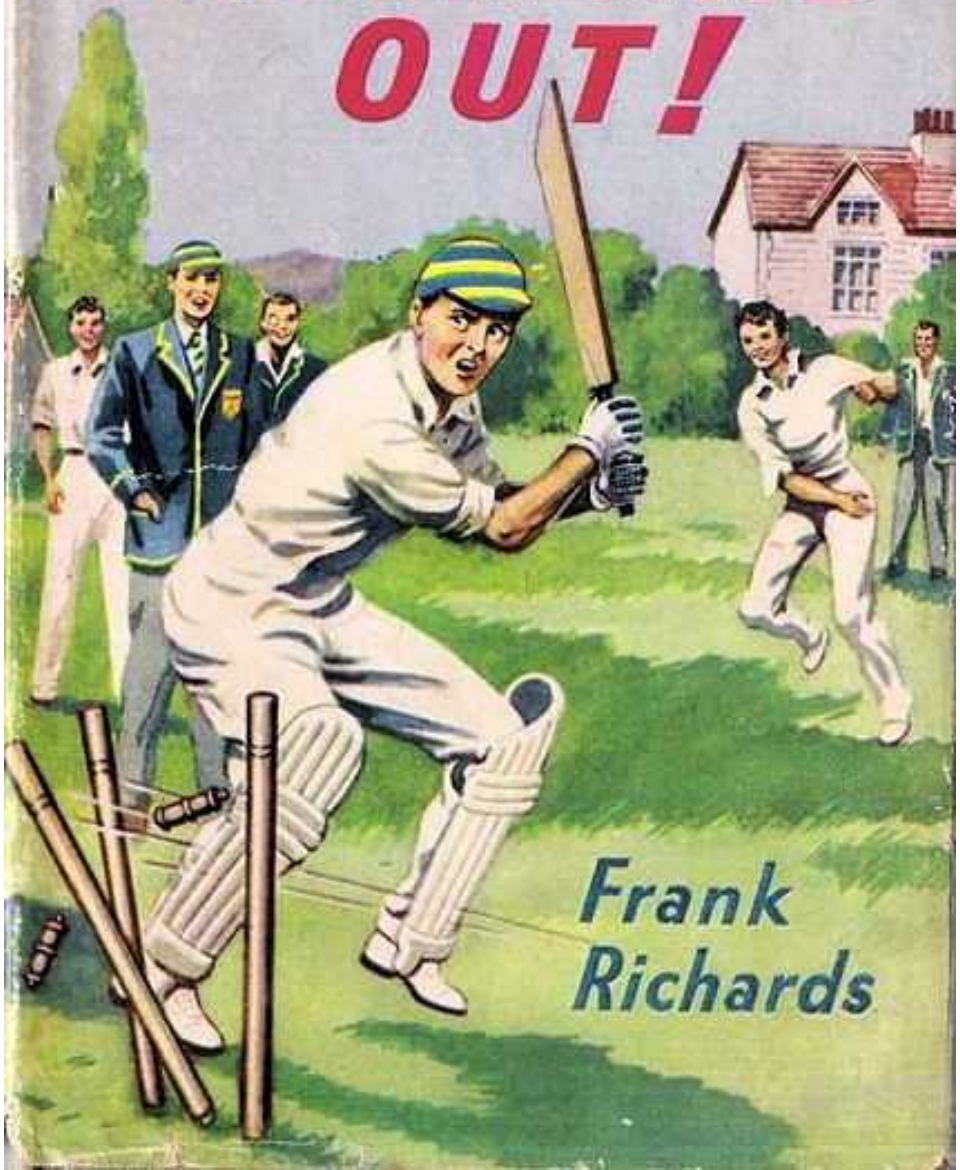


DOWN AND OUT!



***Frank
Richards***

By the same author:

TROUBLE FOR TOM MERRY
THROUGH THICK AND THIN
THE DISAPPEARANCE OF TOM MERRY
CARDEW'S CATCH



He tipped off, and shot down to the water

DOWN AND OUT!

FRANK RICHARDS



SPRING BOOKS - LONDON

Published by
SPRING BOOKS
SPRING HOUSE · SPRING PLACE · LONDON NW 5

Printed in Czechoslovakia

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CHAPTER I

WRATHY

'WELEASE ME!'

'Now, look here, Gussy —'

'I wepeat, welease me!'

'My dear chap —'

'Will you let go my arm, Blake?'

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

'Will you let go my othah arm, Hewwies?'

'Not at all!'

'Will you let go my collah, Dig?'

'Hardly.'

'Bai Jove!' gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. 'If you fellows do not immediately welease me, I will give you a feahful thwashin' all wound.'

'What on earth's up?' exclaimed Tom Merry.

'Trouble in the happy family?' asked Manners.

'Peace, my infants, peace!' said Monty Lowther, soothingly.

It was quite a startling scene that greeted the eyes of the Terrible Three of the Shell. They were sauntering under the leafy old elms when they came suddenly upon it. They were talking cricket as they sauntered: and for once, it was not a junior match that interested them. The

First-Eleven match with Carcroft was the next big item in the cricket calendar at St. Jim's: and that was the topic. But they forgot cricket, at the sight of the four Fourth-formers.

Blake and Herries, Digby and D'Arcy, were great chums, in Study No. 6 in the School House. But at the moment they did not look very chummy.

Blake was grasping Arthur Augustus D'Arcy by his right arm. Herries was grasping him by his left. Digby had a hold on the back of his collar. In the midst of the three, Arthur Augustus was struggling to get loose. His aristocratic visage, usually calm, was wildly excited. There was, at the moment, not a sign about him of the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere. His voice, seldom raised, was on its top note.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther gazed at them. Only too obviously, there was trouble in the happy family.

Arthur Augustus was making mighty efforts. But he could not get loose. His chums held on to him like limpets to a rock.

'Tom Mewwy!' gasped Arthur Augustus, as the Shell fellows came up. 'Pway lend me a hand! Dwag them off.'

'But what's the row?' exclaimed Tom.

'Okay!' said Blake, cheerily. 'Gussy wants to go and look for the most tremendous whopping that he's ever had, and we're stopping him.'

'I wefuse to be stopped!' roared Arthur Augustus. 'I am goin' to punch Cutts' nose —'

'My dear chap, Fourth-form chaps can't punch Fifth-form noses —'

'I wepeat —'

Tom Merry whistled.

Evidently, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, for some unknown reason, was on the war-path. In the circumstances, it was not surprising that his chums were exercising a restraining influence. Cutts, of the Fifth Form, was hardly a fellow whose nose was to be punched by a junior in the Fourth. Gussy was a good man of his hands, among fellows of his own size and weight. But one jolt from a big, hefty senior like Cutts would have put paid to Gussy. In fact, his comrades were holding him back from destruction.

'I wepeat that I am goin' to punch that cheeky wottah's nose!' hooted Arthur Augustus. 'Welease me at once! Tom Mewwy — Mannahs — Lowthah — pway dwag these silly asses off.'

'But what's the trouble?' asked Tom Merry. 'What has Cutts done?'

'He boxed my yahs —'

'Only a smack!' said Blake. 'And Gussy got his rag out! Gussy really asked him for it.'

'I did nothin' of the kind, Blake! It was not my fault that Cutts heard me makin' a wemark, as I did not see him comin' along! And his feahful cheek in smackin' my head —'

'But what the dickens did Gussy say to get Cutts' rag out?' asked Tom.

'I was merely wemarkin' that he had no chance what-

evah of gettin' into the first-eleven for the Carcwoft match, Tom Mewwy.'

'Oh!' said Tom.

'Evevybody knows that he is twyin' to push in, and that he isn't good enough,' hooted Arthur Augustus. 'Any fellow in the House could tell him that.'

'It wouldn't be exactly tactful to tell him!' grinned Monty Lowther. 'You should guard with your left, Gussy, when you tell Fifth-form men home-truths like that.'

'I did not tell him, Lowthah! I was merely wemarkin' that Kildare would have too much sense to play a dud like Cutts in such a match, and he happened to hear my wemark, and boxed my yahs and walked off: and if he fancies that he can box a fellow's yahs —'

'We collared Gussy just in time!' said Blake. 'He was going after Cutts to strew the churchyard with his hungry bones.'

'I was goin' to punch his nose, Blake —'

'Better forget it,' advised Tom Merry. 'Cutts is awfully touchy about his cricket, Gussy, and you got him on the raw. Forget all about it.'

'I wefuse to forget all about it, Tom Mewwy. I am goin' to punch his nose, and punch it vevy hard. Will you welease me, Blake?'

'Not till the bell goes for class,' answered Blake. 'Cutts is a good many sizes too big for you, Gussy.'

'Will you dwag him off, Tom Mewwy?' gasped Arthur Augustus.

Tom shook his head.

'Better give it a miss!' he said.

He glanced round. Gerald Cutts, of the Fifth Form, was strolling at a little distance, with St. Leger of the Fifth. He was not giving the juniors any attention. Having smacked a junior's head for his rather unfortunate remark, Cutts had left it at that, and no doubt regarded the incident as closed and done with. Certainly he did not dream that his nose was in danger of a punch from a Fourth-former. And in fact it was in no danger, for one sweep of Cutts' sinewy arm would have tumbled Arthur Augustus headlong. But that was a trifle light as air to Arthur Augustus, with the blood of all his aristocratic ancestors, as far back as 1066, boiling in his noble veins. His noble ear had been boxed, and that was a matter of which the seriousness could hardly be over-estimated — in Gussy's opinion at least. He was going to punch Gerald Cutts' nose, though the skies fell.

He wriggled vigorously in the grasp of his faithful chums. But he wriggled in vain: and there was no help from the Shell fellows. Willingly they would have watched him punching Cutts' nose, had it been a practical proposition. But they knew that it would not be Cutts who would collect the punches, if punching started.

'Gussy, old man —' urged Tom Merry.

'Wats! Welease me at once, Blake, or I shall punch your nose before I punch Cutts!' howled Arthur Augustus.

'Now, look here, Gussy,' said Blake. 'Have a little sense, and — Oh! ow!' Blake broke off suddenly, as

Arthur Augustus suited the action to the word. It was not a very hard punch on Blake's nose: but it caused him involuntarily to loosen his grasp, and Arthur Augustus, with a tremendous effort, dragged himself loose from Herries and Dig. He shot off, like an arrow from a bow, before they could grasp at him again.

'Oh!' gasped Blake, his hand to his nose. 'Why, I — I — I —'

'Stop him!' gasped Herries.

'After him!' exclaimed Dig.

'Gussy!' shouted Tom Merry. 'Stop!'

Arthur Augustus tore on. His fists were clenched, and his eyes were gleaming. He was heading direct for Cutts of the Fifth, and his friends had simply no chance of overtaking him in time. But at that moment, Cardew of the Fourth appeared on the scene, strolling with his hands in his pockets, between Arthur Augustus and his prey. He strolled across the path, unaware for the moment that an excited Fourth-former was coming along that path at the pace of a runaway lorry. He was aware of it the next moment, as Arthur Augustus crashed into him.

'Oh!' yelled Cardew. 'What —!' He went spinning from the shock, and measured his length on the earth.

'Oh, cwumbs!' gasped Arthur Augustus, staggering.

Cardew sat up.

'You mad ass!' he spluttered. 'What are you charging a fellow over for?'

Arthur Augustus tottered against the trunk of an elm. The collision had quite winded him. He gurgled for breath.

Six juniors came up with a rush.

'Bag him!' gasped Blake.

'Collar him!'

'Hold him!'

Arthur Augustus was captured once more. Ralph Reckness Cardew, quite unintentionally, had saved the situation! Gerald Cutts sauntered on with St. Leger, happily unconscious that dire vengeance had been on his track. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, Blake and Herries and Dig, encircled Arthur Augustus and walked him away — to a safe distance from Cutts of the Fifth. And they continued to encircle him, till the bell rang for third school, when Blake and Herries and Dig walked him into the Fourth-form room, for class with Mr. Lathom, and the danger was over.

CHAPTER II

CAUGHT IN THE ACT

'ROOM for a passenger?'

Tom Merry looked round.

There was rather a crowd on the school raft that sunny afternoon. Bright sunshine gleamed on the rippling waters of the Ryll: and a good many fellows were out on the river. The Terrible Three of the Shell were about to push out in their boat, when Cardew of the Fourth strolled up, his hands in his pockets and his air casually supercilious as usual. They paused as they heard Cardew's careless drawl.

Manners gave a slight shrug of the shoulders. Monty Lowther made a faint grimace. Tom Merry hesitated, holding on with the boat-hook.

In point of fact, none of the three yearned for Cardew's company. They were going to pull down the river as far as Rylcombe, and pull back in time for tea: a cheery hour on the sunny water: and the company of the scapegrace of the Fourth was not likely to make it any cheerier.

Cardew, certainly, could see that his proposition was not welcomed with any enthusiasm. But he gave the Shell fellows an urbane smile.

'You're going down the river?' he said.

'Yes,' answered Tom.

'I've just dodged Levison and Clive,' said Cardew. 'They wanted to rope me in for practice at the nets. I shouldn't wonder if they're looking for me this very minute. We're great pals, you know: but pals are a bore sometimes, aren't they?'

'Hop in if you like,' said Tom, rather curtly.

'Thanks no end.'

Cardew stepped lightly into the boat. Tom Merry pushed off from the raft, and they floated out on the Ryll.

'Like to take an oar, Cardew?' asked Monty Lowther, rather sarcastically. He did not expect the slacker of the Fourth to have any desire to exert himself.

Cardew shook his head.

'You fellows for the strenuous life,' he drawled. 'I wouldn't deprive you of the pleasure of lugging the boat around.'

'We could guess that one,' said Manners, drily.

Cardew smiled, and sat at ease in the stern. Tom Merry and Lowther pulled, and Manners sat with his camera on his knee, his eye on the leafy banks. The school raft dropped behind, and the boat went down with the current at a good rate, towards Rylcombe Bridge.

But the bridge was not yet in sight, when Cardew made a movement. His glance turned on a red roof and chimney-pots that showed over the trees on the bank. That building, as all St. Jim's fellows knew, was the Green Man: an establishment of somewhat dubious reputation,

which had a front on Rylcombe Lane, and a long back-garden down to the river. It did not interest Tom Merry and Co. in the very least: but it had its own interest for Cardew.

He gave a yawn.

'This is a bit slow,' he remarked.

'You can pull, if you like,' said Lowther.

'I fancy I'd rather walk. So good of you to give me a lift,' said Cardew, 'but if you'll pull in for a minute, I think I'll get out and walk.'

'Just as you like,' said Tom.

The boat turned in to the tow-path.

It bumped into the rushes, and Cardew leaped lightly ashore. With all his affectation of lazy slackness, he was active and athletic, and, when he chose, a good oarsman and a good cricketer. But he seldom chose. He made a light leap to the grassy bank, and smiled at the three juniors in the boat.

'Thanks so much!' he drawled. 'You've done me a good turn — a better one than you guess, my dear men. Cheerio!'

'What the dickens do you mean?' asked Tom, a little testily. Tom Merry was a direct, straightforward fellow, and he never could quite understand Cardew's airy ways. 'That is,' he added, 'if you mean anything.'

Cardew laughed, and without replying, crossed the tow-path, towards a belt of high thick hawthorns that hid the fence of the Green Man garden. Tom Merry pushed the boat off from the bank.

'Silly ass!' he remarked. 'Cardew's always talking some rot or other. What an ass the fellow is! He's a good cricketer when he likes — he could bowl as well as Fatty Wynn of the New House, if he would take the trouble — but he would rather loaf about and play the giddy ox.'

'Better for him if he did stick to cricket,' said Monty Lowther. 'Railton's had an eye on him this term, and some of the pre's. One of these days they'll spot him backing his fancy, and he will go up to the Head.'

Manners gave a grunt. His eyes were on the slim, graceful figure of the junior on the bank. Cardew was pushing into the hawthorns by the fence.

'That's why he wanted a lift in our boat, Tom,' said Manners. 'Look at him — you can see where he's going.'

Tom Merry looked round.

'Oh!' he exclaimed.

His cheeks coloured with vexation. He knew now why the scapegrace of the School House had wanted a lift in the boat down the river.

Manners gave another grunt.

'Pretty deep of him,' he said, acidly. 'If any of the pre's noticed him going out with us in a boat, they wouldn't be likely to guess his destination. He's done with us now — we've served his turn.'

'So that's what he meant,' said Tom, slowly.

'Just that!' said Manners.

Tom bit his lip.

'If that's it, I've a jolly good mind to go after him, and lug him back by his back hair!' he growled. 'Using us as

a screen — because the prefects are suspicious of him!
I —'

'Oh, my hat!' ejaculated Monty Lowther, suddenly.

'What —'

'There's Railton!'

'Phew!'

From the boat, out in the river, the three stared. A rather tall and athletic figure had come in sight, on the tow-path, from the direction of Rylcombe. It was Victor Railton, house-master of the School House at St. Jim's. Possibly Cardew had known that Railton was in Rylcombe that afternoon, and that was why he had preferred the back entrance to the Green Man. If so, evidently he had not foreseen that the house-master might walk back to the school by way of the tow-path.

'By gum!' breathed Manners. 'He's seen him!'

Cardew's cap — unmistakably a St. Jim's cap, with its red stripe — was visible among the hawthorns. And the Shell fellows saw Railton give a start as his eyes fell on it.

The house-master was coming along at a swinging pace. But he stopped, and stood staring at that cap, his back to the river.

Tom Merry gave a low whistle.

'Copped!' he breathed.

They watched Mr. Railton. His halt had been only for a moment: now he was striding towards the hawthorns. The cap disappeared: but he had certainly seen it. Cardew, without a suspicion of his danger, had reached the fence beyond the hawthorns, and in another moment or two,

he would have been climbing over. But at that moment a deep voice behind him called halt.

'Cardew!'

'Oh!' gasped Cardew.

His hand fell away from the fence, as if the palings had suddenly become red-hot. He spun round, and stared at his house-master. With all his nerve, all his careless self-assurance, the scapegrace of St. Jim's stood fairly overwhelmed with dismay.

'Cardew!' repeated Mr. Railton.

'Oh! Yes, sir!' gasped Cardew.

'What are you doing here?'

'I — I — I' Cardew could only stammer.

'Come back to the tow-path.'

Railton stepped back from the hawthorn bush to the open path by the river, and Cardew followed him. Cardew's face was a little pale. He had been caught in the very act of breaking bounds, and in a severely forbidden quarter: Railton could not have come along at an unluckier moment for the scapegrace. He had done the same thing a dozen times before, and had been lucky: but on this occasion his luck had let him down, with a jolt. What was to follow, he hardly knew.

On the tow-path, the two were in full sight of the Shell fellows in the boat again. Tom Merry and Lowther rested on their oars, and they looked on, rather anxiously, wondering how it would end. They had no sympathy whatever with Cardew in his wild ways: but they could not help feeling a little concerned for him now.

Railton did not glance towards the boat. His eyes were fixed on Cardew's face, pale and red by turns.

'I have asked you, Cardew, what you were doing there?' said the house-master, in a very deep voice.

'Nothing, sir!' Cardew was recovering a little.

'You were about to climb the Green Man fence?'

'Only to sit on it, sir.'

'What?'

That reply seemed unexpected by Victor Railton. He stared at Cardew, and the Shell fellows in the boat stared too. The words came plainly to their ears across the water, and they could only wonder at Cardew's nerve.

'What?' repeated Mr. Railton.

'Just to sit on the fence, sir, and look at the river,' said Cardew. He was quite cool now. Probably he did not expect to be believed. But he made the answer with cool assurance.

'Cardew!'

'Lovely view of the Ryll from here, sir!' said Cardew. 'From the top of that fence, one can see Rylcombe Bridge in one direction, and the school in the other, and the woods for miles across the river, almost as far as Wayland. It's as good a view as any in Sussex, sir.'

The Terrible Three, in the boat exchanged glances. Manners gave a shrug, and Monty Lowther grinned. Tom Merry compressed his lips. Not to save himself from a 'six', not to save himself from a dozen 'sixes' one after another, would he or could he have lied. But Tom's ways and Cardew's ways were far asunder.

Mr. Railton stood silent for a moment or two. It was as if Cardew had taken his breath away. He spoke at last.

‘You do not expect me to believe you, Cardew.’

‘Oh sir! I hope so!’ murmured Cardew.

‘Go back to the school now!’ said the house-master.

‘I shall consider how to deal with you, Cardew. Go!’

‘Very well, sir!’ said Cardew, meekly.

He walked up the tow-path, in the direction from which the boat had come. Mr. Railton followed, more slowly, with a knitted brow.

‘Well, that’s that!’ said Monty Lowther. ‘Copped at last, my beloved ’earers — but what a nerve to tell Railton that string of crammers. Much better have gone down to the nets with Levison and Clive, what?’

‘Much!’ said Tom. ‘The awful ass — this might mean the sack —’

‘No great loss if it did,’ grunted Manners.

‘Perhaps not — but — oh, the silly ass!’ said Tom. ‘If he chose to stick to cricket, he would be a good man in the junior eleven — I’d be glad to play him when Greyfriars come over. But — he chooses to play the fool instead.’

‘Though you bray a fool in a mortar, yet will not his folly depart from him!’ said Monty Lowther, oracularly. ‘Let’s push on.’

The oars dipped again, and the Shell fellows pushed on down the Ryll — without their passenger now — regretting that they had given Ralph Reckness Cardew a lift in their boat: though probably not so much as Cardew regretted it!

CHAPTER III

GET OUT!

KILDARE of the Sixth, captain of St. Jim's, sat in his study in the School House. He was looking at a paper on his study table, with a thoughtful knitting of the brows. He was, in fact, in a very thoughtful mood: though the paper on which his attention was concentrated was not a Greek or Latin paper. It was a list of names, of New House and School House senior men. It was, in fact, the list of men for the Carcroft match, due the following week: and the St. Jim's captain did not seem wholly satisfied with it. He looked up from the list, as a tap came at his door.

'Come in.'

It was Cutts of the Fifth who entered.

A faint, almost imperceptible, distaste, came into Kildare's face, as he saw who his visitor was. It was involuntary, and was gone in a moment: but Gerald Cutts' eyes were keen and observant, and probably it did not escape him. For a moment Cutts' eyes glinted.

'Oh, you!' said Kildare. 'What is it, Cutts?'

Cutts made a gesture towards the paper on the table.

'That the Carcroft list?' he asked.

'That's it.'

'My name in it, I hope,' said Cutts, with a smile.

'Sorry — no.'

Cutts' smile vanished as if wiped off by a duster.

'That's what I came in to speak about, Kildare,' he said. 'You know I'm keen on playing for School when Carcroft come over.'

'I know! So are most men in the Sixth and Fifth,' answered Kildare, 'but —'

'I can play cricket, I suppose!' snapped Cutts. 'I've played for the first-eleven once or twice. Any special reason for passing me over?'

'Only that there are better men available,' answered Kildare. 'This isn't a House match, Cutts — it's one of our biggest fixtures. Carcroft beat us last time: and we want to beat them this time. I'm going over both Houses with a small comb, to pick out the best men —'

'Of whom I'm not one?' sneered Cutts.

'Exactly.'

'I don't agree,' said Cutts. 'Look here, Kildare, we're not friends, but a cricket captain can't let that stand in the way in picking a team —'

'It wouldn't, with me,' answered Kildare, quietly. 'I've had my eye on you, Cutts, and I know you've been going all out, the last week or two, but —'

'But what?'

'Well, this is rather sudden, isn't it?' said Kildare. 'You've never been keen on the matches, that I've noticed: you've cut games-practice a good many times, on one excuse or another. If you've taken up cricket in earnest,

I'm glad of it — and if you stick to it, you'll get a show later — but —'

'I don't want a show later — I want a show now.'

'Nothing doing.'

'You're short of men,' said Cutts. 'Rushden is in sanny, and won't be out in time for the match — Smith major is crocked — you have to fill both their places. I'm as good a bat as either of them, if you come to that.'

'Possibly,' said Kildare, 'but we're weak in bowlers — we're all right for batting. If you could bowl —'

'I can bowl.'

'Not good enough for Carcroft wickets,' said Kildare. 'The fact is, Cutts, I was going through the list when you came in: and there isn't a man I wouldn't drop, if I could put a good bowler in his place. Rushden and Smith major were our best, and I've lost them. Luckily, we've still got Baker.'

'A New House smudge!' snapped Cutts.

'Houses don't matter, in a School match, as you know as well as I do. I'd play ten men from the New House, if they could put up a better game than School House men.'

'You wouldn't be popular in the House, if you did.'

'That's neither here nor there. Well, if that's all, Cutts —' Kildare turned to his paper again.

'That isn't all,' said Cutts. 'Look here, Kildare, if you're leaving me out because you've been listening to tattle in the day-room —'

Kildare turned his head again, and looked Cutts full in his hard, sullen face.

'I don't listen to tattle,' he said, quietly, 'but one hears a good many things, all the same. Look here, Cutts, what's the use of humbugging? You're not keen on cricket. You're keen on quite different things. Why you're so suddenly set on playing in the match next week, I just don't know. I suppose you've got some reason: but I don't believe you care two hoots whether we beat Carcroft or not — unless you've got a bet on the game. Is that it?'

Kildare's lip curled, as he asked that question.

Cutts coloured a little.

'Nothing of the kind,' he answered. 'I'm keen on the game — as cricket captain, you ought to be glad to see a man keen.'

'So I am,' said Kildare. 'And if it lasts, I'll be gladder. But it's sudden, as I said: and a man can't jump into the first-eleven at the first shot. Keep it up, and you'll get your chance.'

Again he turned his shoulder to Cutts. But the Fifth-form man did not leave the study. If the captain of St. Jim's regarded the interview as over, Cutts did not.

'Look here, Kildare —'

'There's nothing more to be said, Cutts,' answered Kildare, over his shoulder, 'and I've got this to think out —'

'Too busy to give a fellow a minute or two?' sneered Cutts.

Kildare looked round at him impatiently.

'Well, what?' he asked.

'I'd like you to know how matters stand,' said Cutts.

'It's a pretty serious matter for me, Kildare. My uncle, Colonel Cutts, will be coming down to see the Carcroft match — if I play. I don't want to bore you with my family affairs, which wouldn't interest you: but Colonel Cutts is an old sportsman, and he's keen on seeing me the same — I owe him a lot, and I want to please him — and he'd be tremendously bucked to see me playing for School in a big fixture. I'd give a very great deal to let him see me batting for St. Jim's against Carcroft — and I'd play the game of my life, Kildare. You wouldn't be sorry if you played me.'

Cutts spoke very earnestly.

Kildare listened quietly, his eyes keenly on the Fifth-form man's face. He could read eagerness there, but he could not read sincerity. He did not trust Cutts of the Fifth very far.

'Is that all?' he asked.

'What else?' snapped Cutts.

'If that's how it stands, I'm sorry,' said the St. Jim's captain. 'But you've left it rather too late in the day, Cutts. I can't play a man simply because he's got a relation coming to see the game.'

Cutts set his lips.

'You mean that you won't play me at any price?' he asked, savagely.

'Put it like that, if you like.'

'You prefer to pack the team with your own friends,' Cutts' angry temper broke out, as he realised that there was nothing doing. 'Darrell — North — Langton —

Monteith — Baker — Webb — not a man among them a better bat than I am, but you won't play a man you don't like, and you call that cricket.'

Kildare's eyes gleamed, for a moment.

'That will do, Cutts,' he said. 'You'd better go.'

'Not much good coming, was it!' snapped Cutts. 'I might have known that it would go by favouritism, as usual.'

Kildare rose to his feet.

'That's more than enough,' he said. 'Get out of my study.' His manner was quiet, but his look was grim, as he made a step towards the Fifth-former.

Cutts' eyes blazed at him. Cutts was not accustomed to controlling his temper, and it was in his mind to dash his knuckles into the face before him. He clenched his hand.

'Are you going, Cutts?'

'When I choose!'

'You'll go now.'

With that, Kildare dropped a hand on Cutts' shoulder, and twirled him towards the door.

Cutts' clenched hand came up. Kildare, with his left, knocked it aside.

'Better not!' he said, quietly. 'You're asking for the biggest hiding you ever had in your life, Cutts. Better get out.'

'You rotter —!'

'Get out!'

A shove from a powerful arm sent Gerald Cutts tottering doorward. He whirled round, with both fists clenched, his

eyes blazing. But Kildare's cool, steady, contemptuous look daunted him. For a moment he stood, breathing rage: then he tramped savagely out of the study and slammed the door after him. Kildare sat down again, to his cricket list, and forgot his existence.

CHAPTER IV

A PROBLEM

'OH! You're here!'

Levison of the Fourth made that remark, as he came into No. 9 Study with Clive: both of them in flannels, and both looking very cheery and fit. The remark was addressed to a junior in the study armchair, with his legs stretched out, his hands in his pockets, and a frown on his brow.

But as his study-mates came in, the frown vanished, and Cardew gave them a nod and a smile.

'Adsum!' he answered.

'You told us you had to go out of gates, when you wouldn't come down to the nets,' said Clive.

'So I had! Urgent business,' said Cardew, gravely. 'But the urgent business was interrupted by a tactless beak, and I came back. I've been sittin' here ever since.'

'Anything wrong?' asked Levison.

'Oh, lots! To tell the truth — a thing I seldom do! — I was going to see a man about a horse,' said Cardew. 'You fellows wouldn't know anything about Bobstay in the big race next week at Abbotsford —'

'No!' grunted Clive, 'and don't want to know.' He dropped his hat into a corner. 'What about tea!'

‘Tea!’ said Cardew. ‘Talk about Nero fiddling while Rome was burning! Tea — with your pal in a jam!’

‘What’s the trouble, then?’ asked Clive.

‘Cooped?’ asked Levison, quietly.

‘Precisely!’ said Cardew, with a nod. ‘I was just a bit too clever — which has happened before! Knowing that our esteemed and respected house-beak was in Rylcombe this afternoon, I gave Bill Lodgey’s front door a miss in baulk, and went along by way of the river. With what I may call modestly a touch of genius, I got a lift in Tom Merry’s boat down the Ryll — and could the most suspicious prefect, if he noticed me, fancy that I was kicking over the traces, in such respectable and sober-minded company? But —’ Cardew shook his head sadly, ‘some jolly old poet has remarked that the best-laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley. How was I to guess that Railton would walk home by way of the river?’

‘Oh!’ said Clive.

Levison whistled.

‘But he did!’ sighed Cardew, ‘and an erring youth heard his master’s voice behind him, just as he had his hands on the Green Man fence to climb over. *Hinc illae lacrymae.*’

‘Oh, you ass!’ said Clive. ‘We’ve told you often enough that you would be nailed sooner or later. Why can’t you chuck that dingy rot?’

‘Echo answers why!’ said Cardew. ‘Of course, I explained the matter to Railton — told him how the matter stood —’

Clive jumped.

'You told him you were going to the Green Man, to see Bill Lodgey about backing a horse!' he exclaimed.

Cardew chuckled.

'Not exactly,' he answered. 'What I explained was, that I was going to sit on top of that fence, to admire the view on the river. A perfectly innocent occupation for an innocent schoolboy.'

'Did he believe you?' asked Levison, drily.

Cardew shook his head.

'I fear that our house-beak must be a descendant of Doubting Thomas!' he answered. 'He didn't believe a word of it. He sent me in — and every minute now I'm expectin' to be called to his study. I just don't know what the verdict will be. Might be six — might be going up to the Head — might be gates, or Extra School — you never know how the cat will jump, with a beak! So here I am, sittin' on pins as it were, waitin' to be called into the den to hear the lion roar.'

'Well, you've asked for it,' said Clive.

'What a comfort!' said Cardew.

'And you jolly well deserve what you get.'

'More comfort! Job's comforters must have been chaps like you, Clivey. Any more consolatory remarks in stock?'

Clive's reply was a grunt. They were friends, in No. 9 Study, but neither Levison nor Clive ever concealed his opinion of Cardew's shady escapades. There were times when that opinion influenced him: but more often, it seemed only to amuse him.

'And that isn't all!' added Cardew, with a whimsical grimace.

'Well, what's the rest?' asked Levison, restively.

'Bobstay!' said Cardew.

'Oh, don't talk that piffle,' exclaimed Levison. 'If you're going up to the house-beak, you've got enough to think about, without bothering your silly head with that rot.'

'But it isn't rot,' said Cardew. 'It's a serious problem, old thing. The question is, will Bobstay run in the Spangle Stakes next week. Just at the moment, chum, you can get ten to one against him. I believe he's a good horse, and if he is, the odds will shorten before the race — you mayn't be able to get more than two to one by next week — perhaps only evens — perhaps odds on! You see what a problem it is!'

'No, I don't!' grunted Levison.

'Then I'll explain, in words of one syllable, suited to your limited intellect. Just now, Bobstay can be backed ten to one — ante-post betting. If the bookie takes you on, he will have to pay the odds, however much they may change before the day of the race. That means ten quids for a quid, my beloved 'earers! But —' Cardew shook his head, his face grave, as if he were discussing a matter of the most serious import. 'Suppose he's scratched?'

'Oh, rats!'

'If he's scratched before the race,' went on Cardew, imperturbably, 'ante-post stakes are lost! You take your chance on that, see? Backing your gee in good time

means bigger odds: but it also means that if the horse doesn't run after all, you lose your stake.'

'Give us a rest.'

'Starting-price on the day is safer,' continued Cardew, 'but that means shorter odds, as I've said. Ante-post is taking a long chance — but the reward, my young friend, is bigger if it comes off. So the grand question is, will Bobstay run? There are doubts. I was goin' to discuss the probabilities, for and against, with Bill — if Railton hadn't been walking home by the tow-path! But he was — and I never had a word with Bill.'

'All the better,' said Clive.

'Forget the whole thing,' said Levison.

'And that's the sympathy a fellow gets in his own study, when he's in a jam!' sighed Cardew. 'Such is friendship!'

'Fathead!'

'I rather think I shall chance it,' said Cardew meditatively. 'A tenner, if Bobstay runs, does tempt a fellow. He will win if he runs, dear men. But there another difficulty crops up! I shall have to get word with Bill — and it's a bit risky, after Railton copped me at the fence this afternoon, just going in to see Bill. Might be too risky!'

'Much too risky, I should think,' said Clive, staring at him. 'Do you want to be sacked from St. Jim's, you silly ass?'

'Not the least bit in the world,' said Cardew, 'but I do want to touch a tenner on Bobstay! One of you feel like walking down to the Green Man with a note for Bill?'

Neither Levison nor Clive answered that question. But they gave Cardew expressive looks, and he laughed.

'No offers?' he said. 'Such, as I remarked before, is friendship! I wonder —' Cardew broke off, as there was a tap at the study door, and it opened.

An eyeglass gleamed in.

'Is Cardew heah?' asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

'Adsum!'

'Oh, heah you are! Wailton wants you in his study,' said Arthur Augustus. 'He sent me to tell you, Cardew.'

Cardew yawned, and rose from the armchair.

'Down comes the chopper!' he remarked.

'Bai Jove!' Arthur Augustus looked a little concerned. 'I twust that you are not in a wow with Wailton, Cardew.'

'I trust not!' agreed Cardew, 'but I hardly think that he's asking me to tea.'

'I am sowwy,' said Arthur Augustus. 'I do not approve of your ways, Cardew, as you know vevy well: and I have sometimes wegwetted that such a weckless and wathah disweputable person is a welation of mine, but —'

'After all, we're relations,' said Cardew. 'Now I'm in a jam, Gussy, will you do something for me?'

