: if a boy had been out he had got in again, and closed the window. But with Mr. Linton and Mr. Lathom already active within the House, it was likely that he might be spotted on his way back to his study—indeed, it seemed to Mr. Railton more likely than not. And he hurried back into the School House at last, hoping to learn from one or other of the form-masters that the culprit had been discovered.

CHAPTER XXIV

BY WHOSE HAND?

'PREP!' said Ernest Levison.

Cardew yawned.

'For goodness' sake chuck slacking,' said Clive.

Another yawn.

The Fourth were at prep: and in No. 9 Study Levison and Clive were at work on the section of the *Æneid* assigned for preparation by their form-master, Lathom. Ralph Reckness Cardew was not at work. He was lounging in the study arm-chair, indifferent to prep.

More than once his study-mates had paused in their work to address a remark to him on the subject of slacking. Their remarks passed Cardew by, with no more effect than water on a duck.

As a matter of fact, Cardew was not slacking to the extent that his friends supposed. Often enough he slacked, in prep and in other things. But his mind was very busy now. It was busy on the problem he had outlined to Tom Merry in the day-

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room, which Tom had taken to be just some more of his airy nonsense, and had forgotten.

'What next?' was the query in Cardew's mind. Unless his suspicions of Wottle were wildly wide of the mark, the man would sooner or later make some move—he had to. He had been desperate for money when he had run the risk of that hold-up at the bank at Wayland: and now he was desperate for money again. What would he do? Whatever he did could he, when he did it, be nailed by a fellow who was watching him like a cat, with the eye of bitter enmity? It was no easy task that Cardew had set himself—yet he had the great advantage that the man never dreamed that he was suspected—never gave more attention to Cardew than to any other junior in the House. Might he make some slip, in his total ignorance that anyone at St. Jim's suspected him to be other than he appeared to be? He had to make some move—what was it going to be?

'No prep at all this time, Cardew?' asked Clive, sarcastically.

Cardew yawned once more.

'Think I love Latin?' he asked.

'I think you may have a row with Lathom in the form-room tomorrow morning if you slack about

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like that,' answered Clive. 'If you're put on con—'

Cardew laughed.

'That's all right,' he said, 'If I'm put on con I shall have a headache. A fellow's entitled to a headache after the cosh he got on the napper last week.'

'You're going to trade on that?' snapped Clive.

'Why not?' said Cardew, lazily.

'Well, Lathom's a sympathetic old bean,' said Levison, 'But you can carry that game on too long, Cardew.'

'Oh, it will work,' said Cardew, carelessly. 'Anyhow, I'm not bothering about Lathom now. I've got other things to think out.'

'Such as Nobbled Nick for the Welshem Stakes?' asked Clive: who seemed to be in a rather sarcastic mood that evening.

Cardew laughed again.

'Not on your life,' he answered. 'I've chucked all that rot! I've had a lesson on that subject that will last me quite a good long time.'

'Lost your money?' Clive was sarcastic again.

'No: somebody else has lost his,' yawned Cardew.

'That wouldn't worry you,' said Clive.

'Might be a warning, all the same,' said Cardew. He sat up in the arm-chair and regarded his

study-mates with an air of mock seriousness. 'My young friends—'

'Oh, don't talk rot!

'My young friends,' pursued Cardew, unheeding, 'Beware of the first step on the downward path. The first step leads to the second, the second to the third, and so on and so forth—till in the end you may find yourself landed in some bad spot you never dreamed of. Resist the beginnings, my innocent young friends. A half-crown on the Derby may lead, in the long run, to a very unbecoming garb with broad arrows on it. Put a bob each way on Nobbled Nick, and later on you may find yourself holding up a bank to pay the bookie. Take a tip from the man who knows—!'

'Oh, ring off,' said Levison. 'If you've got no prep to do, we have—now then—quisquis es, haud, credo—!'

'Put a sock in it,' said Cardew.

Levison and Clive resumed prep, and Cardew resumed lounging in the arm-chair. But prep was shortly to be interrupted again. There was a sound of footsteps and voices in the passage outside.

'Hallo, what's up now?' said Clive. He stepped to the door, opened it and looked out. Further along the passage Mr. Lathom was standing in the

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doorway of Study No. 6. From that study proceeded the dulcet tones of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

'Certainly not, sir! No one in this study has been out of the House—we have all been heah at pwep—'

'Has anyone been out, sir?' came Blake's voice.

'Certainly someone has,' answered Mr. Lathom. 'Some boy has thrown a stone through Mr. Railton's study window.'

'Bai Jove!'

'I am sure that it could not have been a boy in my form,' added Mr. Lathom. 'But I must make sure that every Fourth-Form boy is in his study.'

With that he turned away from Study No. 6: leaving that study in a buzz of surprise and excitement.

'Oh, my hat!' murmured Clive, 'Did you fellows hear? Somebody's out of the House—buzzing stones at Railton's window.'

'Who the dickens—!' exclaimed Levison.

Cardew whistled.

'Some lad, whoever he was!' he remarked.

'Somebody Railton's licked lately, I imagine. This study is in the clear—we're all here.'

'Just as well you hadn't slipped out to see Bill

Lodgey about a horse!' said Clive: still seemingly in a sarcastic vein.

'By gum—suppose I had!' breathed Cardew. 'Any fellow out of the House about this time will be nailed: and he certainly couldn't explain that he was only dropping in at the Green Man to see a racing tout!' He chuckled. 'My young friends, let this be another warning to you, to keep to the strait and narrow path of rectitude—'

'Dry up—here's Lathom,' muttered Levison.

The master of the Fourth appeared in the doorway. The three juniors in No. 9 stood respectfully to attention, and their form-master ran his eye over them.

'You are all here,' he said.

'Yes, sir,' answered Levison.

'No one in this study has been out of the House?' asked Mr. Lathom. His eye seemed to linger on Cardew. All three of the juniors could guess the reason. The breaking of a Housemaster's window was so wildly reckless an act that it could only be attributed to some boy of a known reckless character—and Cardew had done reckless actions more than once.

'No one, sir,' said Levison, 'We've all been in the study since we came up to prep.'

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Cardew smiled faintly. He knew what was in his form-master's mind: but if Lathom thought of suspecting him his alibi was sound. Both Levison and Clive were witnesses that he had not left No. 9 during prep.

'Very well,' said Mr. Lathom, apparently satisfied: and he turned and went up the passage to pursue his investigations further.

Cardew grinned as he shut the study door.

'What an escape!' he remarked.

'You might have been out of the House,' said Clive. 'You're fool enough.'

'Wrong tense!' said Cardew, 'I was fool enough—past tense, my dear man. We live and learn: and I'm wiser now. In fact, from now on you fellows can take me as a shinin' example—a guide to youth, and—'

'Oh, cheese it!'

The study door re-opened. An eyeglass gleamed in.

'Bai Jove! You're heah, Cardew!' exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, apparently surprised.

'Adsum!' said Cardew, as if he were answering to his name at calling-over.

'Weally, Cardew—'

'Did you think I should be among the missing?' grinned Cardew.

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'I am vewy glad to see that you are not, at any wate,' said Arthur Augustus.

'Somebody has buzzed a stone thwough Wailton's window, and the fellow must have been an uttahly weckless and iwvesponsible ass, so—'

'So you thought of me?' chuckled Cardew.

'Yaas, wathah.'

'Thanks no end,' yawned Cardew. 'Not guilty, my lord! I was sittin' in this arm-chair, like an innocent little bird in its innocent little nest, watchin' these fellows work, when it happened. Must have made Railton jump when the stone came through. I wonder who had the nerve to do it.'

'I wondah,' said Arthur Augustus. 'It was a vewy weckless, wotten and diswespectful act by some fellow who hadn't as much bwains as a bunny wabbit, so natuwally I thought of you, old chap—'

'Ha, ha, ha!' yelled Levison and Clive.

'Where will you have it, Gussy?' asked Cardew, picking up the inkpot from the table.

'Weally, Cardew—!'

A sharp voice interrupted Arthur Augustus.

'D'Arcy!'

'Oh, bai Jove!'

'What are you doing out of your study in preparation, D'Arcy?' rapped Mr. Railton, frowning.

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The Housemaster had come along from the study landing at an unlucky moment for the swell of St. Jim's.

'I-I-I came to—to speak to Cardew, sir—!' stammered Arthur Augustus. 'I-I was wathah anxious to know whether he was heah—I mean—I-I—'

'Go back to your study at once.'

'Yaas, sir.'

Mr. Railton took D'Arcy's place in the doorway as Arthur Augustus, in much confusion, trailed back to No. 6. His eyes fixed very sharply on Ralph Reckness Cardew.

'Have you been out of your study during preparation, Cardew?' Evidently the Housemaster's thought ran on the same lines as Mr. Lathom's and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's.

'No, sir!' answered Cardew, meekly. 'I have already told Mr. Lathom so, sir—none of us has been out.'

The Housemaster gave him a long look, and turned away as Mr. Lathom came down the passage.

'Have you learned anything, Mr. Lathom?' he inquired.

'Nothing, sir,' answered the Fourth-Form master.

'No boy in my form has been absent since the bell for preparation. In the Shell, perhaps—'

'Mr. Linton has already come to the same conclusion with regard to the Shell boys,' said Mr. Railton, his frown deepening. 'But the boy must be in the Fourth or the Shell—the Third are at preparation in the presence of their form-master, in the Third-Form room.'

'Possibly—!' began Mr. Lathom.

'Possibly what, sir?' asked Mr. Railton, curtly.

'Possibly a senior boy—'

'Very unlikely in itself,' almost snapped Mr. Railton, 'And as it happens I have evidence that it was not a senior boy—as it happens, Mr. Wottle was taking a walk in the quadrangle and he saw a boy running—and he is sure that it was a junior boy, though he could not recognise him in the dark. The boy, sir, was either in the Fourth or the Shell, and he must be discovered.'

With that, Mr. Railton walked away, evidently very much disturbed and annoyed by the failure to find the culprit: and Mr. Lathom followed him with a worried brow. Cardew whistled softly as he closed the door of No. 9 again.

'Did you men notice Railton's eye on me?' he asked.