'Certainly,' said Artuhr Augustus, at once. 'What is it?'

'Walk down to the Green Man —'

'What?'

'Ask for Bill Lodgey —'

'Bai Jove!'

'And give him a message from me —'

Arthur Augustus crimsoned. Cardew, certainly, was not

making that request seriously: but he looked quite serious.

'I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort, Cardew!' exclaimed Arthur Augustus, hotly. 'I wegard you as a wank wottah to make such a wequest! And when you go to Wailton's study, I twust that he will give you six of the vewy best, and that it will do you good! Wats!'

With that, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stalked away, leaving Cardew grinning. He lounged to the door.

'I suppose I'd better go,' he remarked.

'It won't make matters any better, to keep Railton waiting,' said Clive.

'Cut off, for goodness' sake,' said Levison.

'You fellows get tea while I'm gone,' said Cardew. He laughed. 'I may have to stand to it, when I come back — Railton's got a hefty arm! What a life!'

He lounged out of No. 9, and strolled away down the passage. His look was, as usual, careless, and faintly supercilious: and fellows he passed could not have read in his face that there was trouble on his mind. But there was: and with all his nerve, it was with considerable trepidation that Ralph Reckness Cardew presented himself in his house-master's study.

A 'HOUSE' RAG

PLOP!

'Oh!'

Plop! Plop!

'What —'

'Who —'

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther jumped at the same moment, almost catching crabs. Manners jumped a moment later.

They had reached Rylcombe Bridge, and the boat was about to pass under that ancient stone structure, when it happened.

Something — they did not for the moment know what — dropped from above — in fact, three 'somethings' dropped. One landed on Tom's head — another on Monty's — and the third just missed Manners, and dropped on the camera on his knees.

The three Shell fellows stared up, in surprise and wrath.

'New House ticks!' exclaimed Monty Lowther.

'Ha, ha, ha!' came from above.

Three juniors of the New House at St. Jim's were sitting in a row on the low stone parapet of the bridge, their legs dangling down. They had, apparently, been

eating oranges, as they sat there, and watching the boat come down the river while they did so. The Terrible Three had not observed them: but Figgins and Co., evidently, had observed the School House fellows. And just as the boat came below, they dropped handfuls of orange-peel on the three heads in the boat.

Tom Merry set his cap straight, and stared up.

'You silly New House asses!' he exclaimed.

'You blithering New House fatheads!' yelled Manners. He clutched at his camera.

'Ha, ha, ha!' came from Figgins and Co. And a chunk of orange-peel from Figgy's hand caught Tom Merry on the nose.

'Go it!' chuckled Kerr.

'Give them the lot!' chortled Fatty Wynn.

The New House trio seemed to have a plentiful supply of orange-peel. Chunks of it whizzed down at the boat. The Shell fellows below dodged the shots as well as they could. They succeeded in dodging Figgins and Kerr. But Fatty Wynn, the champion junior bowler of St. Jim's, had an unerring hand, even with a chunk of orange-peel. He hit the target every time.

'Ow!' gasped Monty Lowther, as a juicy morsel squashed in his ear. 'You fat New House barrel — groogh!'

'Push on!' exclaimed Tom.

There was no defence against the fusillade from above. But the boat glided under the stone arch of the bridge, and late shots dropped into the water.

'Cut across, and give them a few more!' grinned Figgins.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The three New House juniors jumped down from the parapet, and cut across to the other side of the bridge, where they leaned over and watched for the boat to reappear on the lower side. They heard Tom Merry's voice from below, floating out from under the bridge.

'Pull, Monty! Put it on!'

'Ow! My ear's full of orange-juice —'

'Pull, you ass, or they'll get us again.'

The boat shot out from under the bridge. Three pairs of eyes were on it from above immediately it emerged.

'Go it!' chortled Figgins.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

But the Shell fellows, evidently, knew what to expect: the boat shot on like an arrow, and orange-peel dropped into the water astern. Fatty Wynn jumped on the parapet, and took aim with an orange. Tom Merry and Monty Lowther were pulling hard, and Manners shaking his fist back at the three on the bridge. Fatty Wynn was going to get in a last shot before the Shell fellows were out of range.

A fat arm swept through the air, and the orange flew. There was a yell from Monty Lowther, as it tapped, unerringly, on his nose.

The next moment there was a yell of alarm, from Figgins and Kerr.

'Look out, Fatty!'

But it was too late.

Fatty Wynn was a bowler of renown. But the narrow top of a stone parapet was nothing like a bowling-crease. Fatty tipped forward a little in delivering his shot: and a little was enough. Under Figgins' and Kerr's startled eyes, he tipped off, and shot down to the water.

Splash!

'Fatty!' gasped Figgins.

'Oh, crumbs!' gasped Kerr.

They stared down blankly after their fat chum.

Fatty Wynn hit the water like a sack of coke. He came up a dozen yards away, swept down by the swift current. Figgins bawled to the boat:

'Look out! Fatty's in —'

'Look out!' yelled Kerr.

But Tom Merry and Co. were already looking out! They had seen Fatty's plunge from the bridge. A minute ago, and they had been yearning to punch New House Heads. But they forgot all about punching heads now.

'Quick!' panted Tom.

The boat whirled round, and ran down to Fatty Wynn, struggling wildly in rushing water. Manners leaned over and grasped him by the collar. What would have happened to Fatty Wynn, had not the boat been at hand, was an uncomfortable question. But Manners had him safe now.

'Groooogh!' spluttered Fatty, breathlessly. 'Oooooogh!'

'Got him!' said Manners.

'Ooooooooooch!'

'You silly fat ass —'

'Urrrrggh!'

Fatty grabbed at the gunwale, and Manners helped him into the boat. Fatty Wynn sprawled there, in a pool of water, soaked to the skin, spluttering and gurgling. That little jest on the School House fellows had turned out quite uncomfortably for one member of the New House Co.

'Oh, crikey! Urrrggh!' gurgled Fatty. 'I say — atchooh!' I say — aytishooh! Grooooooooooogh!'

Fatty Wynn spluttered, gasped, gurgled, coughed, and sneezed. He gouged water from his eyes and ears and hair.

Tom Merry laughed.

'Feeling damp?' he asked.

'Gurrrggh!'

'Pull for the shore,' grinned Monty Lowther. 'The sooner you get changed better, you fat chump! You're catching a cold.'

Fatty's reply was a gargantuan sneeze! Only too evidently, his sudden plunge into cold water on a hot afternoon had had deleterious effects.

'Atchooh! Aytishooh!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The School House juniors, grinning, pulled to the bank. Figgins and Kerr came running down from the bridge. Tom Merry waved his hand to them.

'Here's your porpoise!' he called out.

Fatty Wynn scrambled out of the boat. He stood dripping, gurgling, and sneezing. Figgins grasped him by one plump arm, Kerr by the other.

'Come on,' said Figgins, 'you've got to get in and change, you ass! Run all the way! Quick!'

'Urrrrrggh!'

'Get a move on,' said Kerr.

'Wurrrrrggh!'

Fatty Wynn squelched away up the tow-path between his two chums. He gurgled and gasped: but they kept him on the run. Tom Merry laughed as he pushed off the boat. But his face became serious as he sat down to his oar again.

'If that fat chump is getting a bad cold —!' he said, slowly.

'No "if" about that!' grinned Monty Lowther.

'Serve him jolly well right!' said Manners. 'Might have damaged my camera, with their silly fag tricks.'

'Um! Yes, but — Fatty's our bowler, when Greyfriars come over to play cricket,' said Tom. 'We don't want our best bowler laid up in sanny. Old Kildare's in a jam for bowlers, in the first-eleven: and we don't want to be in the same boat. Bother the fat ass — what did he want to tumble into the Ryll for?'

And Tom Merry looked very thoughtful, as they continued their spin on the river: though he little dreamed, at that moment, of the strange consequences that were to result from Figgins and Co.'s 'rag' on the bridge over the Ryll.

CHAPTER VI

GATED

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW stood before his house-master: quiet, cool, but with the meekest expression in his face that he could assume.

Mr. Railton was looking very grave: and Cardew well understood that the matter was serious, and that very likely he was in a 'spot'.

He had always been reckless: often a black sheep: and his custom was to regard rules as trifles light as air. There are black sheep in every flock: and Cardew was not the only one at St. Jim's: but he certainly was the most careless and casual in his disregard of authority. Racke and Cooke of the Shell, Gerald Cutts of the Fifth Form, were worse fellows than Cardew at his worst: but they did not run the same risks.

The result was that Cardew had received more attention from his house-master, and the house prefects, and that doubting eyes were upon him. Now, at last, he had been fairly caught: suspicion had become certainty. How his house-master was going to deal with him, he could not tell: but the thought of being sent up to the Head gave him, a sinking inside, though his face did not betray it. He would have preferred, if he had had the choice,

'six' from his house-master's cane, and an end of the affair. But he hardly hoped to get off so easily as that. 'Pub-haunting' was a very serious matter indeed in a house-master's eyes: and the scapegrace had been caught in the very act.

For a long minute, Mr. Railton sat, looking at him across his table, in silence. Cardew waited, with growing uneasiness.

'Cardew!' said Mr. Railton, at last.

'Yes, sir!' murmured Cardew.

'You were about to enter the precincts of the Green Man public-house when I came on you this afternoon.'

'I was climbing the fence, sir!' admitted Cardew.

'With no intention of going inside?'

Cardew was silent for a moment. He was far from scrupulous in dealing with 'beaks': but pride, at least, made him unwilling to tell a direct lie. But he had left himself no other resource.

'None, sir!' he answered: but he could not keep a faint flush out of his cheeks.

Mr. Railton compressed his lips. The contempt in his face caused Cardew's flush to deepen.

'It appears, Cardew, that you have formed undesirable acquaintances outside the school,' said the house-master, obviously dismissing Cardew's reply as an untruth. 'I have had such an impression for some time: now it is placed beyond doubt. I have considered whether to send you to Dr. Holmes —' He paused.

Cardew's heart beat faster.

‘But I have decided to deal with the matter myself, so far,’ went on Mr. Railton. ‘As you cannot be trusted with the freedom enjoyed by the other boys of this House, your freedom will be curtailed. You will be gated for the remainder of the term, Cardew.’

‘Oh!’ breathed Cardew.

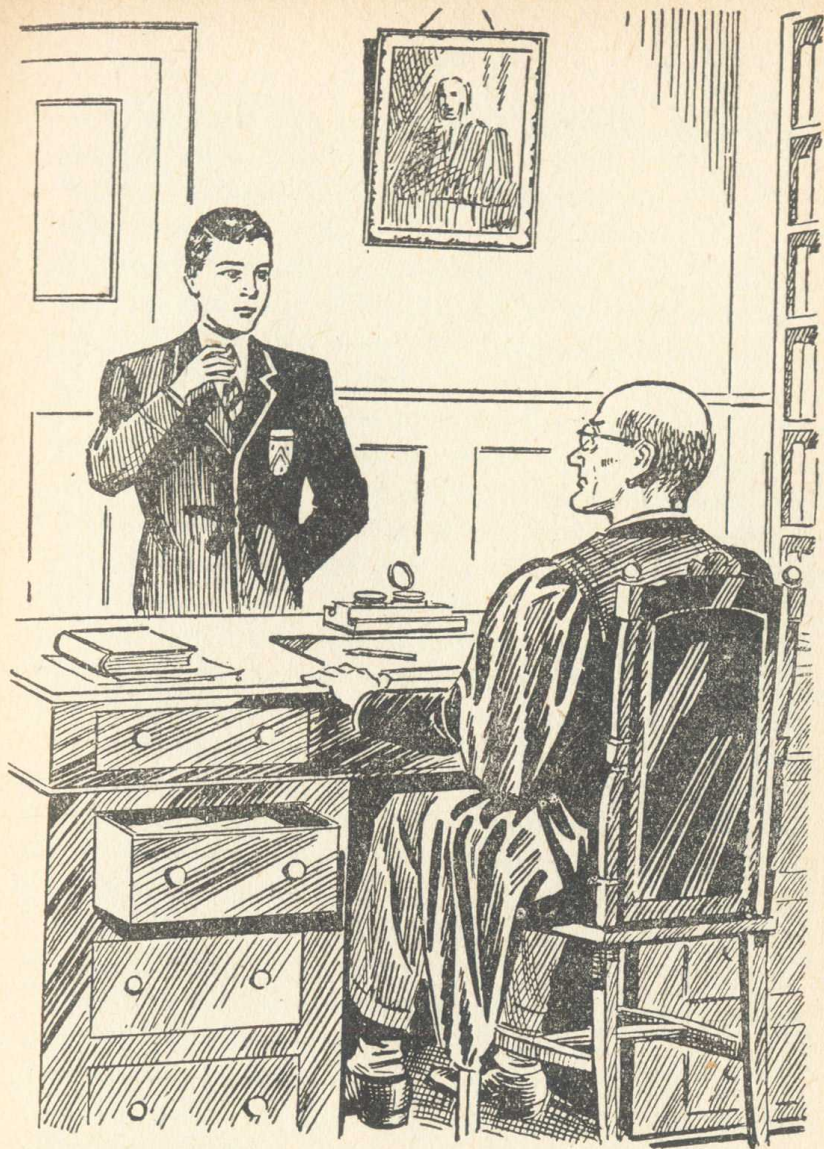
‘From today,’ continued Mr. Railton, sternly, ‘you will remain within gates, Cardew, after classes, and on all half-holidays. I shall speak to the house prefects on the subject. And if —’ Railton’s voice deepened, ‘if you should disregard this, Cardew, and leave the school on a single occasion, on any pretext whatsoever, I shall place the matter in the hands of Dr. Holmes, with a request that you may be sent away.’

Cardew caught his breath.

‘This,’ continued the house-master, ‘will give you an opportunity, Cardew, to reflect — and reform. I advise you to make the most of it. You are, I believe, quite good in class, though you do not always take the trouble to give Mr. Lathom satisfaction. You are certainly good at games, when you choose: and you could distinguish yourself in junior cricket. I advise you to concentrate on these things, Cardew, for your own sake. I shall not fail to keep you under observation, and I shall hope to see that you have taken my advice. If you fail to do so, this school is no place for you, and you will leave it. That is all, Cardew — you may go!’

He made a gesture of dismissal.

‘Thank you, sir!’ said Cardew. ‘I’ll do my best. I —



Cardew waited, with growing uneasiness

I hope, sir, that you may have a better opinion of me before the term ends.'

'I hope so!' said Mr. Railton, drily.

Cardew left the study.

He breathed a little more freely when he was outside. It had not been 'six' after all: and he was not to be sent up to the Head. He had had a narrow escape, and he knew it: but he had escaped.

But his face clouded, as he went down the corridor.

'Gated', for the rest of the term! And Railton meant every word he said: if he disregarded his sentence, and was discovered, he was to go to the head-master — which in all probability meant the 'sack' from St. Jim's. And Railton's eye would be on him: and the eyes of the School House pre's. The scapegrace realised, only too clearly, that he had to walk very warily, if he was not to catch a train home before the end of the summer term.

He went slowly up the staircase. Three Shell fellows, on the study landing, glanced at him rather curiously as he came up. The Terrible Three had come in from the river, and at the sight of Cardew, they remembered the incident on the tow-path.

'Licked?' asked Monty Lowther.

'Sacked?' asked Manners.

Cardew's eyes glinted for a moment. But he smiled as he glanced at the chums of the Shell.

'Not at all,' he drawled.

'Railton hasn't let you off?' asked Tom Merry, staring. Cardew laughed.

‘Not quite!’ he assented. ‘I’ve had a heart-to-heart talk with Railton, and he’s given me some good odvice.’

‘Which you are going to take, of course!’ said Manners, sarcastically.

‘Why not?’ said Cardew. ‘Good advice may be useful, if not palatable. I’m let off with a gating —’

‘That’s getting off cheap,’ said Tom.

‘Well, it’s for the rest of the term, and that’s rather a big order,’ said Cardew. ‘But if I mend my ways, my benevolent house-beak may think again. So I’m going to mend them. They need some mending — at least, my dear relative Gussy has often told me so. What do you fellows think?’

‘I think you’re a silly ass!’ answered Tom Merry.

Cardew laughed again.

‘Right on the wicket!’ he assented, and with that, he lounged into the Fourth-form passage, and lounged along to No. 9.

Tea was ready in that study when he arrived there. Levison and Clive gave him rather anxious looks when he came in. Cardew gave them a cheery nod.

‘No!’ he said, as if answering an unspoken question. He chuckled. ‘Neither licked nor sacked, my dear men. Only gated for the rest of the term.’

‘Thank goodness it’s no worse,’ said Levison.

‘You’ve asked for more than that,’ said Clive.

‘Oh, quite! But —’

‘But what?’

‘It puts a fellow rather in a spot!’ said Cardew, gravely.

'I didn't mention it to Railton, but I'm rather keen about Bobstay in the Spangle Stakes at Abbotsford —'

'Oh, chuck that!' growled Clive.

Cardew sighed.

'Looks as if I shall have to chuck it,' he said. 'Chance of a lifetime, my beloved 'earers — dark horse, absolutely certain to win if he runs — and ten to one to be picked up on him! It's rather a jam! When a fellow's gated, and his house-beak and the pre's watching him like cats, how does he get in touch with his bookie? What?'

Cardew looked at Levison and Clive inquiringly as he asked that question, with an air of gravity, as if discussing the most ordinary matter in the world.

'Fathead!' was Clive's reply.

'Ass!' was Levison's.

And they sat down to tea.

CHAPTER VII

LOOKING AFTER GUSSY

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY breathed hard.

He breathed deep.

There was wrath in his aristocratic brow. His eye gleamed through his eyeglass. It looked like trouble in Study No. 6 in the Fourth.

Blake and Herries and Dig, on the other hand, were grinning. They did not seem to be taking the situation seriously at all. They were grouped between Arthur Augustus and the door.

'Will you allow me to pass?' asked Arthur Augustus, in concentrated tones.

Blake shook his head.

'Not unless you're going to behave!' he answered.

'I am goin' to Cutts' study —'

'Not a bit of it.'

'I am goin' to punch his cheeky nose —'

'Forget it.'

'You know perfectly well, Blake, that he boxed my yahs in bweak this mornin' —'

'You asked him to.'

'I should have punched the wottah then, if that ass Car-dew hadn't got in the way. I am goin' to punch him now.'

'Have a spot of sense, Gussy,' said Herries. 'You can't punch a Fifth-form man! Cutts would strew you in little pieces all over his study.'

'Wats!'

'Twice your size and weight, old chap!' urged Digby.

'That is merely a twifle, Dig. Cutts boxed my yahs, and I am goin' to punch Cutts. The west does not mattah.'

'It does, to us!' said Blake, shaking his head. 'We're not going to have our tame nobleman crocked and wrecked by a hefty Fifth-form man. Look here, Gussy, Cutts is a swanking ass, and a lot too free with his smacks, and if you like, we'll take the matter in hand, and rag the brute —'

'I do not desiah you to take the mattah in hand, Blake! I twust that I am quite capable of dealin' with a wuffian who boxes my yahs. I am goin' to Cutts' study now to punch his cheeky nose —'

'Only over my body!' said Blake, with another shake of the head, 'not to mention Herries' and Dig's bodies!'

Again Arthur Augustus breathed hard and deep.

'I should be sowwy to give you fellows a feahful thwashin' all wound, as you are my friends,' he said. 'But you are askin' for it.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I fail to see any cause for mewwiment in that wemark,' said Arthur Augustus, stiffly. 'I have a vewy gweat mind to thwash you all wound for buttin' in. Howevah, I have no doubt that you mean well, and I will not do so.'

'You won't!' agreed Blake: while Herries and Dig chuckled.

Arthur Augustus sat down in the armchair.

'Vewy well,' he said, with dignity, 'if you persist in buttin' in, I will wait. Pwobably you will get tired of hangin' about in the study.'

'Now, look here, Gussy —'

'Wats!'

'You've got to steer clear of Cutts —'

'I wepeat, wats!'

'Cutts could knock you into a cocked hat with one hand tied!' roared Herries.

'Or both!' said Digby.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy disdained to reply to that. He sat bolt upright in the armchair: a figure of dignified disdain. Apparently he was prepared to sit there and wait, until his loyal chums tired of keeping guard over him for his own good!

Blake and Herries and Dig exchanged glances. Certainly they did not want to remain in the study after tea for an indefinite period. In fact they wanted to get out of doors. But it was clear that if they went, the next item in the programme would be a visit to Cutts' study by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with the inevitable crocking and wrecking of that noble youth to follow.

'Come for a trot in the quad, Gussy,' suggested Blake.

'I wefuse to do anythin' of the kind.'

'What about the nets?' asked Herries.

'Bothah the nets.'

'You want to keep in form for Greyfriars,' said Dig. 'They're coming over the week after next. You don't want Tom Merry to drop you off the team.'

'Tom Merry would hardly be likely to dwop his best bat out of the Gweyfwiahs match, Dig.'

'Will you come down to the nets, fathead?'

'I wefuse to be called a fathead, and I will not come down to the nets, Digby.'

'What about giving the Sixth a look-in?' suggested Blake. 'Kildare's got his men at practice. Let's go and see how they're likely to shape for Carcroft.'

'I am not intewested, Blake.'

There was a pause. Arthur Augustus, evidently, was not to be tempted: he was not going for a trot in the quad: he was not going down to the junior nets: he was not going to watch the first-eleven men at practice. He was going to sit in that armchair till his friends were tired of staying in the study — and then he was going to see Cutts of the Fifth!

'Well, we're not sticking in here,' said Blake, at last. 'I think you'd better come for a walk, Gussy.'

'I wefuse to move, Blake.'

'We're not going to leave you here, to hunt for trouble the minute we're gone!' hooted Herries.

'Wats!'

'Take his other arm, Herries,' said Blake.

'Bai Jove! Welease me!' roared Arthur Augustus, suddenly forgetting aristocratic and dignified calm, as his arms were grasped, and he was hooked out of the armchair.

'Come on!' said Blake.

'I wefuse —'

'This way!' said Herries.

'Will you welease my arms?' gasped Arthur Augustus.

'Help him on from behind, if he won't walk, Dig,' said Blake. 'Never mind if you damage his trousers.'

'Bai Jove! You uttah wuffians —'

'Come on, old chap,' said Blake.

Dig, grinning, threw open the door, and then stepped behind Arthur Augustus. With his arms in the grasp of two of his chums, Arthur Augustus really had to 'come on'. But he came on quite quickly: unwilling to receive assistance from Digby in the rear. The four juniors emerged from Study No. 6 — three of them grinning, the fourth frowning a frightful, fearful, frantic frown worthy of the Lord High Executioner.

In the passage, Arthur Augustus made an attempt to halt.

'Go it, Dig!' said Blake.

Arthur Augustus re-started quite hurriedly.

They marched out of the passage to the study landing. A number of fellows there stared at D'arcy's crimson wrathful countenance.

'What's that game?' asked Talbot of the Shell.

'Taking Gussy for a walk!' explained Blake. 'He wants to slack in the armchair in the study —'

'Nothin' of the kind!' gasped Arthur Augustus, 'and if you wuffians do not immediately welease me —'

'He, he, he!' came from Baggy Trimble, as Arthur

Augustus gave a sudden wrench, and rocked, and Blake and Herries rocked with him. 'I say, there's a pre. in the Fifth-form studies —. Look out if he catches you ragging.'

'Come on Gussy, you ass,' hissed Blake, rather anxiously. Gussy's friends were undoubtedly looking after him for his own good: but they did not want to be caught 'ragging' on the study landing by a Sixth-form prefect.

'I wefuse —'

'Heave ahead!' said Herries.

They heaved ahead, and Arthur Augustus was marched across towards the stairs. But at that moment, two senior men came across from the Fifth-form studies. One was Lefevre of the Fifth: the other was Kildare, captain of St. Jim's. Both of them stared at Blake and Co. and Kildare frowned.

'Stop that ragging!' he rapped.

It had to stop! Kildare was not only captain of St. Jim's: he was Head-Prefect of House and School. His word was law. Blake and Herries released Arthur Augustus's arms, and Dig, whose foot was lifted to give first-aid, dropped it without contacting the most elegant trousers in the School House. Arthur Augustus stood free, panting for breath.

But he stood and panted for only one moment. This was his chance — and Arthur Augustus did not lose it. He almost shot away towards the Fifth-form studies.

Blake made a step in pursuit. Again Kildare rapped:

'Did you hear me, Blake?'

'Oh! Yes,' stammered Blake, 'but — I — I —'

'You — you see —' stammered Herries.

'We — we —' mumbled Dig.

'That will do! Clear!'

There was nothing for Blake and Co. to do but to clear. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had to be left to his own devices. And his anxious friends could only hope that he would not reappear in too utterly and entirely crooked and wrecked a state after his interview with Cutts of the Fifth.

CHAPTER VIII

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS ASKS FOR IT

'THE rotter!' muttered Gerald Cutts.

St. Leger smiled.

They were in their study, in the Fifth. St. Leger was lounging idly in the window-seat. Cutts was sitting on the edge of the study table, his hands driven deep into his trousers' pockets, his brows contracted in a black and bitter scowl.

Cutts, evidently, was in the worst of tempers. St. Leger was mildly amused.

'The rotter!' repeated Cutts. 'I'd like to see Carcroft walk over his crew next week.'

'Better not say so outside this study,' drawled St. Leger. 'It wouldn't make you popular in the House, Gerald.'

'It means a lot to me,' muttered Cutts. 'He's lost two men, and he could have given me a chance. But he chooses to pick out only his own friends.'

'I wouldn't say that either, outside the study!'

'It's true!' snarled Cutts.

'Rot!' said St. Leger. 'Kildare would play any man who could help to beat Carcroft, if he couldn't stand him personally. You won't get anywhere by talking rot like that, old boy.'

'I'm as good a bat as any man in the team.'

St. Leger made no answer to that, save by a slight shrug of the shoulders. Cutts gave him a dark look.

'You don't think so?' he snarled.

'Do you?' smiled St. Leger. 'Anyhow, Kildare isn't short of batsmen. He's in a jam for bowlers — the team's never been so weak in that line. Two of them on the crooked list — only that New House man Baker much good — if you could bowl, old man —'

'Can't I bowl?' snapped Cutts.

'Oh, yes! But —!' St. Leger left it at that.

'I tell you it means a lot to me,' said Cutts, biting his lip. 'I told Kildare my uncle was coming specially to see the match if I play — but that didn't make any difference.'

'Well, how could it?' said St. Leger. He laughed. 'You didn't mention that you expect nunky to exude a handsome tip on the occasion, what?'

Cutts scowled savagely.

'Come clean, old boy,' grinned St. Leger. 'If the old Colonel finds you playing for School, it may be as good as a fiver — isn't that it?'

'A tenner, more likely,' said Cutts. 'He played for School when he was here, donkey's years ago: and if I get him in a good temper, it might run to a tenner. And you know how I'm fixed for cash now.'

'Oh! Those certs!' sighed St. Leger. 'Those certain winners — how they run away with a fellow's spare cash.'

'And I'm left out — for no reason except that Kildare doesn't like me —'

'And you're such a likeable chap!'

'Oh, shut up!' snarled Cutts.

'Bite on the bullet, old boy,' drawled St. Leger. 'You've no more chance of playing for St. Jim's than I have, if I wanted to. Dash it all, you've only turned up for games practice since you had that letter from your uncle, a week or two ago: and between ourselves, old boy, you don't care a threepenny-bit about the Carcroft match, or playing for School. Do you?'

Cutts answered that only with a scowl.

'I hope they'll get licked, at any rate!' he muttered.

'Keep it dark, if you do.'

Cutts left his seat on the table-edge, and moved about the study, scowling: St. Leger watching him with a lazy grin, Cutts scowling in return.

'I can bowl,' he muttered, 'and there's lots of time for practice before Wednesday next week. If that New House tick Baker got crocked —'

St. Leger laughed.

'I can see him getting crocked, to please you!' he said. 'Don't be an ass, old boy. That won't happen.'

'Lots of things might happen in a week.'

St. Leger sat up, in the window-seat, and gave Gerald Cutts a very sharp and penetrating look.

'What have you got in your mind now, Gerald?' he asked, very quietly.

Cutts did not answer that. He moved restlessly about the study, the scowl on his face deepening and darkening. If Gerald Cutts was not, in point of fact, keen on cricket,

he was at least very keen indeed on making a good impression on that old sportsman, Colonel Cutts: with the certain outcome of a fiver, and the possibility of a tenner, as a result. Cutts was going to push into the first-eleven on Carcroft day if he could: and he had little scruple, if any, about his methods.

'Look here, Cutts —' said St. Leger uneasily.

'Oh, dry up,' said Cutts.

St. Leger shrugged his shoulders, stretched himself lazily in the window-seat, and said no more. Cutts continued to pace the study, with a blacker and blacker brow.

He did not heed, if he heard, a sound of hurried footsteps in the passage outside. But he heeded, when the study door was suddenly flung wide open, with a crash.

St. Leger started, and sat up. Cutts stared round towards the door, with an angry glare, at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form.

Why D'Arcy of the Fourth had come to his study at all, why he had ventured to hurl open the door so unceremoniously, Cutts did not know. He had forgotten, or almost forgotten, the incident of the morning. Certainly he could not have surmised that a Fourth-form junior was planning to punch his Fifth-form nose.

But though he did not surmise, guess, or dream, anything of the kind, he was enlightened the next moment, much to his rage and amazement: for Arthur Augustus, after hurling open the door, rushed after it into the study — rushed at the staring, scowling Cutts, and punched.

It happened so suddenly, and so utterly unexpectedly, that Gerald Cutts had no chance of guarding that jolt. That punch landed hard on Cutts' rather prominent nose, with all the beef that an elegant arm could put into it, and there was a spurt of claret.

Cutts staggered.

'Oh, great gad!' gasped St. Leger, staring like a fellow in a dream.

Arthur Augustus panted.

'There, you wottah! That will teach you to box a fellow's yahs — I mean not to box a fellow's yahs —'

Arthur Augustus got no further than that.

Cutts, his nose trickling red, and with the rage almost of a demon in his face, leaped at him like a tiger.

If D'Arcy of the Fourth had entertained any delusion that he could stand up to Cutts of the Fifth in combat, he had to forget it on the spot. Cutts' grasp fell on him, and he whirled in it.

'Oh, cwikey!' gasped Arthur Augustus.

He hardly knew what happened next. Cutts, that morning, had smacked his head: a single smack. Now he smacked it harder, again and again, Arthur Augustus struggling and wriggling and wrenching in vain in his powerful grip. Smack! smack! smack! smack! smack!

'Yawwooh! Let go! Oh, cwikey! Ow! wow!' yelled Arthur Augustus.

Smack! smack! smack! smack!

'Hold on, old man,' gasped St. Leger. 'there's a limit. You don't want to make the kid a hospital case.'

'Did you see what he did?' yelled Cutts.

'Yes: but —'

Smack! smack! smack! smack!

Arthur Augustus, dazed and dizzy, sagged like a sack in Cutts' hefty grasp. He was not very clear whether he was on his head or his heels.

Cutts, tired of smacking, flung him headlong over, and the swell of St. Jim's sprawled on the floor. But Cutts was not finished yet. Cutts was a good deal of a bully: and he was already in the worst of tempers, before Arthur Augustus's fist contacted his nose. That punch had put the lid on. As the hapless junior sprawled, Cutts grabbed up a fives bat, and bent over him. His left hand, gripping Gussy's neck, pinned him down. His right rose and fell with the fives bat in it.

Whop! whop! whop! whop! whop!

'Yawwooh! Oh, cwikey! Wow! wow! wow!' Perhaps Arthur Augustus realised, then, that his chums had acted wisely in seeking to steer him clear of Gerald Cutts. But that knowledge came too late.

Whop! whop! whop!

'Stop it, Gerald!' exclaimed St. Leger.

Whop! whop! whop!

St. Leger jumped up from the window-seat, and grasped Cutts' arm. He dragged it back forcibly.

'Stop it, you fool!' he snapped.

Cutts glared at him.

'Let go my arm!' he snarled.

'Do you want this to come before the House beak?'

snapped St. Leger. 'You've done enough — more than enough. Don't be such a bully.'

'Ooooooh!' mumbled Arthur Augustus. He sat up, dizzily, as St. Leger dragged Cutts back from him. 'Wooooooogh!'

St. Leger snatched the fives bat from Cutts' hand, and pitched it into a corner of the study. Cutts gave him a furious look: but perhaps he realised that he had gone far enough, if not a little too far.

'Now let the young ass go,' said St. Leger. 'Get up, D'Arcy.'

'Oooooooooogh!'

'Cut, you young ass!'

'Oh, cwiskey! Ow!'

Arthur Augustus tottered to his feet. His face was crimson, his hair a mop, his clothes rumpled. As Blake had predicted, he was crocked and wrecked. He swayed and caught at the table for support.

'Oh, cwumbs!' he gasped.

'Get out!' snarled Cutts.

'You wuffianly wottah —'

'Get out — and take that with you.' Cutts caught up the inkpot from the table, and with a jerk of his arm, splashed the contents over the swell of the Fourth.

'Gwoooooogh!' gasped Arthur Augustus.

He tottered, streaming with ink. Ink streaked his face, mixed with his hair, and ran down his neck. St. Leger grinned, and Cutts burst into a harsh laugh.

'Now if you don't get out —!' he said.

Arthur Augustus got out. Even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's aristocratic intellect realised that there was nothing else to do, and that if there were further happenings in Cutts' study, he would be at the receiving end. He tottered out of the study and Cutts kicked the door shut after him.

CARDEW THE CRICKETER

'OH!' ejaculated Tom Merry.

He stared down at his wicket.

'Well bowled, Cardew!'

'Bai Jove!'

Cardew smiled.

He was amused by the expression on Tom Merry's face. Tom was easily the best junior bat at St. Jim's. Even Talbot of the Shell, or Figgins of the New House, did not quite equal him with the willow. Even Fatty Wynn, who had a magic hand with the round red ball, found Tom Merry too hard a nut to crack. It was a surprise to all the onlookers when his wicket went down to Cardew's bowling.

But if the fall of his sticks surprised Tom Merry, and perhaps did not gratify him very much, he was not displeased. With Fatty Wynn laid up in 'sanny', possibly not to emerge before the next fixture, he was glad to see a junior bowler who had apparently acquired all Fatty's skill, and a little over.

He glanced along at Cardew's smiling face.

'Good man!' he called out. 'Try that again.'

'Pleased!' drawled Cardew.

Blake fielded the ball, and tossed it back to Cardew. Perhaps Blake intended to give Cardew a difficult catch: at all events, it was not an easy one. But Cardew, with a graceful movement, caught the ball in his left hand, without an effort.

It was only games-practice, and the fall of a wicket did not matter. But it was surprising, and interesting to the School House fellows, to see Cardew shaping like this. As it was not a compulsory day, many were surprised to see him there at all. It was true that Cardew, who never seemed to like anything for long, sometimes took up games with a temporary zest: but generally he was regarded as a slacker. He had, indeed, been 'whopped' by the captain of the school for slacking at games, on more than one occasion.

But there seemed nothing slack about him now.