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'Couldn't miss it,' answered Clive.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

'You're rather a dog with a bad name, Cardew,' he said. 'I know it wasn't you, of course, as you were here with us—but I'm dashed if I can think of any other fellow mad ass enough to do such a thing. You can't blame the Beaks if they have an eye on you. D'Arcy thought the same.'

'Oh, I don't blame them,' said Cardew, carelessly.

'But who the dickens was it? Who'd want to make old Railton jump by heaving a rock through his window? Must have been a Lower boy, I suppose, but who?'

'From what Railton said to Lathom just now, Wottle saw the fellow running, and saw that it was a junior,' said Levison. 'Anyhow, one can't fancy a senior man playing such a mad trick.'

'Wottle!' repeated Cardew.

A sudden gleam came into his eyes. The name of Mr. Wottle was very much in Cardew's mind: he was prepared to note, and ponder on, any action of Mr. Wottle's.

'It seems he was taking a trot in the quad, from what Railton said,' remarked Clive. He stared at Cardew, struck by the change in his look.

'Just a coincidence, when it happened to happen!'

said Cardew. 'Wottle just happened to be around.'

'Eh? Why not?' asked Clive, puzzled. 'Why shouldn't Wottle take a trot in the quad on a fine autumn evening?'

'Why not?' assented Cardew. 'And happening to be around, he was able to make it quite certain, to everybody concerned, that it was a junior of the House who cracked Railton's window.'

'As it happens, yes.'

'As it happens!' repeated Cardew, with a nod. 'Yes, quite: as it happens! It naturally wouldn't occur to anyone that Wottle might like to get the idea fixed in everybody's head that it was a junior skylarking—and might have a reason for it!'

Both his friends stared at him blankly.

'What on earth are you driving at?' exclaimed Levison. 'If Wottle said he saw a junior running, he saw a junior running, I suppose.'

'Unless—!' said Cardew.

'Well, unless what?'

Cardew laughed.

'Unless he heaved that rock himself, and was interested to put everybody on the wrong track!' he suggested.

Levison and Clive jumped.

'Mad?' exclaimed Levison.

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'Is that one of your deep jokes that no fellow can see?' asked Clive.

Cardew laughed again.

'What does it matter, anyway?' he yawned. 'They can't lag me for it as I've got two jolly old irrefragable witnesses that I was in this study at the time. Get back to prep, little boys—you don't want a spot of bother with Lathom in form, and you can't plead a headache as I can.'

'You talk such rot,' said Clive.

'Such piffle!' said Levison.

'Prep, dear boys, prep!' urged Cardew. 'Get back to the pious Aeneas and dear old Dido, and I'll watch you while I slack.'

Levison and Clive returned to prep: Cardew to the arm-chair. What he was thinking as he sat there with a wrinkled brow neither of his friends could have guessed, and he had no intention of telling them.

CHAPTER XXV

A PUZZLE

'YOU?' asked Tom Merry.

'Two to one on Cardew!' said Monty Lowther.

'Ten to one, you mean,' said Manners.

The 'Terrible Three' regarded Cardew curiously as he sauntered into the junior day-room after prep. A good many other fellows looked at him. Cardew was, in fact, as Levison had said, to a large extent a dog with a bad name: and a wildly reckless act, of which the perpetrator could not be discovered, was very likely to be attributed to him.

Cardew laughed. With his alibi so safe and sound he was rather amused by the general surmise that he was probably the fellow concerned.

'Poor little me!' he sighed. 'Lathom asked me, Railton asked me, Gussy came along and asked me: now you fellows are asking me. Did I do it?'

'Well, did you?' asked Tom.

'Of course you'd take it as the frozen truth if I said I didn't?' asked Cardew, banteringly.

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'Um!' said Tom. 'I know you tell the tale to the Beaks, Cardew—but no need to tell it here. Nobody here would give you away.'

'Why did you do it?' asked Manners. 'What has old Railton done to you? He hasn't licked you lately, has he?'

'Not that I remember.'

'Well, why, then?'

'But I didn't do it,' said Cardew. 'Frightfully sorry to disappoint everybody, but I really and truly didn't. I was sitting in my study, hard at work sitting in the arm-chair, when it happened.'

'Sez you!' remarked Monty Lowther.

'There's a whole pane knocked out of Railton's window,' said Gore of the Shell, 'I heard Kildare say so—'

'An upper pane?' asked Cardew.

'How did you know?' grinned Gore.

'I didn't—I'm asking.'

'Yes, from what Kildare said, it was an upper pane,' said Gore. 'But I fancy you didn't guess that one, Cardew. You jolly well knew, as you jolly well did it.'

'Rotten trick, too,' said Kangaroo. 'What did you want to rag old Railton for? Railton's all right.'

'Right as rain: and I wouldn't rag him for whole

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worlds and universes,' drawled Cardew. 'I was sitting in my study—'

'Gammon!' said several voices.

'I suppose you lost that rotten temper of yours again, like you did on Saturday,' grunted Kangaroo. 'But I don't see what Railton can have done to get your rag out.'

Cardew flushed.

'Can't you let that drop?' he snapped. 'I think it's been rubbed in hard enough by this time. And I tell you I never heaved that rock at Railton's window—if I wanted to rag a Beak I'd think of something a little less crude.'

'Somebody did!' said Manners.

'Did you work that out in your head?' asked Cardew, sarcastically. 'Brainy men, you Shell fellows.'

'Well, if you didn't, who did?' asked Manners. 'I can't think of any other fellows in the school, in either House, who'd be mad ass enough.'

'Sure it was some fellow in the school?' asked Cardew.

That question caused him to be stared at on all sides. Certainly it had not occurred to any fellow that the stone-thrower might have been some intruder from outside St. Jim's.

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'Oh, my hat!' said Lowther. 'Is that the idea? You couldn't put that across, Cardew—altogether too thin.'

'I've no need to put anything across,' drawled Cardew. 'You see, Levison and Clive were in the study with me, both witnesses that I was there at the time. I fancy their word is good enough for Railton, if not for you.'

'Good enough for me, if they back up what you say,' answered Tom Merry, at once. But he regarded Cardew doubtfully. 'Did they tell Railton so?'

'They did!'

'Blessed if I can make it out then,' said Tom. 'If it wasn't you smashed Railton's window, there must be another mad ass about the place, but who it is has got me beat.'

'Here they are,' said Manners, as Levison and Clive came into the day-room together. 'Here, Levison, was Cardew in your study—?'

'All through prep,' answered Levison.

'Honest Injun?' asked Monty Lowther.

'Honest Injun!' said Clive.

That settled it so far as most of the School House fellows were concerned. Cardew's word might be open to doubt: Levison's was not, and still less

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Sidney Clive's. Cardew's alibi was sound. That only made the affair more puzzling, however: for if the most wayward and reckless fellow in the House had not 'done it', it was quite a mystery who had.

'Everybody's down on the fellow, whoever he was,' said Talbot of the Shell. 'A rag's a rag—but smashing a window isn't a rag—it's just hooliganism. I can't think of any man in the House who'd do it, if—' He broke off.

'If not poor little me,' grinned Cardew.

'Well, we know now it wasn't you,' said Talbot.

'But it's a rotten shame to rag Railton, whoever did it—he's a good sort.'

'One of the best,' agreed Cardew. 'But perhaps it wasn't a rag on Railton at all.'

'What else?' asked Tom Merry, staring.

'Lots of reasons for breaking a window—especially an upper pane,' drawled Cardew. 'I could name one.'

'Give it a name, then,' said Tom, puzzled. 'You don't know anything about it, and you're talking your usual rot, I know that: but give it a name.'

'Elementary, my dear Watson, as dear old Sherlock Holmes used to say,' drawled Cardew. 'If there's a gap in an upper pane of a window, my beloved 'earers, a johnny could put his hand through

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and unfasten the catch—say around midnight.'

'Wha-a-a-t?'

'Suppose there was something in Railton's study that such a johnny wanted,' argued Cardew. 'He might get around at the witching hour of night, as dear old Shakespeare so poetically calls it, and drop in at a Housebeak's window if he could get at the catch.'

'Oh, my hat!'

'Railton locks his study door at night,' went on Cardew, in the same airy tone, while the juniors stared at him. 'Don't we know that? A johnny who wanted to get into his study mightn't be able to pick a lock—but he could heave a rock at a window. They can't get that pane repaired until tomorrow.'

'What rot!' said Tom.

'He couldn't heave that rock at midnight without risking waking up the whole show,' continued Cardew. 'And so, you see—'

'I don't see,' interrupted Tom. 'What the thump could anyone want to get into Railton's study at night for?'

'Oh, lots of reasons! Might be a rag—his study was shipped once, you know, by some disgruntled fellow. Or there might be other reasons, too numerous to mention.'

A PUZZLE

Monty Lowther whistled.

'By gum, I suppose it's possible,' he said. 'If some mad ass has planned to ship Railton's study—'

'Who'd do anything of the kind?' said Manners. 'Oh, ask me another.'

Cardew laughed, and went across to the window-seat and sat down. Levison joined him there, giving him a very intent look.

'Did you suggest that seriously, Cardew?' he asked, quietly.

'Am I ever serious?'

'Oh, do talk sense for once,' exclaimed Levison, impatiently. 'A fellow never knows how to take you or anything you say. Why do you fancy that some fellow smashed that pane to be able to get at the catch later, to get into Railton's study?'

'Might be something attractive in the study, after Railton's gone up to bed,' yawned Cardew. 'Fellows have been known to pinch exam papers and such things.'

'No exams on now, that I know of.'

'Might be other things. Railton keeps a lot of money locked up in his desk sometimes, and the fellow might be in a position to know.'

Levison started, as if he had been stung.

'Are you out of your senses?' he breathed.

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'I hope not.'

'I think you must be, to think of such a thing,' said Levison angrily. 'Do you think there's a thief in the school?'

'Not in the school, certainly.'

'Some outsider, do you mean?'

'Quite—in fact, a rank outsider.'

'And how could any outsider know anything about money in Railton's study, or anything about Railton's study at all?' snapped Levison. 'Look here, Cardew, you're not half so clever as you fancy you are: and the less you talk about ideas like that the better. For goodness' sake, forget it. But you're not serious—you can't be.'

'How well you know me!' sighed Cardew.

'Oh, rats,' said Levison, gruffly.