It was several days since his interview with Mr. Railton in the house-master's study. That interview had not failed to impress Cardew's mind, volatile as it was. He knew that he was on thin ice, and that it behoved him to walk warily.

It was a surprise, and an agreeable one, to Levison and Clive, to find that their unpredictable chum had suddenly become very keen on cricket. For several days now, Cardew had been, or had at least seemed to be, as keen as Tom Merry himself on the summer game. 'Undesirable acquaintances' outside the school seemed to have faded from his mind. If he was still thinking about Bobstay for the Spangle Stakes, he said nothing about it. How long

it would last, his friends doubted: but at least they were glad to see the change. No doubt Railton noted it also: Cardew, certainly, hoped that he did. Very much indeed he wanted Railton to forget doubts and suspicions.

But it was not wholly on that account that Cardew was now throwing himself into the game. He was a good cricketer when he chose: and now he chose. It served his turn with Railton: but it also afforded him satisfaction to do what other fellows could not do: he loved the limelight. He could have been as valuable a bowler as Fatty Wynn of the New House, as Tom Merry had remarked, if he would have taken the trouble. Now it happened to please him to take the trouble. Of late, not a fellow at St. Jim's had been more assiduous at games practice.

'Bai Jove, you know, Cardew's comin' on,' remarked Arthur Augustus, as Cardew prepared to deliver the ball again. 'He weally is a bowlah!'

'Flash in the pan,' grunted Herries.

'Yaas, pewwaps: but if he keeps up this form, he will be a wod in pickle for Wharton's cwozd when they come ovah fwom Gweyfwiahs,' said Arthur Augustus, sapiently. 'I wondah whethah he could take my wicket!'

'He's taken Tom's!' said Digby.

'That is neithah heah nor there, Dig. I wathah think that I should put paid to his bowlin',' said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head.

'There he goes!' said Blake.

Tom Merry stopped the ball dead. A slight shade

crossed Cardew's face for a moment. He would dearly have liked to knock out the junior captain twice running. But if he was a good man with the leather, Tom was undoubtedly a good man with willow.

Twice again Cardew bowled, and Tom knocked away the ball. But the next was a surprise. The ball flew from the bat: and Cardew gave a sudden leap, and held up the ball.

'Bai Jove! Caught and bowled Cardew!' exclaimed Arthur Augustus. 'Good man!'

'Good man!' chuckled Levison and Clive together.

Tom Merry came off the pitch. Cardew gave him a curious look. He did not expect Tom to be pleased: certainly he would not have been pleased himself in the same circumstances. But Tom gave him a cordial smack on the shoulder.

'Jolly good,' he said. 'Keep that up, Cardew, and you'll make the Greyfriars men sit up and take notice when they come over. If old Fatty isn't able to play, we shan't miss him so much after all.'

'Thanks,' drawled Cardew.

'Pway give me a few, Cardew,' said Arthur Augustus.

'Pleased!' yawned Cardew.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy went to the wicket. He took his stand very warily. after what he had seen, and he was very watchful indeed. But it booted not, for the first ball from Cardew lifted his bails.

'Bai Jove!' ejaculated Arthur Augustus, in surprise.

'Ha, ha, ha!' came from a dozen fellows.

'Twy that again, deah boy.'

'Any old thing,' drawled Cardew.

He tried 'that' again, with the same result. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy really was a good bat: but there was little doubt that Cardew, in his present form, was better with the ball. More fellows gathered round to watch, among them some seniors coming away from games-practice on the senior nets: Kildare, Darrell, and Langton, of the Sixth, and Cutts, St. Leger, and Lefevre of the Fifth. Kildare stopped to look on: and the other seniors stopped with him.

Arthur Augustus came away from the wicket with rather pink cheeks. His intention to 'put paid' to Cardew's bowling had worked in reverse!

'That kid can bowl, and no mistake,' Kildare remarked. His eyes were curiously on Cardew. As a prefect, he had doubts about him: and he was prepared to 'run him in' ruthlessly if he caught him transgressing Railton's order of 'gates'. But he had to admire good cricket. His remark drew a sneering rejoinder from Cutts of the Fifth.

'You mean that the other kid can't bat,' said Cutts. He gave Arthur Augustus an inimical glance as he spoke. Cutts had not forgotten that punch on the nose, in his study a few days ago, amply as he had avenged it.

Arthur Augustus's eyes gleamed. If Cutts had not forgotten the punch on the nose, still less had Gussy forgotten what had followed. He was not taking that jeer from Cutts without reply.

He made a step towards the group of seniors.

'Gussy, old man —' murmured Tom Merry.

Gussy did not heed. His eye and his eyeglass gleamed at Gerald Cutts, who stared at him contemptuously.

'Wats to you, Cutts!' said Arthur Augustus, very distinctly.

Cutts started. He had not expected that.

'What?' he exclaimed.

'I said wats, and I wepeat, wats!' said Arthur Augustus, firmly. 'I fweely admit that the bowlin' was too good for me, Cardew bein' in such wemarkable form, but your wemark that I cannot bat shows that you know nothin' whatevah about it, Cutts. You are no cwicketah.'

Cutts flushed with anger, as some of the juniors laughed, and some of the seniors grinned.

'That will do, D'Arcy,' said Kildare, half-laughing.

'Vewy well, Kildare,' said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. 'But I would weally like to see Cutts twyin' to stop Cardew's bowlin'. Let him twy it on, and then pewwaps he will keep his wude wemarks to himself.'

Cardew grinned. At the top of his form, and feeling in a mood to take Test wickets, he would have been glad to show that he could handle senior cricketers. He had no doubt whatever that he could deal with Gerald Cutts.

'Like me to send you down a few, Cutts?' he asked.

Cutts scowled at him.

'Don't be a cheeky young fool!' he snapped.

'Why not?' said Kildare. 'Let the kid show what he can do, Cutts.'

Cutts gave a contemptuous laugh.

'Okay, if you like,' he answered. He had his bat under his arm, and he walked to the wicket, slipping it down into his hands.

It did not enter Cutts' mind for a moment that a Fourth-form bowler could knock him out at the wicket. He had much too good an opinion of himself for that. All the same, he knew good bowling when he saw it, and he was on his guard for the ball when it came. With a lingering hope of wedging into the Carcroft match, he did not want to run risks of being bowled out by a junior under the eyes of the St. Jim's captain.

But that ball came down with a twist on it quite unexpected by Gerald Cutts. Cardew, keen on the limelight, put in all he knew: and it was a little too good for Cutts. The sweeping willow did not touch the ball — and Cutts gave quite a jump, as the middle stump was whipped out of the ground. He stared at a wrecked wicket in surprise and rage.

'How's that?' yelled a dozen juniors.

Cardew winked at Levison and Clive, who laughed. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy chuckled. Cutts' face was crimson.

'By gum!' said Kildare, and he repeated his former remark, 'that kid can bowl, and no mistake.'

'Try again, Cutts?' asked Tom Merry, smiling.

Cutts did not answer. He almost stamped off the pitch: with a look at Cardew which revealed that he would have been glad to lay his cricket bat about him.

'Dear man!' murmured Cardew, as Cutts stalked away, and the other seniors followed. 'Does he look ratty?'

'Vewy watty!' chuckled Arthur Augustus.

'And then some!' grinned Blake.

'Anybody else like a few?' drawled Cardew.

Quite a lot of other fellows wanted a 'few': and few of them had much luck at the wicket. Cardew seemed tireless: the one-time slacker seemed to have developed tremendous energy, as well as almost uncanny skill. When they left the nets, Levison and Clive walked Cardew off, for once quite proud of their chum. Cardew the cricketer was, in their estimation, a considerable improvement on Cardew the sportsman, the scapegrace, and the backer of 'geegees': though they wondered how long it would last.

CHAPTER X

INKY

TOM MERRY stared.

He was surprised.

He was looking into Study No. 6, in the Fourth. Blake and Herries and Digby were out: but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was in the study. And his occupation was enough to make any fellow stare.

On the study table stood a jug. It was surrounded by a number of bottles of ink, and several bottles of gum. Apparently Arthur Augustus had been collecting ink and gum from various quarters. Now he was engaged in pouring the contents of the bottles, one after another, into the jug. Tom Merry blinked at that surprising sight.

'What on earth's that for, Gussy?' he asked.

Arthur Augustus glanced round.

'Cutts!' he answered, briefly.

'Cutts of the Fifth?' repeated Tom Merry. 'What the dickens —'

'Not a word about it, of course,' said Arthur Augustus. 'I do not want the wottah to heah anything, and be put on his guard.'

'But what —'

'Cutts smothahed me with ink, in his study,' said Arthur

Augustus, a thrill of wrath and indignation in his voice. 'You are awah, Tom Mewwy, that the cheeky wat boxed my yahs the othah day, and that I went to his study to punch his nose — Bai Jove, what are you laughin' at, Tom Mewwy?'

Tom chuckled. Many eyes had fallen on Arthur Augustus in his inky state after his call on Cutts of the Fifth. Onlookers had found it amusing. Gussy, like the old Queen, was not amused!

'If you wegard it as funny for a fellow to be smothahed with ink, and his clothes pwactically wuined —' exclaimed Arthur Augustus, hotly.

'Oh! Not at all, old chap!' gasped Tom. 'But —'

'I was vewy wuffly handled in Cutts' study,' said Arthur Augustus. 'The fact is, Tom Mewwy, that I cannot handle a Fifth-form man. Cutts is vewy much too big for me. He smacked my head wight and left, and walloped me with a fives bat: and weally I had a vewy wuff time, and it would have been much worse if St. Leger hadn't butted in and stopped him. St. Leger is not a bad chap, though I cannot appwove of his choice of fwriends. But Cutts —!' Arthur Augustus's brows knitted. 'Cutts is a wuffian and a wottah and a wat! He tipped his inkpot ovah me — I was in a fwightful state —'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Weally, Tom Mewwy —'

'So that lot's for Cutts?' said Tom. 'But, my dear chap, you can't ladle ink over Cutts of the Fifth. He would skin and scalp you bald-headed.'

Arthur Augustus smiled.

'I am goin' to use stwategy,' he explained. 'I am not goin' to walk up to Cutts and tip this jug ovah him. I am goin' to take it up to the dormitowy and have it weady for tonight —'

'Tonight?' said Tom, puzzled. 'Cutts will be in bed tonight, like everybody else.'

'Pwecisely. And I shall go along to the Fifth-form dorm, and tip this jug ovah his head in bed!'

'Oh, crumbs!'

'As he is too big for me to tackle personally, and as I am quite wesolved to let him have his ink back, that is the only wesource,' further explained Arthur Augustus. He smiled darkly. 'Pewwaps the cheeky wottah will be sowwy for himself, when he wakes up with this jug of ink stweamin' ovah his face? What?'

'But —!' gasped Tom.

'That is what I am goin' to do,' said Arthur Augustus. 'I am gettin' all the ink I can, and puttin' in some gum — pewwaps Cutts will like the gum as much as the ink. Ha, ha!'

'But —!' repeated Tom.

'If you have any ink to spare in your study, Tom Mewwy, you might twot it along. I want the jug to be full.'

'But, for goodness sake!' exclaimed Tom. 'There'll be a fearful row if a fellow goes ragging in a senior dormitory, Gussy.'

'Pwobably!' assented Arthur Augustus. 'But nobody will see who it was, in the dark, and if the beaks come

up, they won't know a thing. I am goin' to be vewy cautious, Tom Mewwy.'

'Railton may hear the row and come up —' urged Tom Merry. 'Lathom or Linton may butt in. Better wash it out, Gussy.'

'Wats!'

Arthur Augustus, evidently, was determined, and deaf to argument. He poured the last of the bottles into the jug, filling it almost to the brim. Then he picked up the jug from the table. At that moment, there was a tramp of feet in the passage, and Blake, Herries, and Dig came into the study.

'Tea ready, Gussy?' asked Blake, as he tramped in.

'Weally, Blake —'

'Well, you might have got it going, fathead,' said Blake. Then he stared at the jug. 'What's that game?'

'I have told you what I am goin' to do to Cutts, Blake, aftah lights out tonight,' answered Arthur Augustus.

Snort, from Blake.

And I've told you to forget it,' he said.

'Wubbish.'

'Better forget it, Gussy, old man,' said Tom Merry, persuasively. 'If the Fifth-form men catch you in their dorm after lights out, they'll massacre you.'

'They will not catch me, Tom Mewwy.'

'You'd drop that jug before you were half-way to Cutts' dorm,' said Herries.

'Weally, Hewwies —'

'Or walk into a door and smash it!' said Digby.

'Weally, Dig —'

'You know what a howling ass you are, Gussy!' said Blake, in argumentative tones. 'You know that as well as we do!'

'Weally, Blake —'

'Chuck it away, and forget all about it,' said Blake. 'Now let's have tea — can't you see we've got a guest here? Manners and Lowther coming, Tom?'

'Yes, they'll be along in a minute or two,' answered Tom Merry. 'Chuck that muck away, Gussy, old chap —'

'Weally, Tom Mewwy —'

Arthur Augustus did not 'chuck' the 'muck' away. Holding the almost brimming jug carefully in his hand, he moved towards the open doorway. That jug had to be conveyed to the Fourth-form dormitory, to be hidden there in readiness for the night's adventure: when, according to plan at least, it was to be emptied over the offending head of Gerald Cutts in the Fifth-form dormitory.

Blake and Herries and Digby gave him exasperated looks.

That Cutts of the Fifth deserved a jug of ink over his head, they did not dispute. They would have been quite pleased and amused to see him receive the same. But they did not believe for one moment that Arthur Augustus would get through such an enterprise without mishap. That Arthur Augustus would make some blunder in the dark, if he wandered out of the dormitory with a jug of ink after lights out, they had not the slightest doubt. And

if a beak or a prefect caught him out of his dormitory, as was only too probable, the result was likely to be very painful for the swell of St. Jim's. It was, in fact, time for Gussy's friends to rally round once more, and save him from himself, as it were.

'Stop!' rapped Blake.

'Wats!' said Arthur Augustus, over his shoulder.

'Hold on, Gussy —' urged Tom.

'I wepeat, wats!'

'You're not taking that jug out of this study!' roared Blake.

'I am goin' to take it up to the dorm, Blake, and hide it undah my bed weady for tonight. Pway say no more.'

Blake said no more: but he stepped after his aristocratic chum, and grasped him by the arm. Arthur Augustus had to halt.

'Bai Jove! Will you welease my arm, Blake?' he exclaimed.

'Put down that jug!'

'I wefuse to do anythin' of the kind.'

'Put it down, fathead.'

'I wefuse to be called a fathead, and I uttably wefuse to put down this jug. Welease my arm at once.'

Arthur Augustus jerked at his imprisoned arm. The jug wobbled, and a wave of its inky contents flowed over the brim. There was a yell from Blake, as that wave dashed over the knees of his trousers.

'Oh! Oh, crumbs! You silly ass, look what you've done!' he yelled.

'Your own fault entirely, Blake.'

'You — you — you —' gasped Blake, gazing down at trousers streaming with gummy ink. 'You — you — you dangerous lunatic — you — you —'

'Wats!'

Blake grabbed up a duster, and mopped at inky trousers. Arthur Augustus once more headed doorward, jug in hand.

'Collar him,' howled Blake. 'Tip the jug over his silly head.'

Herries and Dig made a jump to collar Arthur Augustus in the doorway. Arthur Augustus made a jump through the doorway into the passage.

Crash!

Manners and Lowther were due for tea in Study No. 6. Tom Merry had arrived first, but, as he had said, Manners and Lowther were coming along in a minute or two. It was rather unfortunate for Manners and Lowther that they arrived outside the doorway of Study No. 6, just as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy emerged therefrom with a bound, jug in hand.

It was quite a crash!

'Oh!' gasped Monty Lowther.

'Ow! You mad ass!' howled Manners.

They staggered back from the collision, splashed with ink from the jug. Arthur Augustus sat down from the shock, with a bump. He sat down suddenly and hard, forgetful for the moment of the jug in his hand. That jug reposed on his knees as he sat — unluckily upside-down.

Gummy ink streamed from it over the most elegant trousers in the School House at St. Jim's.

'Ooooooogh!' gasped Arthur Augustus.

'You potty chump —' hooted Lowther.

'Oh, cwikey! Oh, cwumbs!'

'You dangerous maniac!' hissed Manners.

'Oh, scissahs! Look at my twousahs!'

Arthur Augustus sat in a pool of ink. He gazed down at his trousers in horror. They swam with ink. There was hardly a drop left in the jug. Most of the ink and gum that Gussy had collected so industriously, surrounded him in a swamp, and soaked into his trousers. He wallowed in ink.

'Ha, ha, ha!' came a yell from Study No. 6, as Tom Merry and Herries and Dig and Blake looked out of that study.

'Ha, ha, ha!' echoed Manners and Lowther in the passage.

'Oh, cwikey!'

'Much left for Cutts, Gussy?' asked Herries.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, cwumbs!'

Arthur Augustus staggered up. Ink dripped from him as he tottered away, followed by a howl of laughter. He left an empty jug and a pool of ink in the passage, and six fellows chuckling in the study. Six fellows tea'd in Study No. 6 without Arthur Augustus — who was more in need of a bath and a change than tea.

CHAPTER XI

CARDEW CARRIES ON

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW sat in the armchair in No. 9 Study, that evening, with a frown on his brow.

Levison and Clive sat at the study table, with their books. It was prep: and they were giving it attention, if Cardew was not.

Several times, Cardew opened his lips to speak: but closed them again. The frown on his brow grew darker and darker.

He broke the silence at last.

'Look here, you chaps —' he began.

'Prep!' said Levison, over his shoulder.

'Hang prep!' snapped Cardew, 'I've something else to think of than prep.'

Sidney Clive looked up.

'Don't be a silly ass, Cardew,' he said, quietly. 'You're in a bad patch now, and your best guess is to toe the line. You've pulled up at games: and you'd better pull up in form, too. You won't improve matters by getting Lathom down on you in class tomorrow.'

'Bother Lathom!'

'Have a little sense, Cardew,' said Levison. 'You've got the House beak down on you, and the pre's watching you

like cats. You only want to make one false step, to get yourself turfed out of the school. You've come jolly near it, and if you don't want to go over the edge —'

'Sermon taken as read!'

'Do you think I don't know what's in your mind?' snapped Levison, angrily. 'I've seen you mooning over the racing columns in the papers. You must be crackers to think of running risks, after what's happened. Can't you think of cricket, and bowling against Greyfriars when they come over? Tom Merry will be glad to play you, on the form you've shown —'

'Bother Tom Merry.'

'Oh, rats! Well, if you're going to slack about and chuck prep, let us get on with it, at any rate.'

Cardew knitted his brows.

'Think I don't know the risk?' he snapped. 'Railton meant every word he said to me, and if I kick over the traces, and get spotted, I know it's the long jump. He would march me off to the Head, to be sacked, like a shot. Haven't I been toeing the line? It's pretty tough to be gated every day — but I haven't taken a step outside gates — I'm mindin' my p's and q's. But —'

He paused.

When a fellow has pals, he expects them to stand by him, in a spot,' he said. 'I can't get out of the school — it's too jolly risky. But I've got to get word to a man at Rylcombe.

'Still thinking of Bobstay?' asked Clive, sarcastically.

'Exactly.'

'More fool you!'

'I've had my eye on the papers,' said Cardew, unheeding. 'The tipsters are all sure that Bobstay will run. If he runs he will win.'

'You know, of course,' said Clive: sarcastically as before.

'I think I do. Anyhow, it's too good a chance to be lost,' said Cardew. 'I tell you I can get ten to one on Bobstay. He's a dark horse, and —'

'Bosh!' said Clive, concisely.

'Give us a rest,' said Levison.

Cardew's eyes gleamed at them.

'I tell you it's a dead cert, and I'm not missing it,' he said. 'I want a note taken to Bill Lodgey.'

'Oh, chuck it,' said Clive.

'I'm not asking you to contaminate your spotless selves by calling at the Green Man!' said Cardew, with a sneer. 'I've got an arrangement with Bill, for times when communications are difficult. You know the big oak tree on the footpath to Wayland. There's a hole in the trunk — easy enough to find if you look for it. Bill will pick up a note left for him there. I've used it as a letter-box a good many times. See? Bill knows I'm keen on the Spangle Stakes, and he will look for a note from me, if I don't go along and see him — and I can't, owing to Railton. All I want one of you fellows to do, is to walk along that footpath and leave a note for Bill in the oak. Will you?'

He watched his two chums eagerly as he asked that question.

But he did not derive much comfort from their looks.

Sidney Clive gave him a stare, and turned back to his books, without speaking a word. But his silence was as eloquent as words.

Cardew's eyes fixed on Ernest Levison.

'You, Ernest —' he muttered.

'You're asking me to take a note to a boozy bookie, about backing a horse,' said Levison, quietly. 'We should be sacked together if it came out.'

'If you funk it —' sneered Cardew.

Levison breathed hard.

'That will do,' he said, curtly. 'We're friends, and I don't want to punch your cheeky head. But you'd better shut up.'

'That means that you won't?'

'It means exactly that.'

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

'I've got to get that note to Bill,' he said. 'If you won't help, you can go and eat coke. I shall have to cut gates, that's all.'

'You're mad if you do,' said Levison. 'You've said yourself that Railton will march you off to the Head to be sacked, if you're spotted. And I jolly well know he would, too. I only wonder he hasn't done so already. But he's given you a chance to play straight: and if you've got a spot of sense, you'll make the most of it.'

'Will you take a note and leave it in the tree for Lodgey?'

'No, I won't.'

'Then I've got no choice,' said Cardew. 'I shall have to take it myself and chance it. Bill's going to have that note.'

'If you take a single step outside the school, after what Railton said, you're up for the sack!' said Levison.

'I shall have to take a good many steps, to get as far as the old oak in Wayland Wood. If you won't help me out —'

'I'll have nothing to do with it, or Clive either. You ought to be jolly well ashamed of asking us,' said Levison, hotly.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

'Leave it at that,' he said. 'If that's what your friendship's worth, you can keep it. And keep your sermons to yourself: I've no use for them.' He rose from the armchair, and lounged to the table, and sat down there, his brow dark and his eyes glinting.

But he was not thinking of prep. He took a sheet of note-paper, and dipped a pen into the ink. Levison and Clive looked at him, in silence, and then dropped their eyes to their work again. Cardew's pen glided over the paper: and they knew what he was writing: his note to Bill Lodgey, to be left in the hollow oak for Bill to collect: backing Bobstay in the Spangle Stakes.

He dashed off the note, blotted it, folded it and put it into his pocket. Then he lounged to the door.

Levison looked up quickly.

'You're not going out, in prep, Cardew!' he exclaimed.

'Why not?'

‘For goodness’ sake —’

Levison was interrupted by the snap of the door shutting after Cardew. The scapegrace, evidently, had no use for remonstrances. Levison sat staring at the door.

‘Oh, the reckless fool!’ he muttered. ‘Asking for it.’

Clive gave an expressive grunt. He was concerned and anxious, like Levison: but he was impatient too.

‘The fool!’ repeated Levison. ‘Look at that!’ He pointed to the blotter on which Cardew had blotted his note. With utter thoughtlessness, Cardew had taken no heed of the impression of wet ink on blotting-paper: and he had left what amounted to a copy of that dangerous missive on the study table. On the blotting-paper, of course, it was backwards: but the impression was so fresh and clear, that it could be read backwards at a glance:

Dear Bill,

I’ve decided about Bobstay. Put a quid on for me, and be ready with a tenner when he romps home!

R. R. C.

Almost every letter came clear and distinct, and Cardew’s hand-writing was easily recognisable. If that blotter had fallen under the eyes of the house-master —

Levison and Clive exchanged an eloquent look.

‘Like him!’ grunted Clive.

‘That’s enough to get him bunked from St. Jim’s!’ said Levison. He picked up the blotting-paper, and tore it into

tiny fragments. That piece of evidence, at least, was gone. There was nothing more that the scapegrace's friends could do: and they resumed prep — not in a happy mood.

CHAPTER XII

NARROW ESCAPE

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

He started, in alarm.

It was dusky in the Fourth-form dormitory in the School House, though the summer sunset glimmered in at the high windows. During 'prep', of course, Fourth-form fellows should have been in their studies: neither was any fellow allowed by the rules to go up to the dormitories before the bell rang for 'dorm'. These circumstances Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was disregarding, for reasons that seemed good to himself. Blake and Herries and Dig, in Study No. 6, missed their noble chum, and wondered why he did not come in to prep. Arthur Augustus was not thinking of prep. He was thinking of what was due to Gerald Gutts, of the Fifth Form.

The untoward happenings in Study No. 6 that afternoon had not deterred him. Certainly, his supply of ink had been expended, mostly on his trousers. But a supply of ink could be renewed, and Arthur Augustus had succeeded in accumulating a fresh jugful. With tremendous artfulness, he had accumulated that jugful in a box-room, unknown to his friends: and planned to convey it up to

the dormitory while Blake and Co. were at prep, and in consequence unable to butt in again.

So there was Arthur Augustus, in the dusky dormitory. Very carefully, very cautiously, and unseen by any eye, he had conveyed that jug of ink to its destination. He had hidden it out of sight under his bed, all ready for action when the time came. At a much later hour, that jug was booked to stream over the astonished face of Gerald Cutts on his pillow. In the meantime it was quite safe and unsuspected. Late that night, Arthur Augustus was going to turn out very cautiously and silently, without waking a single fellow in the dormitory: his anxious friends were not going to be given another chance of butting in, and saving Cutts from what he so richly deserved.

Having deposited the jug in its hide-out, and made sure that it was safe from all eyes, Arthur Augustus prepared to go. His work, for the present, was done: and it behoved him to get to Study No. 6 and give some attention to prep. But —

He halted suddenly, on his way back to the door, with a start, and a startled exclamation under his breath.

The door-handle was turning!

Someone was coming!

Immediately it rushed into Arthur Augustus's startled mind that he was in a 'spot'. He was out of his study in prep, which was against the rules: he was up in the dormitory before bedtime, which was equally against the rules: and if he was found there, he would be reported to

his house-master! Explanation would certainly be very difficult: for assuredly he could not explain to Railton about his deadly designs on a Fifth-form man after lights out!

The door was opening.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not always quick on the uptake. His aristocratic brain moved, as a rule, with aristocratic leisure. But on this occasion he acted promptly.

He ducked down close beside his bed.

The door was open the next moment.

Keeping close beside the bed, in its shadow, as silent as a mouse, D'Arcy hoped to escape observation. Probably it was only the house-porter, or one of the maids, coming up for something or other: he had only to keep out of sight till he, or she, departed.

Somewhat to his surprise, he heard the door close again, very softly. Whoever had come in, had shut the door again, after entering. And D'Arcy could not help noticing how softly it closed — softly, indeed stealthily, as if the newcomer did not want to be heard.

Then quiet footfalls crossed to the high window that looked out on the back of the School House.

'Bai Jove!' breathed Arthur Augustus.

From the sound of those footfalls, he knew that the newcomer had his back to him. He lifted his head, and looked.

'Bai Jove!' he repeated.

It was not the house-porter, nor one of the maids. He

had a back view of a Fourth-form junior: and did not need a front view to recognise him. It was his relative, Ralph Reckness Cardew of the Fourth Form.

Arthur Augustus stared at his back in amazement.

Cardew should have been in No. 9 Study, with Levison and Clive, at prep. Evidently he had, like D'Arcy, cut prep. But why, was rather a mystery to Gussy. Cardew was moving quietly, but quickly, towards the window. There were several windows in the Fourth-form dormitory: Cardew had selected the one that looked out behind the building, over an expanse of kitchen-garden. And as the amazed swell of St. Jim's stared, he reached up to the catch: with the obvious intention of opening the window. The meaning of that action was unmistakable: Cardew was going to climb of the window.

'Bai Jove!' repeated Arthur Augustus, blankly.

Outside that window, thick masses of ancient ivy clung to the walls. It was possible, indeed facile, for an active fellow to climb down. And such a climber was unlikely to be observed: Cardew had chosen the spot with caution. He was taking a risk, a great risk: for he knew what to expect if he was caught. But it was a minimum of risk: and his wilful mind was made up that he was going to slip out, as far as the hollow oak in Wayland Wood, and leave that note for Bill Lodgey to collect. Among the risks he was running, he certainly had not counted his relative, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Not for a moment could he have dreamed that that noble youth's eyes were upon him, as he unfastened the catch of the window. And he jumped

almost clear of the floor, with a startled gasp, as an unexpected voice came to his ears.

‘Cardew!’

He spun round, panting. He caught the gleam of an eyeglass, as Arthur Augustus came towards him. And, as he recognised the swell of St. Jim’s, his eyes blazed with anger.

‘You!’ he breathed. ‘You dummy, what are you doing here?’

‘Weally, Cardew —’

‘Why aren’t you at prep, you gibbering idiot?’

‘I wefuse to be called a gibbewin’ idiot, Cardew,’ exclaimed Arthur Augustus, indignantly. ‘And I need not inquiah why you are not at pwep, you sweep. You were goin’ to get out that window.’

‘No business of yours, you fool! Hold your tongue, and mind your own business, if you’ve sense enough,’ snarled Cardew.

He turned to the window again. He had had a startling shock: but it was, after all, only a Fourth-form fellow there, who did not matter. As a matter of fact, Arthur Augustus did matter, as Cardew was soon to learn. He grasped at Cardew’s arm as he opened the window.

‘Cardew, you weckless ass —’ he exclaimed.

‘Let go!’ hissed Cardew.

‘Pway listen to me, Cardew —’

Cardew breathed fury. He was in no mood to listen to fatherly advice from his noble relative. He wrenched his arm free, and gave Arthur Augustus a violent

shove on the chest, that sent him staggering backwards.

There was a crash, and a roar, as Arthur Augustus landed on his back on hard oak planks. The back of his head throbbed painfully.

‘Yawoooooh!’

Cardew grasped at the window again. He was done with the swell of St. Jim’s for the moment! But only for the moment! Arthur Augustus was on his feet again almost like a jack-in-the-box. His face flamed with wrath as he jumped at Cardew.

‘You wuffianly wottah!’ he gasped, and he grasped Cardew and whirled him away from the window. ‘Now put up your hands, you wottah, and I will show you whethah you can knock a fellow ovah.’

‘You fool — you idiot — Oh!’ gasped Cardew, as a set of aristocratic knuckles impinged upon his nose. ‘Oh, you meddling dummy — you — you —’ He came at Arthur Augustus with right and left.

In his rage, he forgot, for the moment, why he was there. His one desire was to knock Arthur Augustus spinning. But that was not so easy: for Arthur Augustus, with all his elegant and fastidious ways, was a good man of his hands. He gave back quite as much as he received, and for two or three minutes they tramped, and punched, and panted: quite forgetful that they were in forbidden precincts. Cardew, if not Gussy, was reminded of it, by the sound of footsteps in the passage outside. He realised that the noise had been heard.

He dropped his hands and jumped back.

'Quiet —' he panted.

'You uttah wottah —'

'Somebody's coming, you fool — the house-porter, I expect — quiet —' hissed Cardew. 'Get out of sight, dummy, or do you want to be walked in to Railton?'

'Oh, bai Jove!'

Heavy footsteps were approaching the dormitory door from the direction of the stairs. Cardew made a dive for the nearest bed, and disappeared under it in a twinkling. He, much more than Arthur Augustus, did not want to be discovered in the dormitory — with the window open! Much more impended over him, than over Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

But Arthur Augustus, certainly, did not want to be 'walked in' to Railton. Breathlessly, he followed Cardew's example, disappearing under another bed.

They were just in time. The heavy tread stopped at the door, and it opened. Then a voice was heard: as footsteps tramped in.

'What's going on 'ere?'

They knew the voice of the house-porter. They were not likely to reply. They could only hope that he would not think of looking under the beds.

'Winder open!' They heard his voice again. 'Coo! I got to report this.'

The man stood, for a moment or two, looking from the open window. Then the two juniors heard him close it, and fasten the catch. Then his heavy footsteps went back to the door. It closed after him.

Cardew emerged from under the bed, panting. He knew what was in the house-porter's mind: that some fellow had gone out of House bounds by way of that window — as, indeed, would have been the case, but for the unexpected intervention of Arthur Augustus. Even the reckless scapegrace of the Fourth was not thinking of carrying on now: his one thought was to get back to his study before he was missed. He cut across to the door, and left the dormitory, without a word or a look to Arthur Augustus, crawling breathlessly into view.

'Bai Jove!' breathed Arthur Augustus. 'Cardew —'
Cardew was gone.

Arthur Augustus rubbed his noble nose, where a punch had landed — and his chin, which had captured another.

'The wottah!' he breathed.

But he, like Cardew, realised that his cue was prompt departure. He rubbed his nose, and his chin, set his tie straight, adjusted his eyeglass in his eye, and left the dormitory. A couple of minutes later, he was in Study No. 6 in the Fourth: where Blake and Herries and Digby greeted him with inquiring glares.

'Where have you been, fathead?' inquired Blake.

'Weally, Blake —'

'Caught your nose in a door?' asked Herries.

'Weally, Hewwies —'

'What have you been up to, image?' asked Digby.

'Wats!' was Arthur Augustus's reply to that. He had no intention of confiding his nocturnal plans to his study-mates.

He sat down to prep. It was as well that he had lost no time: for a few minutes later, Kildare of the Sixth was looking into the Fourth-form studies, with an inquiring eye. No one was missing: but two members of that form had had narrow escapes.

CHAPTER XIII

NECK AND CROP

KILDARE of the Sixth stood at his study window, a faint puzzled frown on his face. His eyes were fixed on a Fifth-form man sauntering towards the House with his hands in his pockets. It was Gerald Cutts, and he was coming from the direction of the gym. Cutts was smiling. He was unaware that Kildare's eyes were upon him, from the study window: but those eyes fixed on him very curiously. Since the interview in that study a few days ago, the captain of St. Jim's had not spoken with Cutts, and had indeed almost forgotten his existence. Now he could not help wondering what that somewhat peculiar smile on Cutts' face implied. Cutts' feelings on the subject of the Carcroft match, he knew, were deep and bitter, and his exclusion from the team was a settled thing; yet to judge by his look at the moment, matters were going to his satisfaction. As Kildare stood looking at him, St. Leger of the Fifth joined Cutts. His voice floated to Kildare's ears.

'That's rather rotten, Cutts.'

Cutts' smile widened.

'Why?' he asked.

'Well, in the circumstances —'

'Accidents will happen!' drawled Cutts.

'Accidents!' repeated St. Leger, with a curious significance in his tone. Then they passed on, and went into the House.

Kildare was a little puzzled, but not much interested. He turned from the window, as Darrell of the Sixth came into the study.

'Any catch?' asked Darrell.

'Eh? Oh!' Kildare shook his head. 'No! Railton asked me to look through the studies, but there was nobody missing. Nobody out of the House, so far as I could find. Goodness knows why that dormitory window was opened, or by whom. Nobody's out, at any rate. You looked in the Shell?'

'Yes — nobody out. Looks as if some young sweep meant to go, but changed his mind,' said Darrell. He glanced at a paper on the study table, and smiled. 'Going through the list again?'

Kildare nodded.

'Can't improve on it,' he said. 'Lucky we've got that New House man Baker. We're too weak in bowlers for Carcroft. We've got some good change bowlers — but Baker's our only really first-class man —'

'Cutts has been coming on. He has been sticking hard to practice for a good while now.'