And he left Cardew and joined a group of which Tom Merry was the centre, and whose subject of discussion was soccer in general, and the coming Rookwood match in particular.

When the bell rang for dorm, it was known that the window-breaker was still undiscovered. The School House fellows went to bed, still in ignorance of the identity of the stone-thrower: unless Ralph Reckness Cardew knew. And Ralph Reckness Cardew believed that he did!

CHAPTER XXVI

RAT-CATCHING?

'Bai Jove!' murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, sleepily.

He lifted his head from the pillow.

It was very dark in the Fourth-Form dormitory in the School House. The hour was late—very late. Slumber reigned in both Houses at St. Jim's. The last door had closed: the last light turned off. The chime of midnight from the clock-tower fell on deaf ears. It was not that chime that had awakened the swell of St. Jim's. It was some sound closer at hand.

'Bai Jove!' repeated Arthur Augustus, blinking into the shadows. 'Is that somebody up?'

No reply.

Ralph Reckness Cardew stood very still, suppressing his breathing. He did not want the Fourth to know that he was up that night. He had turned out of bed silently, after twelve had chimed. He had intended to make no sound at all. But a fellow moving in the dark had to take chances of

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that, and he had bumped on his bed in groping for a pair of rubber shoes he had placed under it in readiness. Slight as the sound was, it had evidently reached ears.

He stood still, silent, waiting for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to settle down again. He had a task before him that night: a task he was going to perform if the whole dormitory awakened. But he was going to perform it in secret if he could. He was sure—yet he could not be quite sure: and not until he had his man where he wanted him was anyone to know of his activities.

Arthur Augustus, however, did not immediately settle down again. Instead, he sat up in bed.

'Is that you, Blake?' he asked.

There was a mumble from Jack Blake's bed.

'Urrgh! Who—what—?'

'Are you up, deah boy?'

Blake awakened, and peered in the gloom.

'Is that Gussy?' he asked. 'What the thump are you burbling for in the middle of the night, you image?'

'I wefuse to be called an image, Blake, or to heah my wemarks chawactewised as burblin'—'

'Go to sleep, ass.'

'Who's that chinning?' came from Herries' bed, 'What's up?'

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'Had a nightmare, Gussy?' Dig was awake too, now.

Cardew set his teeth. He was tempted to awaken Arthur Augustus still more effectually by administering a smack to his noble head. However, he resisted that temptation, and remained still and silent.

'Somethin' woke me up,' said Arthur Augustus. 'I wathah think that some fellow is gettin' up—'

'Rot!' said Blake.

'Or some fellow larkin' fwom anotheah dormitoway,' said Arthur Augustus. 'I certainly heard somethin'.'

'Trimble snoring, perhaps,' suggested Herries.

'It was not Twimble snowin', Hewwies. Twimble is not snowin' at the moment, though he so vewy often does. Pewwaps it is that ass Cardew, bweakin' bounds. I shouldn't wondah—'

Cardew breathed very hard.

'Go to sleep, Gussy,' came from Ernest Levison's bed.

'And let other fellows do the same!' came from Clive's.

'It's after midnight, I believe!' came from Julian's. 'Is Gussy going to do a song and a dance at this time of night?'

'Weally, you ass—'

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'Oh, go to sleep!' said several voices. More and more of the juniors were awakening at the sound of voices.

'Nobody's up,' said Blake. 'Even that ass Cardew wouldn't be up at this time of night. Think he would come home with the milk in the morning?'

'I am quite suah that somebody is movin' about in the dorm—,' said Arthur Augustus, firmly.

'Pewwaps it is that ass Lowthah, fwom the Shell, playin' one of his silly twicks. You know vewy well that he came in one night and put gum in my socks—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'It is not a laughin' mattah for a fellow to find gum in his socks in the mornin', and to make his toes all stickay before he found out—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, wats! I am goin' to get up and stwike a match, and if it is that ass Lowthah playin' twicks—' There was a rustle of bedclothes as Arthur Augustus prepared to get out.

Cardew gritted his teeth. He was already fully dressed, and there was no chance of concealment if the swell of St. Jim's turned out and struck a match. He spoke at last, in concentrated tones.

'You needn't take the trouble, D'Arcy! I'm up.'

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'Bai Jove! Is that you, Cardew?' asked Arthur Augustus, peering in the direction of the low angry voice.

'Yes, you born blitherer.'

'Weally, Cardew—!'

'Now go to sleep, fathead! You've woken the whole dormitory—do you want to wake the whole House?' hissed Cardew.

'Wats! If it is only you, Cardew, I will certainly go to sleep, and you can go and eat coke,' said Arthur Augustus, disdainfully. 'But I must wemark that you are wathah a wottah to be bweakin' bounds aftah lights out. I wegard you as a wapscallion, Cardew.'

And Arthur Augustus laid his noble head on the pillow again, disdaining further converse with the black sheep of the form.

'So it's you, Cardew,' said Blake. 'You shady sweep—'

'Thanks,' said Cardew.

'You'll find the Green Man shut up at this time of night,' said Herries, with a snort.

'You've left it jolly late,' said Digby. 'Go back to bed, and don't play the silly goat, Cardew.'

'Mind shutting up?' asked Cardew. His tone was light and airy: but his feelings were deep. In point

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of fact, he had no intention whatever of 'breaking out' that night: for the time, at least, what he had told Tom Merry was sincere: he had thrown over that kind of thing. But he was a dog with a bad name—and the juniors took it for granted that he had turned out at that late hour for some wild escapade.

'Cardew!' It was Levison's quiet voice, 'For goodness' sake, don't be such a fool. You can't go out of bounds at this hour.'

'Who's going out of bounds?' asked Cardew.

'What have you turned out for, then?' asked Clive.

'Might be lots of reasons, apart from the almost irresistible attraction of the back parlour at the Green Man,' drawled Cardew. 'Suppose I'm going to step across to the Shell dormitory to put gum in Lowther's socks as he did in Gussy's one night?'

'Bai Jove!' Arthur Augustus sat up again. 'If that's the ideah I will come along with you, Cardew. It will be wathah funnay for that silly ass Lowthah to find his own socks dwippin' with gum in the morning. Wait a minute or two while I get my twousahs on.'

'Stick where you are, you silly ass!' snapped Cardew.

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‘Weally, Cardew—’

‘Don’t be a goat, Gussy,’ said Blake. ‘Cardew isn’t turning out to lark like that ass Lowther.’

‘Not exactly,’ drawled Cardew, ‘But it’s a lark, in a way. If it interests you—and you all seem interested—I’m not going out of bounds. I’m not going out of the House at all. So you can all go back to your balmy slumbers in peace and—if I may suggest it—mind your own business.’

‘You’re not going out of the House?’ repeated Levison.

‘Not at all.’

‘Where are you going, then?’

Cardew laughed softly.

‘If you really want to know—!’ he said, airily.

‘Oh, rats!’

‘I’ll tell you. I’m going rat-catching.’

‘Wha-a-t?’

‘Rat-catching!’

‘Oh, don’t talk rot,’ snapped Levison.

‘Honour bright!’ said Cardew. ‘I was going quietly, but as you’ve all woke up and want to know, I’m telling you. There’s a rat in the House, and I’m going to catch it—at least, I hope so. Satisfied?’

‘I suppose that chap couldn’t talk sense if he

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tried,' said Blake. 'Get off to the Green Man, Cardew: and if there's any rat-catching tonight it will be when a prefect grabs you by the back of the neck.'

'Yaas, wathah.'

'You mean that you're not going to tell us what you're up to, Cardew,' said Levison.

'I've told you.'

'Oh, give us a rest,' said Levison, gruffly, and he said no more.

'Alas!' sighed Cardew, 'Mine own familiar friend doesn't believe me! I can't do more than state the facts—I'm going rat-catching—believe it or not.'

That was Cardew's last remark. A moment later the dormitory door was heard to open, and close softly. Cardew was gone. There were remarks from bed to bed, for a few minutes: all of them uncomplimentary to the breaker of bounds. Nobody in the Fourth was likely to believe Cardew's extraordinary explanation that he was going rat-catching in the middle of the night. But after a few minutes the juniors settled down to sleep again, and Cardew was left to his own devices—whether rat-catching or not.

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THE HOUSE was very still and silent.

Not a single light burned in the great building. There was a glimmer of stars from the high windows on the study landing: but it was faint. A lightly-treading figure that flitted across the great landing was merely a flitting shadow among shadows.

Cardew made no sound in his rubber shoes. He was silent as a ghost as he stepped into the passage from the study landing that led to Mr. Wottle's rooms. His face was set and hard.

He had left all the School House Fourth believing that he had gone on some disreputable excursion out of bounds. But what he had said was, in fact, the truth: even to the rat-catching, if the man he was watching could be described as a rat: which at all events was Cardew's description of him. He had no intention of leaving the House—no occasion to do so. What he hoped to discover was within the House.

He had asked himself 'What next?', and waited

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and watched for the man's next move. Now, he was convinced, the man was making it. He had to be sure—and to be sure he had to know whether Wottle left his rooms that night. He had the whole thing pictured in his mind: how easy it was for the man to slip out of the House when all others slept: open a window where a smashed pane gave access to the catch, enter the Housemaster's study—easier, safer than his previous desperate exploit of raiding a bank. Often, as everyone knew, Railton had a large sum in his money-drawer: and the Head's Secretary was in a position to know just when he had it there. Cardew knew nothing about it: but he knew that Wottle would know: and if Wottle left his rooms secretly that night, Cardew would know too.

How easy it was for a man who never dreamed that he was suspected and watched! The pane in Railton's window that gave access to the catch had been smashed: and Wottle had made everyone believe that it was a trick of some reckless junior. If a robbery was discovered in the morning—as Cardew believed that it would be—it might be supposed that some prowling tramp had found the window accessible, and taken advantage of it—or even that the unknown junior who had smashed

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the pane had done it—but who would dream of suspecting the mild, respectable Mr. Wottle? No one—no one but Cardew who knew him to be a desperate and unlucky gambler, and suspected him to be the bank-raider who had struck him down in Rylcombe Wood. Suspicion was not proof: but Cardew was going to have proof that night—he was, in fact, as he said, going rat-catching!

The passage was dark: Cardew could not have seen his hand before his face as he groped along. His ears were on the alert like a fox's. That Wottle would leave his rooms that night he was as good as sure: but he could not know when, except that the man was sure to leave it till a very late hour, when all others were certain to be sleeping.

He was going to be on the watch soon after midnight: but he did not expect the man to make a move till later than that. He had no doubt that Wottle was in his rooms now—but not gone to bed: far from that. He would not keep on a light: he would not take the remotest chance of any wakeful eye discerning that he was still up: he would not risk the merest glimmer from a chink. He would wait in the dark—till the time came. Likely enough, that would not be till two or three in the morning—Cardew had to wait.

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Without a sound he reached the door of Mr. Wottle's sitting-room. He stood there silent, listening.

All was dark: no gleam came under the door or through the keyhole. But he was sure that there was a wakeful man within.

It was not long before he had evidence of it. There was a sound of a creaking chair in the room, followed by soft footsteps on the carpet. Cardew backed swiftly away from the door, and further up the passage, where another passage joined. He backed swiftly round the corner. If Wottle was coming out—!

But the man was not coming out. The time was not yet. He had wearied of sitting in the chair, and was pacing his room to pass the time of waiting: that was all. Cardew had to wait—and watch!

He was patient.

He knew now, at all events, that Wottle, though his rooms were dark, had not gone to bed. Why was the man sitting up in the dark? There was only one explanation of that, to Cardew's mind. He had to be patient: and he was as patient as a Red Indian watching a trail, though by nature he was far from patient. Once or twice he ran his hand over his head, where there was still a bruise

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under the hair. This man had struck him that cruel, brutal, cowardly blow—if he was right about Wottle! And if it was not so, why was the man sitting up waiting in the dark?

The stroke of one boomed out from the clock-tower. Cardew heard it, and did not doubt that the man in the room along the passage heard it also—probably the only ears at St. Jim's that did. Would he make a move now—or would he, in his caution, leave it till still later?

The long, weary minutes dragged: and still there was no sound. From where he stood, at the corner, Cardew could have heard the slightest sound from the door of Wottle's room: but all remained silent.

It seemed to him a century before two strokes boomed dully through the night. It was two o'clock.

He was tired, weary, sleepy. Even the black sheep of the Fourth, who had often been awake after lights-out, was not used to hours so late as this: and his eyelids dropped and dropped, as he stood leaning on the wall in the darkness.

But he would not allow himself to nod. He drove off drowsiness and remained alert, watchful, listening.

There came a sound at last. His heart beat as he

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heard it. It was a sound, faint but unmistakable, from the door of Wottle's room.

That door had opened.

His heart beating, suppressing his breathing, Cardew strained his ears to listen. The faintest sound was clear in the deep silence of the night. Faint but unmistakable, there was a click. The man had come out of the room and locked the door after him. He was as cunning as a fox, as wary as a badger. He could not have dreamed of any possible visitor to his rooms at that hour: but he was not taking even that remote chance. He was leaving his rooms locked behind him when he went.

He stepped away so softly that even Cardew's straining ears could pick up no sound. But, peering round the corner, watching, Cardew caught, for a moment, a moving shadow, at the landing end of the passage, where there was a star-glimmer from a high window.

It was nothing but a shifting shadow: but it told him that the man had gone out of the passage to the study landing. Silent in his rubber shoes, he trod down the passage and peered out on the landing. It was deserted: the man had gone down the stairs. Silent as a shadow, Cardew flitted across to the banisters and between them looked down

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into the great well of the staircase. His eyes gleamed as they fell on a descending figure—a little figure, visible for a moment or two in passing the starlit staircase window. For that moment or two the starlight glimmered on a face—the face of the Head's Secretary.

Then it was gone.

'The rat!' breathed Cardew.

He did not stir: but his thoughts followed the skulker of the night—creeping out, creeping in the shadows to Railton's study: forcing a drawer to which the Housemaster kept the key on his ring: his thieving hands groping for what he knew was there. What would be thought in the morning? Suspicion, if it fell on anyone, would fall on anyone but the Secretary—who would think or dream of the respectable Mr. Wottle? The dastard did not care where it fell: no thought of others was in his mind: all he cared for was to obtain, by any means, what he wanted: suspicion might fall on some innocent head, and that was nothing to him. The loathing that Cardew felt for the man could not have been expressed in words.

He moved at last. The man would be coming back—what he had to do, like a thief in the night, would not take him long. Cardew remembered that

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cruel blow in Rylcombe Wood, and knew what might happen if the wretch should discover that he was watched. He crossed the landing to the dormitory staircase and, a little distance up that staircase, waited and watched.

It was hardly a quarter of an hour before a shadow flitted on the study landing again. Almost without a sound that shadow flitted into the passage to Mr. Wottle's rooms. The man had come back. He had gone back to his rooms—with what in his keeping.

Cardew knew with what. And yet, certain as he was—as certain as if he had watched the man's every step, every motion—it was nothing but surmise and suspicion so far: he could not say that it was certain, that there was no doubt, unless and until he heard news of a robbery in Railton's study. Only that could make it a certainty. If he heard that news in the morning he would know all: and he would know what he was going to do. All that remained was to wait for that news—if it came.

He knew that it would come: that the morning would see the end. Quietly, he tiptoed up to the dormitory: he had done all that could be done, and he had to wait for the new day.

All was silent in the Fourth-Form dormitory as

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he tiptoed in. Only a sound of regular breathing reached his ears. But as he threw off his clothes at his bedside a low voice came through the stillness. Ernest Levison was awake.

'That you, Cardew?'

Cardew caught his breath. He answered, evenly.

'Little me.'

'So you've got back?'

'Adsum!'

'Where have you been?'

'Roaming in the gloaming.'

'Oh, talk sense! Will you tell me what you've been up to?'

'I've told you—rat-catching.' Cardew chuckled softly. 'I think I've caught the rat—you'll see in the morning.'

Levison made no answer to that. Cardew did not speak again: he turned into bed, and was asleep almost the moment his head touched the pillow.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE NIGHT

'WHAT'S UP?' asked Tom Merry.

'Ask me another!' said Monty Lowther.

'Something!' said Manners.

The 'Terrible Three' were in the quadrangle after breakfast in the morning. At 'brekker' they had sensed that 'something' was up. Masters' faces had been unusually grave: the prefects at the high table, who evidently knew what the 'something' was, showed as much in their looks: Baggy Trimble had heard Mr. Linton mention to Mr. Lathom that Railton was seeing the Head: Gore of the Shell had seen Railton coming away from the Head's house with a face like, as he described it, a boiled owl: and there had been other rumours and whispers already.

But nobody knew anything exactly, so far—only that there was a sort of electric atmosphere in the House.

'Cutts of the Fifth may have dodged out once too often,' hazarded Lowther.

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'The Beaks look jolly solemn,' said Tom. 'Hallo, here come Study 6. They may know something.'

Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy came up to the Shell fellows. But as it transpired, they came to seek information, not to impart it.

'You fellows know anythin'?' asked Arthur Augustus. 'Somethin' seems to be w'ong some-whah.'

'Can't be a fuss about that smashed window last night,' said Blake. 'That wouldn't make all the Beaks and pre's look so jolly solemn.'

'Hardly,' said Dig. 'But what—?'

'Lowther thinks some sportsman may have been lagged,' said Manners. 'Where was Cardew of your form last night?'

'Bai Jove!' ejaculated Arthur Augustus. 'I nevah thought of that! That uttah ass Cardew was up.'

'Copped, perhaps,' said Manners, with a shrug of the shoulders.

'He was fast asleep in bed when the bell went this morning,' said Blake. 'He didn't look as if he had been copped.'

'Levison had to shake him to wake him,' said Herries. 'He must have been up a good bit of the night. I wonder what he was up to.'

'Nothing he would want the Beaks to know of,

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I expect,' said Manners, drily. 'By gum, is there going to be a bunking this morning?'

'Here he comes!' said Tom. 'If he's going to be bunked he seems to be taking it as a joke.'

Cardew came out of the House with Levison and Clive. Certainly, if the 'something' that was up was in connection with Cardew it did not seem to trouble him unduly. He was smiling cheerfully, and seemed to be in excellent spirits. Levison and Clive both had serious faces: but Ralph Reckness Cardew could not have looked more merry and bright.

'Cardew, deah boy,' called out Arthur Augustus, 'Pway excuse my askin', as it is wathah a personal question, but are you goin' to be bunked this mornin'?'

Cardew stared at him blankly for a moment, and then burst into a laugh.

'Not that I know of,' he answered. 'Thanks for asking: but you're not losing me yet, so far as my knowledge extends.'

'I am vevy glad to heah it,' said Arthur Augustus. 'As you are a welation of mine I should wegwet it vevy much, Cardew, although I feel bound to wemark that you deserve it.'

'So good of you,' drawled Cardew.

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'Look here,' said Blake. 'You were out of the dorm last night, and you were up to something. Now all the Beaks are looking as if there's thunder about. Any connection?'

'Not in the least—so far!' said Cardew, lightly. 'I may come in on the drama later—at present I'm merely a looker-on in Vienna, as jolly old Shakespeare says.'

'Something must have happened in the House last night,' said Tom Merry.

'Right on the wicket,' assented Cardew.

'Well, what was it, if you know?' asked Tom.

'I couldn't say that I know—only that I can guess. But I'm not throwin' my guesses around—yet!' said Cardew. 'We shall get the news soon, I expect.' His eyes glimmered. 'There's little Wottle—let's ask him if he knows.'

Mr. Wottle was walking in the quad. The juniors had not noticed him till Cardew drew attention to him: now they all looked round. Mr. Wottle did not glance at them: he paced under the elms in his accustomed quiet and sedate manner, looking as meek and mild as usual.

'Anybody got the cheek to ask Wottle?' said Blake.

'I have,' yawned Cardew.

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'Yes—you've got cheek enough for anything! Ask him, then!' said Blake.

'Why not?' said Cardew.

'Weally, Cardew, it is wathah a nerve to ask Wottle—'

'Well, he might know!' said Cardew. 'In fact I've got a sort of idea that he knows a lot. I'll ask him.'