'Not good enough,' said Kildare, shaking his head. 'Sit down, old chap, and go through it with me. Any suggestions welcome — except Cutts.'

Darrell laughed, and sat down. But cricket talk in

Kildare's study was interrupted a few minutes later. There was a tap at the door.

'Come in!' called out Kildare, and then, as the door opened, he added cordially, 'Trot in, Baker, old man! We were just talking about the wickets you're going to take for us on Wednesday.'

Baker of the Sixth came in. His face was a little flushed and uncomfortable. He did not speak, but he held up his right hand: and Kildare, with a start, saw that his wrist was bandaged.

He jumped to his feet.

'What's the matter with your fin, Baker?' he exclaimed.

'I'm awfully sorry, Kildare —' stammered the New House senior.

'Don't say you've had an accident!' exclaimed Kildare. 'For goodness' sake, don't tell me you're crocked for Wednesday!' There was dismay in the face of the St. Jim's captain.

'I — I'm sorry —'

'I know that! What's happened?'

'I — I'm afraid you'll have to leave me out, Kildare! I've had a knock on the wrist — a hard knock! It was a pure accident, of course. But — I shan't be able to bowl on Wednesday — or for a week to come.'

Kildare drew a deep breath.

'You ass!' he said. 'You — you ass! Rushden and Smith major are both out, and now you have to get crocked!'

'I couldn't help —'

'I don't suppose you did it on purpose!' said Kildare,

acidly, 'but you might have been more careful, knowing that we are relying on you —'

'But what's happened?' asked Darrell. 'You were all right when I saw you going to the gym half an hour ago. Accident in the gym, or what?'

'Well, yes! Just one of those things,' said Baker. 'I was fencing with Cutts — that Fifth-form chap —'

'Cutts?' repeated Kildare.

'Yes, and then it happened. I think Cutts' foot slipped — anyhow he toppled on me, and gave me an awful crash on the wrist with his foil — by gum, did it hurt!' Baker made a grimace, wincing. 'I cut off at once to have it seen to, Kildare, but — but it's no go. I shan't be able to handle a pen even from tomorrow — I couldn't handle a cricket-ball to save my life! I thought I'd come and tell you, so that you'd know you've got to look for another man —'

Kildare drew a deep, deep breath.

He remembered that peculiar smile on Cutts' face, and the words that St. Leger had spoken as they passed. His brow darkened.

'So you were fencing in the gym, and Cutts crocked you — accidentally!' he said, slowly. 'Who suggested a bout with the foils — you or Cutts?'

'Oh, Cutts,' answered Baker. 'I wish I hadn't taken it on now, but how could a fellow foresee anything like this —'

'A fellow couldn't!' said Kildare, quietly. 'All right, old man — I'm not blaming you — it can't be helped. I shall have to find another man.'

Baker nodded, and left the study.

Kildare stood with his brow growing darker and darker. With his team already depleted, he had lost the only first-class bowler left in it. But that was not all. That smile on Cutts' face haunted him.

'Rotten luck!' said Darrell. 'We're getting rotten luck all round this time, Kildare. May have to be Cutts after all.'

Kildare's eyes gleamed.

'Not Cutts!' he said, briefly.

'You'll have to find a man —'

'I shall have to think this out!' said Kildare, with knitted brows: and Darrell left the study, leaving the captain of St. Jim's to his problem.

But he was not long left alone. Again there was a tap at the door: and this time it was Cutts of the Fifth who came in.

Kildare's eyes fixed on him, glinting. He was not sure — he could not be sure: but his suspicions were strong. Never had he disliked and distrusted the 'bad hat' of the Fifth so much.

'What do you want, Cutts?' he asked.

'Only a word.' Cutts' manner was very civil. 'I've just heard about poor old Baker —'

'Well?'

'It seems that he's standing out on Wednesday.'

'You could have guessed that, I think, as you are the cause of it,' said Kildare, bitterly. 'Didn't you know he couldn't bowl after that crack on the wrist?'

Cutts raised his eyebrows.

'I couldn't know that it was so serious, of course,' he answered. 'I needn't say how sorry I am that it happened —'

'You needn't!' said Kildare. 'I should find it pretty hard to believe you, Cutts.'

'Of course I'm awfully sorry,' said Cutts. 'If there's anything I can do —'

'What could there be?'

Cutts bit his lip.

'I thought I'd mention that I'm available, if you want a man,' he said. 'That wretched accident has left you a man short, and I'd be glad of a chance to make up for it. I'd do my best.'

'After doing your worst!' said Kildare, sarcastically.

'I don't understand you.'

'I think you do!' said Kildare. 'Well, there's nothing doing, Cutts — you don't play in the Carcroft game — I'd rather play Trimble of the Fourth than you. I'd rather play a man short. You've got Baker out of the eleven, but you've not got his place. That's all — now go.'

Cutts breathed hard.

'If you're insinuating —' he began.

'That will do.'

'It was a sheer accident, and if you think otherwise —'

'What I think doesn't matter,' said Kildare. 'I'm not sure — if I were sure, Cutts, of what I can't help suspecting, I'd —' He broke off. 'Never mind that! Get out of this study.'

'I tell you —'

'You're asking to be pitched out neck and crop.' Kildare's eyes flamed. 'You rat, you know what you've done, and you know why you did it — and I know as well as you do! Outside!'

'Hands off!' yelled Cutts, as Kildare grasped him.

The next moment he was spinning through the doorway. He crashed in the passage.

The door banged shut.

Cutts staggered to his feet, his face convulsed with fury. Two or three Sixth-form men looked out of their studies at the crash and stared at him. Cutts, with a crimson and furious face, limped away. Whatever he had expected to come of his visit to the captain's study, he had certainly not expected this. But Kildare knew, or as good as knew: and he had played his last card, and failed. As he limped away, with malice and hatred and all uncharitableness in his heart, his only consolation was the miserable one of seeing Kildare and his team defeated when Carcroft came over: on that, at least, he felt that he could now count as a certainty.

CHAPTER XIV

AFTER LIGHTS OUT

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW sat up in bed.

The last stroke of eleven had died away in the summer night.

The Fourth-form dormitory was dim and dusky: from the many beds came the sound of regular breathing, with an occasional snore from Trimble's. Cardew listened. All were sleeping — or seemed to be sleeping. He put a leg out of bed — and paused.

Wilful, reckless, unthinking, as the scapegrace was, he had to reflect now. This was not the first time he had planned to break bounds after lights out. But such a venture was more perilous now than it had ever been before. Railton's words were still in his ears. True, since that interview with his house-master, he had been warily on his guard. He had thrown himself into games — he had been talked of as the wonderful bowler: he had even exerted himself in form, and won approving words from Mr. Lathom. But he knew that he was walking on very thin ice — very thin indeed. One word, one syllable, of his dealings with Bill Lodgey, and all was over for him. What he was going to risk now was the 'sack' — expulsion from the school, and the train home. Even

the reckless scapegrace paused as he thought of it.

And yet —

He argued it out in his own mind, as he sat in the gloom, half out of bed. His house-master was suspicious — the House prefects were wary — but they were all in bed at that hour. Was Railton, in his suspicious mood, likely to look into the dormitory after lights out? If he did, and if he found an empty bed there —! Cardew shivered at the thought of that.

Yet again — He would not be gone long. A quick trot through the summer night, to drop his note into the hollow of the old oak in Wayland Wood — and a quick trot back. He would not be gone more than a quarter of an hour. Surely he would be safe for fifteen minutes! On previous occasions he had absented himself for four or five times as long, and nothing had happened. No doubt it was more risky now — but a mere quarter of an hour —

He put his other leg out of bed.

He was going to chance it! He was not going to lose the chance of a lifetime on Bobstay, because of a fancied danger! He was going!

But even as his feet touched the floor, there was a sound in the sleeping dormitory: the sound of some fellow stirring.

Cardew paused again, and waited for the stirring fellow to settle down. But that fellow, whoever he was, did not settle down. Further faint sounds told that he was getting out of bed.

Cardew gritted his teeth.

Some other Fourth-form fellow, it seemed, was getting out that night. He wondered savagely who it was. So far as he knew, he was the only fellow in the Fourth Form reckless enough to break bounds after lights out. He listened intently.

There was the sound of a bump. It was followed by a suppressed exclamation.

'Bai Jove!'

'That idiot!' breathed Cardew.

He knew the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. What, in the name of all that was exasperating, was D'Arcy getting up for, past eleven o'clock at night? D'Arcy, assuredly, could not be thinking of breaking bounds like Cardew. But he was certainly out of bed: and he had bumped into something in the dark, which was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy all over.

That bump had evidently been heard by others, for a sleepy voice came from Jack Blake's bed.

'What's that?'

'Oh, bothah!'

'Is that you, Gussy, you ass?'

'Weally, Blake —'

'You blithering bandersnatch, what are you turning out for?'

'I wefuse to be called a blithewin' bandahsnatch, Blake. Pway go to sleep and don't ask questions.'

Cardew, gritting his teeth, heard Blake sitting up in bed. There were other sounds, as other fellows awakened

at the sound of voices. Cardew clenched his hand hard. He would have been glad to dash it into the aristocratic face of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. That evening, in prep, D'Arcy had butted in, and prevented his excursion out of bounds. Now, for some utterly unknown reason, he was turning out of bed in the middle of the night, just as Cardew was preparing to try it on again: and it looked as if he might awaken the whole dormitory at this rate. Silence was what Cardew wanted — not a sound to reach any ear that might be wakeful. Arthur Augustus was making many sounds.

'Ow!' came a startled howl. 'Wow! Oh, my nappah! Ow!' It seemed that Gussy had knocked his head, this time.

'You benighted ass —!' came Herries' voice.

'Weally, Hewwies —'

'What on earth's the row?' came Digby's voice.

'Wow! I have knocked my head on my bed — wow!'

'You unutterable ass!' hissed Blake. 'What are you banging your silly head on your bed for?'

'Wow! I was weachin' undah it for the jug — wow! Pway don't keep on talkin,' Blake — you will wake evewybody up.'

'The jug!' howled Blake. 'Mean to say that you're thinking of carrying on with that jug of ink?'

'Yaas, wathah!'

'Oh, you ass!' said Herries.

'Oh, you fathead!' said Digby.

'What's that about a jug of ink?' Levison was awake now. 'What potty tricks are you up to, D'Arcy?'

'Weally, Levison —'

'A jug of ink!' exclaimed Clive. 'How on earth did a jug of ink get into the dorm?'

'That is a vewy easy one, Clive. It is heah because I cawwied it up in pwep, and hid it undah my bed.'

Cardew's eyes glinted in the gloom. He knew now why Arthur Augustus had been in the dormitory during prep, so unluckily for his plans. He would have liked to tip that jug of ink over Gussy's noble head. But he remained still and silent, breathing rage.

'In the name of all that's idiotic, what did you want a jug of ink in the dorm for?' asked Lumley-Lumley. 'Thought you might wake up thirsty?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I am goin' to cawwy it to the Fifth-form dorm, and mop it ovah Cutts, if you are cuwious to know,' answered Arthur Augustus. 'Pwobably you are awah that he dwenched me with ink when I punched his cheeky nose in his study the othah day. I am goin' to give him tit for tat — a Woland for an Olivah. Pewwaps he will be sowwy for dwenchin' a fellow with ink, when he gets this jugful ovah his cheeky head!'

'Look here, Gussy —' exclaimed Blake.

'Turn out and stop him!' exclaimed Herries.

'Wats!' floated back from a distance. Arthur Augustus, with his jug of ink, was already at the door.

'Gussy, you fathead —'

The door was heard to close. With his friends awake, Arthur Augustus had lost no time: he was not going to

give them a chance of intervening this time. He was gone.

'Oh, the ass!' breathed Blake.

'Oh, the dummy!' said Herries. 'There'll be a fearful row if he gets as far as the Fifth-form dorm with that jug of ink.'

'More likely to drop it and fall over it,' said Dig. 'If he does, I expect it will be just outside Lathom's door — or Railton's.'

'Oh, the fool!' breathed Cardew.

He slipped back into bed. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was gone — with a jug of ink destined for the devoted head of Gerald Cutts in the Fifth-form dormitory. Whether he succeeded in carrying out that fell intention or not, something was scheduled to happen: only too probably something that would wake slumbering ears, and bring masters on the scene. It was no time for a breaker of bounds to be missing! A raid on a senior dormitory in the middle of the night was fairly certain to cause a 'row' — very likely a tremendous row. Cardew was reckless: but he was not quite reckless enough to carry on with his intention, when at any moment a disturbance might rouse out masters and prefects. He laid his head on his pillow again, in silent rage. For the second time Arthur Augustus had unconsciously put 'paid' to his plans: and that note for Bill Lodgey had to remain in his pocket, far from the 'letter-box' in the hollow oak in Wayland Wood.

'Oh, the ass!' repeated Blake. He was listening intently.

'There'll be a fearful hullabaloo if Cutts gets that jug of ink! Bet you he will rouse the House.'

'If they catch that blithering chump!' said Herries.

'Oh, the fathead!'

'Oh, the burbling blitherer!'

'Hark!' exclaimed Levison.

There were sudden sounds in the night. From a distance, came almost a roar of voices. The silent House echoed and re-echoed.

'He's done it!' gasped Blake.

'And woken the House!' said Dig.

'The ass —'

'The chump!'

'If they get him —'

Every fellow in the Fourth-form dormitory was wide awake now. The din from the distance reached every ear. Blake's prediction was verified: only too evidently, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's nocturnal antics had caused a fearful hullabaloo!

WRONG MAN

'HERE he comes —' breathed Blake.

The door of the Fourth-form dormitory was heard to open. It was heard to shut again immediately. A panting breath was heard, with hurried footsteps. Evidently, Arthur Augustus had returned.

'That you, Gussy, you chump?' exclaimed Herries.

'Weally, Hewwies —' came a gasp from the gloom.

'Have you done it?' hissed Blake.

'Yaas, wathah.'

'Oh, you ass! You've woken the whole House —'

'I have not woken the House, Blake, but I wathah think that Cutts has. He made a feahful wow when he got the ink —'

'Jump into bed, fathead!' said Blake. 'If they haven't spotted you yet —'

'I have not been spotted, Blake! I was vewy careful — vewy cautious indeed. I wetired fwom the Fifth-form dorm immediately aftah givin' Cutts the ink — and Wailton certainly did not spot me —'

'Oh, my hat! Is Railton up?'

'I wathah think so, as I heard him callin' out to ask what was the mattah, with Cutts yellin' at the top of his

voice, and the othah fellows in he dorm all shoutin' —' Arthur Augustus chuckled. 'Wailton must have heard the wow, unless he was deaf —'

'Sure he never saw you?'

'Quite suah, deah boy. It is quite all wight.'

'It won't be all right if Railton looks in here and finds you out of bed,' said Levison. 'You can bet he'll make a round of the dormitories to find out who has been up.'

'Bai Jove! I had bettah turn in,' said Arthur Augustus. He chuckled again. 'You fellows should have heard Cutts yell when he got it —'

'Turn in, fathead, before Railton pokes his nose in!' hissed Blake. 'Look here, you men — mind everybody's fast asleep if the House-beak looks in.'

'Yes, rather.'

'Yaas, wathah! I am goin' to be as fast asleep as Wip van Winkle,' chuckled Arthur Augustus.

Still chuckling, the swell of St. Jim's turned in. The voices in the distance had died down now, though a murmur could still be heard. Undoubtedly that nocturnal visit to a senior dormitory, and the up-ending of a jug of ink over a Fifth-form head, had caused excitement in the Fifth Form. But probably Mr. Railton was on the spot by that time, calming the uproar. That there would be immediate investigation was certain: and undoubtedly Arthur Augustus's best guess was to appear to be fast asleep when the house-master looked in.

Chuckling, he drew the bedclothes over him. Most of the fellows listened for the sound of approaching

footsteps, while a buzz of whispering voices ran from bed to bed.

Cardew listened in savage silence.

His plans were knocked competely on the head. After such an alarm, even the reckless scapegrace was not thinking of leaving his dormitory that night. His visit to the 'letter-box' in Wayland Wood was once more unavoidably postponed. Chuckle after chuckle came from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's bed: and Cardew would have been glad to turn out with a pillow and swipe his relative right and left.

'Ha, ha!' came from Arthur Augustus. 'Bai Jove, you know, that wottah Cutts yelled like a Wed Indian when he got the ink. He got it wight in the middle of his features, you know — ha, ha! I wathah think that it made him jump — ha, ha!'

'I fancy it would make any fellow jump!' said Blake. 'And I expect Railton will be making you jump, next.'

'Wailton won't know a thing, deah boy!' said Arthur Augustus, serenely. 'I was wight off the scene in plenty of time. Bai Jove! I wathah think I have given Cutts what he asked for, when he dwenched me with ink in his study. He is wathah more feahfully dwenched than I was — he got the whole jugful, wight ovah his nappah! Ha, ha!'

'Fancy Gussy getting away with it!' said Digby.

'Weally, Dig —'

'That's queer!' agreed Blake. 'Might have expected him to walk into Railton, or bang the jug on the wall and

upset it, or wander into the wrong dorm and tip it over Tom Merry or some chap in the Shell —'

'Weally, Blake —'

'But he seems to have pulled it off all right,' said Blake. 'Beats me. Hallo, here comes somebody — quiet, you chaps.'

There was silence, as footsteps were heard without. Mice with the cat at hand could not have been quieter than the Fourth-form fellows, as the door of the dormitory opened, and the light was switched on.

Arthur Augustus, his noble head on his pillow, clamped his eyes shut. Most of the other fellows did the same. Blake, with one eye open, peered cautiously from under the edge of a sheet.

It was Mr. Railton who had entered the dormitory. The expression on his face was very stern. A dormitory raid, and the up-ending of a jug of ink over a fellow's head, might seem a 'lark' to the juniors: but evidently the house-master did not regard it in that light. One peep at Railton's face told what the offender had to expect if he was 'spotted'.

Mr. Railton glanced up and down the dormitory. One glance showed him that every bed was occupied. Cardew lay very still, his heart beating a little unpleasantly. He had made his plans for the night knowing nothing of D'Arcy's: and if he had already gone when D'Arcy turned out, his bed would have been empty now — under his house-master's eyes. He would have been 'on' Bobstay for the Spangle Stakes: but he would not have been at

St. Jim's to collect his winnings — if any — from Bill Lodgey! He was thankful, from the bottom of his heart, that he had not planned to go earlier.

'Is any boy here awake?' Railton's voice broke the silence.

There was no reply.

There was a footstep at the open doorway, and Kildare's voice was heard. Evidently, the prefects were up, as well as the house-master.

'I have seen no one, sir.'

'Some boy has been out of his dormitory, that is quite certain,' said Mr. Railton. 'But all here appear to be asleep.'

'Some of the Fifth say that they heard somebody running,' said Kildare. 'But no one seems to have seen him, whoever he was. I — I suppose it must have been some junior, sir — not a Fifth-form man larking with St. Leger —'

'That is very unlikely, Kildare. Only some very foolish junior can have been guilty of so unthinking a trick — possibly some thoughtless boy with some grudge against St. Leger —'

'I suppose so, sir, but — but St. Leger is rather a popular fellow, I believe. — I just can't imagine any junior wanting to play such a ghastly trick on him — drenching him with ink in the middle of the night —'

'But someone certainly has drenched him with ink in the middle of the night, Kildare, and we must investigate further, and discover who it was.'

The light was turned off, and the door closed on the house-master and the prefect. There was dead silence in the Fourth-form dormitory after it had closed. All eyes were closed: but all ears were open: and every fellow in the dormitory had heard every word of that colloquy.

The silence was broken by a faint voice from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's bed.

'Bai Jove! Did — did — did you fellows hear that?'

'Didn't we!' gasped Blake.

'Oh, crumbs!' said Herries. 'St. Leger — not Cutts, St. Leger —'

'That ass —'

'That fathead —'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, cwikey! It is not a laughin' mattah, you fellows,' moaned Arthur Augustus. 'I was suah that it was Cutts' bed —'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Of course, I could not see much in the dark —'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I weally had only a glimpse of him, you know, but I certainly thought that I was gettin' Cutts with that jug of ink —'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'It is not funny, you chortlin' asses!' exclaimed Arthur Augustus, indignantly. 'I must have mistaken the bed in the dark —'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I went to the Fifth-form dorm to dwench Cutts with

that ink. It is weally awful if I dwenched St. Leger by mistake. St. Leger is a good chap — he butted in when Cutts was waggin' me in his study — I wouldn't have, dwenched him with ink at any pwice —'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I tell you it is not funnay at all!' howled Arthur Augustus.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

If Arthur Augustus did not think it funny, every other fellow in the dormitory seemed to regard it in that light. They had wondered at Gusy getting away successfully with his nocturnal expedition. But the explanation was simple — he hadn't! Certainly, he had up-ended that jug of ink over a head in a Fifth-form bed. But it was the wrong head. It was not Cutts' head — it was St. Leger's unoffending head that had received the inky deluge! It was awfully disastrous and dismaying to Arthur Augustus: but to the other fellows, it seemed a real scream! They laughed and laughed and laughed — even Cardew chuckled. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the only fellow in the dormitory who was not amused!

NO GO

GERALD CUTTS scowled.

Cardew of the Fourth was the object of that scowl.

It was the following day: after class. A good many fellows were at the cricket nets: but Cutts of the Fifth, lately very assiduous at games-practice, was giving it a miss. In point of fact he cared nothing for cricket: and his recent keenness had been due wholly to other motives. A 'fiver', probably a 'tenner', as an avuncular tip, would have been his reward, if old Colonel Cutts could have watched his nephew playing for School in the biggest fixture of the season. That hope was wholly washed out now.

Cutts had expensive manners and customs: and needed that tip — now a lost hope. His last unscrupulous device, in eliminating Baker of the New House from the team, had certainly not improved matters — it had, in fact, washed out whatever slim chance might have remained.

That game was up: and so, in consequence, was cricket, for Gerald Cutts. He was not going to exert himself for nothing. While Lefevre, St. Leger, and other Fifth-form men were at the nets, Cutts loafed away to a quiet corner to smoke a cigarette — a consolation which had to be

indulged in out of sight, if penalties were not to be incurred.

Leaning on the trunk of an old elm, in a quiet corner between the trees and the school wall, Cutts was quite out of sight, scowling over his cigarette. He was out of the Carcroft match — he had been pitched neck and crop out of the captain's study — Kildare had only contempt for him — even St. Leger had been stand-offish since the incident of Baker in the gym — altogether, things were not going well for the 'bad hat' of the Fifth. Sore and resentful and disgruntled, he told himself that at least he would have the satisfaction of watching St. Jim's go down before Carcroft on Wednesday — it would be something to see the defeat of the team from which he was excluded. But his thoughts took another turn, as a junior came along the path under the wall. His scowl darkened and deepened at the sight of Cardew of the Fourth — the junior who had taken his wicket with so much ease at the nets, when he had been keenly desirous to impress the St. Jim's captain with his batting.

He whipped the cigarette from his mouth and dropped it, putting his foot on it, as he saw Cardew. He did not want even a junior to see him breaking a strict rule of the school, if Cardew happened to glance in his direction.

But Cardew did not glance towards him.

He was moving along close to the wall, glancing up at it as he moved: and Cutts wondered what he was up to. He did not notice the Fifth-form man in the deep shadow of the branches thick with foliage — he might not have

noticed him, even if he had looked round. But he did not look round. He was intent on the ivied wall — and Cutts wondered why. He looked like a fellow who had sought that remote corner to climb out over the wall unseen: but there seemed no sense in that, for after class the school gates were open, and every fellow at liberty to walk out if he liked.

Then Cutts suddenly remembered talk he had heard about Cardew of the Fourth. The young rascal was in some spot of trouble with the house-master, and had been gated for the term. That was why he was seeking that remote spot out of the general view: he was going out against house-master's orders — in fact, breaking bounds.

A sneering grin came over Cutts' face. That cheeky young sweep had knocked out his wicket and made him look a fool to Kildare — and he had had, or Cutts fancied that he had had, a vaunting air when he did it. And Cutts was in a mood to make himself unpleasant to anyone just then. He knew what he was going to do when Cardew clambered up the wall — if that was indeed the 'gated' junior's intention.

That that was his intention was soon clear, as he stopped at a spot where the thick ivy on the wall made a climb an easy matter. With his back towards Cutts, Cardew grasped the ivy, and pulled himself off the ground.

Then Cutts made a sudden, swift dash forward. He grasped an ankle, before Cardew pulled himself up out of reach.

There was a startled gasp from the junior. Holding on to the ivy, he stared down, with bulging eyes. For a moment Cardew dreaded that he was in the grasp of a Sixth-form prefect, or — worse still — a 'beak'. If it was Railton —!

He panted with relief as he saw that it was a Fifth-form man. But his relief faded at once into quick anger.

'Let go, will you?' he snapped.

Cutts, holding on to his ankle, grinned up at him.

'Breaking bounds, what?' he said.

'No business of yours.'

'You're gated —'

'That's nothing to do with you. Let go my ankle!' breathed Cardew. He cast an anxious glance along the shady path by the wall. He did not care if a Fifth-form man saw him breaking bounds, any more than if he was seen by a Fourth-form fellow or a fag of the Third: but if a master or a Sixth-form prefect came along that path —!

'Get down!' said Cutts.

Cardew gave him a stare of fury.

'Can't you mind your own business?' he hissed. 'What are you butting in for, Cutts, I'd like to know.'

'I said get down.'

'I won't!'

'I'll make you.'

'You bully!' breathed Cardew. 'Is this because I took your wicket the other day? You can't bat, you booby — you're a slacker and a dud — you're no more use at a wicket than a sack of coke.'

Cardew could hardly have expected those remarks to please Gerald Cutts. Certainly they did not have that effect. Cutts compressed his grip, and dragged at him. The ivy swayed and rustled as Cardew clung on.

'Will you let go, you meddling rotter?' hissed Cardew.

Cutts' only reply was a jerk at the captured ankle.

'Let go, or — take that, then!' hissed Cardew, and with his free foot, he kicked out, catching Cutts on the ear.

There was a howl from Cutts. For a moment, his grasp relaxed, and Cardew made an effort to drag himself out of reach. But before he could escape, both Cutts' hands were grasping him: and the Fifth-form man, exerting his strength, dragged him back bodily.

Cardew came hurtling down, in a cloud of dust from the old ivy. He crashed into Cutts, and they staggered and fell together. Cardew strove fiercely and savagely to drag himself loose — but Cutts held him fast, and they rolled and struggled on the earth.

Cutts was by far the stronger of the two, and Cardew had no chance: but in his fury he fought like a wildcat, and the Fifth-form man had his hands full with him. For several minutes they struggled fiercely, sprawling and tumbling, loose articles from their pockets strewing the ground as they rolled. Then Cutts gained his feet, his grasp on Cardew's collar.

'You cheeky young sweep!' he panted. 'Take that — and that — and that —' With his free hand, he smacked Cardew's head, right and left.

'You bully —' panted Cardew.



'You bully!' breathed Cardew

'— and — that — and that — and that —! Oh!' howled Cutts, as Cardew, in desperation, grasped him and hooked his leg. Cutts went over with a crash, yelling.

Cardew did not wait for him to get up again! He cut through the elms, leaving Cutts of the Fifth sitting on the earth, panting for breath, and with an expression on his face like unto that of a demon in a pantomime.

CHAPTER XVII

CAT AND MOUSE

CUTTS of the Fifth struggled to his feet, panting. He was untidy, rumped, dishevelled, breathless, and in a towering rage. Had Cardew still been within reach, he would certainly have had the time of his life at the hands of the enraged senior. But Cardew was gone before Cutts was able to resume the perpendicular. He was not thinking of climbing the wall now — he was only thinking of getting out of Gerald Cutts' reach — and he had not lost a second, vanishing almost like a ghost at cock-crow. Cutts made a stride in pursuit: but paused. He did not want to show up in the quad in his present dishevelled state: neither could he deal with Cardew as he wished, under a crowd of eyes. He stood panting and panting.

'By gad!' muttered Cutts, 'I — I — I'll —' Words failed him. He had intervened, not because he cared two straws whether the 'gated' junior broke bounds or not, but from dislike and sheer ill-temper. Now both the dislike and the ill-temper were intensified tenfold. Cardew had escaped for the moment: but he had something coming to him later, when opportunity occurred. Cutts had a long memory for grudges.

He dusted down his clothes, set his tie and collar

straight, and rubbed spots that had sustained damage. Then he picked up a wallet that had dropped from his pocket in the scrambling struggle, and then a fountain-pen. Scowling, he stared round for other articles that might have fallen, and found the letter from his uncle, Colonel Cutts, and some scattered loose change. Then his eyes fell on a folded paper, and he picked it up and looked at it: not, for the moment, supposing that it might be Cardew's, as he unfolded it.

Then he gave a jump.

'Oh, gad!'

He stared at the paper. His eyes almost popped at it. He had supposed, for the moment, that it might be a paper fallen from his own pocket, like the other articles. But he knew now that it must have fallen from Cardew's. He did not know the hand: he had never had occasion to see Cardew's hand-writing. But he knew the initials at the end of the note. And obviously that paper had fallen from Cardew's pocket, as it had not fallen from his own. He stared at the note. It ran:

Dear Bill,

I've decided about Bobstay. Put a quid on for me, and be ready with a tenner when he romps home.

R. R. C.

Cutts whistled.

So that was why the young sweep was sneaking out of bounds, regardless of 'gating': to get that note to 'Bill'.

Cutts did not need telling who 'Bill' was: he had himself had dealings with Bill Lodgey, in his time: in any case, obviously that was a note to a book-maker.

'Oh, gad!' repeated Cutts.

He grinned.

He did not know the 'fist': but any fellow in the Fourth would have known it: and Mr. Lathom, the Fourth-form master, certainly would. That note was enough, more than enough, to get Cardew 'sacked' from the school: already in disgrace, already 'gated' for the term by his house-master, that would be the finishing touch. Cutts could guess now why Cardew was 'gated': something of this kind must have come to Railton's knowledge, and the 'gating' was intended to keep him out of touch with undesirable acquaintances outside the school. And this was how the young rascal reacted to it: slipping out surreptitiously to leave a note somewhere for Bill Lodgey!

Cutts grinned a very unpleasant grin! He held the fate of that young rascal in the hollow of his hand! If Railton saw that note, Cardew's number was up, at St. Jim's.

'The dingy young rotter!' muttered Cutts: perhaps forgetting for the moment that he had sometimes dabbled in the same kind of thing himself. 'By gum, if Railton got his eyes on this —'

He laughed, and slipped the note into his pocket, the unpleasant grin still on his face.

He had no intention of letting Railton see that note. It

would have been the duty of a Sixth-form prefect to report such a matter to the house-master. But Cutts was not in the Sixth, and not a prefect: it was no more his concern than the concern of any fag in the Third Form. A prefect's duty was a prefect's duty: but any fellow who 'told' on another was, in the estimation of the whole school, a 'sneak' and Cutts, unscrupulous as he was, and bully as he often was, would have disdained to 'sneak'. He disliked Cardew, and he was going to punish him for his 'cheek' in handling a Fifth-form man: but it did not even enter his mind to 'give him away'. So far as that went, Cardew was as safe with the note in Cutts' pocket, as if it had been in his own. But Cutts could easily guess what Cardew would feel like, when he missed that note, and realised that he must have dropped it somewhere within the precincts of the school. That was an amusing thought to Cutts.

He leaned on the old elm, and smoked another cigarette. Then he strolled away into the quad. He smiled as he caught sight of Ralph Reckness Cardew, at a little distance. He had no doubt that Cardew was watching to see him go, before returning to that secluded spot to climb the wall again. Smiling, he strolled across to the Fourth-former.

Cardew eyed him warily. He did not expect Cutts to indulge his savage temper in the open quad, under the windows of the School House, and with a crowd of fellows in sight. But he was wary. He looked Cutts coolly in the face as the Fifth-form man came up.

'Hands off!' he said. 'Lay a finger on me, Cutts, and I'll hack your shins. That's a tip.'

Cutts laughed. Evidently, the young rascal had not yet missed the note that had fallen from his pocket under the wall.

'Have you lost anything, you young sweep?' asked Cutts.

Cardew stared at him.

'Not that I know of. What do you mean?'

'Might drop anything in a rough-and-tumble,' said Cutts banteringly. 'I dropped a few things from my pockets. Didn't you?'

'Not that I know of.'

Cutts chuckled.

'Then the note I picked up doesn't belong to you?' he asked, in the same bantering tone.

Cardew gave a violent start: and his hand shot to his pocket. It came out empty. His face was startled.

'Oh!' he exclaimed.

'Then you did drop something?' grinned Cutts.

'I — I — I think —' Cardew felt in his pocket again. 'Yes, I — I must have dropped a folded paper — if you picked it up, it's mine — give it to me.' He held out an eager hand.

'Sure it's yours?' grinned Cutts.

'Yes, yes — give it back to me!' breathed Cardew. 'Look here, Cutts, give me that note — it's nothing to do with you.'

'Nothing at all,' agreed Cutts. 'If I were a prefect,

I should have to take it straight to Railton —'
Cardew panted.

'You're not a prefect! You're not a sneak, I suppose? Will you give me back my note?'

'No,' said Cutts, coolly, 'I won't! I'll keep it in my pocket.' He chuckled. 'You'd better hope that I don't drop it about, as you did! I might!'

'You rotter!' breathed Cardew.

Cutts laughed, and walked away, with his hands in his pockets. Cardew stared after him, in utter dismay. He did not fear that Cutts would show that dangerous paper to anyone in authority: there was a limit, even for Cutts. It amused him to play cat-and-mouse with the junior he disliked, that was all. He was going to keep that note, and leave the hapless scapegrace in dread that by some accident it might come to light!

Cardew clenched his hands. But there was nothing he could do — if Cutts chose to keep that note, he could keep it.

'Oh, here you are.' Levison of the Fourth, in flannels, with a bat under his arm, joined him. 'Forgotten cricket, old boy?'

'Oh, don't bother!' snapped Cardew.

'Look here —'

'Oh, rats.'

Cardew almost stamped away, leaving Ernest Levison staring. He was not thinking of cricket — neither was he thinking, now, of stealing out of bounds with a note for Bill Lodgey: he had more pressing matters to think of

than Bobstay's chances in the Spangle Stakes. So long as that miserable note was in hostile hands, he was in peril: and there was nothing he could do — nothing! — so long as Cutts chose to play cat-and-mouse!

CHAPTER XVIII

MAN WANTED

'I WONDER —'

Kildare paused.

Darrell gave him an inquiring glance.

The two Sixth-form men were in the captain's study. They had been talking cricket. Kildare's cricket list lay on the table: but, when he glanced at it, it afforded the captain of St. Jim's little satisfaction. The loss of Baker of the New House from the team had been a heavy blow. It was easy to replace him — there was plenty of cricket talent in both Houses at St. Jim's: but it was not easy to find the bowler that was wanted. While Tom Merry and Co. were looking forward to the next junior fixture with cheerful confidence, the senior men were not feeling in anything like the same mood about the prospects of the first-eleven. The Carcroft men were always a hard nut to crack: and this time they looked like being the nut-crackers rather than the nut.

'I wonder —' repeated Kildare, slowly.

'Give it a name,' said Darrell.

'We're in a spot, old man,' said Kildare. 'We've as strong a batting side as ever we had: but —'

'But —' assented Darrell.

'But we want bowlers. We've lost three — all first-class men. We may as well bite on it, that we've got only change bowlers to put up against Carcroft tomorrow.'

'Looks like it.'

'Well, I wonder —' Again Kildare paused. His brow was very thoughtful. 'Look here, when we can't have what we want, we have to put up with what we can get. I've been thinking of young Wynn.'

'Wynn!' repeated Darrell, blankly. 'Who's Wynn?'

Kildare smiled.

'Fourth-form kid in the other House,' he said. 'You've seen him bowling in junior matches.'

'Oh, that kid!' said Darrell. He stared. 'My dear chap, you're not thinking of playing a junior in a first-eleven game.'

'That's just what I was wondering,' said Kildare. 'The fact is, it's a case of any port in a storm. It would make the men stare, to see a junior's name up in a list for a first-eleven game — but —'

Darell whistled.

'I rather fancy it would!' he said.

'But the kid can bowl,' said Kildare. 'I've seen him take wickets, against jolly good batting.'

'Not first-eleven batting.'

'No: but he has put up good bowling against senior wickets at games fagging, all the same. We want bowlers, Darrell: and I wonder —'

Darrell whistled again. That the first-eleven were hard up for bowlers, in present circumstances, was a fact, well

known to all St. Jim's. It was that fact upon which Cutts had based the scheme that had gone awry. Kildare had gone over the Upper School with a small comb, as it were, in search of bowling talent. Now he was thinking of the Lower School: and the name of Fatty Wynn, the champion junior bowler of St. Jim's, naturally occurred to him. Wynn of the Fourth, among the great men of the Sixth and Fifth, might be rather like a minnow among the whales: but he could bowl. No doubt those great men would stare, at a junior's name in the Carcroft list. That would not matter very much, if David Llewellyn Wynn could take Carcroft wickets. And Kildare, thinking the matter over, fancied that he could.

'Any port in a storm, I suppose,' said Darrell, after an expressive whistle.

'Exactly.'

'It would mean chucking away a wicket in our innings,' said Darrell. 'The kid could never stand up to Carcroft bowling.'

Kildare nodded.

'I know that! But we're a strong batting side — we could afford a bat short. It's a bowler we want — and he's a bowler.'

'Well, it will surprise the men, but it might work,' said Darrell. 'Better try him out on Big Side, and see what he can do.' He laughed. 'I'll give him a chance to take my wicket — if he can do that, he can knock the Carcroft sticks. What?'

'That's what I was thinking,' said Kildare.

He stepped to the open study window, and looked out into the sunny quadrangle. After class, there were plenty of fellows to be seen in the quad: among them, Kildare's eyes fell on Figgins and Kerr, of the New House, Generally, Fatty Wynn was with his two special chums: but on this occasion Figgins and Kerr were without their plump comrade. Kildare was not aware of the reason: he had heard nothing about Fatty Wynn's misadventure in the Ryll and its unfortunate outcome for the fattest member of the New House at St. Jim's. He called from the window.

'Here, Figgins.'

George Figgins looked round. He left Kerr immediately, and cut across to Kildare's window.

'You called me, Kildare.'

'Yes! Take a message from me to Wynn, of your House.'

'Glad to,' said Figgins. 'What's the message?'

'Tell him to get into his flannels —'

'Eh?'

'And come down to senior nets —'

'What?'

'I want to see him put up some bowling,' said Kildare. He smiled. 'You can tell him, Figgins, that if he's at the top of his form, I'm thinking of giving him a chance in a first-eleven match —'

'Oh, crumbs!' gasped Figgins.

'Cut off and tell him,' said Kildare.

But Figgins did not cut off. He stood looking up at Kildare at the window, with deep dismay in his face. At any other time, that message would have delighted Figgins.

He would have rejoiced at such a distinction coming the way of a member of the New House Co. But now —

‘Oh, what rotten luck!’ gasped Figgins.

Kildare stared down at him.

‘What the dickens do you mean, you young ass?’ he asked, brusquely. ‘I tell you I’m thinking of trying Wynn out for a first-eleven match. Go and tell him he’s wanted, at once.’

‘But I — I can’t!’ gasped Figgins, ‘Wynn can’t come, Kildare —’

‘Do you mean that the young duffer’s in detention?’

‘Oh! No! But —’

‘If he’s gone out —’

‘He hasn’t gone out, but —’

‘But what?’ snapped Kildare, testily.

‘He’s in sanny!’ gasped Figgins. ‘He fell into the river the other day, and caught a frightful cold, and now he’s in sanny sneezing and coughing his silly head off, Kildare. He couldn’t go down to the nets, Kildare — he couldn’t go anywhere — they’re keeping him in bed.’

Kildare drew a deep breath. He had thought that matter over, thought it over long and hard, and made up his mind. And this was the result. The champion junior bowler of St. Jim’s was a last resource: and he was not available. It really seemed as if there was no end to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, so far as the Carcroft match was concerned.

‘I — I’m awfully sorry,’ stammered Figgins, ‘but — but —’

'Never mind,' said Kildare, 'you can cut off.'

Figgins did cut off then: to relate to Kerr, in lugubrious tones, that tremendous chance that David Llewellyn Wynn had missed, owing to that unlucky tumble in the Ryll.

Kildare looked round at Darrell, who made a grimace.

'Nothing doing, it seems!' said Darrell. 'If the young ass is in sanny —'

'It leaves us where we were!' said Kildare.

Darrell nodded, and left the study. Kildare, at the window, looked out over a crowd of St. Jim's fellows, with a clouded brow. That last resource had failed him. But his expression changed a little, as his eyes fell on a Fourth-form junior who was sauntering with his hands in his pockets, and a far from contented or happy expression on his face. As he glanced at Cardew of the Fourth, he remembered an incident of a few days ago.

He had seen Cardew's bowling — and he had heard a good deal of the talk among the juniors on the subject. He had thought of playing a Lower School man, as a last resource: but Fatty Wynn, after all, was unavailable. But Cardew —

Kildare's brow grew very thoughtful, as he watched the junior lounging idly in the quad.

He had had his eye on Cardew — as a prefect! Now he had it on him as a cricket captain, and he wondered.

Cardew was a reckless young sweep: in trouble with his house-master, gated because he could not be trusted out of gates. But he could bowl. Cutts of the Fifth could bat: but Cardew had taken his wicket with apparent ease.

If that was not a fluke — if he could keep up the same form — Kildare was thinking hard.

Cardew, unaware of the eyes on him from the captain's study window, lounged on, thinking of anything but cricket. Kildare was not likely to guess the thoughts that were in his mind just then!

Kildare's eyes followed him, till he disappeared. He remained at the window, thinking. He was, as he had told Darrell, in a 'spot'. Fatty Wynn might have been the solution: but Wynn was in 'sanny'. Might that reckless young sweep, who seemed to have a magic hand with a cricket ball, prove the solution?

For a long time, Kildare stood in thought: but he gave a nod at last, as if he had made up his mind. It might be useful, at least, to try the kid out, and see how he shaped against senior wickets. And having so decided, Kildare leaned from the window, to call to the nearest junior and tell him to send Cardew in.

CHAPTER XIX

A PUZZLE FOR TOM MERRY

'MERRY!'

Tom Merry glanced round at the call.

'Yes, Kildare.'

'Tell Cardew to come to my study.'

'Right!'

Kildare stepped back from the window. Tom turned away, to meet rather significant looks from Manners and Lowther. The Terrible Three had been, as a matter of fact, speaking of Cardew, as they sauntered in the quad after games practice: commenting on the fact that he had not shown up at the nets that afternoon, which was not in keeping with the keenness he had recently displayed. It looked as if his accustomed slackness had supervened: and that, amazing skill as he had displayed, he was still as unreliable as he had always been.

'So Kildare wants Cardew!' said Monty Lowther. 'What has that silly ass been up to now? Only the other day he was up before Railton — and now it's a prefect on his trail.'

Manners shrugged his shoulders.

'Gone out, very likely,' he said.

'He's gated!' said Tom.

Another shrug from Manners.

'Fat lot Cardew would care about that,' he said.

Tom Merry whistled.

'The awful ass!' he said. 'If he's cut, against Railton's orders, he will be landed now, as Kildare wants him. I suppose I'd better look for him.'

And Tom proceeded to look for Cardew of the Fourth. None of the Terrible Three doubted that it was some sort of a 'row' that awaited the scapegrace of the Fourth in Kildare's study. And the 'row' was likely to be a very serious one, if it transpired that Cardew had gone out of gates, in defiance of his house-master — as, indeed, he would have done, but for the intervention of Cutts of the Fifth. Certainly Cardew, when he laid his plans to slip over the school wall in that quiet corner, had never dreamed that he might be sent for by the head-prefect during his absence.

'Seen Cardew, Talbot?'

'Cardew? Yes, he passed me about ten minutes ago,' answered Talbot. 'He's in the quad somewhere, I think.'

'Oh!' said Tom, relieved. 'Then he hasn't gone out.'

'Couldn't have — he's gated.'

'Well, thank goodness he hasn't, as Kildare wants him,' said Tom, and he went on his way in search of Cardew. The next fellow of whom he inquired was Levison of the Fourth.

'Know where Cardew is, Levison?'

'Somewhere about,' answered Levison. 'If you're going to rag him for cutting nets —'

'Kildare wants him.'

'Oh! Another row?'

'I suppose so. I've got to find him, anyhow. Know where he is?'

'No! He stalked off when I spoke to him, a quarter of an hour ago, and I haven't seen him since.'

'Bother him!' said Tom. And he went on.

Then he came on Study No. 6 in a group. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was a little pink: Blake and Herries and Digby were grinning. Something, apparently, had perturbed the serenity of the swell of St. Jim's.

'The wude wottah!' Arthur Augustus was saying as Tom came up. 'I am sowwy to say it of a welation of mine, but his mannaahs, are weally fwightful. I merely asked him why he did not turn up at the nets, and instead of answerin' a civil question like a civilised human bein', he said, "Shut up, for goodness sake!" Tellin' a fellow to shut up —'

'A thing you never do!' said Blake, sympathetically. And there was a chuckle from Herries and Dig.

'Weally, Blake —'

'Seen Cardew?' chimed in Tom Merry. He could guess that Arthur Augustus's indignant remarks applied to the fellow he was seeking.

'Yaas, wathah,' answered Arthur Augustus. 'I spoke to him a few minutes ago, and he had the fwightful cheek to tell me to shut up. I have a vewy gweat mind to go aftah him and punch his cheekay head.'

'Kildare wants him,' said Tom.

'Bai Jove! In a wow again?' said Arthur Augustus. 'What a fellow he is for wows! He went along the path by the wall, if you're lookin' for him.'

Tom Merry cut along the path by the wall, arriving at the quiet shady corner where the scuffle had taken place between Cardew and Cutts. There at length he found the fellow he sought.

Cardew was leaning on an elm, in the spot where Cutts of the Fifth had smoked his cigarette. His hands were driven deep into his pockets, his eyes on the ground, his brow dark. Evidently he was buried in gloomy thoughts, which was no doubt the reason why he had sought that solitary spot. He did not look up as Tom came, till his name was called.

'Cardew —'

Then he looked up, with a scowl.

'What the dooce do you want?' he snapped. 'Can't you leave a fellow alone? If you're going to jaw me about nets, you can save your breath.'

Tom looked at him, quietly, and then glanced at the ivied wall, close at hand. Then he looked at Cardew again.

'If you came here to climb that wall —' he said.

'No business of yours, if I did.'

'None at all,' agreed Tom, 'but you're lucky to be still inside, all the same, as you're gated, and I've been sent to look for you.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Cardew, with a start. 'Railton —'

'No: Kildare. He wants you in his study.'

Cardew gave a low whistle. It was the head-prefect of

the House who had sent for him: and he had to go. If he had been outside that wall, and had not returned in time — His feelings towards Cutts of the Fifth were deep and bitter: but he was glad now that Cutts had stopped him.

‘What does Kildare want?’ he drawled.

‘How should I know? He told me to find you and send you to his study.’

Cardew laughed sarcastically.

‘Keepin’ a fatherly eye on me, to make sure that I’m not out of gates, what?’ he said. ‘Railton’s orders, I suppose.’

‘You seem to need an eye on you,’ said Tom, drily.

‘Oh, quite!’ drawled Cardew, ‘but I’m not here to climb that wall, old bean. I had the idea, a little while ago: but I’ve changed my mind, for reasons that wouldn’t interest you if I explained them — which I’m not goin’ to do.’

‘I’m glad you changed your mind, at any rate,’ said Tom. ‘If you had the sense of a bunny-rabbit, Cardew, you’d chuck up all that dingy rot, and stick to cricket.’

‘If!’ said Cardew. He detached himself from the elm. ‘I suppose I’d better go — when Kildare says jump, we have to jump! Lucky I’m here to jump!’

‘Sorry if you’re in a row again,’ said Tom.

‘Oh, there’s no row on, that I know of,’ drawled Cardew. ‘A dutiful pre, giving me the once-over, that’s all, so far as I know. Sort of dog with a name, I’m afraid. They’ve got nothing on me — I’ve been too jolly careful for that, since Railton gave me that heart-to-heart talk, in his study.’ Then, as another thought came into his mind, his face suddenly changed. ‘Hold on a minute, Tom Merry.’

Tom, who was turning away, turned back. He was startled by the changed look on Cardew's face.

'What's the matter, Cardew?' he exclaimed.

'You don't know why Kildare's sent for me?' muttered Cardew.

'No: I've said so.'

'Did you see him in his study?'

'Yes, at the window,' said Tom, in surprise. 'He called to me —'

'Was anybody with him?'

'Not that I noticed,' answered Tom, more and more surprised. 'I didn't look in, but so far as I noticed, nobody was with Kildare. What the dickens does it matter?'

'Not Cutts, of the Fifth?' breathed Cardew.

Tom Merry stared.

'Cutts, of the Fifth!' he repeated. 'He wouldn't be likely to be in Kildare's study — everyone knows they're on the worst of terms, since Cutts was left out of the first-eleven —'

'You didn't see him?' snapped Cardew. 'Did you or not?'

'No,' answered Tom.

'He wouldn't — he couldn't —' muttered Cardew. 'He's a rat and a rotter, but he wouldn't — he couldn't —' He seemed to have forgotten, for the moment, that Tom was there, as he followed his own harassed thoughts. 'Even Cutts —'

'He wouldn't or couldn't what?' asked Tom Merry, blankly. 'What the dickens are you talking about, Cardew?'

Cardew did not answer that question. Without speaking, he swung away, Tom staring blankly after him as he went. He could not surmise what was in Cardew's mind — then sudden overwhelming fear that Cutts had given him away — that that tell-tale note had been passed on to a prefect — to be handed to the house-master! If Cutts had betrayed him — if that was why Kildare had sent for him, to take him to his house-master — If that was it, it was the end of things for him at St. Jim's. But was it? Cardew tramped away with a heart like lead, while Tom Merry stood and stared.

Tom's face was very grave when he rejoined his chums in the quad. He had never liked Cardew much, and trusted him very little: but he could not help feeling concerned about him now. It was a puzzle for Tom Merry: but, only too clearly, the scapegrace of the Fourth was in deep waters.

CHAPTER XX

NOT A 'ROW'

'COME IN,' said Kildare, glancing at the doorway.

Cardew hesitated at the door.

His first thought, on receiving the message from Kildare, had been that the prefect desired to make sure that he was within gates, according to Railton's instructions: giving him the once-over, as he had expressed it to Tom Merry. That would have mattered nothing, as, owing to Cutts' intervention, he was in the school. But now the fear was heavy in his heart that it was something much more serious than that. He had come to the captain's study with dragging feet — dreading what he was to hear there. If Cutts had given him away —

If so, it was the end.

That wretched note to Bill Lodgey, once in his house-master's hands, would seal his fate. Railton had given him a chance to amend: and to some extent, he had made the best of it: he had played hard at games and he had done better than usual in form: and he had no doubt that Railton had noticed it. But —

If it came out that, instead of having mended his ways, he was carrying on precisely as before, only more secretly and surreptitiously — It would come out, if that note was

seen. Could Cutts have played the miserable part of an informer? Surely not — Cutts was a good deal of a bully, and something of a blackguard: and he had been angry and exasperated: but surely he would not sink to the level of a wretched sneak telling tales! But if it was not so, what did Kildare want?

Cardew stood in the doorway, as if his feet would not carry him into the captain's study. His cool, mocking self-assurance seemed to have deserted him, for the time. His miserable thought was, what a fool he had been. He had carried on, in his own wilful way, knowing the danger and disregarding it — but now — What did Bobstay, and the Spangle Stakes, and odds of ten to one, matter, if he was going to be kicked out of the school, and sent home in disgrace? What a fool he had been — he, who esteemed himself so clever!

Kildare stared at him.

'I said come in, Cardew,' he rapped.

Cardew dragged himself into the study at last. He made an effort to recover his usual composure: but he could not quite succeed.

The St. Jim's captain gave him a keen and curious look. Then a faint smile came over his face. Cardew was a dog with a bad name: he was in disgrace with his house-master: he knew that the prefects' eyes were upon him. He did not know why he was sent for: and he anticipated trouble. Kildare guessed that much from his looks: though he could not guess how terribly serious was the trouble that Cardew anticipated. He smiled.

That smile somewhat reassured Cardew. It did not look as if the prefect had sent for him to march him off to his house-master. But what did he want, then?

'I've not sent for you to rag you, young ass!' said Kildare, good-humouredly. 'You needn't walk into my study as if it were the lion's den.'

Cardew drew a deep, deep breath.

He knew now that it was not the final blow. Cutts had said nothing — done nothing — after all, even Cutts was not capable of such baseness. Cutts was playing cat-and-mouse with him: but he had not betrayed him. Kildare knew nothing of that wretched note in Cutts' pocket.

The relief made him feel almost giddy. But he pulled himself together, and his old coolness came back. He surprised himself by the ease with which he answered the captain's remark.

'A pre's study is rather like one, Kildare, at times!' he drawled, 'but I'm glad I'm not goin' to be devoured this time.'

Kildare laughed.

'I'm going to surprise you, I think,' he said. 'You've been coming on uncommonly well at cricket lately, Cardew.'

'Glad you've noticed it, Kildare.'

'I hear that Tom Merry has picked you for the junior match with Greyfriars when it comes off.'

'It has pleased Thomas to do me that honour!' said Cardew, with a nod. He was quite himself now.

'You've come on remarkably in bowling,' said Kildare.

'I saw you take a Fifth-form man's wicket the other day, you know. According to talk I've heard among the juniors, you've turned out as good as young Wynn of the New House.'

'Quite!' said Cardew. 'Even a little better, if I wasn't too modest to mention it. My natural modesty apart, I could bowl Fatty Wynn's head off.'

'I hope you could!' said Kildare, drily. 'You're not short of a good opinion of what you can do, at any rate.'

'Never was!' assented Cardew. 'If a fellow bloweth not his own trumpet, by whom shall it be blown? But I don't quite know why you say you hope so, Kildare — you're not thinking of playing me in the first-eleven, I suppose.'

'Yes!' said Kildare.

Cardew fairly jumped.

His remark had been made as a jest. Not for one moment had it occurred to him that any such thought could be in the captain's mind.

He stared blankly at Kildare.

'Pulling my leg?' he ejaculated.

'Don't be a young ass!' said Kildare, gruffly. 'Do you think the captain of the school would send for a Fourth-form kid to pull his leg?'

'Well, no, of course not: but — but you can't be serious!' Cardew almost stuttered, in his surprise. 'What would the big guns say in the Prefects' Room if you played a Fourth-form man in the first-eleven?'

'Never mind that,' said Kildare. 'I suppose you know what everyone at St. Jim's knows — that we're weak in

bowlers — three men crooked, and nobody of the same class to put in their places.'

'I know,' assented Cardew.

'I was thinking of giving young Wynn a chance, but it seems that he's knocked himself out by tumbling into the river —'

'Much obliged to him!' said Cardew.

'Then I remembered you, and what I've seen of your bowling lately,' said Kildare. 'Look here, Cardew, you're rather a cheeky young ass, and you've landed yourself in trouble by playing the fool and getting your house-beak down on you: and if I catch you out of gates, I shall run you in, and you'll be sacked, quick enough to take your breath away —'

'Thanks!' murmured Cardew. 'So good of you, Kildare.'

'But that's got nothing to do with cricket,' went on the captain of St. Jim's. 'I've had an eye on you, Cardew, and it looks to me as if you're doing your best to make the most of the chance Railton has given you. If that's the case, it shows that you've got a little sense, at least.'

Cardew smiled. It was agreeable news to him that he was 'getting away' with the outward change in his manners and customs: little as he had changed inwardly, if at all.

'I hope I've got a little sense, Kildare,' he said, very meekly. 'Railton put it very plainly to me, and I've done some thinking since.'

'Good!' said Kildare. He rose from his chair. 'Now, I want to see what you can do, and make up my mind

whether to give you a chance in the Carcroft match. It's a bit late in the day to pick a new man — and I daresay the men will stare if I pick a junior —'

'Any port in a storm!' murmured Cardew.

'Get into your flannels, and get down to senior nets,' said Kildare. 'You're going to put up some bowling against senior batsmen, and I'm going to see what you can do. I suppose you'd be keen to play in a first-eleven fixture, if you're picked?' he added.

Cardew's eyes danced.

'Keen?' he said. 'My dear man, the keenest blade that ever came out of Sheffield would have nothing on me. Keen? If I play for the First, Kildare, I shall have to order myself a larger size in hats at once. I shall look on myself as the greatest Panjandrum that ever panjammed. I —'

'That will do,' said Kildare, laughing. 'Go and get changed, and get down to the nets, and we'll see.'

'What-ho!' said Cardew.

He had entered the captain's study almost like a fellow going to execution. He almost danced out of it. Kildare glanced after him with a smile, pleased by the junior's evident keenness, and by his delight at the prospect of playing in such a match. He was, no doubt, a reckless young ass: but there was good stuff in him, after all.

Cardew almost pirouetted down the corridor. At the corner, he found Levison and Clive waiting for him.

'What was the trouble?' they both asked together.

'Trouble?' repeated Cardew, and he chuckled. 'None

at all — only a pleasant chat with our esteemed and respected captain.'

'Oh, don't be an ass,' said Clive. 'What did Kildare want?'

'Me!' said Cardew.

'What for, fathead?' exclaimed Levison.

Cardew chuckled again.

'He's thinking of picking me for the first-eleven,' he answered, negligently. 'He seems to have had an eye on my cricket lately.'

'If you can't be serious —' grunted Clive.

'Sober as a judge!' said Cardew. 'Honour bright, honest Injun: frozen truth. Come along to senior nets, and see how I handle Sixth-form wickets. And wish me luck — by gum, if I've a chance of playing in the Carcroft game I'm going to make the most of it.'

He danced on. A minute later he passed Cutts of the Fifth, who gave him a black look. But he did not even notice Cutts. His face was bright, and his eyes shining, as he changed into flannels. Cardew loved the limelight — and a Fourth-form man picked to play for the first-eleven was likely to get all the limelight he wanted — the cynosure of all eyes, the envy of every other fellow in the Lower School. Like Quintus Horatius Flaccus of old, Cardew was feeling like touching the stars with his exalted head: and for the time, at least, all other matters were dismissed from his mind.

CHAPTER XXI

PICKED TO PLAY

'WEMARKABLE!' said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

'One up for the Fourth!' said Blake.

'Yaas, wathah! But —'

'Good luck to him!' said Tom Merry.

'Oh! Yaas! But —'

'Queer fish, Cardew!' remarked Monty Lowther. 'Only the other day run in by his house-beak, and as near the sack as a fellow can get without taking the long jump: and now — picked out for a trial for the first-eleven!'

'Will he swank!' murmured Manners.

Tom Merry laughed.

'Well, any Lower man might swank a little, in the cirs,' he said. 'I should feel no end of a V. I. P. if Kildare wanted me to bat against Carcroft!'

'Yaas, wathah!' concurred Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. 'But if Kildare's hard up for a cwicketah, and wants a man fwom the Lowah School, his choice of Cardew is wathah wemarkable —'

'He's a good man at cricket!' said Tom.

'Oh, yaas: but there are bettah,' said Arthur Augustus shaking his head. 'You are fah and away a bettah bat than Cardew, Tom Mewwy.'

'Thanks,' said Tom. 'But Kildare's not short of bats — it's a bowler he wants: and that's where Cardew comes in.'

'There are othah fellows in the Fourth who can bowl, Tom Mewwy,' said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. 'I think Kildare might have looked furthah.'

'And fared worse?' asked Monty Lowther.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Weally, Lowthah —' Arthur Augustus frowned. 'I twust that I am not the fellow to cwack up my own cwicket, but it does seem to me wathah wemarkable that Kildare should pick a Fourth-form man, without thinkin' of lookin' into Study No. 6.' And Arthur Augustus shook his noble head again.

'I wish he'd looked into No. 10 in the Shell!' said Tom Merry, laughing. 'But Cardew could bowl my head off — just as he could yours, Gussy.'

'Weally, Tom Mewwy —'

'Queer fish, that chap!' said Monty Lowther, again. 'He's been whopped for slacking at games, more than once. Now he's as keen as mustard. And who'd ever have dreamed that he'd turn out such a demon bowler.'

'That chap's had no end of chances, and thrown them all away,' said Manners. 'This is only a flash in the pan — I expect he'll be slacking and loafing and dodging games-practice again, in a week or two.'

'Let's hope not,' said Tom. 'In his form now, he's a rod in pickle for the Greyfriars crowd when they come over. In his present form, even Fatty Wynn couldn't touch him.'

'Rot!' said two voices in unison: those of Figgins and

Kerr. New House men were not disposed to admit that the champion bowler of that House could be excelled by any School House man!

It was quite an excited group of juniors in the quad, discussing the new development. The news had spread that Cardew, of the Fourth Form, was to have a trial for the first-eleven, and it was exciting news. There was hardly a fellow in the Lower School, in either House, who would not have given worlds, or whole universes, to be in his place. Tom Merry could have wished that Kildare had been short of batsmen: Arthur Augustus that his gifts as a bowler had caught the captain's eye! But everyone wished Cardew luck: even if he did, as Manners predicted, swank more than a little over the great distinction that had come his way. And everyone intended to go along to senior nets and see how it turned out. Everyone was keenly interested to know whether the name of R. R. Cardew would be posted up in the list for Carcroft.

Cardew's name was on almost every tongue now. It caught the ears of Gerald Cutts, of the Fifth Form, as he passed the group of juniors. Cutts was not thinking of Cardew, at the moment: he was thinking, with a sour and bitter satisfaction, of the very dubious prospects of the first-eleven on the morrow, when the Carcroft men came over. From the bottom of his malicious heart he hoped to see the St. Jim's team wiped off the ground, and he had no doubt that, in the unpropitious circumstances, that was what would happen. In the batting line, the teams

were probably equally matched: in the bowling line, Kildare had only second-rate men to play: the loss of Baker of the New House had been the final blow: and Cutts had no doubt that it was a knock-out blow. He gave quite a start as he heard from Tom Merry:

'It's jolly good luck for Kildare too! — picking up a top-notch bowler at the last minute like this.'

Cutts started, and came to a stop. He stared at the juniors, with lowering brows. This was the first he had heard of it. So far as he knew, Kildare was still in the 'spot' where his scheming had placed him. After an angry stare at the group, he strode towards them.

'What's that, Merry?' he snapped, 'what was that you said?'

Tom Merry looked round at him. Some of the juniors grinned. It was hardly a secret that Cutts was savagely disappointed and resentful about his own exclusion from the team. Many fellows knew that there had been a 'row' in Kildare's study, and that Cutts had been thrown out, though nobody knew the precise details.

'What's that about picking up a new bowler?' snapped Cutts, before Tom could answer him. 'Is there a new man in the team?'

'Not yet,' answered Tom. 'A new man's being given a trial this afternoon — we're just going down to see —'

'Who's the man?'

'Cardew!'

'Cardew!' Cutts stared at him. 'Is that a joke, you young blockhead?'

'Not at all,' answered Tom, cheerfully. 'Cardew of the Fourth —'

'What utter rot.'

'Kildare doesn't seem to think so,' said Tom. 'I believe he knows something about cricket, too,' he added, with mild sarcasm.

'A Fourth-form fag —' said Cutts. He burst into a laugh. 'By gad, Kildare must be hard up for men to play, if he's looking in the Fourth Form for a man. He might as well look in the Third.'

He laughed again, as he walked on. For a moment he had been uneasy, wondering what unknown talent Kildare might have found in the hour of need. But he was quite easy again now: the idea of a Fourth-form junior in the first-eleven only amused him.

'Cutts doesn't seem to think much of Kildare's selection!' remarked Blake, with a grin. 'He would rather old Kildare looked in the Fifth for a man.'

'Yaas, wathah!' chuckled Arthur Augustus.

'What Cutts doesn't know about cricket, would fill the Long Room at Lord's, and overflow!' said Monty Lowther. 'Cutts is a better judge of cigarettes than of cricketers.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'He will wake up, when he sees Cardew's name in the list for Carcroft,' said Levison. 'Come on, you fellows — we don't want to miss it.'

The crowd streamed away. Cutts of the Fifth, not in the least interested, strolled to that quiet corner by the school

wall, and lit a cigarette. But nobody gave Cutts a thought, or cared where he was or what he was doing. All were interested in Cardew. Cutts of the Fifth was nobody: Cardew of the Fourth, undoubtedly, was somebody, at least for the time being. It was quite possible that, as Manners had said, in a week or two he might be slacking and loafing again, as careless of cricket as he was now keen on it: nothing was certain about Ralph Reckness Cardew but his uncertainty. But for the time, at least, he was the 'goods'. Everyone was going to watch him — and he proved worth watching.

He looked a handsome figure, and not in the least perturbed by the innumerable eyes fixed on him, at the senior nets. He was as cool as a cucumber, and enjoying himself thoroughly. He tossed the ball into the air, almost out of sight, and caught it with his left hand, quite casually, as it came down: a spot of playing to the gallery that was just like Cardew. Even when he bowled to Darrell, one of the best bats in the first-eleven, he had an air of casual unconcern, outwardly at least. Darrell stopped that ball: he knocked away the next, and then —

Then Darrell stared at a wrecked wicket.

'Man down!' chuckled Clive.

'Good man!' chortled Levison.

'Bai Jove!' remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with quite a thoughtful air. 'Bai Jove, that's bowlin', you fellows. I wathah think that Kildare knows what he is about, aftah all.'

'Sort of!' chuckled Tom Merry.

Great men of the first-eleven, like Darrell and Langton and Monteith, had been taken by surprise by Kildare's latest idea, and perhaps not wholly gratified. At any rate, they had had no doubt of knocking a junior's bowling anywhere. Certainly, they would have been glad to welcome any first-class bowler into the depleted team, from whatever form he came: but it was hard to believe that their wickets were not safe from the Fourth Form.

It did not prove so, however. Monteith, the captain of the New House, took Darrell's place, but he fared no better than Darrell. Then Kildare himself, the best batsman that St. Jim's had ever turned out, faced up to Cardew's bowling: watched with breathless excitement. And when Kildare's wicket went down, there was a roar.

'Well bowled!'

'Good man!'

'Huwway!' yelled Arthur Augustus, waving his eyeglass in the air in his excitement. 'Bwavo! Tom Mewwy, old chap, you were quite wight — Cardew could bowl my head off! Bwavo, Cardew.'

Kildare came across to Cardew, and smacked him on the shoulder. Cardew looked up at him with a whimsical grin.

'Any chance?' he asked, demurely.

The St. Jim's captain laughed.

'You play Carcroft!' he said. 'Keep that up, kid, and we'll pull the game out of the fire after all. Your name goes down to play.'

Cardew was walking on air when he went, in the midst

of a crowd of excited juniors. Trouble with his house-master, ten to one on Bobstay for the Spangle Stakes, even Cutts of the Fifth and his malicious cat-and-mouse game, had quite disappeared from his mind. He was picked to play for the first-eleven: he was going to play for St. Jim's in Kildare's team under the eyes of all the school: he was going to gather laurels that had never come the way of any other junior at St. Jim's: and there was no room in his mind for anything else: and more than ever he felt like Quintus Horatius Flaccus, touching the stars with his exalted head!

CHAPTER XXII

A SURPRISE FOR CUTTS

ST. LEGER of the Fifth opened the door of his study, and stepped in — and stopped. Cutts, sprawling in the armchair, gave him an unpleasant look. He was accustomed to dominating St. Leger, who rather tolerated than liked him: but his influence seemed to have waned of late.

‘Oh, come in!’ he snapped. ‘What have you been keeping out of my way for, I’d like to know.’

St. Leger did not answer that question: but he came into the study, after a moment or two of hesitation, and threw the door shut. It was plain enough that he did not want Cutts’ company, and had thought of going, when he saw that his study-mate was there. However, he came in, and stretched his lazy limbs in the window-seat. Cutts scowled at him from the armchair.

‘I asked you a question,’ he snapped.

St. Leger gave a shrug of the shoulders.

‘Do you want an answer?’ he asked. ‘If you do, can’t you guess it for yourself?’

‘Give it a name.’

‘Okay, if you want me to speak out. I don’t like your methods, Gerald! I’m not a particularly particular chap:

but there's a limit, and you go over the limit, a long way.'

'If you're alluding to that accident in the gym —'

St. Leger's lip curled.

'Did Kildare think it an accident?' he asked. 'I've heard something about him chucking you out of his study.'

'It was a sheer accident, of course.'

'Oh, all right: call it what you like.' St. Leger gave another shrug. 'Accident or not, it didn't get you anywhere.'

'No!' said Cutts, between his teeth. 'Kildare's got a down on me — he wouldn't play me at any price: he'd rather pick a kid out of the Fourth Form, from what I've heard. He will pay for it, when the Carcroft men wash his team out — as they will! St. Jim's haven't a look-in, and Kildare knows it as well as I do. I'm going to watch them licked, that's one comfort.'

'Oh, chuck it,' said St. Leger, in disgust. 'You'd get a house ragging, if the fellows heard you talking in that strain.'

Cutts' eyes glittered.

'Think I want to see Kildare in the role of conquering hero, after he's kicked me out of the team, and chucked me out of his study?' he asked. 'I'd give that tenner he's disappointed me of, to see his gang beaten by an innings and a hatful of runs. And I shall see it.'

'Think so?' drawled St. Leger.

'I know so, and so do you!' said Cutts, savagely. 'St. Jim's haven't an earthly — Carcroft beat them last time, and this time they'll rub it in. They've got as good a batting side as we have — and we've no bowlers —'

change-bowlers if you like, but not a man good enough to put up to take Carcroft wickets. It's going to be a walk-over.'

St. Leger eyed him curiously. Cutts spoke with vindictive bitterness: evidently he was looking forward, with relish, to the overwhelming defeat of the St. Jim's side. A faint contemptuous smile came over St. Leger's face. Cutts, obviously, knew nothing of the prize-packet that had lately been secured for the first-eleven. The news of it was likely to have a perturbing effect on his malicious anticipations.

'So you haven't heard?' drawled St. Leger.

'Heard what?'

'About the new bowler.'

Cutts stared for a moment, and then laughed.

'I heard some talk among the juniors,' he said. 'It seems that Kildare is trying out a kid in the Fourth. Last shot in the locker, what? Much good may it do him. He couldn't be fool enough to play Cardew.'

'The kid can bowl! He made hay of your wicket the other day, you remember.'