Cardew walked over to Mr. Wottle. The rest, exchanging glances, followed more slowly. Certainly they were very curious to know what could have happened in the night to cause the perturbation that was obvious in the School House. But only Cardew cared to question the Head's Secretary on the subject.

'Good morning, Mr. Wottle,' said Cardew, urbanely.

'Eh?' Mr. Wottle glanced at him. 'Oh! Good morning!' He would have walked on but Cardew edged into his path.

'Perhaps you could tell us something we all want to know, sir,' said Cardew. 'Did something happen last night in the House, sir?'

'I have heard so,' said Mr. Wottle. 'Indeed, I was very startled by what I heard this morning. I am afraid that some foolish, reckless boy is in very

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serious trouble.' He shook his head. 'No doubt you will hear soon what has happened: I believe Mr. Railton has telephoned to Inspector Skeat at Wayland, and he will soon be here.'

With that, Mr. Wottle walked on, leaving the juniors catching their breath. Only too clearly, now, something had happened—something so serious that a police-inspector had been called in!

'Oh, my hat!' said Tom Merry, 'What on earth can have happened? What do they want a bobby for?'

'Must have been a burglary, or something,' said Blake. 'Bobbies aren't called in for nothing.'

'Hardly!' drawled Cardew. 'If any johnny around St. Jim's has been appropriating something that isn't his'n he had better watch his step when the Skeat-bird blows in.'

'Oh, don't be an ass,' said Tom Merry. 'We—Hallo, here's Trimble—looks as if he's heard something.'

Baggy Trimble came up breathless.

'You fellows heard?' he gasped. 'I say, I've just heard Railton jawing to Kildare—I say, his study's been robbed—'

'Railton's study!' exclaimed Tom.

'Yes, rather! Money-drawer cracked open, and no end of currency notes taken,' gasped Trimble.

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'It seems that Railton had a lot of money there, ready to pay bills or something—and the lot's gone. But that ain't all.' Trimble spluttered with excitement, 'I say, they want the man who smashed Railton's window last night—'

'They've wanted him ever since it happened,' said Blake.

'Yes, but they want him special now!' gasped Trimble. 'You see, somebody got in at Railton's window, and he couldn't have if that pane hadn't been smashed—couldn't have got at the catch—so what does it look like?'

'What indeed?' murmured Cardew.

Levison gave him a startled look, and his face paled. He remembered what Cardew had said in the day-room the previous evening. Cardew had as good as predicted what had actually happened!

'What does it look like?' repeated Tom Merry, staring at Trimble. 'What do you mean, you fat ass?'

'Well, look at it!' said Trimble. 'I jolly well know what Railton thinks. They fancied it was only a rag last night—but now it looks as if that pane was smashed on purpose so that somebody could get in at the window at night—what else does it look like?'

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'Phew!' said Manners.

'Oh, crumbs!' said Blake. 'Dashed if it doesn't look like it! If somebody got in at that window last night—'

'Somebody jolly well did!' said Trimble. 'I say, I wonder who it was. Some Lower School chap—but who?'

'Dwop that, Twimble, you fat tick!' said Arthur Augustus, sternly. 'No chap in the House would do anythin' of the kind. There is nothin' whatevah to connect any Lower School chap with the mattah at all.'

'Isn't there jolly well?' said Trimble. 'What about the junior that Wottle saw running in the quad after the window was smashed?'

'Oh, bai Jove!' Arthur Augustus was quite taken aback. 'I had forgotten that! Pwobably Wottle was mistaken.'

'What was it he said a few minutes ago?' said Blake, in a low voice. 'He said he was afraid that some foolish reckless boy is in for serious trouble. That shows what Wottle thinks.'

'The rat!' breathed Cardew. The cunning of the man made him feel almost sick with disgust. Suspicion had to fall somewhere now that a robbery had taken place: and upon whom was it

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to fall but the unknown junior who had been running—a junior who did not exist outside a wicked man's cunning scheming. The trail had been cleverly laid in the wrong direction, to lead investigation astray.

Cardew left the group in excited discussion. Ernest Levison followed him, with a deeply-troubled face. He touched him on the arm and brought him to a halt, out of hearing of the other fellows.

'In heaven's name, Cardew, what does this mean?' muttered Levison. 'They'll be after the fellow who smashed Railton's window—'

'They will!' said Cardew, with a nod.

'They may get him—'

'They will get him!' Cardew, coolly. 'You can bank on that, Ernest, as a dead cert. They'll get him all right.'

'They'll think he was the same chap who got in at the window later and cleared out Railton's money-drawer—'

'He was,' said Cardew.

'Well, it looks like it, though you can't know,' said Levison. 'But—but—but.' He broke off, stammering.

'Cough it up, old bean,' said Cardew, encouragingly.

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'What were you doing out of the dorm last night?' breathed Levison. 'If they knew you'd been out in the night—! Have you had bad luck with your rotten racing, and have you been fool enough—mad enough—?' He broke off again.

Cardew whistled.

'You know what you said to me last evening, in the day-room,' muttered Levison. 'You knew this was going to happen. I thought you were talking your usual rot at the time—but now this has happened—Cardew, what do you know about it?' Levison's voice was husky. 'Cardew, tell me—what do you know about what happened in Railton's study last night?'

A gleam of anger came into Cardew's eyes. But it faded out at the distress in Levison's face. He spoke quietly.

'Don't be a fool, Ernest.'

'You knew this was going to happen,' breathed Levison. 'What you said couldn't mean anything else. How could you know, unless—?'

'Unless I'm the window-climber!' grinned Cardew. 'Well, old thing, I didn't know, for I couldn't—but I was jolly certain that it was going to happen—and now it has. But you know I never smashed Railton's window because I was with you

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in the study at the time—and you know I never went out of the House last night because I've told you so. And if that isn't good enough for you, Ernest Levison, you can go and eat coke, and leave me alone.'

'It's good enough for me! But—but—but—'

'But what?'

'But you knew—how could you know? It's happened exactly as you said, and—and—and—!'

'Elementary, my dear Watson!' drawled Cardew. 'You see, I know who the window-smasher was—at least I was sure—'

'I don't see how—'

'The things you don't see, Ernest, would pile up as high as Everest,' said Cardew. 'That's only one of them. Knowing, or at least being sure that I knew, who the window-smasher was, I could guess why he had done it—'

'I don't see how—' repeated Levison.

'Only one more of the innumerable things you don't see, laddie,' grinned Cardew. 'But I'll let in a further spot of light, if you'll say nothing about it till I give you leave.'

'I shall say nothing, of course.'

'Well, then, I knew that the window-smasher was going to get in at that window after Railton's

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cash because I knew that he was in a desperate corner for money lost on racing—and I knew he was capable of it because I knew that he had robbed a bank—'

'Wha-a-at?'

'Forgotten the jolly old bank-raider of Wayland that Tom Merry and his gang got after on their bikes last week?' asked Cardew, bantering. Then his bantering manner dropped from him, and his eyes glittered like steel. 'The rat who coshed me in Rylcombe Wood, and knocked me out, and caused a lot of the things that followed—the rat who left me with the bruise I've still got on my napper—the rat I was after last night, rat-catching—'

'You're dreaming—'

'Think so? Leave it at that, then.'

'Either you're dreaming or you're pulling my leg,' said Levison, in wonder. 'Nobody knows who that bank-raider was, and he most likely will never be caught now—he's vanished utterly, and there's not a clue.'

'Only his red hair and beard and things vanished, laddie,' grinned Cardew. 'The rest of him is visible to the eye.'

'You can't mean that you've seen him, and know him?'

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'Exactly that!'

'Where, then?'

'Here!'

Levison jumped.

'Here? In the school do you mean?' he stuttered.

'Why not?'

'At St. Jim's!' gasped Levison.

'At St. Jim's!' agreed Cardew, with a nod.

'Then who—where—what—?' Levison could hardly find words. He was utterly amazed, almost stupified.

Cardew made a gesture towards a figure walking sedately under the elms at a distance. Levison glanced round at Mr. Wottle.

'See that johnny?' murmured Cardew.

'Yes—Wottle—'

'He doesn't look much like a bank-raider, does he?'

'A—a—a bank-raider—!' stuttered Levison. 'No—what do you mean?'

'He would, though, if he sported the red beard and whiskers he wore in Wayland on Wednesday.'

'Cardew!'

'Not a word, old man!' grinned Cardew. 'Dead secret—till I've had a pow-wow with Inspector Skeat.'

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Levison gazed at him speechlessly.

'And by the same token, here's jolly old Skeat!' added Cardew, as a taxi drove in at the gates. 'Keep what I've told you under your hat, Ernest, old bean, till the balloon goes up.'

He strolled away, leaving Levison rooted to the ground, and rejoined the group in the quad, who were watching Inspector Skeat alighting from the taxi at the School House.

'There's old Skeat!' Monty Lowther was saying. 'Wottle was right—they've sent for Skeat.'

'Yaas, wathah.'

'I suppose Inspector Skeat will worry out what's happened,' said Tom Merry.

'He will!' said Cardew, as he joined the group. Tom looked round at him.

'How do you know he will?' he asked.

'Because I'm going to help him.'

'You're going to help a police-inspector!' repeated Tom Merry.

Cardew nodded, while all the juniors stared at him.

'Lookin' at me,' said Cardew, gravely, 'You might suppose that my mission in life was merely to be ornamental, like Gussy here—'

'Weally, Cardew—'

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'But that would be an error,' continued Cardew, 'I'm going to be useful. I'm not at all sure that the jolly old policeman, on his own, would get his man. He might even wander off with the idea that some St. Jim's man had burgled Railton's study. It's every law-abidin' citizen's duty to help the police in the execution of their duty, isn't it? That's where I come in.'

'And how are you going to help, you footling ass?' asked Blake with a sniff.

'That,' said Cardew, 'Is a top secret till the psychological moment arrives. I'm goin' to have a chat with Skeat when he's through with Railton, and give him a few points. Why not?'

'You'll be in form with the rest of us,' said Herries.

'Lathom will excuse me form if I have a headache owin' to that knock on the crumpet last week.'

'Do you mean that you've got a headache?' asked Tom, staring.

'Not at all! I'm goin' to have one for Lathom.'

'Bai Jove! I wegard that as a vewy wotten twick for gettin' out of form, Cardew,' exclaimed Arthur Augustus, warmly. 'I advise you vewy sewiously to do nothin' of the kind.'

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE NIGHT

'That's good advice,' said Tom, gruffly.

Cardew nodded.

'Quite!' he agreed, 'But did I ever have any use for good advice? Hallo, there goes the bell!'

The school bell rang, and the group in the quad broke up. The juniors headed for their form-rooms—very unwillingly: for the exciting episode of the night and the arrival of Inspector Skeat from Wayland were very much more interesting than lessons. But there was no help for that: and Tom Merry and Co. went in with the Shell, and Blake and Co. with the Fourth. But there was one member of that form who did not remain in the form-room—heedless of the stern disapproval of his relative, Cardew pleaded a headache, and kind-hearted Mr. Lathom gave him leave from class. All the notice Cardew took of Arthur Augustus's disapproval was to give him a wink as he walked out of the form-room.

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'GOOD MORNING, Mr. Skeat!'

Inspector Skeat turned his head.

He was standing by Mr. Railton's window, in the quad. His interview with the Housemaster on the subject of the night's happening was over. Railton, now, was in the Sixth-Form room: he had left the matter in the Inspector's hands. Mr. Skeat, at the moment, was making an examination of window and window-sill from outside, no doubt in the hope of picking up some clue to the unknown person who had clambered in over-night. He was not pleased to be interrupted by a junior schoolboy, though Cardew's greeting was very polite.

'Oh! Good morning,' said the Inspector, gruffly. Then, as he recognised Cardew, his look became kindly. He remembered him as the schoolboy who had been knocked out in the wood by the bank-raider the week before, and who had been able to give valuable information. Mr. Skeat, certainly,

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had not succeeded in laying that bank-raider by the heels: but, excepting for what Cardew had been able to state, he might still have been looking for a man with red hair and a red beard!

'Feeling none the worse for that rap on the head, I hope, Master Cardew,' said the Inspector, genially.

'Not a lot, though there's still a bump, Mr. Skeat.'

'But what are you doing out of school?' asked Mr. Skeat.

'I'm excused this lesson,' explained Cardew.

'May I take up a few minutes of your time, Mr. Skeat?'

'If you've anything to say, certainly.'

'I've quite a lot to say, sir. You haven't forgotten that I gave you a small spot of information last week—'

'Not at all! No more to give, I suppose?' said the Inspector, with a smile.

'Quite a lot, sir.'

Inspector Skeat gave him a very hard, keen, searching look. He was there to investigate a robbery and was not disposed to waste time. But if the junior knew, or remembered, or suspected, something, in connection with that elusive bank-raider, he was more than willing to give him a

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hearing. The affair of Railton's study was a very minor matter in comparison. In fact, the Inspector had little doubt in his mind on that subject. Mr. Railton hoped, and hoped that the Inspector might discover, that it was some prowling vagrant in the night who had found his window accessible, owing to the smashed pane. But Mr. Skeat had no doubt of a connection between the smashing of the window and the theft that had followed: which indicated what he would have called an 'inside job': and the offender could scarcely be other than the junior whom Mr. Wottle had seen running in the quad. However, Mr. Skeat quite understood the House master's feelings on the subject, and he was going to investigate the matter thoroughly. But it could wait, if a more important matter came in the way: and the bank-robbery at Wayland was a very much more important matter in the mind of the police-inspector.

'You've remembered something more about that man in the wood—something you omitted to tell me at the time?' he asked.

'Not remembered—found out,' said Cardew.

'You've found out—what?'

'I've found out who the man is,' said Cardew, quietly.

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Mr. Skeat drew a very deep breath.

'I can't suppose that you're simply wasting my time with a silly story, Master Cardew,' he said, slowly, 'But that sounds very steep.'

'I know it does.'

'Who is the man then—if you've found out?'

'I'd better tell you from the beginning,' said Cardew, in the same quiet tone. 'Take the facts as I found them out. I'd thought over the matter a lot without getting anywhere, but on Monday I got to know, quite by chance, that a man had hidden a suitcase in that hawthorn thicket in Rylcombe Wood on the morning of the bank-raid. A fellow saw him, and gave it no thought—but I gave it a lot of thought when he told me. A suitcase hidden in that thicket, Mr. Skeat—that thicket where the brute came back like a homing pigeon after the raid.'

'Go on.'

'His red hair was a fake, as I told you last week. What was in that suitcase but his disguise for the bank-raid? Why did he come back to it, except to pack in his disguise and get his normal outfit?'

'Go on,' said the Inspector again.

'It was the same man—must have been,' said Cardew. 'That thicket in the wood was his hide-

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out for changing in and out of his disguise. That was why he came on me there and knocked me out. He left me stunned, and walked off in his proper person—but—'

'But what?'

'If I didn't know the bank-raider, I knew the man who put the suitcase into the hawthorns,' said Cardew. 'I'd seen him often enough. And as they were the same man, I knew the bank-raider.'

'If that is all—!'

Cardew's lip curled.

'If that was all, and you questioned the man, I've no doubt he could think up some spoof,' he said. 'But that isn't all, Mr. Skeat. A few days before I'd seen, by chance, a bookmaker's slip which showed that he was a wild and reckless plunger on the races, losing money that his salary couldn't cover.'

'That is all?'

'Hardly! That was not enough,' said Cardew, coolly. 'Next—'

'Next?' repeated Mr. Skeat. He was listening very attentively now.

'Next,' said Cardew, 'He had another heavy loss on the races—I saw him looking as sick as a cat after it. I knew then that he had lost the money

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he pinched at the Wayland Bank, or most of it, and was in deep waters again. What was he likely to do next?

The Inspector did not speak.

'I waited, and kept my eyes open,' said Cardew. 'When Mr. Railton's window was smashed last night I guessed his next move.'

Mr. Skeat gave quite a jump.

'What has that to do with the bank-raider?' he ejaculated.

'Same man!' said Cardew.

'Wha-a-t?'

'Don't fancy that this is a fantastic schoolboy yarn, Mr. Skeat. The man I'm speaking of is here, in this school: and the currency notes taken from Mr. Railton's money-drawer are hidden in his room in this House.'

Mr. Skeat's ruddy face grew grim.

'If this is what you might call a lark, Master Cardew, and you are pulling a police-officer's leg—!' he began, gruffly.

'Listen to the rest,' said Cardew. 'That man—the rat I'm speaking of—was out in the quad when the window was smashed, and he told Railton that he saw a junior running—'

Mr. Skeat jumped again.

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'He saw nobody,' said Cardew. 'That was to put everybody on the wrong track: I guessed that one.'

The Wayland Inspector stared at him: doubt, incredulity, but a gathering deep interest mingling in his face.

'Last night,' went on Cardew, 'Knowing what he was going to do, I got out of the dormitory and kept watch on his room, in the dark.'

'You did!' breathed Mr. Skeat.

'He left that room at two o'clock in the morning,' said Cardew. 'A quarter of an hour later he came back.'

'He did not see you—?'

Cardew gave a low laugh.

'Was I likely to let him?' he asked. 'I hadn't forgotten the cosh in Rylcombe Wood, Mr. Skeat. He knows nothing—suspects nothing—never dreams that I know he is the man who coshed me that day. I needn't tell you his name now, Mr. Skeat.'

'It was Mr. Wottle who saw a junior running last night, your Housemaster has told me—'

'It was he who said so.'

'I have asked Mr. Wottle, and he has repeated that statement to me,' said Mr. Skeat. 'He is your Headmaster's Secretary, Master Cardew. He looks

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a most respectable, quiet man—a most respectable man—’

‘He didn’t—when Cauliflower came in nowhere at Wapshot!’ said Cardew. ‘You should have seen his face.’

‘If all this is true—!’

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

‘I’ve told you the facts, Mr. Skeat,’ he said. ‘That man Wottle, who looks so respectable and meek and mild, has a wildcat’s temper under it, as more than one fellow here could tell you. He plunges on the races, and I’ll bank on it that bookmaker’s slips will be found in his room if they’re looked for. He deals with Abrahamson’s, the bookmakers, under the name of John Smith, with an accommodation address at 14 High Street, Wayland. He coshed me, like a cowardly brute, in Rylcombe Wood. Railton’s money is locked up in his room here at this very minute. I’ve told you the facts, Mr. Skeat—you can act on them or not, just as you like.’

Cardew made a movement.

‘Don’t go!’ said Mr. Skeat.

‘Well?’

‘What you have told me sounds fantastic, but it hangs together,’ said Mr. Skeat, slowly. ‘If it is

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true, I cannot neglect to take action—if it is a fantastic story with little or no foundation, I must report it to your Headmaster who will, I have no doubt, expel you from this school for inventing such a story about his Secretary.'

Cardew laughed aloud.

'Go ahead, which way you like,' he said. 'Act, if you want the bank-raider—or leave it to me.'

'Leave it to you!' repeated Mr. Skeat.

'I'm not leaving it where it is if you do!' said Cardew, coolly. 'The man who coshed me in Rylcombe Wood is going to be shown up for what he is, and what he's done. I've spoken to you, Mr. Skeat, because you're the proper person to act on what you call 'information received'. But if you do not act, I shall go to my Housemaster and tell him exactly what I've told you. Then if you want your man you'll have to look for him in the next county, I expect—or further—he will bolt at the first alarm, you can bank on that.'

Mr. Skeat gave Cardew a not wholly pleasant look.

'I cannot pass this over without action,' he said. 'I must investigate the truth or otherwise of this extraordinary story, Master Cardew. I shall proceed with circumspection: but if you have been

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stating the facts, you may rely upon it the person will not escape the law. In the meantime, kindly say nothing of what you have told me.'

'Mum's the word!' smiled Cardew. 'Good morning, sir.'

He sauntered away.

That strong doubts were in the police-inspector's mind, he knew. But he knew, too, that Inspector Skeat would do his duty: and his duty was to follow up any clue leading to a breaker of the law. Certainly, in the strange circumstances, he had to proceed with circumspection: but there was no doubt that he would proceed. That was all that Cardew wanted. The man who had coshed him in Rylcombe Wood was booked!

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MR. RAILTON frowned.

'Absurd!' he said.

The Housemaster could not conceal his impatience.

Inspector Skeat coughed.