Cutts scowled blackly.

'That was a fluke,' he snarled.

'Possibly! If it was, the kid seems able to repeat his flukes ad lib,' grinned St. Leger. 'I've just been watching him at senior nets, where Kildare's been putting him through his paces.'

'More fool he!' said Cutts.

'Hardly, judging by the result!' said St. Leger. 'I'd never

have believed it if I hadn't seen it — but I did see it —'

'The kid did wonders?' jeered Cutts.

'Sort of! He clean-bowled Darrell, Langton, Monteith, and Kildare — and looked as if he could have repeated the mixture as before.'

Cutts sat upright in the armchair, staring at St. Leger.

'Cardew did that?' he jaculated.

'Under my eyes, and under a good many others,' smiled St. Leger. 'The kid seems a born bowler — born with a cricket-ball in his hand! From what I've heard of him, he seems to be a slacking young rascal, as a rule — but when he goes for the game, by gum, he is rather a wonder. His bat won't be much use in a first-eleven game: but he is going to take Carcroft wickets, old man — and I can tell you that hat tricks may be cheap tomorrow.'

'Hat tricks!' repeated Cutts.

'Looks like it to me.'

'Rot!'

St. Leger laughed.

'You can wash out those happy anticipations of yours, Gerald,' he said banteringly. 'Nothing to come, old man. That accident in the gym has found Kildare a better bowler than Baker at his best. That kid Cardew is a prize-packet — rather a swanky young sweep, but can he bowl!'

'You say that he bowled Kildare?'

'I saw him.'

'A fluke —' muttered Cutts.

'Just as much a fluke as when he bowled you, old boy,' grinned St. Leger. 'By gad, it will make all the difference

in the game. You'll come down with me to watch, old boy — I'll be cheering the hat tricks while you're grinding your teeth, what?' And St. Leger chuckled.

'It's rot!' muttered Cutts.

'You'll see!'

'You can't mean that Kildare's put his name up?'

'I know that I heard him say he was going to.'

Cutts sat staring at him, with a black brow. He was utterly taken aback and disconcerted by this news, as St. Leger was amused to see. He loathed Kildare — indeed, his feelings towards the captain of the school amounted to hatred — but that did not blind him to the fact that Kildare was the best batsman at St. Jim's. A bowler who could take Kildare's wicket was good enough for any eleven — so far as bowling went, and it was bowlers that were wanted. If Cardew had bowled Kildare, he could bowl Carcroft men. Neither did personal bitterness blind Cutts to the knowledge that Kildare was a keen judge of any man's form — if he had decided to play Cardew, he was not making a mistake — he was playing him because he was worth playing. His happy anticipations, as St. Leger described them, certainly had to be washed out, if Kildare had discovered a bowler who was a genuine prize-packet. He was not going to gloat over an overwhelming defeat of the home side — the game, after all, was on the knees of the gods! It might even be a home win after all.

Cutts gritted his teeth, as he rose from the armchair. He did not speak again, but slouched savagely out of the study, St. Leger watching him with a grin as he went,

In the passage he came on Lefevre and Gilmore of the Fifth: both members of the first-eleven. They were talking cricket, and he caught the name of Cardew, and his eyes glinted. He called to Lefevre.

'Is the Carcroft list up, do you know?'

Lefevre looked round at him.

'Yes — Kildare's put it up, Cutts,' he answered. 'Bit of a surprise in it too.'

'What's that?' asked Cutts: though he did not need to ask, after what he had heard from St. Leger.

'Young Cardew, of the Fourth,' answered Lefevre. 'It will make some fellows stare — but can that kid bowl!'

'What rot!' muttered Cutts.

'You wouldn't say so, if you'd seen him bowling Sixth-form wickets,' said Lefevre, and Gilmore nodded. Cutts, with a knitted brow, tramped down the passage, and went down to look at the cricket list, now posted up on the board by the St. Jim's captain.

He found a crowd of fellows staring at it. Cardew's name passed from tongue to tongue. Cutts pushed roughly through a crowd of juniors, and there was an indignant ejaculation from one of them.

'Pway look where you are shovin', Cutts.'

Cutts did not heed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He stared at the names in the cricket list with lowering brow and glinting eyes. There was the name, R. R. Cardew, in Kildare's hand. Cutts stared at it, long and hard, and then pushed out of the crowd again, and went out into the quad. Never had his temper been so black and bitter.

That cheeky young rascal, Cardew, whose fate he held in the hollow of his hand! He remembered the note in his pocket. Kildare had found a bowler — in Cardew! If he chose to show that note to Kildare, it would be the prefect's duty to hand it to the house-master: and what would become of his precious bowler then?

'By gad!' muttered Cutts, his eyes gleaming.

If that note came under Railton's eyes, Cardew would not be at St. Jim's to play cricket when Carcroft came over. Kildare would lose his new recruit almost as soon as he had found him. It was a temptation: and Gerald Cutts was not accustomed to resist temptation. He slid his hand into his pocket, and felt the crumpled note there. It was from sheer malice and dislike that he had kept that note, to play cat-and-mouse with the reckless young rascal who had written it. But now he had thought of a use for it — now that Cardew had been picked to play in the Carcroft game. But —

The base thought was in his mind. But he shook his head. Even Cutts, bad as he was, had his limits, and he did not like to see himself in the role of informer and betrayer. He was not going to let other eyes see that note. But — Cardew was not going to pull that game out of the fire, if Cutts could stop him. And he could — he had no doubt that he could. As he walked in the quad, with a knitted brow and a bitter heart, the 'bad hat' of the Fifth thought it over and over: and when the bell rang, and he came in for calling-over, his mind was made up, and he knew what he was going to do.

AN UNEXPECTED BLOW

TOM MERRY smiled.

It was quite a good-natured, though an amused, smile, as he looked at Cardew of the Fourth, in the sunny quad in the morning. Cardew, after breakfast, was sauntering with Levison and Clive, till the bell should ring for form. That he was in great spirits could easily be read in his face. That was natural enough, in a junior picked for the uncommon distinction of playing for the first-eleven, in the big fixture due that day. Any fellow, in such circumstances, was entitled to feel extremely pleased with himself. But there was a slightly vaunting air about him, too, which caused Tom to smile. Perhaps that great distinction had gone to his head a little.

If that distinction had come Tom's way, it certainly would not have caused him to put on 'roll'. He would have been enormously pleased: but he would have taken it in his stride, never dreaming of putting on airs about it. But anyone looking at Cardew, at the moment, might have supposed that he fancied the old quad at St. Jim's not quite good enough for him to walk on.

Levison and Clive were both looking very cheery. It was not often that they had cause to take pride in their

chum: but they had now. More than that, they knew that other and less creditable matters had been driven from Cardew's mind. He seemed to have utterly forgotten Bobstay, and the Spangle Stakes, and a bet of ten to one on with Bill Lodgey. There was no danger of Cardew venturing out of gates to drop a note for Bill in the 'letter-box' in Wayland Wood. A dozen 'dead certs' would not have tempted him: he had in fact forgotten all about dead certs.

'Feeling fit?' Levison was saying, as Tom Merry came up.

'Fit as a fiddle, ol' man!' answered Cardew. He laughed. 'And not a bit nervy, if that's what you mean. Want anything?' he added, as Tom Merry stopped, and the three came to a halt. He threw the question carelessly at the junior captain of his House, as he might have thrown it to a fag of the Third Form. Evidently, Cardew was feeling on top of the world that morning, with a full and complete consciousness of his own importance.

Tom's smile widened.

'Only a word, if you've a moment to spare for common mortals, Cardew,' he answered, and Levison and Clive grinned.

Cardew gave him a supercilious stare.

'Cut it short,' he said.

'As short as you like,' said Tom. 'Cutts has just asked me to tell you that he'd like to speak to you.'

Cardew's look changed.

He had almost forgotten Cutts, and his cat-and-mouse

game. The mention of his name was an unpleasant reminder.

‘Cutts?’ he repeated.

‘Cutts of the Fifth,’ said Tom. ‘He said he’d like to speak to you, if you’d go up to his study before the bell goes. That’s all.’

With that, Tom Merry walked away: having had enough of Cardew, and not in the least interested in the message he had delivered. Cardew stood very still, both his chums eyeing him curiously.

‘What the dickens does that Fifth-form man want?’ said Clive. ‘You’ve nothing to do with Cutts.’

Cardew did not answer.

‘Going?’ asked Levison.

So far as Cardew’s chums could see, it was entirely a matter for him to decide. But Cardew knew better. He was wondering, angrily and uneasily, why Cutts wanted to see him: but he knew that he had to jump if Cutts said jump. That note in Cutts’ pocket had almost vanished from his volatile mind: but he had to remember it.

‘Oh, may as well be civil,’ he drawled, and he left his friends, and went into the House. His look of slightly vaunting self-satisfaction had left him now. He was, for the nonce at least, in the first-eleven: his name was on every tongue: later that day, all St. Jim’s would be watching him on Big Side: for once, if for once only, he was the most distinguished fellow in the Lower School: fellows like Tom Merry, Talbot, Figgins, merely ‘also rans’ in comparison. But he had to jump to Cutts’ orders,

all the same — he dared not let that message pass unheeded.

He found Cutts' study door half-open. He kicked it wide open, and walked in.

Gerald Cutts was standing by the window. He turned his head, and glanced at the junior.

'Shut the door after you!' he snapped.

Cardew looked at him. He did not touch the door.

'Tom Merry said you wanted to speak to me, Cutts,' he said.

'Shut that door.'

Cardew breathed hard. Cutts' tone was bullying, and Cardew would gladly have walked out of the study and banged the door. But he could not venture to do so. He shut the door at last.

Then he turned to Cutts again, his eyes gleaming.

'What do you want?' he asked. 'The bell will be going in a few minutes, and I have to go into form. Get it out.'

Cutts slipped his hand into his pocket, as if to make sure that something was there. Cardew knew what that gesture meant. It was to remind him that Cutts held him in the hollow of his hand.

'Are you going to give me that note back?' he asked. 'Is that what you want to see me for?'

Cutts laughed unpleasantly.

'Not quite,' he answered.

'Then what is it? Can't you get it out?'

'I'm going to give you that note back — this evening!' said Cutts, in a slow and deliberate tone. 'Not before

then — and not unless you do as I'm going to tell you.'

Cardew eyed him, puzzled. That Cutts liked to throw his weight about, that he liked to have power in his hands, and to use it maliciously, he knew: Cutts was that kind of fellow. But he could not guess in the least what the 'bad hat' of the Fifth wanted now. Apparently he required something at Cardew's hands, in exchange for that dangerous scrap of paper: but what it could possibly be, had Cardew guessing.

'Let's have it plain!' went on Cutts, in the same tone. 'This note in my pocket would get you bunked from the school if Railton saw it. You're in disgrace already — gated for kicking over the traces, watched by the prefects — with the sack hanging over your head because you're a reckless and blackguardly young rascal. Isn't that how the case stands?'

Cardew bit his lip, without replying. That was, in fact, exactly how the case stood. He knew it without Cutts telling him. He only wondered why Cutts had sent for him to tell him what they both knew.

'This note' — Cutts tapped his pocket — 'would be the last straw. If Railton found it on his study table —'

Cardew involuntarily shivered.

'You wouldn't!' he muttered. 'You couldn't! A prefect would have to hand it to the house-beak — but you're not a prefect — you'd be simply a sneak, like a fag telling tales! You couldn't do it.'

'Not if you tune in,' said Cutts.

'I don't understand! If there's anything I can do, I'd

do it willingly enough, to get that note back. But what the dooce can I do for you?’

‘I’m going to tell you that,’ said Cutts. He paused a moment. Perhaps even Cutts of the Fifth was a little ashamed of the line he was taking. If so, it made no difference to his fixed intentions. He went on, ‘Kildare’s picked you to play for the first-eleven today.’

Cardew stared. He was wondering what Cutts could possibly be coming to: but never dreamed that he could be coming to that, and he could not guess why.

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘What about it?’

‘It seems that you’re a wonderful bowler,’ said Cutts, with a bitter sneer. ‘I can bowl a little myself, but Kildare isn’t impressed — he chooses to pass over a Fifth-form man to play a kid in the Fourth — you!’

Cardew realised that Cutts’ feelings on that subject were deep and bitter. Still he was puzzled.

‘From what I hear on all sides,’ went on Cutts, ‘Kildare isn’t making a mistake, as I supposed at first. Yesterday it looked as if St. Jim’s hadn’t an earthly. But — I know what you can do, Cardew — if I let you do it.’

‘If!’ repeated Cardew.

‘You can take Carcroft wickets,’ said Cutts. ‘You’re about the only man in the home team that can. If St. Jim’s have a chance, it depends not on the big men batting, but on a cheeky junior bowling.’

Cardew smiled.

‘Thanks!’ he said.

‘Don’t be a young fool!’ said Cutts. ‘I haven’t sent for

you to pay you compliments. I couldn't believe it at first — but I know now! You're a dingy, blackguardly, slacking young rotter, Cardew — but when you choose, you can play cricket, and you seem to have a magic hand with a ball. Well, you're not going to take Carcroft wickets today.'

'What?'

'If you're dreaming of hat tricks, and the crowd yelling your name sky-high, you can forget it,' said Cutts, sardonically. 'Anything like that, Cardew, and the next act will be Railton finding this note on his study table, and you going up to the Head to be sacked.'

'Oh!' gasped Cardew.

He stared blankly at Cutts of the Fifth. He understood now what the Fifth-form man wanted from him.

'You — you rotter!' he panted. 'You want your own school to lose?'

'Exactly that!' said Cutts, coolly. 'I want it, and I mean to have what I want. Kildare kicked me out of the eleven, and he can lose the match to pay for it — and he's going to lose it. Carcroft are going to walk over St. Jim's on their own ground. Go ahead if you like, and take Carcroft wickets — and catch the train home tomorrow morning.'

'Oh!' gasped Cardew, again.

He stood overwhelmed.

'That's what I had to say to you!' said Cutts.

'If I told Kildare this —' breathed Cardew.

Cutts laughed.

'Do!' he said. 'Do — if you like! You'll be seeing Railton afterwards. Do — if you dare.'

Cardew was silent. He knew that he dared not.

Cutts was not playing cat-and-mouse now. He was using the power in his hands, and using it ruthlessly. That power had been put into his hands by Cardew's own reckless and unthinking folly: he had himself to thank for it. His fate was in the balance. He stood looking at Cutts, in overwhelmed silence. He broke the silence at last.

'I can't stand out of the game, Cutts! What reason could I give — you know I can't do it.'

'That's not what I'm asking you to do,' said Cutts. 'That wouldn't suit my book. Kildare has chosen to play a kid from the Fourth in my place — and he's going to look just as big a fool as he's made me look! What will the men say, when his precious new bowler from the Lower School turns out a dud after all? You're going to keep your place in the team — you're going to bowl for St. Jim's — and you're going to turn out a passenger in the team — a dead loss all round. That game is going to be lost, and Kildare is going to look the biggest fool ever, for picking a Fourth-form kid to play. Have you got it now?'

Cardew panted.

'If I play, I've got to do my best,' he muttered, huskily. 'I can't let the side down.'

Cutts shrugged his shoulders.

'Do as you choose!' he answered. 'I can't stop you! All I can do is to leave your note to Bill Lodgey on Railton's

table, while you're doing hat-trick stunts on Big Side!

'I — I tell you —'

'That will do! We're through — you can get out of my study.'

'I — I can't do it —'

'It's your choice,' said Cutts. 'Play up if you like, and go to the Head to be sacked afterwards. Take a single Carcroft wicket today, Cardew, and your number's up here —'

'You — you rotter —'

'Get out!'

'You worm — you rat —' panted Cardew.

Cutts made a step towards him.

'Are you getting out, or waiting to be kicked out?' he asked. He threw open the door. 'Get out!'

Cardew almost stumbled from the study.

CHAPTER XXIV

NO LUCK

'WALLY wound, deah boys.'

'What the dickens —'

'Come on, Gussy.'

'What are you doing with that squirt, you ass?'

'Pway hold on a minute —' urged Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

'The bell will be going in a minute, fathead.'

'Bothah the bell! —'

'Do you want to be late for Lathom, ass?'

'Bothah Lathom, too!'

'Look here, Gussy, you chump —'

'I wefuse to be called a chump, Blake, and I wepeat, that I want you fellows to wally wound! Will you wally wound or not?' demanded Arthur Augustus, hotly.

Blake and Herries and Digby paused, in transit across the study landing to the stairs. They paused reluctantly. It was almost time for class, and they did not want to be late for Mr. Lathom in the Fourth-form room. On that morning, of all mornings, they did not want to run the risk of a detention — with Carcroft coming over to play St. Jim's, and a Fourth-form man figuring in the first-eleven. However, they paused, staring at their aristocratic

chum with inquiring and somewhat exasperated looks.

Certainly, they were prepared at any time to 'rally round' if Arthur Augustus was in need of rallying. But they saw no need at the moment: and they had not the slightest idea why Gussy had a squirt in his hand, instead of school books under his arm.

'What's up, then?' exclaimed Blake, impatiently. 'Cough it up — quick.'

'That wottah Cutts —'

'Oh, bless Cutts!' said Blake.

'Blow Cutts!' said Herries.

'Pewwaps you have forgotten,' said Arthur Augustus, with dignified sarcasam, 'that that wottah Cutts boxed my yahs, and wagged me in his study, and smothahed me with ink, and pwactically wuined my clobbah —'

'Quite!' agreed Blake. 'Forgotten all about it.'

'Weally, Blake —'

'Are you coming?' demanded Herries.

'Weally, Hewwies —'

'Well, I'm not going to be late, for one!' said George Herries, and he shot on to the stairs, and descended the same at speed.

'Bai Jove! Hewwies, you ass — Hewwies!' But Herries was gone. 'Blake — Dig — pway wally wound — Cutts will be here in a minute —'

'I expect he's gone to his form-room —'

'Nothin' of the kind,' said Arthuh Augustus. 'I have been keepin' an eye on the wottah. He has gone to his study. He is there now —'

'Well, come on, and let him stick there, and be late for Ratcliff if he likes. We don't want to be late for Lathom.'

'Nevah mind that now, Blake. As soon as I saw him go to his study, I went to fill this squirt.' Arthur Augustus help up a large squirt, from which several drops of ink exuded. 'Now I am waitin' for him to come — he will come along when the bell goes.'

'Oh, my hat!' said Dig. 'Still at that game? You got St. Leger last time — who's going to get it this time?'

'Cutts is goin' to get it this time, Dig, wight in the middle of his face!' answered Arthur Augustus. 'And if he cuts up wusty —'

'If!' grinned Blake.

'Then I want my fwiends to stand by me,' said Arthur Augustus. 'The fact is that I cannot handle that big Fifth-form bwute on my own, so I want my fwiends to wally wound.'

'Oh, scissors!' said Dig. 'We're to be late for Lathom, while you play monkey-tricks with a squirt! Forget all about it, Gussy, and cut on.'

'I am waitin' heah for Cutts —'

'Bosh!' said Dig. And he cut down the staircase after Herries. Squirting Cutts of the Fifth with ink might or might not be an attractive proposition: but only Arthur Augustus thought it worth the risk of a detention on Carcroft day. Dig disappeared.

'Blake, deah boy —'

'Oh, don't be an ass, old chap!' said Blake. 'Cutts will

keep! Shove that squirt in your pocket, and come on, and don't be a goat.'

'I wepeat —'

'Hurry up!' was Blake's reply: and he too disappeared down the staircase.

'Weally, Blake — stop — bai Jove!'

Blake was gone, after Herries and Dig. Arthur Augustus was left on his solitary own on the study landing. Not even his chums, it seemed, were going to be late for class, while he visited the vials of wrath on Gerald Cutts' head, in the shape of a stream of ink from a squirt.

'Bai Jove!' repeated Arthur Augustus.

He realised that his best guess was to follow his comrades down the stairs. Squirted Cutts of the Fifth with ink was quite a fascinating idea: but it was clear that, if he squirted Cutts of the Fifth with ink, he would be in dire need of some rallying-round. Three or four juniors, no doubt, could have handled Cutts with promptness and despatch. But Arthur Augustus, on his own, was likely to fare no better than he had fared in Cutts' study.

Arthur Augustus frowned.

But his noble brow cleared as three fellows came at a run across the landing from the Shell studies.

'Tom Mewwy! Mannahs! Lowthah! Pway stop a minute —'

'Eh! What? Why?'

'I am waitin' heah for Cutts, to squirt him,' explained Arthur Augustus. 'Vewy likely he will cut up wusty —'

'Oh, my hat!' exclaimed Tom Merry. 'Very likely indeed, I think.'

'It will be all wight if you fellows wally wound and stand by a fellow —'

'And be late for Linton?' asked Manners, staring.

'Nevah mind Linton —'

'We have to mind our form beak, just a little, Gussy,' said Tom Merry, laughing. 'Chuck it, old man, and get down to your form-room. Come on, you chaps.'

'Weally, Tom Mewwy —'

But the Terrible Three were gone. No more than Blake and Co. did they seem disposed to be late for class while Arthur Augustus D'Arcy performed antics with an inky squirt.

'Bai Jove!' said Arthur Augustus, again.

His noble countenance was quite disconsolate. Any minute now Cutts of the Fifth might come along from his study: and the inky squirt was all ready for him. But the warlike swell of St. Jim's had to realise that, while he wanted very much to drench Cutts with ink, as he richly deserved, he did not want what would indubitably follow, if there was no help at hand.

As he stood undecided, there was a footstep in the Fifth-form passage, and he looked round quickly, expecting to see Cutts. But it was not Cutts who came out on the landing: it was Cardew of the Fourth.

One look at Cardew's face was enough to make Arthur Augustus almost forget Cutts and his many offences. Cardew's face was almost white: he had an almost dazed

look. He was utterly unlike the fellow who had seemed to be walking on air, only that morning. If there had been a spot of 'swank' about Cardew since he had seen his name up in the first-eleven list, it had quite vanished. If ever a fellow looked as if he had 'taken the knock', Cardew did, as he came under the surprised eyes of his relative. He looked utterly down and out.

'Bai Jove! What's the mattah, Cardew?' exclaimed Arthur Augustus, with concern.

Cardew did not seem to hear. He walked on, unsteadily, towards the stairs. Arthur Augustus, after staring at him blankly, cut after him, and caught him by the shoulder as he was about to descend.

'Cardew, deah boy —' Arthur Augustus forgot that they were not friends, and that quite recently they had been exchanging punches. 'You look ill, old chap — what is the mattah?'

'Leave me alone, you fool!'

'Weally, Cardew —'

Cardew jerked his shoulder savagely away. Arthur Augustus was sympathetic: but his relative had no use for sympathy. Neither was he likely to tell Arthur Augustus, or anyone else, what the 'matter' was!

He tramped down the stairs, leaving Arthur Augustus staring after him, puzzled as well as concerned. Half an hour ago, he had seen Cardew looking on top of the world. Now he saw him looking like a fellow down and out. It was a startling change.

Squirt in hand, but quite forgetful of Cutts of the Fifth

and of his hostile intentions towards that unpopular senior, Arthur Augustus stood staring down the staircase after Cardew's disappearing head. As that head vanished, a bell began to ring.

That reminded Arthur Augustus of class.

'Bai Jove!' he ejaculated. 'That's the bell! I suppose I had bettah cut off, and let that wottah Cutts wip, and — Yawooooooh!' Arthur Augustus wound up with a frantic yell, as a heavy foot impinged upon his elegant trousers from behind, and the squirt dropped from his hand as he tottered.

In his concerned interest in Cardew, he had not heard Cutts coming. Cutts of the Fifth came along to the stairs to go down, and Arthur Augustus's ejaculation reached his ears as he came. Probably he was not pleased to hear himself alluded to as a 'wottah'. At all events, he landed his foot on Arthur Augustus's trousers, with quite a crash: and the swell of St. Jim's, yelling, tottered, and almost tumbled down the stairs.

'Oh, cwikey! Yawoooooh! Oh, cwumbs! Who's that! Oh, you wottah — you wat — you uttah wuffian —'

Cutts, laughing, went on his way, down the stairs. Arthur Augustus was left wriggling on the landing. He wriggled and wriggled, his aristocratic countenance crimson with wrath.

The clang of the bell ceased.

With deep feelings, Arthur Augustus picked up the squirt, put it into his pocket, and cut down the staircase. He was just in time before the form-room door closed. But

he did not bestow much attention, in that lesson, to the words of wisdom that fell from the lips of Mr. Lathom. Once more he had had ill-luck on the trail of vengeance: it was not the inky squirt, but Cutts' heavy foot, that had been featured in the encounter on the landing. But Arthur Augustus was not going to be discouraged. One disaster after another did not deter him. Cutts of the Fifth had it coming!

THE CARCROFT MATCH

'CHEEK!' murmured Tom Merry.

Cutts of the Fifth glanced at him. Perhaps that murmur had reached his ears: Tom did not care whether it did or not.

A crowd was gathering on Big Side.

Few fellows at St. Jim's, in 'break' that morning, were thinking of anything but cricket. Carcroft day was always a great day: but on the present occasion, the match had even more than its usual interest. Carcroft were known to be in great form: and St. Jim's, it was also well known, were not quite up to the usual mark. And the fact that a junior of the Fourth Form had been recruited to fill a place in the depleted team, among the great men of the Sixth and Fifth, was a topic on every tongue. Everyone wanted to know how it would turn out, and even slackers like Racke and Crooke and Baggy Trimble were going to give the game a look-in.

It was beginning early, before lunch: the Carcroft team were already at St. Jim's. Third school was washed out for the cricketers: including one lucky member of the Fourth. All that the rest could do, was to see the start, before they trooped back to the form-rooms. So, in break, there was a general convergence on to Big Side.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were there, with the four members of Study No. 6, in a cheery bunch. Figgins and Kerr came down with a New House crowd. Fatty Wynn was not with his chums: he was not yet out of 'sanny'. Had he been, it was probable that Kildare would never have thought of Cardew. Fatty's misfortune was Cardew's good fortune: though many fellows in the Fourth had noted, during early school with Mr. Lathom, that Cardew did not seem to look as if he were enjoying his good fortune. Some of them wondered whether, after all, he had misgivings: little dreaming of what was really on the mind of the sportsman of the Fourth.

Near the bunch of juniors stood some Fifth-form men, Cutts among them. It was a remark from Cutts that drew Tom Merry's murmured comment of 'Cheek!' St. Leger had remarked that the Carcroft men, now coming into the field, looked a pretty fit crowd, and undoubtedly they did. Kildare having won the toss, had elected to take first knock, and the whole crowd watched eagerly to see the captain of St. Jim's open the innings for School, with Darrell at the other end, before the summons of the bell called them away. In reply to St. Leger's remark, Cutts was heard to drawl:

'Not the sort of men to go down to fag bowling, I fancy. We shall see some fireworks when they take their knock. Does Kildare really expect a Fourth-form kid to put up anything like a show in a match like this? Must be wandering in his mind.'

It was then that Tom murmured 'Cheek!'

'Yaas, wathah!' breathed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, his eye and eyeglass gleaming at Gerald Cutts. 'Fwightful cheek!'

'Oh, Cutts has forgotten more about cricket than old Kildare ever learned,' said Monty Lowther. 'Look how he stood up to Cardew's bowling the other day.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Some of the Fifth-form men grinned, and Cutts knitted his brows, as those remarks among the juniors reached him. However, he affected not to hear.

'You're talkin' rot, old boy,' said St. Leger. 'Kildare's got the eye of a hawk for a man's form, and if he thinks that young sweep Cardew can take Carcroft wickets, why, he can take them.'

'I'd like to see it!' said Cutts, shrugging his shoulders.

'You'll see it, when Carcroft bat.'

'Rot!' said Cutts. 'Kildare's made a mistake — and it's a mistake that no cricket captain ought to make. He will look a precious fool when his fag recruit lets him down.'

'Is the wish father to the thought?' asked St. Leger, sarcastically. And without waiting for an answer to that question, he moved away from Cutts, apparently having had enough of his company and conversation.

Cutts shrugged his shoulders, a sneer on his face. Nobody was likely to heed him, as a critic of Kildare: but at all events, his emphatic opinion would be remembered afterwards — after the 'fag recruit' had let down the side! And that that recruit was going to prove a quite useless passenger in the St. Jim's team, Cutts

knew: for he knew that Cardew dared not do otherwise.

He could have no doubt on that point. Either Cardew had to obey his instructions, or face the 'sack', and he dared not face it. A fellow like Tom Merry, or Jack Blake, or George Figgins, would have defied him to do his worst — but a fellow like Tom Merry, or Jack Blake, or George Figgins, would never have been in Cardew's position. It was his own bad conduct that had placed the wretched junior at Cutts' mercy: it was his own reckless folly that had come home to roost. And he would not and could not face the consequences of that reckless folly, so long as a way of escape remained. And the only way of escape was to jump to Cutts' orders. And when he proved, as he must prove, a hopeless failure, what were the St. Jim's men going to think of Kildare and his judgment? Cutts was perhaps the only critic now: but later on there would be plenty of criticism. And what would Kildare's own feelings be? It was a very pleasant prospect for the fellow whom Kildare had pitched neck and crop out of his study!

But if the envious and malicious fellow was prepared to gloat over disaster to the home side, he had no occasion to gloat so far, at all events. There was a ripple of hand-clapping as Kildare came out to the wickets with Darrell. Kildare took the first over from Carcroft, and in that over he showed that, so far as wielding the willow went, St. Jim's looked like keeping their end up. The bowling was good, and the fielding efficient: but the captain of St. Jim's scored eight in the over: and when the field

changed, Darrell proceeded to add to it. And then the clang of a distant bell came on the summer breeze, and the crowd had to melt.

'Wotten!' remarked Arthur Augustus. 'Bothah that bell, and bothah class, and bothah Lathom! Howevah, I daresay old Kildare will still be battin' when we come out.'

'Perhaps,' said Tom Merry. 'Anyhow, we shall be in time to see the tail of the innings. I wonder what sort of a show Cardew will put up.'

'Yaas, wathah! We shall pwobably see him, as he is last man in. His battin' won't be much to w'ite home about, but I wathah think that we are goin' to see some fireworks when he bowls. That cheeky wottah Cutts doesn't seem to think so, but I am expectin' to see hat twicks.'

'Hear, hear!' said Levison.

The crowd cleared off, reluctantly, to the form-rooms. Seldom or never had third school been so unwelcome to most St. Jim's fellows. It was, as Monty Lowther remarked, cruelty to animals, while cricket was going on on Big Side. Mr. Lathom in the Fourth, Mr. Linton in the Shell, and even Mr. Ratcliff in the Fifth, had somewhat inattentive forms to deal with. And never had third school seemed quite so long to most of the fellows. Time seemed to crawl, till the welcome moment of dismissal came at last.

Then a whooping crowd poured out to rush down to the cricket-field. Eager eyes scanned the score-board. St. Jim's were still batting, but the innings was close to the finish.

'100 for nine,' exclaimed Tom Merry.

'Last man going in!' said Blake.

'All over bar shouting,' said Monty Lowther. 'Cardew may make it a hundred and one — let's hope so!'

Tom Merry's eyes were rather curiously on Cardew, as he went to his wicket to take the bowling. After what he had seen of him that morning, he rather expected to see Cardew walking on air, perhaps even strutting, as he went out to bat for the first-eleven. But anything in the nature of 'swank' seemed to have been quite eliminated from Kildare's new recruit. His face was clouded, and his movements were far from alert: and if he was enjoying this distinguished occasion, his looks belied him. Certainly he did not look like a fellow who was going to keep his end up against first-eleven bowling from Carcroft. Not, of course, that much was expected from Cardew in that line: it was in the bowling that he was expected to shine.

'Bai Jove!' remarked Arthur Augustus, his eye and eyeglass also on his relative. 'Cardew isn't lookin' feahfully fit, you fellows. I wondah if it's nerves — stage-fwight, you know.'

'Might be!' agreed Tom.

'I wemembah I saw him lookin' quite sick this mornin', befoah school,' said Arthur Augustus, thoughtfully. 'I wondah how he is goin' to shape.'

Arthur Augustus did not have to wonder long. The first ball from a Carcroft hand ripped a stump out of the ground, and the bails flew. Cardew of the Fourth had scored a duck.

'Rotten luck!' said Blake.

'Not making it a hundred-and-one after all!' remarked Monty Lowther.

'Wait till you see him bowl, though!' said Arthur Augustus, confidently. He little dreamed of what they were going to see, after they had waited to see Ralph Reckness Cardew bowl!

CHAPTER XXVI

NO GOOD!

'OH, chuck it!' said St. Leger.

He turned and walked away.

Gerald Cutts scowled after him as he went. Cutts had been speaking on what now seemed to be his favourite theme, as they walked in the quad after dinner — what a fool Kildare was going to look when his junior recruit let him down. That theme did not make Cutts popular. Later, perhaps, his remarks might be recalled as prophetic: at the moment, nobody wanted to hear them.

That junior recruit, Cardew of the Fourth, had his eye on Cutts, from a little distance. Any minute now he might be wanted; the Carcroft innings was just on due to begin. But he wanted to speak a last word to Cutts of the Fifth — a word he could not speak while there were other ears to hear. It was a relief to him to see St. Leger go; and he hurried up as Cutts was left alone.

'I want to speak to you, Cutts,' he said, in a low voice.

'You've nothing to say to me that I know of,' answered Cutts. 'Don't bother.'

Cardew gave him a bitter look.

'I must speak!' he said. 'I — I can't do what you

want, Cutts. I can't! Kildare trusts me — he's relying on me — I can't let him down.'

'Please yourself.'

'You rat — you rotter!' breathed Cardew. 'If the fellows knew that you were holding that paper over my head, you'd be cut by every man in the school — you'd be sacked, if the Head knew.'

'Go and tell him!'

'Will you let me off?' Cardew's angry tone changed to pleading. His arrogant nature hated asking the slightest favour: but he pleaded now. 'Cutts! Don't be such a rotter — after all, you're a St. Jim's man — Cutts, will you give me back that paper you've got in your pocket, and let's forget all about this —'

Cutts gave him a stare, turned on his heel, and walked away without answering. Cardew ran after him and caught his arm.

'Look here, Cutts —'

'Get out of it, you young fool!' snapped Cutts. 'Do you want the whole school to see us confabbing?'

'I don't care —'

'Well, I do — clear off, and leave me alone.'

'You know what happened in my innings,' muttered Cardew, unheeding, 'I was bowled for a duck — it was this on my mind that caused it —'

Cutts jerked his arm loose, and strode away.

Cardew did not follow him further. He realised that an appeal to the 'bad hat' of the Fifth was useless.

He stood with clenched hands.

It was in his mind to carry on regardless of Cutts; to play up loyally, to justify his captain's faith in him. But he knew that he dared not. Unless Cutts relented, he had to play Cutts' game: he dared not let that tell-tale note meet his house-master's eyes. Cutts had him in the hollow of his hand. He knew what he ought to do — what duty and honour required him to do — but he dared not do it. He had to fail the captain who trusted him — he had to let the side down — it was that, or going up to the Head to be 'sacked'. And that he could not face.

'Cardew! Cardew, deah boy.'

His name was called.

He glanced round at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, coming towards him at a trot.

'You're wanted, Cardew,' called out Arthur Augustus, as he came breathlessly up. 'Kildare's sent three or four fellows to look for you. Have you forgotten that you're playin' cwicket today, Cardew?'