'Absurd!' repeated Mr. Railton. 'I understand that what occurred here last night is what you call, I believe, an inside job—'

'Quite,' said Mr. Skeat.

'I fear that you may be right!' said Mr. Railton. 'It certainly does appear that my window was broken, not as a foolish trick, but to give access to my study. Yet possibly some outside person—'

'It was no outside person, sir.'

'I must bow to your judgement in that, Mr. Skeat. But your proposal to make a search of the House—'

'Why not, sir, if it is my official opinion that the missing notes are to be found in this House?'

'Yes, yes, yes—a search of the boy's studies, even

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of the dormitories—I could understand that. But you propose that no one—no one in the House—should be excluded. Even the masters—’ Mr. Railton reddened. ‘Surely, Mr. Skeat, you can see that it is quite impossible for me to consent to such a step.’

‘It may not be necessary to take the step, Mr. Railton,’ said Inspector Skeat, soothingly. ‘The prospect of such a step may be sufficient.’

‘I do not understand you,’ said the Housemaster, curtly.

‘I will make it clear, sir!’ said Mr. Skeat. ‘If any man asked for his keys shows a strong disinclination to hand them over, it is that man’s quarters I should like to search, and it may be quite unnecessary to go further.’

‘Such a request, sir, would be taken as an insult by any member of Dr. Holme’s staff: but not a single member would dream of refusing to hand over his keys if the request were made by a responsible police-officer.’

‘That is all I desire, sir,’ said Mr. Skeat, in the same soothing tone. ‘My desire is to note the reaction of any man asked for his keys with a view to a search of his rooms. If any man should actually refuse—’

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'That is absurd, sir,' said Mr. Railton. 'Such a request would cause indignation: but a refusal could only draw suspicion upon the person concerned.'

'Exactly,' said Mr. Skeat.

The Housemaster breathed hard.

'I will, very reluctantly, allow you to make the request,' he said, almost gruffly. 'It will be most unpleasant: but if you regard it as your duty I must place no impediment in your way. With whom would you like to begin, Mr. Skeat? With me personally, perhaps!' added Mr. Railton, with sharp sarcasm.

Inspector Skeat smiled.

'Not at all, sir! Let me see—there is a Mr. Wottle—the gentleman who saw a boy running in the quadrangle yesterday evening after the breaking of your window—'

'Yes, yes: the Headmaster's Secretary. What of him?'

'As the masters, sir, are probably busy in the form-rooms at the moment, let us begin with Mr. Wottle.'

'I have no doubt that he is engaged on his secretarial work,' snapped Mr. Railton, 'but I will send him a message.'

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'Please do so, sir.'

Mr. Railton, with a sound strongly resembling a snort, touched the bell. In a few moments Trotter appeared in the doorway.

'You rang, sir?' Trotter gave a curious sidelong glance at the Wayland Inspector. The happening of the night was discussed as excitedly below stairs as above.

'Yes, Trotter. Kindly go to Mr. Wottle and ask him if he will oblige me by coming to this study for a few moments.'

'Yes, sir.'

Trotter disappeared. Mr. Railton, with a frowning brow, and Inspector Skeat, with a stolid face that expressed nothing, waited. They had only a few minutes to wait. Then the little, neat, respectable figure of the Head's Secretary appeared. He glanced at the inspector and then at the House-master.

'Trotter tells me that you wished to see me, Mr. Railton—'

'Yes—pray come in, Mr. Wottle,' said the House-master, biting his lip. 'Inspector Skeat desires to speak to you.'

'I am wholly at your service, Mr. Skeat,' said the Secretary, 'But I am afraid I can add nothing to

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what I have already told you. All I know is that I saw a boy—apparently a junior boy—running—'

'It is not that,' said Mr. Railton. 'It is quite another matter, and I trust you will not be offended, Mr. Wottle.'

The Secretary's eyes widened.

'I do not quite follow, sir—!'

'Mr. Skeat has the same request to make of every person in the House,' said Mr. Railton. 'However, I will leave it to the inspector to speak. Pray proceed, Mr. Skeat.'

He stood with a set face, not concealing his displeasure. Inspector Skeat did not seem to heed it. His eyes were on Mr. Wottle: and he did not failed to note a startled gleam that came into the black beady eyes. The man was on his guard—why?

'You will, I am sure, excuse any inconvenience, in the circumstances, Mr. Wottle,' said the Inspector, urbanely. 'I desire to make a search of this House while I am here, excluding nobody.'

'The boys, you mean—!'

'Excluding nobody!' repeated Mr. Skeat. 'With Mr. Railton's permission, I shall ask every person in the House for his keys so that his rooms may be searched—'

'What—?'

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'Pray understand, Mr. Wottle, that this does not imply any reflection, any suspicion,' said Mr. Railton, hastily. 'It is a formality which Mr. Skeat considers necessary, in which I do not agree with him, I need hardly say.'

'You have no objection, Mr. Wottle, to handing over your keys and permitting a search of your rooms?' asked the Inspector.

Mr. Wottle panted.

'Certainly I have an objection,' he exclaimed, shrilly. 'I will permit nothing of the kind. Such a request is an insult.'

'I am sorry you should think so, sir!' said Mr. Skeat, 'But I must ask you to hand over your keys, Mr. Wottle.'

'I refuse to do so.'

Inspector Skeat's face hardened. Mr. Railton gave the Secretary quite a startled look.

'Mr. Wottle!' he exclaimed, 'Kindly do as the Inspector asks. It is most unpleasant—but while I understand your feelings, we must place no obstacle in the way of an officer of the law.'

'I shall certainly not allow my rooms to be searched, sir,' said Mr. Wottle. His beady eyes were dilated. 'If you have given your consent to this, Mr. Railton, I shall appeal to Dr. Holmes.'

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'Dr. Holmes would certainly direct you to do as the Inspector requests,' said Mr. Railton, sharply. 'If you refuse, sir, Mr. Skeat will conclude that you have something to hide.'

'I certainly do refuse, and I will not remain here to be insulted!' exclaimed Mr. Wottle, and he made a step towards the door. The plump form of the Wayland inspector interposed.

'Please stay where you are, Mr. Wottle,' said Inspector Skeat. 'I ask you to hand over your keys, and permit an examination of anything that may be locked up in your rooms—'

'I refuse.'

'If you persist in this refusal, Mr. Wottle—'

'I do! Now let me pass.'

'For goodness' sake, Mr. Wottle!' exclaimed the Housemaster. His face was quite startled. 'Cannot you see what a refusal implies?'

'Will you let me pass, Mr. Skeat?' said Mr. Wottle, between his teeth, taking no heed of the School Housemaster.

'I will let you pass, sir, to the extent of accompanying me to your rooms,' said Inspector Skeat, stolidly.

'I forbid you to enter my rooms.'

'Mr. Wottle—!' gasped the Housemaster.

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'I shall enter your rooms, Mr. Wottle, and I shall search them,' said the Inspector, deliberately. 'And if you do not choose to hand over your keys I shall take upon myself the responsibility of forcing locks.'

The Secretary looked at him almost wildly. He had come to Railton's study without a doubt, without a suspicion: never dreaming that anything was known: that anything could be known. But he knew now that he was suspected, at least: and it dawned upon Mr. Railton, too, that the Inspector had had Mr. Wottle in his mind all the time, and that it was only the Secretary's reactions that he desired to note. Those reactions told their own tale. It was only too clear from Mr. Wottle's face that he dared not have his rooms searched.

Mr. Railton's brows knitted.

'For the last time, Mr. Wottle, will you hand Inspector Skeat your keys?' he exclaimed.

'I will not—I will not.'

'Then Mr. Skeat must proceed with his duty,' said the Housemaster. 'I will accompany him, and you, to your rooms, Mr. Wottle. I cannot understand your refusal, which can only cause grave suspicion in Inspector Skeat's mind. You have your keys about you, doubtless. Will you hand them over to this officer of the law?'

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'No! No! I will not!' Wottle panted, his face white, beads of perspiration on his forehead. 'Such a request is insulting—I will not tolerate it—my rooms shall not be searched—I forbid it—I protest—'

'Upon my word!' breathed Mr. Railton. He could not fail to read the terror in the man's face: the terror of guilt. 'Inspector Skeat! Pray proceed.'

Mr. Skeat opened the study door. He stepped out, ponderously, Wottle's eyes on him like a frightened rat's. The man seemed rooted to the floor.

'Come, Mr. Wottle,' said the Housemaster, sharply.

The man almost tottered from the study. Mr. Railton led the way: Wottle followed him, with faltering steps: the stout inspector brought up the rear, with a wary eye on the Secretary. If Mr. Skeat had doubted Cardew's story before it was impossible for him to doubt it now. He hardly needed Wottle's keys: he knew what he would find in the Secretary's rooms.

At the foot of the staircase Mr. Wottle stopped, and turned haggard eyes on the Wayland inspector. His voice came panting through dry lips.

'You are going to search my rooms?'

THE INSPECTOR KNOWS HOW

'My duty, sir!' said Mr. Skeat, stolidly.

'You will go so far as to force locks?'

'Unless you hand over the keys, Mr. Wottle.'

The Secretary gave a gasping breath.

'Very well—here are my keys!' he said.

He stepped back to the inspector, who held out a hand for the keys. But Mr. Wottle did not place keys in that extended hand. He leaped like a tiger, and his clenched fist crashed in the ruddy face, taking Mr. Skeat entirely by surprise. The Wayland inspector staggered back and crashed. Mr. Railton spun round with a startled exclamation. The Secretary ran like a deer for the big open doorway on the quadrangle.

'Mr. Wottle—stop—!' gasped Railton.

The man flew like a deer. Hatless, just as he had come from the Head's study a few minutes ago, he fled: his flight an open confession, but that mattered little to him now, now that he knew that the stolen notes, the disguising red beard and wig, the cosh that had struck down the bank cashier at Wayland, and Cardew in Rylcombe Wood, were to be unearthed in a locked suitcase in his rooms. Only instant swift flight could save him from justice—if it could! He raced out of the House into the quad.

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Mr. Railton rushed to the inspector. But Mr. Skeat was already scrambling up: dizzy from the crashing blow, but prompt to act. He rushed to the open doorway, shouting:

'Stop that man! Stop him! Stop thief!'

CHAPTER XXXI

CAUGHT!

TOM MERRY jumped.

'What—!' he gasped.

'What—!' exclaimed Lowther.

'Bai Jove, what's happenin'?' stuttered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, his eyeglass dropping from his noble eye in his amazement.

'Wottle—!' exclaimed Blake.

'Look—!'

'What the thump—!'

'What the dickens—!'

Fifty fellows, at least, stared, with popping eyes, in blank amazement. It was morning break, and the Fourth and the Shell were out of form. A moment ago the old quadrangle of St. Jim's had presented its accustomed aspect, with nothing more exciting happening than Figgins and Co. punting a footer, and Wally of the Third snatching a cap from the head of another fag and tossing it into the air. But now the old quad buzzed, or rather roared, with excitement.

CARDEW'S CATCH!

A little swift figure had darted from the doorway of the School House, racing for the gates. That was surprising enough. Little Mr. Wottle, usually so quiet and sedate, bolting hatless across the quad, was enough to make any fellow stare. But it was the climax when the stout figure of Inspector Skeat of Wayland appeared in the doorway, waving frantic hands, and shouting 'Stop thief!' St. Jim's fellows could hardly believe either their eyes or their ears.

In all the amazed crowd there was only one who was not amazed—Ralph Reckness Cardew. Cardew was very much on the alert. That Inspector Skeat would take some action was certain: and that if he did take action the Secretary's guilt would be manifest, was also certain: and Cardew was quite prepared for a sudden attempt at flight by the unmasked rascal, when no other hope was left to him.

Certainly Cardew did not look very alert. His manner was careless and casual as usual, and he sauntered with his hands in his pockets, apparently thinking of nothing in particular. But his eyes were keen and watchful all the same.

And when the moment came, he was quick off the mark. The whole crowd stood staring and

CAUGHT!

exclaiming: but Cardew cut across to intervene between the fleeing Secretary and the gates.

Swift as was Wottle's flight, his feet seeming scarcely to touch the ground, Cardew was between him and the gates in a moment: standing facing him as he came, cool and steady, with set lips and glinting eyes.

The desperate man rushed him down, without a second's pause. Cardew spun under the rush, but both hands grasped at the man, and held, and dragged him over. They rolled on the ground together.

'Help here!' yelled Cardew.

'Bai Jove!'

'What the thump—!'

'Stop thief!' roared Inspector Skeat. He ran down the steps of the School House, panting. 'Stop him! Stop thief!'

The desperate man was making frantic efforts to shake Cardew off. But the junior clung to him: and Levison ran to his aid, grasping Wottle's arm as his fist was about to crash in Cardew's face. Clive, amazed as he was, ran up too, and lent a hand. Tom Merry and Co. came crowding round. With an almost frantic effort the Secretary tore himself loose, and bounded up—only to find himself

CARDEW'S CATCH!

the centre of a crowd. Inspector Skeat came panting up, still shouting:

'Stop thief! Hold him!'

Like an animal at bay, the man stared round at innumerable staring faces. Cardew scrambled up.

'Hold him, you fellows! He's wanted—he robbed Railton's study last night and he's wanted—'

'Oh, cwiskey!'

'Stop him!' exclaimed Tom Merry, as the desperate man made a furious rush, and countless hands dragged him back. A moment more, and Inspector Skeat was on the scene, his plump hands on the man he wanted. Another moment, and there was a clink of metal. With popping eyes, the St. Jim's fellows stared at the Head's Secretary, standing panting for breath with the handcuffs on his wrists.

'Bai Jove!' murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, quite dazedly, 'Are we dweamin' this, you fellows?'

'Blessed if I don't half think so!' said Blake, in wonder. 'Wottle—run in by a bobby—with the handcuffs on—oh, my only hat!'

'Thank you, Master Cardew!' said the Inspector. 'Come, my man!' With a grip on Wottle's arm, he led him back to the House.

'Not at all, sir!' answered Cardew. He was



*Both hands grasped at the man, and held and dragged
him over*

CARDEW'S CATCH!

dusting his clothes after that roll on the earth: breathless, but with a smile on his face. He grinned at Levison. 'Think I had it right now, Ernest, old bean?'

'Looks like it,' said Levison. 'But—I can't make it out! Wottle—the Head's Secretary—phew! How—why—?'

'Remember that paper I picked up in the quad and showed you in the study?' said Cardew. 'That was how and why!' He grinned at Tom Merry. 'You never knew what that paper was, that I gave you to take back to Wottle, did you?'

'Of course not,' said Tom. 'What has it got to do with all this?'

'It was a bookmaker's slip—'

'Oh!' exclaimed Tom.

'And showed how deep the man had gone in,' said Cardew. 'And if I hadn't known that I might never have got on to the rest. Gussy, old ornament, you came in jolly useful in the cause of jolly old justice, when you floored Wottle with Figgy's football.'

'Bai Jove!'

'Did you know anything about all this, then, Cardew?' asked Tom.

Cardew chuckled.

CAUGHT!

'Sort of,' he answered. 'In me, my beloved 'earers, you behold the nigger in the woodpile—the Polonius behind the curtain—the johnny who pulled the strings. But for me—little me—moi qui vous parle—they'd never have got the bank-raider of Wayland—'

'The bank-waidah of Wayland!' repeated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. 'What the dooce do you mean, Cardew?'

'Wottle!' answered Cardew.

'Wubbish! The bank-waidah of Wayland had wed hair—'

'I expect he's still got it,' drawled Cardew, 'But I fancy he keeps it locked up in his rooms, ready for another go.'

'Oh, cwikey!'

'You mean to say—!' gasped Tom Merry.

'Honest Injun!' Cardew grinned round at amazed faces, quite enjoying the scene. 'He coshed me in Rylcombe Wood, the rat, and I sort of fancied I'd like to put salt on his tail, if I could—and it turned out that I could—and did! Didn't I tell you fellows last night that I was going rat-catching? Well, I caught the rat—and Skeat's got him now.'

'If all that's anything but your usual rot—!' said Tom Merry.

CARDEW'S CATCH!

'It is—for once!'

'Then tell us—!'

'Happy to oblige!' drawled Cardew. 'Lend me your ears, and I will a tale unfold—!'

'Oh, get on with it!' said Blake. 'Not so much of your gas—get on with it.'

'Yaas, wathah.'

Cardew laughed, and got on with it. He had a packed audience, everyone listening breathlessly. Quite recently, Cardew had been somewhat of an outcast in his House: now everyone hung on his words. He was still holding the crowd when the taxi that had brought Inspector Skeat to St. Jim's drove away again—with two occupants. One was the plump Inspector, rubbing a bruised nose: the other, a whitefaced, guilty man with handcuffs on his wrists, whose future residence was to be much less comfortable than the Secretary's rooms in the School House at St. Jim's.

The bank-raider of Wayland had been caught at last: Inspector Skeat had his man, but it was Cardew's Catch.

CHAPTER XXXII

CONCLUSION

A WEEK LATER, Ralph Reckness Cardew stood in the junior day-room, looking at a list posted on the wall. It was the list of men for the junior match with Rookwood School: chosen from both Houses, including seven School House men and four New House men. Among the New House names was G. Figgins: among the School House names was not included R. R. Cardew. He had expected it—more than expected it: but it was a blow all the same. He was as fit as a fiddle—that episode in Rylcombe Wood was no longer leaving a trace: he was at the top of his form, and keen to play—but there was no place for him in the team going over to Rookwood. Cardew set his lips, and turned away: and almost ran into Figgins of the New House, coming in.

‘Hallo! Don’t barge a fellow over!’ said Figgins.

Cardew, for a moment, gave him a dark look. But his face cleared. A couple of weeks ago he had hacked Figgins savagely in a soccer game. If, as he

CARDEW'S CATCH!

tried to believe, that was all Wottle's fault, that wretched man had paid scot and lot: he was now behind bars, awaiting trial. But perhaps Cardew had realised since that all the blame could not be laid on a scapegoat. His face cleared, and he gave Figgins a friendly grin.

'Coming in to see the list?' he said. 'Tom Merry's put it up! Your name is in it, Figgins. I'm glad you're fit.' He hesitated a moment. 'I've told you I'm sorry for—for that rotten trick in the House match. I hope your leg's all right again now.'

'Not quite,' said Figgins, shaking his head. 'Not too bad, but hardly up to a game at Rookwood. Might conk out, and I wouldn't like to let the side down.'

Cardew winced. He knew how keen Figgins was, and what a jolt it would be to him to stand out. If he had acted like this, on the day of the House match—! He hadn't: but he wished from the bottom of his heart that he had. A flush came into his cheeks.

'Your name's up,' he said.

'I know! I've just told Tom Merry it will have to come out. There's quite a good man available,' said Figgins, with a grin.

'New House man?'

CONCLUSION

'Oh, no: School House.'

'Manners, I suppose?' Cardew could not help his lip curling. He had no doubt that Tom Merry would be glad to find room for his pal, in the match at Rookwood.

'Oh, no, not Manners,' said Figgins. 'Better man than old Manners—if he can keep his temper.'

'What?'

'That's why I've come in here,' grinned Figgins.

'I suggested it to Tom, and he's agreed—and he's told me to write the name in, so there you are.'

Figgins took a stump of pencil from his pocket, and stepped to the list on the wall. Cardew watched him, staring. Figgy drew the pencil through his own name in the list, and then scribbled under it,

R. R. Cardew.

He stepped back, and grinned round at Cardew. For a long moment Cardew stared at the name Figgins had written in place of his own. He seemed at a loss for words.

'Is that straight?' he asked, at last.

'Straight as a string.'

'Oh!' breathed Cardew.

Figgins gave him a cheery nod, and went to the door. But he turned his head as Cardew called:

CARDEW'S CATCH!

'Figgy!'

'Well?' said Figgins, looking round.

'If you'd like to boot me all round the room, you're welcome.'

Figgins chuckled.

'I'd rather see you kick goals for St. Jim's,' he said. 'I'll come over with the team and watch you doing it.'

That remark was prophetic: for the next day Figgins, standing chiefly on one leg, watched the game at Rookwood: and added a stentorian roar to the shout that went up when Cardew kicked the winning goal for St. Jim's.

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