'I'm coming.'

'Anythin' the mattah, deah boy?'

'Eh? Yes — no — what should be the matter?' snapped Cardew, and he stared off at run. Arthur Augustus kept pace with him.

'You were lookin' wathah upset, deah boy,' said Arthur Augustus, as they trotted side by side. 'I saw you speakin' to Cutts — I hope you have not let that wottah discourwage you.'

Cardew laughed harshly.

'Cutts is a wat,' continued Arthur Augustus. 'He has

been talkin' a lot of wot about you lettin' the side down — lots of fellows have heard him. A fellow might almost think that he wanted St. Jim's to lose the match, bai Jove.'

'Almost!' said Cardew, savagely.

'Weally, I would not put it past him, as he is such a wat,' said Arthur Augustus. 'He kicked me on my twousahs this mornin'. The othah day he smothahed me with ink. He is a wegulah wottah, Cardew. He doesn't know anythin' about cwicket, eithah — you shouldn't take any notice of what he talks out of the back of his silly neck.'

Cardew did not answer that.

'He has got it comin', too!' added Arthur Augustus, with a gleam in his noble eye. 'Cutts hat got somethin' comin' to him, Cardew. But I am not goin' to waste time on the wottah now. I'm not goin' to miss your bowlin' against Carcwoft. Don't you mind what that wottah may have said, Cardew — we all know you are goin' to put up a tewwific show. You go in and win, old chap.'

Cardew cut off to the pavilion, and Arthur Augustus rejoined his friends. Almost all St. Jim's were packing the ground, to watch the opening of the visitors' innings. A ripple of hand-clapping greeted the St. Jim's men as they came into the field: but, great men as Kildare, and Darrell, and Monteith, and the rest were, most eyes fixed on Cardew. Sturdy as he was, for a junior, he looked diminutive among the great men of the Upper School. But everyone knew how he could bowl and expectation was keen.

'Kildare ought to give him the first over!' said Levison. 'Good show to start with a Carcroft wicket down,' agreed Clive.

Evidently their faith in their chum was complete!

'Well, Cardew won't exactly make hay of their wickets,' remarked Tom Merry. 'They're good men with the willow. But we're going to see some fireworks, if Cardew's in anything like the form he's shown lately.'

'Yaas, wathah!'

'No swank about him, either, now', remarked Jack Blake. 'I rather thought he'd look as if the cricket ground belonged to him.'

Tom Merry laughed. He had rather expected something of the kind, too. But there certainly was no sign of 'swank' about Ralph Reckness Cardew at the moment. His looks could hardly have been more subdued. Indeed, some fellows wondered a little whether he was feeling nervous, in the tremendous company in which he now found himself.

It was Darrell of the Sixth who bowled the first over, to Langley, captain of Carcroft. Apart from Cardew, Darrell was the best bowler left in the eleven, and he was a good man with the leather. But Langley of Carcroft was also a good man with the willow. He made five, and so was still at the batting end when the field changed over. And then, to the delight of a swarm of juniors watching, the ball was given to Cardew.

'Now look out!' said Levison.

'What-ho!' said Clive.

'Yaas, wathah!' said Arthur Augustus.

'There's that rotter Cutts,' muttered Blake. 'By gum, I'd like to smack that sneer off his face.'

'Same here,' said Tom Merry.

Glances of disfavour were cast at Cutts of the Fifth. He had come along to watch the exploits of the team from which he was discarded — with a special interest in the new bowler. The sneer on his hard face was quite pronounced. No doubt he was willing to let everyone observe that he, at least, was not expecting anything in the nature of fireworks from that new bowler. Blake and Tom Merry were not the only fellows who would have liked to smack that sneer from his face.

However, Cardew was now preparing to bowl, and all attention turned to him. Cutts and his sneer were disregarded: it was the new bowler who was the cynosure of all eyes.

The ball went down, and Langley snicked it away with ease.

'Oh!' murmured Levison.

'Bai Jove!' breathed Arthur Augustus.

Certainly, wonderful bowler as Cardew had proved himself to be, nobody expected him to deal with Carcroft wickets as if they were skittles. To knock out the captain of Carcroft at the first ball was rather too much to look for. But every onlooker could see that that had been a feeble ball — such a ball as might have been bowled at fag nets. It gave Carcroft two. There was a faint flush in Cardew's cheeks, as he caught the ball from Monteith in the field.

'Lost his nerve, what?' murmured Monty Lowther.

'Wait till he warms up!' said Levison.

'Yaas, wathah.'

'Give him time,' said Tom Merry. 'After all, it's a bit of a test, playing in a match like this. Look out for the next shot.'

The next shot proved no better than the first. Almost any junior on the ground could have dealt with it: and it was pie to the Carcroft captain. He sent it to the boundary.

'Um!' said Tom.

'Bai Jove!'

Great expectations faded, as the over went on. Kildare, in the field, bit his lip. It was not only that no wicket fell: not only that the over gave Carcroft ten: but Cardew's bowling was that of any average junior — good enough, perhaps, for a game on Little Side, but of no use at all against mighty men like the Carcroft first-eleven. His almost uncanny skill with the ball seemed to have wholly deserted him. Levison and Clive had rather long faces. The Cardew they knew had nerve enough for anything: but they could hardly doubt that his nerve had failed him now.

'He'll pull round,' muttered Levison.

'Sure to!' said Clive. But he did not feel sure.

'Bai Jove!' remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, 'we shall have to wait for those fireworks, aftah all.'

Monteith bowled the next over. The ball came Cardew's way in the field, and a myriad eyes were on him. His finger-tips touched the leather — but it slipped and fell.

'Butter-fingers!' called out somebody.

Cardew, with a crimson face, picked up the ball to return it.

'You'd have made that catch, Tom,' said Manners.

Tom Merry nodded.

'I think so,' he assented. 'What on earth's come over Cardew?'

'No more use in the field than a sack of coke!' said Monty Lowther. 'By gum, I wonder whether that sneering cad Cutts was right after all.'

'Wait and see, deah boys,' said Arthur Augustus, oracularly. 'Cardew will pull wound all wight. I wefuse to believe that that wottah Cutts knew what he was talkin' about.'

'Um!' said Tom.

'Kildare will look rather an ass, if Cutts was right, and Cardew lets him down,' muttered Blake. 'After all, it was a big risk to take.'

'Chuckin' a batsman away to get a bowler — and the bowler's no good!' said Herries, shaking his head. 'Too much swank about Cardew, if you ask me. Swank never gets anybody anywhere.'

'Off his form, anyhow,' said Dig.

'Wait and see, deah boys,' repeated Arthur Augustus.

The St. Jim's crowd waited — and they saw!

What was the matter with Cardew — whether he had lost his nerve, whether he was off-colour, or whatever it was, it became clearer and clearer that he was not the wonderful bowler he had appeared to be. Kildare,

reluctant to admit to himself that he had made a mistake, gave him plenty of chances — he was given the ball for over after over. But the result was ever the same — not a single ball was ever dangerous to a Carcroft wicket — not a ball left Cardew's hand that could not have been played by any cricketer in the Fourth or the Shell. It was 'pie' to the Carcroft bats: and they knocked it all over the field, accumulating runs.

That was altogether too expensive to keep up: and at length, Cardew was taken off the bowling. Kildare had to admit, to himself and to the rest, that he had picked a passenger for the team. Whatever might be the cause, his new recruit was of no use to the side, and unpleasant as it was, the St. Jim's captain had to realise that Cutts of the Fifth would have done infinitely better than this.

It was a blow, and a bitter disappointment. But he did not utter a single word of reproach to the recruit who had failed him. He placed all the blame on himself: he had taken too long a chance: never for a moment did a suspicion cross his mind that the junior was not doing his best.

Cardew took his place in the field, where he was as useless as on the bowling crease. St. Jim's were as good — or as bad — as playing a man short: and that that game could be pulled out of the fire, was a very forlorn hope.

'What a sell!' grunted Blake.

'Yaas, wathah!' mumbled Arthur Augustus. 'I am

afraid, deah boys, that we are not goin' to see any fireworks aftah all.'

'That cad Cutts was right,' said Manners.

'Looks like it,' said Tom Merry.

'Kildare must be feeling pretty rotten,' remarked Lowther. 'First time he's ever made such a mistake.'

'The men will grouse about it, later,' said Blake, with a shake of the head. 'They'll all be feeling sore. Cardew was put in over the heads of a dozen men in the Fifth and Sixth — and look how he's turned out!'

'Rotten show!' said Herries.

Cutts of the Fifth smiled as he heard those remarks, and a good many others of the same tenor. He strolled off the field with that smile on his face.

Nobody else felt like smiling. The Carcroft innings ended for 150: and when Monty Lowther remarked that St. Jim's might as well call it a day, most fellows were disposed to concur.

Cardew muttered a word to Kildare when the field went off.

'I'm sorry, Kildare.'

The St. Jim's captain gave him a quite kind glance.

'Don't worry, kid,' he said, 'it was my fault, not yours. I know you've done your best, and no fellow could do more. Don't let it worry you.'

Cardew moved away, unable to answer. Kildare's kind words were the climax to his shame and humiliation and misery. He had let down the captain who trusted him, and Kildare believed that he had done his best, never

dreaming of treachery. He did not linger at the pavilion. Last man in, for the St. Jim's second knock, was not likely to be wanted for a long time: and the shame-stricken fellow was anxious to get away from all eyes. Levison and Clive looked for him but did not find him.

GUSSY ON THE WAR-PATH

'BAI JOVE!' breathed Arthur Augustus.

His eye gleamed behind his eyeglass.

It gleamed at Gerald Cutts, of the Fifth Form.

Arthur Augustus was, as a matter of fact, looking for his relative, Cardew. Cardew seemed to have disappeared, after the inglorious part he had played in the Carcroft innings. It was natural, perhaps, that after so inglorious a display, after disappointing all hopes, the hapless junior should desire to keep out of the public eye. Many fellows were speaking of him with derision, contrasting his self-satisfaction, when he was picked for the team, with the dismal performance he had put up in the field. But the kindly heart of Arthur Augustus was sympathetic. He had remarked to Blake and Herries and Dig that the chap must be feeling absolutely 'wotten': and the fact that he disapproved of Cardew's manners and customs, and had recently exchanged punches with him, did not diminish his sympathy.

So, leaving his friends watching the St. Jim's second innings, Arthur Augustus looked for Cardew, with the benevolent intention of solacing him with sympathy, and encouraging him to hope for better luck when Carcroft

batted again. He hoped that that might help his relative to brace up. He did not find Cardew at the pavilion, where indeed he might have had grim looks from senior members of the eleven: neither did he find him anywhere near the cricket ground: and he was not visible in the quadrangle. The benevolent swell of St. Jim's did not, in fact, find Cardew at all: but in looking for him, he found Cutts.

Coming along the path by the school wall, in that shady corner behind the elms, his eye and eyeglass fell on Cutts of the Fifth.

Cutts, evidently, was not interested in the St. Jim's second knock. He had watched the Carcroft innings, to see Cardew carry out his malicious instructions. He had been quite satisfied with the result. He did not suppose for a moment that St. Jim's batting would make up the lee-way: Carcroft were fifty ahead, and that margin was more likely to be increased than diminished. Everything was going Cutts' way — the match was going to be a heavy defeat, and Kildare was going to look a fool: both results eminently satisfactory to the scheming fellow Kildare had 'chucked' out of his study. Cutts, quite at ease in his mind, had strolled to that quiet shady spot, to smoke a cigarette or two before he gave the cricket a look-in again.

He was leaning back against the ivied wall that bordered the road, in the spot where he had caught Cardew. He had his cigarette-case in his hand, as Arthur Augustus came along the path.

It disappeared into his pocket as he saw the junior, and he bestowed a scowl on the swell of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus responded to it with a glance of scorn.

His hand slipped into his pocket, where the squirt reposed. Cutts was going to get the contents of that squirt — when opportunity knocked. Strongly was Gussy tempted to jerk it from his pocket, and let fly, there and then. But his hand came out of his pocket empty. Discretion was the better part of valour. Gussy was brave as a lion: but it was useless to ask for a record thrashing: and it had been borne in upon his noble mind that in Cutts' sinewy hands he was little more than an infant. Really and truly, a Fourth-form junior had to walk warily in dealing with a big hefty fellow in the Fifth Form. So the swell of St. Jim's contented himself with a glance of ineffable scorn at the lounging senior, as he walked on.

Get out of this, D'Arcy,' snapped Cutts. He did not care to produce his smokes under the eyes of the junior.

'Weally, Cutts —'

'Are you waiting to be kicked?'

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy breathed hard.

'I am lookin' for Cardew,' he said. 'Pewwaps you have seen him awound somewhah, Cutts.'

'He's not here, anyhow. Get out.'

'I pwesume, Cutts, that I can walk on this path if I choose,' said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

'Do you?' said Cutts, unpleasantly. He detached himself from the ivied wall, and came towards the junior,

with so obvious an intention of booting him, that Arthur Augustus jumped away swiftly.

'Bai Jove! You wotten bully!' he exclaimed: and with that, Arthur Augustus retreated through the elms. He did not run — he disdained to run — but he walked very quickly, and disappeared from the spot.

Cutts, with a grunt, resumed his lounging posture at the wall, and the cigarette-case came into view again. He helped himself to a smoke, while Arthur Augustus, in the quad, breathed wrath and indignation.

Cutts of the Fifth was quite unaware that vengeance was on his trail, in the shape of a squirt of ink, when opportunity knocked! In ordering Arthur Augustus away he was simply 'throwing his weight about', as usual. It was extremely repugnant to Arthur Augustus to let him get away with it: but he had to go, and it was useless to collect a kick before he went. But he breathed indignant wrath.

'The wottah! The uttah wottah! The cheeky wat!' breathed Arthur Augustus. 'I have a vewy gweat mind to go stwaight back, and let him have the squirt wight in the eye! The cheeky wat!'

He realised that it was not judicious to go back and let Cutts have the squirt of ink right in the eye, desirable as that exploit might be! When Cutts captured that squirtful of ink, it was necessary to be out of his reach, unless his friends were at hand to see him through. But a sudden gleam shot into the eye behind the eyeglass.

'Bai Jove!' ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

He grinned.

It was quite a bright, indeed a brilliant, idea that had flashed into his mind — a real spot of strategy. He had left Cutts leaning on the wall in that corner behind the elms. On the other side of that wall was the road. What if a fellow walked down the road, and climbed the wall from the outside, at the spot where Cutts was leaning on it inside? From the top of the wall, Cutts would be in easy range of the squirt, but the squirter would be out of his reach — from that coign of vantage, Arthur Augustus could rake him fore and aft, as it were, with a stream of ink!

Arthur Augustus chuckled.

He thought it over for a few minutes. It seemed to him an absolutely sound scheme. Cutts would be at the mercy of the inky stream from above — he would be drenched, as Gussy had been drenched on that occasion in his study — and he couldn't do a thing.

'Ha, ha, ha!' chortled Arthur Augustus. And he headed for the gates.

He forgot that he was looking for Cardew. He even forgot that the St. Jim's innings was going on, on Big Side. He was concentrated on Cutts of the Fifth: Cutts, at long last, was going to get what was coming to him.

Arthur Augustus strolled out of gates, and strolled along the road, a cheery grin adorning his aristocratic features. He calculated the distance very carefully, judging the precise spot by a leafy branch that projected over the wall. There he came to a halt.

It was a rather high wall. But there were interstices^s in the ancient stones: and Arthur Augustus was active. He was careful to make no sound as he climbed. Cutts, probably, would not have heeded any slight sound from the road: but Gussy was wary — he was not going to risk the Fifth-form man taking the alarm.

Slowly, but surely, he pulled himself up the wall, till he had his elbows on the top, in a mass of ivy. There he paused, uneasy lest a rustling of the old ivy should convey a warning to Cutts. And as he hung there, half-buried in the ancient ivy, voices floated up to his ears from below — one the voice of Cutts of the Fifth, the other the voice of the relative for whom he had been looking — Ralph Reckness Cardew, of the Fourth. He was only three feet above Cutts' head: and every word came up clearly and distinctly to his ears.

And what he heard, made Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stick motionless where he was, as if petrified, wondering whether he was dreaming.

THE LAST APPEAL

CUTTS of the Fifth, leaning on the ivied wall, threw away the stump of his cigarette, as Cardew came along the path under the elm branches. A sardonic smile came over his face, as he glanced at the approaching junior.

He could read the pale, harassed trouble in Cardew's usually careless and supercilious looks. He could guess that the junior had been looking for him, to make some further appeal: some last attempt to wriggle out of the pit he had dug for his own feet. Cutts' sardonic smile indicated exactly how much chance Cardew had of success. He disliked the junior — it was upon this very spot that Cardew had resisted his bullying and 'handled' him, crashing him over and leaving him spluttering. But little as he liked the junior, it was mainly as a tool in his hands that he regarded him — Cardew was his means of 'getting level' with Kildare for a long list of grievances, real or fancied. If Cardew hoped that he might relent, he was soon to learn how unfounded that hope was.

Cardew quickened his pace, as he saw Cutts. He came up, breathing hard, the colour wavering in his pale cheeks. He felt that he hated Cutts, and hated himself, for the position he was in — which amounted to begging for

mercy. The scapegrace was paying dear now for his sporting speculations. Gladly he would have planted his clenched fist full in Cutts' sardonic face. But he had to be civil — he had to plead.

'I've been looking for you, Cutts,' he muttered.

'Have you? Well, you've found me,' smiled Cutts.

Cardew stood looking at him. For a long time, the wretched junior had sought solitude, overwhelmed with shame, only anxious to avoid all eyes. But at last, as the time drew near for him to return to the cricket-ground, he had made up his mind to make one more appeal to Cutts: and he had looked for him, and now he had found him. But whatever hope he might have had, sank to zero, as he looked at Cutts' hard sardonic face. He stood silent. It was Cutts who broke the silence.

'You've done okay so far, Cardew,' he said. He laughed. 'Think you could have taken Carcroft wickets if you had tried?'

'I know I could,' muttered Cardew.

'In top form, what?' sneered Cutts.

'Yes.'

Cutts laughed again.

'Well, don't forget yourself, and put up any hat-tricks when Carcroft bat again,' he said. 'You know what to expect if you do.'

'I — I can't go on with it, Cutts! I can't! I felt like a rat, like a cur, like a mean skunk, letting down Kildare like that! I tell you, I could have taken wickets — it would have made all the difference, if I had. Kildare thinks I've

lost my nerve, and failed him, and — and he puts the blame on himself, not on me — and he was kind about it —’ Cardew’s voice faltered. ‘Not a word of blame for me — Oh, I could have sunk into the ground with shame, when he spoke to me so decently after I’d let him down.’

Cutts yawned.

‘I can’t go on with it,’ said Cardew, almost wildly. ‘If Kildare trusts me with the ball again, Cutts, I’ve got to play up. I — I must.’

‘Do, if you choose,’ said Cutts. He tapped his pocket. ‘You know what I’ve got here in my pocket, Cardew. The note you wrote to Bill Lodgey, to put money on a horse for you. Had you forgotten it?’ He grinned.

‘Look here, Cutts —’

‘What will happen, if Railton finds that note on his study table?’ drawled Cutts. ‘That’s what’s coming, if you bowl a single Carcroft man at the wickets, or if you make a single catch in the field. Don’t be a young fool, Cardew. You know you’ve got to jump to orders.’

‘You rotter —’

‘That will do,’ said Cutts. He waved his hand in dismissal. ‘You can clear off. You’ll be wanted on the ground soon, to score another duck. You young rotter, you’ve got my place in the eleven — I wish you joy of it!’

‘A lot you care about cricket!’ said Cardew, bitterly. ‘Have you got money laid against your own school, you cad? Is that why you want St. Jim’s to lose?’

‘I’ve said that will do. Clear off.’

Cardew did not move.

'I can't give the match away like this!' he muttered. 'I tell you I can't. Kildare will look a fool to all St. Jim's for having played me —'

'That's what I want.'

'Oh, you cur!' breathed Cardew.

'I've told you to go!' Cutts made a threatening gesture. But Cardew did not go. He was desperate now.

'Cutts! Give me back that note — give me that paper you've got in your pocket! It's the sack if Railton sees it — and I can't face that! Give it back to me! It's mine — you're stealing it if you keep it! Give it back to me, I say.'

'Get out.'

Cardew clenched his hands.

'I tell you, I won't play Kildare false any further — I've got to do the decent thing — and I've got to have that note back. Give it to me.'

'You young fool!'

'Will you give it to me?' Cardew almost screamed.

'No, I won't! And now — oh, gad!' gasped Cutts, as the junior, desperate, sprang at him like a tiger.

A wild idea of, somehow, getting that fatal note back from Cutts by force, was in Cardew's mind, in his desperation. But it was hopeless — Cutts grasped him, as he sprang, and with an exertion of his strength, twice Cardew's, flung him headlong away.

The panting junior rolled on the earth.

Cutts gave him a savage stare, as he lay panting.

‘That’s that!’ he said. ‘Now get back to the cricket, you young blackguard, and carry on as you’ve started — or get ready to go up to the Head to be bunked.’

With that, Cutts strode away, and disappeared through the elms.

Cardew tottered to his feet.

Limply, he moved away. He went with drooping head. Had he looked up at the wall, he might have seen an amazed face staring down at him from the clustering ivy. But he did not look up. He moved away limply, the most utterly miserable fellow in the county of Sussex that bright summer’s afternoon. A few minutes later, as he was walking aimlessly in the quad, his name was called, and Levison came up at a run.

‘You’re wanted, Cardew.’

Cardew gave him a dull look, without answering. Levison stared at him.

‘Anything the matter?’ he asked.

‘Eh? Yes — no —’

‘For goodness’ sake, come along,’ exclaimed Levison. ‘You’re next man in — do you want to keep the field waiting?’

‘Oh!’ breathed Cardew. He had forgotten that the St. Jim’s innings must be nearing its end by that time. He gave a harsh laugh. ‘What does it matter — another duck won’t help —’

‘Pull yourself together,’ Levison, anxiously. ‘I can’t make out what’s the matter with you today, Cardew. You were as keen as mustard to play, and now —’



Cutts grasped him as he sprang

‘Oh, I’m coming,’ said Cardew. ‘May as well turn the duck into a pair of spectacles! Come on.’

Last man was called, as Cardew arrived at the pavilion. He gave the score-board a glance — St. Jim’s had taken 105. He went out to bat: and nobody expected that score to be altered when he faced Carcroft bowling. Neither was it: his duck, as he had bitterly predicted, was turned into a ‘pair of spectacles’. Carcroft, when they took their second knock, wanted only fifty-six to win: and the most optimistic St. Jim’s onlooker could hardly doubt that they would get them, with wickets to spare.

WORD IN SEASON

'BAI JOVE!' murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, faintly.

He was almost stunned.

Clamped on top of the ivied wall, half-buried in the clusters, he had remained motionless, petrified, unable to believe his ears, as the voices of Cutts and Cardew came up to him. He was like a fellow in a trance. Even after that brief colloquy had ceased, after Cutts and Cardew had gone, and the spot was left solitary and silent, Arthur Augustus remained clamped in the ivy, his aristocratic brain in a whirl, fairly stunned by what he had heard. Certainly, he had had no intention of listening-in: but he had been too utterly amazed and astounded to make a move or a sound. Indeed it had seemed more like a dream than a reality to him. That aristocratic brain was, perhaps, not very quick on the uptake. But it was borne in upon Arthur Augustus that, on the track of Cutts with the inky squirt, he had inadvertently surprised a secret — unknown, unsuspected, by any other fellow at St. Jim's. He had forgotten the squirt now, and his fell intention of drenching Cutts with its contents. He had much more weighty matters to think about now. Was it possible — could it be possible — that a St. Jim's man, picked to play

for the first-eleven in the biggest fixture of the season, was letting down the side — betraying the captain who trusted him — playing for defeat and not for victory? It was impossible — yet it was so, unless he had dreamed what he had heard from below the ivied wall. He almost had to pinch himself to make sure that he was not dreaming.

‘Bai Jove!’ he ejaculated, at last, in a faint voice.

He dropped back from the wall into the road. Cutts was gone: there was no chance now of catching him by surprise with the inky squirt. But Arthur Augustus did not even remember the squirt in his pocket.

‘Bai Jove!’ he repeated.

Still in a somewhat dizzy state, he walked away, and went in at the gates. Taggles, at his lodge, glanced at him as he came in, noticing the dazed look on his face. Arthur Augustus walked on without seeing Taggles, or anything else. His noble brain was still in a whirl.

He walked in the quad, trying to think it out. What he had learned was hard to assimilate: but gradually it took shape in his mind. Cutts — that unspeakable rotter, Cutts of the Fifth — had somehow got hold of a note Cardew had written to some dingy racing man outside the school, and was holding it over his head. That was bad enough. But there was worse to it. Cardew’s hopeless failure as a bowler had surprised Arthur Augustus, as it had surprised others — but he, alone, knew the reason for it now. Cardew had failed his side at Cutts’ orders — that was Cutts’ retaliation on Kildare. He had put up rotten bowling

because he dared not do otherwise — letting the side down, to save himself!

‘The wat!’ murmured Arthur Augustus. ‘The weptile!’

He hardly knew whether he despised Cardew more, or Cutts more. Both of them impressed him as in the nature of rats and reptiles.

‘And that wat is a welation of mine!’ breathed Arthur Augustus. ‘Lettin’ the side down — playin’ to lose! Bai Jove!’

A deep wrinkle of worried thought corrugated the brow of Arthur Augustus. He knew now — the only fellow in the school who knew why Cardew had failed so lamentably. What was he going to do about it? Was there anything that he could do?

Two Fifth-form men passed him in the quadrangle. One of them was Cutts, at whom Arthur Augustus’ noble eye gleamed scorn and loathing. The other was St. Leger, who was speaking.

‘You seem to have been right about that kid, Gerald. By gum, a duck in each innings, and bowling like a fag on Little Side! If there was a chance of beating Carcroft this time, Kildare’s thrown it away by playing that Fourth-form kid.’

Cutts laughed.

‘I’ve said so,’ he answered.

‘Can’t make it out, though,’ said St. Leger, with a puzzled look. ‘Kildare’s no fool — he knows a man’s form —’

‘Looks as if he doesn’t.’

'Well, look what a show the kid put up, that made Kildare pick him out. I suppose he lost his nerve, playing against first-eleven men from Carcroft — that accounts for it, I suppose. Kildare didn't foresee that.'

'A cricket captain should know better.'

'Lots of the men will be thinking so, at any rate. It's a facer for old Kildare, his fag recruit failing him like this. He's not likely to trust him with the ball again — that's something. But the game's a goner — they'll never pull up now.'

'Hardly!' smiled Cutts.

They passed on, out of D'Arcy's hearing, his eyeglass gleaming scorn after Cutts, who did not even notice him there.

'Wat!' breathed Arthur Augustus. 'Weptile! Wottah! Wapscallion! Wascal! Wogue!'

But there was one consolation in St. Leger's remark, that Kildare was not likely to trust Cardew with the ball again. After his ghastly failure in the Carcroft first-innings, it was extremely improbable that he would be wanted to bowl in their second knock. He had done all the harm he could: and if he did not bowl again, he could do no more.

'Gussy, you fathead —' Jack Blake came up, with Herries and Digby. 'Where have you been wandering all this while, ass?'

'Weally, Blake —'

'You've missed Cardew's show,' said Herries, sarcastically. 'He was worth watchin' — bagging a pair of spectacles.'

‘Bai Jove! Did he make anothead duck, Hewwies?’

‘What else?’ said Digby. ‘Not that that would matter much, if he could bowl. But can he bowl?’

‘Rotten all round,’ said Blake. ‘Can’t make out what’s come over him. But he won’t play ducks and drakes with the rest of the game — Kildare won’t give him any more bowling.’

‘Not likely!’ grunted Herries.

‘I suppose we can be suah of that?’ said Arthur Augustus, thoughtfully.

‘Bank on that!’ said Blake. ‘I heard Kildare tell Darrell so. Catch him giving Cardew another chance to make Carcroft a present of boundaries.’

‘Better cut in for tea,’ said Digby. ‘Carcroft go in after tea, and we don’t want to miss the finish.’

‘Not much to miss, if we did,’ grunted Herries. ‘Carcroft want only fifty-six to win — they’ll make them all right.’

‘All over bar shouting!’ sighed Blake. ‘Come on, Gussy — don’t you want any tea?’

Blake and Herries and Dig went into the House. But Arthur Augustus did not follow. His eyes had fallen on Cardew, walking between Levison and Clive, his eyes on the ground. Arthur Augustus stood looking at the fellow who was betraying his trust and letting down his side. His scorn was deep: but as he read the harassed lines in his relative’s face, and knowing now their cause, he felt something like compassion too. Cardew was playing a despicable part: but he was playing it reluctantly, bitterly against his own will — only the threat that Cutts held over

his head, drove him to do what, of his own accord, he never would have dreamed of doing. And that threat was an overwhelming one — nothing short of the 'sack' from the school, and going home in disgrace. Even yet he would gladly have played up and justified his captain's faith in him — if he could have faced the consequences. Arthur Augustus, as he watched him, wondered whether a word in season from his noble self might have any effect.

He crossed over to the three. Cardew, breaking a long and sullen silence, was speaking, as he came up.

'Cut in to tea, you fellows! For goodness sake, leave a chap alone! I'm not feeling like anybody's company.'

'I wouldn't brood over it,' said Levison. 'You've had rotten luck, old chap, but you're not to blame —'

'Give us a rest.'

'You couldn't help conking out, old fellow,' said Clive. 'Don't let it get you down.'

Cardew breathed hard.

'Will you fellows leave me alone?' he snapped.

At that, Levison and Clive exchanged a glance, and left him. They could only suppose that he was brooding miserably over his failure, and they would have given him what consolation they could. But he made it very clear that he did not want their company. They went in to tea, and Cardew was left to his own black and bitter thoughts — interrupted by an unwelcome voice:

'Cardew!'

Cardew gave his relative a black look.

'Leave me alone!' he almost snarled.

Sniff, from Arthur Augustus.

'I would vewy willingly leave you alone, you wat,' he said. 'But I have somethin' to say to you.'

Cardew started, and stared.

'What did you call me?' he breathed.

'I called you a wat,' answered Arthur Augustus, scornfully. 'You are a wat, Cardew, as you know vewy well.'

'What do you mean, you fool?'

'A fellow who lets down his side is a wat, and a weptile too,' said Arthur Augustus. 'I fancied you had had bad luck, like the othah fellows: but now that I know that you were delibewately playin' to lose, I wegard you as a wat and a weptile, Cardew. There are weally no words in the dictionawy to express what I think of you, since I have found out —'

Cardew's face whitened.

'You — you've found out — what?' He hardly breathed. 'How could you have found out — what do you mean? What —'

'I am goin' to give you a word of advice, Cardew. I wecommend you to play the game, whatevah the consequences, like a decent chap, whatevah Cutts may do aftahwards —'

'Cutts? Then — then you know —'

'I know the whole stowy, Cardew, and I can hardly express my uttah disgust. You have let down old Kildare, who twusted you. You are a wat! I am uttably ashamed that you are welated to me,' said Arthur Augustus, hotly. 'You are bein' a twaitor, to save your own skin! If you

have a wag of decency left in you, Cardew, I wecommed you to play up, when you go into the field, and make up so fah as you can for what you have done alweady. That is all, Cardew — and now I shall be vevy glad to leave you alone — you make me sick.’

With that, Arthur Augustus D’Arcy marched off, his noble nose in the air. He left Reckness Cardew staring after him, rooted to the ground, with a face like chalk.

BOWLED CARDEW!

'KILDARE!'

'Well?'

Kildare's answer was curt. It was not unkindly: but he did not want to hear anything from his new recruit just then. St. Jim's were about to go into the field, for the Carcroft second innings: and the most hopeful member of the team had no anticipation of victory. The home bowling was, in fact, not good enough: three good men, who should have been in the team, were out of it: and the new recruit had proved, after all, a hopeless dud. Kildare did not blame Cardew: he blamed himself: but he was feeling far from happy, and his manner was short and almost sharp.

'Will you let me try again?'

'Sorry — no.'

'Give me a chance —'

'No use, kid! You're out of place in this game, as I ought to have known — and as I have no doubt plenty of fellows will be telling me later. It's my fault, not yours: but we can't afford to give Carcroft runs. Do what you can in the field.'

Cardew crimsoned.

He knew what he could do with the ball, given

a chance. And he had made up his mind what he was going to do — if Kildare gave him that chance. His mind seemed suddenly to have crystallised on that.

Possibly Arthur Augustus D'Arcy 'word in season' had produced an effect. Certainly Cardew had been stung, to his very soul, by the contempt in D'Arcy's face and voice. It had brought home to him, more clearly than before, the baseness of the line he had taken, at Cutts' dictation. It had made him realise what a despised outcast he must have become, if the other fellows knew what D'Arcy unexpectedly knew. It brought his own bitter self-contempt to a head. And he had made his resolve.

He knew that Cutts would keep his threat. He knew that if he played up, as he could play up if he chose, and if he succeeded in pulling that game out of the fire, that fatal note to Bill Lodgey would go to Railton: and the outcome could not be doubted. He could picture the anger of the house-master, who had given him one more chance, and had been led to believe that he was making the most of it, on discovering what that miserable scrap of paper would tell him. Once Railton had seen that note, all was over for him at St. Jim's — all but a brief interview with his head-master: then the train home. He would have to go — sacked from the school. He had risked it more than once: he had fairly asked for it now, and now it was coming to him. If he defied Cutts, his number was up.

And he was going to defy Cutts!

That was why he spoke to Kildare. If only he was given a chance — he knew, he felt in his bones, that he could

prove that Kildare had not, after all, made a mistake in playing him — he only wanted a chance. But it seemed doubtful whether he would get one. His bowling had so far proved altogether too expensive to the side.

The St. Jim's captain was shaking his head.

'Nothing doing, Cardew,' he said. 'I can't throw away a single run now. I'm sorry, kid — I know you did your best, but —'

'I can do better —'

Kildare smiled faintly.

'I'm sure you think so,' he said, kindly enough, 'but it's no good. Don't think I'm blaming you — nothing of the kind. But you can't touch a Carcroft wicket, kid — forget all about it. That's all.'

He turned away.

Cardew caught him by the arm. He was feeling desperate. Now that he had fought it out in his own mind, and won the fight, resolved to do the right thing whatever the consequences, was he to have no chance?

'Kildare, just one over, and see —' he pleaded.

Kildare hesitated. The junior's eager earnestness influenced him. Yet, after Cardew's earlier display, what was the use?

'Oh, all right,' he said, at last. 'It can't do a lot of harm, I suppose, the shape things are in now. You shall take the second over.'

Cardew almost panted with relief.

The field went on, and Darrell bowled to Langley. The crowd was thick round the field. In Carcroft's first knock,

Cardew had been the cynosure of all eyes: but hardly a glance was cast at him now — only Levison and Clive giving him rather anxious looks, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's eyeglass turning on him. A few moments later, that eyeglass dropped from Arthur Augustus' eye as he gave a jump.

Langley of Carcroft knocked away the ball. An almost unnoticed fieldsman made a sudden spring, with uplifted hand. Smack!

Cardew held up the ball.

'Bai Jove!' gasped Arthur Augustus, his eyeglass fluttering at the end of its cord. 'Gweat Scott! Did you fellows see that?'

'Oh, well caught!' roared Tom Merry.

'Yaas, wathah.'

'How's that!' yelled Levison.

'Good man!' chirruped Clive.

'Well, wonders will never cease!' said Jack Blake, with a whistle. 'That sack of coke seems to have woken up.'

'Well caught, Cardew!'

'Good man!'

'Hurray!'

Kildare's face, for a moment, was a picture.

Earlier, Cardew had been absolutely useless in the field. Now he had caught the Carcroft captain out in the first over.

'By gum!' breathed the St. Jim's captain. Was that queer kid, after all, worth his place in the team?

Lowndes of Carcroft came on to bat. The over ended

with four for Carcroft, four for one wicket! That was not what the visitors had expected, after their previous experience. It was a good beginning for St. Jim's, at least, and hopes had risen. But there was staring, when it was seen that the ball was given to Cardew for the next over.

'Bai Jove!' murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. 'If Kildare twusts that chap to bowl —' His aristocratic face was very serious. He knew, what no one else knew, that Cardew had bowled to lose hitherto. If he carried on now in the same way, Arthur Augustus could scarcely keep silent about what he knew. Yet that catch in the field did not look as if Cardew was still bent on letting down the side. Arthur Augustus hardly knew what to think, and he watched Cardew with a corrugated troubled brow.

'That's rot!' remarked Blake. 'Catch me letting him bowl again, if I were in old Kildare's place.'

'Chucking away runs,' said Herries.

'I wonder!' said Tom Merry. 'Cardew may have pulled round — after all, we all know that he's a first-class bowler when he's in form. If it was only nerves, he may have got over it.'

'Um!' said Blake. 'He looks a bit more lively, at any rate.'

Every eye was on Cardew now. Levison and Clive watched him almost breathlessly — Arthur Augustus with deep anxiety. Certainly Cardew looked more lively, as Blake expressed it. There was a keenness in his face that had not been seen there before, and his movements were elastic. In point of fact, he was on his mettle now. He

knew what would follow: he knew that he had no mercy to expect from Cutts. And, for the time at least, he did not care. He had resolved to do the right thing: and he was going to do it, and all else was dismissed from his mind.

The Carcroft batsman, perhaps not much impressed by what he had already seen of that particular bowler, was perhaps a little careless. If so, he soon had reason to repent thereof. For a ball that came down like a bullet whipped out his leg stump: and there was a roar:

‘How’s that?’

‘Bowled Cardew!’

‘Bai Jove!’

‘Hurray!’

There was a roar of cheers. Kildare was seen to cross over to Cardew and smack him on the shoulder. The St. Jim’s captain’s face was very bright. He had not, after all, made a mistake in playing that recruit!

‘Cardew’s pulled round, and no mistake!’ said Monty Lowther. ‘Gentlemen, chaps, and fatheads, we may pull this off after all. Two down for four — what?’

‘What-ho!’ chuckled Tom Merry.

‘Queer fish!’ remarked Manners. ‘You never know how to take Cardew! If that wasn’t just a flash in the pan —’

‘It wasn’t!’ said Levison. ‘Cardew’s all right!’

‘Right as rain,’ said Clive.

‘Yaas, wathah!’ chuckled Arthur Augustus. ‘Look out for hat twicks, you fellows.’

Arthur Augustus was quite satisfied now. He had no doubt that his ‘word in season’ had produced the required

effect! Whether that was the reason, or whatever the reason might have been, certainly Cardew had 'pulled round': and was after all a prize-packet in the team: at the top of his form, and a better man with the leather than any other on the field. And although there were no hat-tricks in that over, there were no runs either: and after it, Kildare gave the junior another cheery smack on the shoulder.

'Keep that up, kid,' he said.

'You'll let me bowl again?' murmured Cardew.

Kildare laughed.

'Sort of!' he said.

There was no need now for Cardew to plead for the ball. Whatever the cause of his earlier failure, he was now at the top of his form, keen as mustard, in a mood to take Test wickets. He was a cricketer now, pure and simple: all else forgotten: and he did not even see a lowering face that stared at him with hardly-suppressed fury from the crowd: he had almost forgotten the existence of Gerald Cutts.

Darrell bowled the next over, and Carcroft's four became eight. Then Cardew was on the bowling-crease again, and all eyes on Cardew. And even Figgins admitted that Fatty Wynn couldn't have put up a better show: and Kildare no longer gave a thought to the bowlers he had lost. And Cutts of the Fifth had the pleasure — or otherwise — of listening to another roar of 'Well bowled, Cardew!' as another Carcroft wicket went down.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS KNOWS HOW

‘WAT!’

Arthur Augustus D’Arcy murmured that monosyllable. His eye, and eyeglass, were on Cutts of the Fifth.

Every other eye was on the cricket, and especially on Cardew. But Arthur Augustus had an eye to spare for Cutts.

Cutts did not notice him. The Fifth-form man, staring over the heads of a mob of juniors, watched Cardew. It was hardly judicious for Cutts to display his feelings in such a spot at such a time: but he could hardly help it. That young rascal was letting him down — that was how Cutts expressed it to himself. He had jumped to orders so far — Cutts had had no doubt that he would carry on as he had started, because he dared not do otherwise. It seemed now, however, that he did dare. A catch from Cardew had sent the Carcroft captain out — and he had clean bowled two Carcroft bats — after that, Cutts could have no doubt that the worm had turned, so to speak.

Cutts’ feelings were inexpressible. The game, which had seemed all over bar shouting, had taken on new life. With the visitors three down for eight, prospects were very much brighter. Quite likely it might prove a home win:

in any case, Kildare was not going to look the biggest fool ever for having played that junior: everyone knew now that if the match was saved, or the margin of defeat kept down, it would be due more to that junior than to anyone else. Gerald Cutts' miserable scheming had, from beginning to end, brought him nothing, as it was turning out now.

'Wat!' breathed Arthur Augustus, eye and eyeglass gleaming scorn at the scowling face of the Fifth-form man. Blake looked round at him.

'What are you burbling about, Gussy?' he asked.

'Look at that wat Cutts,' said Arthur Augustus.

Blake looked at him.

'Seems sort of shirty,' he said. 'What's the matter with him?'

'The wottah would wathah see Carcroft takin' wuns than losin' wickets.'

'Oh, rot!' said Blake, and he turned back to the cricket. 'A bit sore about being left out, I expect.'

Arthur Augustus, frowning, watched Cutts. Other fellows who noticed his scowling looks no doubt attributed them to the same cause as Blake. But Arthur Augustus knew better. He knew what Gerald Cutts had banked on: and how deep and savage was his disappointment and resentment now that Cardew was defying his orders. And Gussy's frown deepened, as he thought of the inevitable result to his relative. Cardew was playing up — playing the game of his life — but Cutts had his fate in the hollow of his hand — and only too easily could D'Arcy read in

that lowering face that the disappointed plotter would carry out his threat.

'Bai Jove!' murmured Arthur Augustus. 'Cardew's doin' the wight thing at last — but aftahwards — bai Jove! As soon as Wailton sees that note, his numbah is up — sacked fwom the school, bai Jove! That's what he's facin' now — poor old Cardew!'

Arthur Augustus was hardly heeding the cricket now. He was thinking of Cardew, and what he had to pay for his defiance of Cutts. He woke up, as it were, as there was a shout:

'Oh, well bowled, Cardew.'

Another wicket was down.

Cutts' brow was black as thunder. He turned and walked off the field, Arthur Augustus's eye following him as he went.

'Wat!' breathed Arthur Augustus.

'Four down for twenty!' said Tom Merry. 'We're getting on.'

'It won't be a walk-over after all, at any rate,' said Manners.

'By gum, that chap Cardew is a magician!' said Blake. 'This is worth watching! I wouldn't have missed this!'

Arthur Augustus hardly heeded. He watched Cutts, till the Fifth-form man disappeared in the direction of the House. The frown on his noble brow deepened and deepened. His aristocratic brain was working over-time. Cardew was doing the right thing — and he had to pay for it. But if it was possible to help him out — Was it?

Blake gave a jump, as he was nudged in the ribs. He stared round at Arthur Augustus.

‘What —’

‘Pway come with me, deah boy,’ said Arthur Augustus, in a low voice. ‘I want you to come to the House —’

Blake stared at him.

‘And miss the cricket?’ he gasped.

‘Yaas: you see —’

‘Fathead!’ said Blake. And he turned back to watch.

‘Weally, Blake —’

‘Don’t be an ass.’

‘It is vewy important, Blake —’

‘Bosh!’

‘Hewwies, deah boy —’ began Arthur Augustus, giving Blake up as hopeless. ‘Pway come away with me — I can’t explain heah, but it is vewy important —’

‘Ass!’ said Herries, without even looking round.

‘Dig, deah boy —’

‘Don’t jaw, old chap — use your eyes instead of your tongue,’ said Dig, also without looking round.

Arthur Augustus breathed hard.

A plan had flashed into his noble brain. But he needed assistance in carrying it out. Blake and Herries and Dig were not available — he could not explain, within hearing of a crowd of ears, and their eyes were glued to the cricket.

He turned to Tom Merry. Tom’s eyes, also, were glued, and he only half-turned his head as Gussy caught his arm.

'Don't bother, old man,' he said. 'Cardew's just going to bowl —'

'Nevah mind that for the moment, Tom Mewwy. Pway come with me —'

'Eh?'

'I want your assistance, deah boy. It is vewy important,' whispered Arthur Augustus. 'Feahfully important, Tom Mewwy.'

Tom Merry laughed.

'More important than watching Cardew mop up Carcroft wickets?' he asked.

'Yaas, wathah.'

'Bow—wow!' said Tom. And he jerked his arm away. But Arthur Augustus clutched it again. Tom was his last hope.

'Tom Mewwy —'

'Chuck it, Gussy.'

'It is fwightfully important, Tom Mewwy,' whispered Arthur Augustus, anxiously. 'I weally entwheat you to come.'

Tom Merry looked at him, rather blankly. He was unwilling to take his eyes off the cricket for a minute — even for a moment. But the distressed earnestness in D'Arcy's face impressed him.

'What on earth's up?' he asked.

'Come away, and I will explain.'

'Oh, rot!' said Tom, crossly: but he gave in, and allowed Arthur Augustus to lead him out of the crowd. He gave several backward glances, as he went: but the

swell of St. Jim's succeeded in steering him out of hearing.

'Now what?' exclaimed Tom, impatiently.

'It is a secwet, deah boy — a vewy deep secwet,' said Arthur Augustus. 'I would wathah handle the mattah alone, but I cannot handle Cutts on my own —'

'Cutts?' repeated Tom, blankly.

'That wuffianly wottah is too big for me,' explained Arthur Augustus. 'But we could handle him together easily, Tom Mewwy.'

Tom gave him a glare.

'You howling ass!' he exclaimed. 'Have you dragged me away from the cricket, for a rag on Cutts of the Fifth? Gone crackers?'

'It is not a wag, Tom Mewwy,' said Arthur Augustus, earnestly. 'That wat Cutts has got hold of a note that Cardew wrote to a wacin' man, and is holdin' it ovah his head. He is goin' to take it to Wailton, and get Cardew sacked, unless he lets Kildare down in the cwicket.'

Tom stared at him, dumbfounded.

'Dreaming?' he asked.

'Weally, Tom Mewwy —'

'Look here, Gussy, you ass — what —'

'Pway listen while I explain, Tom Mewwy — but wemembah, it is a secwet — not a word about it to any othah chap —'

'Cut it short!' said Tom.

Arthur Augustus proceeded to explain: Tom listening in blank amazement. Arthur Augustus did not cut it

short: but Tom, after the first few words, listened with close attention.

'It's impossible!' he said, at last. 'Cutts is a rotter, and a rank outsider, but even Cutts —' He paused. What Arthur Augustus had told him, amazing as it was, accounted for what had hitherto been a puzzle. 'Oh!' breathed Tom. 'Was that why Cardew conked out in the first Carcroft innings —'

'That was why, Tom Mewwy.'

'The awful rotter!' breathed Tom.

'But he is twyin' to make up for it now, Tom Mewwy. And it is all that wat Cutts' fault. He is facin' the sack to do the wight thing.'

'Oh!' said Tom.

'Cutts has no wight to that papah,' continued Arthur Augustus. 'It is Cardew's papah, and he told Cutts that if he kept it, it was stealin' — and so it is, Tom Mewwy. I am not goin' to let my welation be sacked simply because he is doin' the wight thing — I am goin' to get that papah fwom Cutts —'

'Oh!' said Tom, again.

'You back me up, deah boy — we can handle him between us. He is too big for me — but the paih of us —'

'Come and look for Cutts!' said Tom Merry.

HAND IT OVER!

'BY GAD!' breathed Gerald Cutts.

He stood at his study window, in the School House.

He had been pacing the study, in a restless and savage mood. He had smoked a cigarette or two, but cigarettes seemed to have lost their savour. He was in a mood of disappointment, resentment, and savage animosity, hardly to be described in words.

Everything had gone wrong. His hope of getting into the eleven, with a 'tenner' from the old Colonel to follow, had failed: and his wretched trick in 'croking' Baker of the New House had made matters worse instead of better — that had resulted only in his leaving Kildare's study 'on his neck'. Only the hope of seeing Kildare's team defeated remained to console him: and that at least had seemed a certainly, with Cardew playing into his hands. But even that hope was gone now — or almost gone. Where that young rascal found the nerve to defy him, knowing what would follow, he could not imagine — but the fact was clear and unmistakable — Cardew was playing Kildare's game, not Cutts': disregarding the blackguard of the Fifth as if he did not exist.

'By gad!' repeated Cutts, as he stared from his study window.

He noticed, without heeding, two juniors in the quad below: Tom Merry and D'Arcy of the Fourth, coming to the House. From his window he had a glimpse of the playing-fields — white-clad figures on the green, and a cheering crowd.

Cutts gritted his teeth.

Cardew had turned on him — knowing the price to be paid, he had turned on him: well, he should pay the price. Cutts' hand crumpled the note in his pocket. That fatal note was going to the house-master. Railton would find it on his table. He would not know who had left it there — even Cutts shrank from appearing in the role of tale-bearer and informer. But the note itself would be enough. Railton knew Cardew's hand: he would read that note, and know what use the young rascal was making of the chance given him to reform. They might be cheering Cardew on the cricket-field now — later on, they would know that he had been taken to the Head: that he was sacked from the school. That was all the satisfaction that was left to Gerald Cutts: everything else had failed him, but he had that left.

But had he?

He turned from the window, as his study door was thrown open. Two juniors appeared there — the two he had seen coming to the House: Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

'Heah he is!' exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

Cutts gave them an angry stare.

'What do you want here?' he snapped.

'You!' said Tom Merry, grimly.

He banged the door shut, and, to Cutts' angry amazement, turned the key in the lock. Interruption was not likely, with the House deserted, very fellow on Big Side watching the cricket: but no chance interruption was wanted, while Cutts was being dealt with.

'What the dooce —' exclaimed Cutts. 'You cheeky young ruffian, get out of my study.'

'We've come here —'

'I said get out.'

'We're not getting out just yet, Cutts,' said Tom, coolly.

'Wathah not!' said Arthur Augustus, emphatically.

'We've come here,' repeated Tom, 'to ask you for something you're keeping that doesn't belong to you.'

Cutts stared at him.

'What do you mean?' he snapped. 'There's nothing of yours here, or of D'Arcy's either. Get out, the pair of you.'

'Weally, Cutts —'

Cutts made a step forward, with a threatening gesture. Tom Merry faced him coolly. Tom, strong and sturdy, the best boxer in the Shell, was not perhaps a match for a Fifth-form man: but Cutts would have found him hard to handle.

'What we have come here for, belongs to Cardew, of D'Arcy's form,' said Tom, quietly. 'We want to give it back to him, Cutts.'

Then Cutts understood.

'By gad! Has that young rascal told you —'

'Nothing at all,' answered Tom. 'But we know, all the same: and we've come here for that paper, Cutts.'

'Get out of my study, before I throw you out.'

'Thwow us out, if you fancy you can, you wottah!' exclaimed Arthur Augustus. 'You can handle a Fourth-form chap, you wotten bully: now twy handlin' the two of us togethah.'

Cutts eyed them malevolently. Certainly he had handled Arthur Augustus, on his own, with ease. With equal ease he had disposed of Cardew. Tom Merry was a tougher proposition than either: but singly he could hardly have expected to get the upper hand of a Fifth-form senior. But the two juniors together were more than enough for Cutts, and he realised it. But he had no intention of parting with Cardew's note, if he could help it.

'Will you hand that paper over, Cutts?' said Tom. 'We're not leaving this study without it. If you keep a paper belonging to another fellow, you're a thief, as well as a bully and a rotter all round.'

'A note to a beery book-maker, that the young rascal would be sacked for, if the house-master saw it!' sneered Cutts.

'That's no business of yours, or of mine either!' answered Tom. 'Cardew's asked for the sack: and if a beak or a prefect got hold of that note, he would get what he's asked for, and I don't know that I should be

sorry, either. But what you're doing is worse than anything Cardew ever dreamed of doing. You're holding that thing over his head — using it to make him let down the side in the Carcroft game — you rotter, it is you who ought to be sacked from the school, and you'd be sacked like a shot if Railton knew the game you're playing.'

'Yaas, wathah.'

'Will you get out of my study?' breathed Cutts.

'Will you hand over Cardew's paper?' counter-
questioned Tom Merry.

'No!' said Cutts, between his teeth.

'Then we shall take it.'

Cutts backed a pace, as the two juniors advanced on him. His hands were clenched, his eyes glinting.

'Stand back!' he breathed.

'Wats! Collah him, Tom Mewwy.'

Cutts backed again, as the two juniors rushed. Then, as they came at him, he hit out furiously.

'Oh, cwumbs!' gasped Arthur Augustus, as a jolt on the chest sent him staggering backwards. The swell of St. Jim's went over on his back.

The next moment, Cutts and Tom Merry were fighting. It was an unequal combat, a junior against a senior: but there was a yellow streak in Cutts, and he did not like hard hitting. Tom Merry stood up to him steadily, hitting hard, and heedless of punishment. It was Cutts who backed round the table, Tom following him up.

Then Cutts, screwing up his courage to the sticking-

point, made a desperate rush at the junior, and grasped him. They reeled to and fro in a clinch.

But by that time, Arthur Augustus was on his feet again. He fairly bounded at Cutts, grasped his collar, and dragged him over.

Cutts went with a crash to the floor, Tom sprawling over him. A moment more, and his knee was on Cutts' waistcoat, pinning him down.

The Fifth-form man struggled savagely.

'Better chuck it, Cutts,' said Tom, coolly.

'Yaas, wathah,' chuckled Arthur Augustus. 'Bettah keep quiet, you wottah — I'm goin' to bang your head so long as you w'iggle.'

With his grasp on Cutts' collar, Arthur Augustus proceeded to bang his head on the floor. He banged it hard.

Frantic yells came from Cutts. He struggled fiercely, but the juniors had him down, and they kept him down. Tom Merry's knee ground into his waistcoat, and his hapless head was banged again and again.

'Stoppit!' howled Cutts. 'Stoppit! I — I give in.'

'We want Cardew's note!' said Tom.

Take it, then,' panted Cutts.

'I'm not going through your pockets. It's not yours, and you're going to hand it over, to go back to its owner,' said Tom, coolly. 'Bang his napper till he hands it over, Gussy.'

'Yaas, wathah.'

Bang!

'Stoppit!' shrieked Cutts. 'I'll hand it over.'

'Get a move on, then.'

Almost foaming with rage, Cutts groped in his pocket, and dragged out the crumpled note. Tom Merry took it from his hand. But he did not look at it. He passed it on to Arthur Augustus.

'Look at that, Gussy, and make sure it's all right,' he said.

Cutts lay panting, still pinned down under a grinding knee, while Arthur Augustus uncrumpled the paper and looked at it. A frown came over his face as he read:

Dear Bill,

I've decided about Bobstay. Put a quid on for me, and be ready with a tenner when he romps home.

R. R. C.

'Bai Jove!' murmured Arthur Augustus. His frown deepened.

'It's the right paper?' asked Tom.

'Yaas, deah boy. It is written in Cardew's fist, and signed by his initials. It's a note to that howwid man Bill Lodgey askin' him to put money on a horse. It is weally vewy shockin', and I am almost sowwy that we butted in. Cardew is weally a vewy weckless and wotten young wascal, and he weally deserves to go up the Head to be sacked —'

'Very likely,' said Tom, 'but that's not our business,

or Cutts'. Shove it in your pocket, Gussy, and get it back to Cardew as soon as you can. We're through here now.'

'Not quite deah boy.' Arthur Augustus folded the note, and slipped it into his pocket. From another pocket he drew a squirt.

'What the dickens —' exclaimed Tom.

'You are awah, Tom Mewwy, that Cutts dwenched me with ink, and pwactically wuined my clobbah —'

'Never mind that now —'

'But I do mind, deah boy,' said Arthur Augustus, firmly. 'What is sauce for the goose, is sauce for the gandrah. Cutts is goin' to get as good as he gave. So fah, I have not been able to pull it off — but now he is goin' to get it, and he is goin' to get it all ovah him.'

Arthur Augustus took aim with the squirt. Cutts made a frantic effort to dodge. But he made it in vain. Swoooooosh!

'Urrrrrrggh!' gurgled Cutts.

'Oh, my hat!' gasped Tom Merry.

'There, you wottah — there, you wat — there, you weptile!' chirruped Arthur Augustus. 'Pewwaps you will think twice, next time, befoah you dwench a fellow with ink and wuin his clobbah.'

'Urrrrrrggh!'

Tom Merry jumped up, laughing. Cutts sprawled, clawing at ink. His face was black with it, his hair dripped with it, it ran down his neck, and oozed into his mouth and nose and ears. He was of the ink, inky! He sprawled and gasped and gurgled and wallowed in ink.

'Ha, ha, ha!' roared Tom Merry. 'Come on, Gussy: we've done with Cutts.'

'Yaas, wahah!' chuckled Arthur Augustus.

They left the study, laughing. Cutts tottered to his feet, still clawing at ink. Under the ink, his face was crimson with fury. Cardew's note was gone — his power over him had broken like a reed in his hand: everything else had failed, and now even that failed. Not a single consolation was left to the wretched schemer — he was left with nothing but the ink! In a state of fury indescribable in words, Gerald Cutts tramped away to a bath-room to wash off ink: while Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, completely indifferent to his fury, trotted cheerily back to Big Side to watch the exciting finish of the Carcroft match.

THE HAT TRICK

'HOW'S it going?' asked Tom Merry, breathlessly.

'Not so dusty!'

'Seven down for forty —'

'Fifteen to tie —'

'Sixteen to win —'

'Bit of a change from the start —'

'More than a bit —'

'Cardew's going strong —'

'By gum, that chap can bowl —'

'Kildare knew what he was about, after all.'

'He generally does!' said Tom Merry, laughing.

'Yaas, wathah.'

Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy joined the excited crowd on Big Side, after their rather prolonged absence, eager for news. Excitement had been growing during that innings: and there was cause for it. On the earlier results, it had looked as if St. Jim's were in for the most overwhelming defeat they had ever sustained at the hands of a visiting team. Their most enthusiastic supporter could hardly have doubted that Carcroft would wash them out with wickets to spare. But there had been a change — and that change was wholly due to the new

recruit. Almost every fellow had doubted old Kildare's judgment in playing Cardew, after the disastrous show he had put up: and agreed with Gerald Cutts' loudly-expressed view that the St. Jim's captain had made a ghastly mistake. But nobody thought so now.

Cricket is proverbially an uncertain game. That match undoubtedly exemplified its proverbial uncertainty. Seven down for forty in their second knock, was a different tale from 100 in their first: and the Carcroft men realised that the game they had fancied that they had in the bag, was still on the knees of the gods.

'Three to fall, and sixteen wanted to win!' said Tom Merry. 'This is where we want a hat trick.'

'Yaas, wathah!' chuckled Arthur Augustus.

'And Cardew's the man to hand it out!' said Levison.

'Dash it all, I shouldn't wonder!' said Monty Lowther. 'Blessed if I make the chap out! He bowled like Baggy Trimble to start with, but now —'

'Amazing how he's pulled round,' said Manners.

'By gum!' said Figgins, 'if that ass Fatty hadn't tumbled into the Ryll, and got himself laid up in sanny, he would have been in Cardew's place now — but I'm dashed if I think he would have done better.'

'Hardly!' agreed Kerr.

Which was a tremendous concession, from the New House!

Darrell of the Sixth was bowling. It was good bowling, but not quite good enough for Carcroft. Away went the ball to the boundary.

'Oh, crumbs!' said Blake.

'That's a boundary —'

'Four for Carcroft —'

'Twelve to win!' said Manners. 'Um!'

Hopes that had risen high wavered again. And they wavered still more, when the last ball of the over gave Carcroft three more. Nine wanted to win, with three wickets in hand. Once more it looked as if it was all over bar shouting. But —

'Next over Cardew!' said Levison.

Excitement was high, as Cardew went on to bowl. Every eye was glued on him. He knew it, and he knew that all hopes were pinned to him. But he was cool as ice. He had not forgotten Cutts: he had not forgotten what would, what must, follow, if he pulled that game out of the fire. Of what Tom Merry and D'Arcy could have told him, he had not the remotest idea. He was facing the penalty of his own folly, and that penalty was overwhelming. Somehow, in his present mood, it seemed rather to exhilarate than dismay him — as if the crash that was coming spurred him on. This was his last game on a St. Jim's ground — he would never play for the junior eleven in the coming Greyfriars match — he would never play at St. Jim's again — on the morrow he would be gone. But at least he would leave them something to remember him by.

He gave one glance round — at an ocean of faces, eagerly watching. He had a glimpse of Mr. Railton, overtopping a mob of juniors, his look almost as eager as

a junior's — his house-master, before whom he was to come up for judgment after that match was over! For a second, the colour changed in his face. Then he set his lips, and dismissed Railton, and everything else, from his mind, and concentrated on the game.

The Carcroft batsman was wary: all the Carcroft men knew the quality of this particular bowler, by this time. But his wariness did not save his sticks. There was a sudden roar:

'How's that?'

'Well bowled!'

'Good man Cardew!'

'Hurray!'

'Oh, bai Jove!' gasped Arthur Augustus. 'Can that chap bowl, Tom Mewwy?'

'Can he?' chuckled Tom.

'Man in!' said Blake. 'Watch Cardew!'

That injunction was hardly necessary: everyone was watching Cardew. Every eye was eagerly on him as he delivered the ball. And a crowd of fellows fairly gasped as the bails flew.

'Out!'

'Bowled Cardew —'

'Huwway!' gasped Arthur Augustus. He waved his eyeglass wildly in the air. 'Bai Jove! This is gettin' fwightfully excitin', you fellows. I just can't wait for the next ball, weally, you know.'

'Last man in!'

'Watch Cardew!'



Ralph Reckness Cardew left the field on the shoulders of Kildare and Darrell

'By gum, if it's a hat trick —'

'Why doesn't that man hurry up? What is he crawling for?'

'Bai Jove! this is weally gettin' wathah too much for me! Is that chap never gettin' at the wicket?'

Excitement was at fever heat. It seemed to the crowd of juniors that the in-going batsman was crawling! Perhaps he was not in a hurry. That remarkable bowler seemed bent on polishing off the Carcroft 'tail': and perhaps the batsman who was at the tip of the tail had his misgivings. However, he took his stand at last.

Even then, seconds seemed ages, as Cardew deliberately prepared to bowl. After several ages, as it seemed, the ball went down — and it went down like a bullet hot from the rifle. Quite possibly the Carcroft man never saw it at all. If he did, it did not avail him. There was a crack of leather meeting wood: and the next moment that batsman was staring down at a wicket that had a toothless look, with its middle stump gone.

Then there was something like delirium. Hats were hurled into the air, the owners caring nothing where they came down, or whether they came down at all. The roar woke every echo in the school.

'Cardew —'

'Well bowled —'

'The jolly old hat trick —'

'St. Jim's wins —'

'Bravo!'

'Oh, cwumbs! Oh, cwikey! Toppin!' Bai Jove, look at

old Kildare smackin' him on the back! Bwavo! Bai Jove! they're cawwyin' him off shouldah-high! Give him anotheh yell, deah boys.'

Ralph Reckness Cardew left the field on the shoulders of Kildare and Darrell, with a roar of cheering in his ears. But when they set him down at the pavilion, he slipped away as quickly as he could. He had played the game of his life — he had pulled that game out of the fire — he had kept faith with the captain who trusted him — and now the penalty had to be paid. Fellows who looked for him did not find him: while all St. Jim's rejoiced over that glorious victory, the hero of the hour was withdrawn to a secluded corner behind the elms, pacing to and fro with a pale and harassed face, awaiting the call to his house-master's study — and the sack! — the hero of the hour, but down and out!

DOWN — BUT NOT OUT!

‘CARDEW —’

‘Oh, get out!’

‘Weally, Cardew —’

‘Leave me alone.’

‘But —’

‘Fool!’

Arthur Augustus D’Arcy breathed rather hard. His eye gleamed behind his eyeglass. He had sought out Cardew, to tell him the good news: but or the moment he felt more like punching his head!

Cardew was moving to and fro under the shady branches of the old elms. The red rays of the setting sun glimmered on his face, showing it pale, drawn, almost haggard. The excitement of the cricket had passed — the exhilaration of victory had gone, and left him cold. St. Jim’s fellows were in great spirits over that victory, snatched from the jaws of defeat as it had been: but the hapless sportsman of the Fourth had to think of what was to follow. What a fool — what an absolute fool — he had been. Bobstay, that dead cert, odds of ten to one, Bill Lodgey’s beery face — the mere thought of them now inspired him only with disgust and self-contempt.

Railton had given him a chance. What had he made of it? Railton might have taken him to the Head — he might have been sacked there and then. But the house-master had given him a chance — one chance more. And he had thrown it away in sheer carelessness and flightiness. Thrown away his last chance as a thing of no value. Cutts of the Fifth had acted like the rotter he was — but he could have done nothing, had not Cardew's own dinky folly placed the power in his hands. He had himself to blame — for what comfort that might be to him.

He wanted to be alone, till the blow fell. Levison and Clive and many other fellows were looking for him. All wanted to give him 'gratters'. He was in no mood to listen to them. In that dusky, quiet corner behind the elms, he paced restlessly and moodily, thinking of far other things than 'gratters'. Possibly Railton knew by this time — that fatal note in his hands — and had sent some prefect to walk him in. At the sound of a footstep he felt his heart almost cease to beat. But it was only Arthur Augustus D'Arcy who came — and Cardew had only savage words for him. Couldn't the fool leave him alone?

He turned his back on his relative. He wanted to be alone — alone till the blow fell. After that greeting, he expected D'Arcy to go. But Arthur Augustus did not go.

He frowned, but he followed Cardew, as he moved off.

'Will you listen to me a minute, Cardew?' he asked. 'I have somethin' wathah important to tell you —'

Cardew turned on him savagely.

'You silly goat, will you leave a fellow in peace?' he snarled. 'Clear off before I punch your silly face.'

'Bai Jove! If you punch my silly face — I mean my face — I should certainly give you a feahful thwashin', Cardew,' exclaimed Arthur Augustus, indignantly.

'Shut up and go.'

'I wefuse to go, and I shall certainly not shut up till I have told you what I came heah to say. I have been lookin' for you eveywhah, and then I thought you might be heah, and came along to look, and —'

'And now go, ass!'

'You are askin' to have your nose punched, Cardew. Howevah I will not punch your cheeky nose, aftah the splendid way you played up for the school. Your bowlin' was weally wemarkable, Cardew —'

'Pack it up.'

'I heard Kildare say to Wailton —'

'I don't want to know what he said —'

'You seem to be a wathah disgwuntled ass, Cardew. But if you are wowwyin' about Cutts,' added Arthur Augustus, as if that had just occurred to him, 'you need not wowwy — that is all wight, and I was lookin' for you to tell you so.'

Cardew gave him a black look.

'You seem to know all about that,' he snarled. 'Well, as you know so much, I may as well tell you the rest — I'm waiting to be called in by Railton, taken to the Head, and sacked. Now leave me alone.'

Arthur Augustus smiled, and dived his hand into his pocket. He held up a crumpled paper.

'Look at that, Cardew,' he said.

'Oh, rot! Leave me alone, I tell you.'

'It will intewest you, deah boy.' Arthur Augustus shoved the crumpled paper fairly under Cardew's nose.

'Look at it!'

Cardew was about to break into a torrent of angry words. But those words died on his lips, as he saw the paper, and recognised his own note to Bill Lodgey: the note that had been in Gerald Cutts' pocket: that he had feared might have already reached his house-master: the note that, placed before the Head, would have meant the end of St. Jim's for him. His eyes popped at it. He could scarcely believe his eyes.

He could not speak. He stretched out a hand that trembled, and took the note from D'Arcy's hand. He scanned it, almost wildly. There was no mistake — it was his note to Bill Lodgey — it was the fatal paper that Cutts had held over his head! And now it was in his own hand!

Still speechless, he looked at Arthur Augustus. Then he looked at the crumpled paper again. And then, with a gasping breath, he tore it across and across, and across and across again, reducing it to the tiniest fragments, and tossed those fragments on the summer breeze over the school wall. Arthur Augustus watched him with a smile.

'All wight now, deah boy, what?' he asked.

Cardew breathed long and deep.

'You got that from Cutts?'

'Yaas, wathah.'

'He gave it to you — for me —' Cardew could not understand.

'He weally did not have much choice in the mattah, as Tom Mewwy was kneeling on him, in his study, and I was bangin' his head on the floor!' explained Arthur Augustus. 'We wathah gave Cutts the wuff stuff, Cardew, which we wegarded as quite wight in the cires, as he was stickin' to what did not belong to him, and makin' a wascally use of it —'

'Oh!' gasped Cardew.

'So it is all cleah now, deah boy,' said Arthur Augustus. 'Of course we are goin' to say nothin' about it — Tom Mewwy will not say a word, and you can wely on my tact and judgment. Nobody is goin' to know anythin' about it. But —' Arthur Augustus paused.

'Well?'

'But I would vevy stwongly advise you to let this be the last time you play the silly goat, Cardew. If you have the sense of a bunny wabbit, you will take the chance that Wailton gave you, and wun stwaight aftah this. Cutts is a wank wottah: but he could no have hurt you, if you had not been wathah a wottah yourself, Cardew. I twust you will weflect on that!'

And having delivered that little homily, Arthur Augustus walked away, and Cardew was left to himself. He stood looking after his relative, a strange expression

on his face. For long, long minutes he stood there, thinking — then, at last, he left the spot, and it was with a smiling face, and an elastic step, that he sauntered to the School House.

* * *

‘Here he is!’

‘Good old Cardew!’

‘Where have you been?’

‘Here’s the shy violet.’

‘Shoulder-high!’ shouted Tom Merry.

‘Yaas, wathah —’

‘Here, chuck it!’ exclaimed Cardew, laughing.

But the crowd that surrounded him did not ‘chuck it’. Up went Cardew, shoulder-high, and a cheering crowd bore him into the House. One face, from which ink had been recently washed, wore a scowl: but every other fellow was cheering, and nobody noticed Cutts of the Fifth. Cardew was the ‘goods’: the hero of the hour was the junior who had been down and so nearly out.

