

TOM MERRY'S
OWN

MANDEVILLE PUBLICATIONS

Published by
MANDEVILLE PUBLICATIONS
45 Great Russell Street, London, W.C.1

Printed by The Alcuin Press, Welwyn Garden City, Herts.

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FOREWORD

HERE we are again, with the sixth issue of Tom Merry's Own. We hope that the reader will feel that he has had "six of the best": though in a more agreeable way than when Billy Bunter bends over under Mr. Quelch's cane!

Bunter is here: but pride of place belongs to Tom Merry and Co., our old friends of St. Jim's: and in so roomy a volume space is found for other old friends: Jack of all Trades, Jimmy McCann and the Slackers of High Coombe, and Ralph Redway weighs in once more with a tale of the Rio Kid all in new adventures.

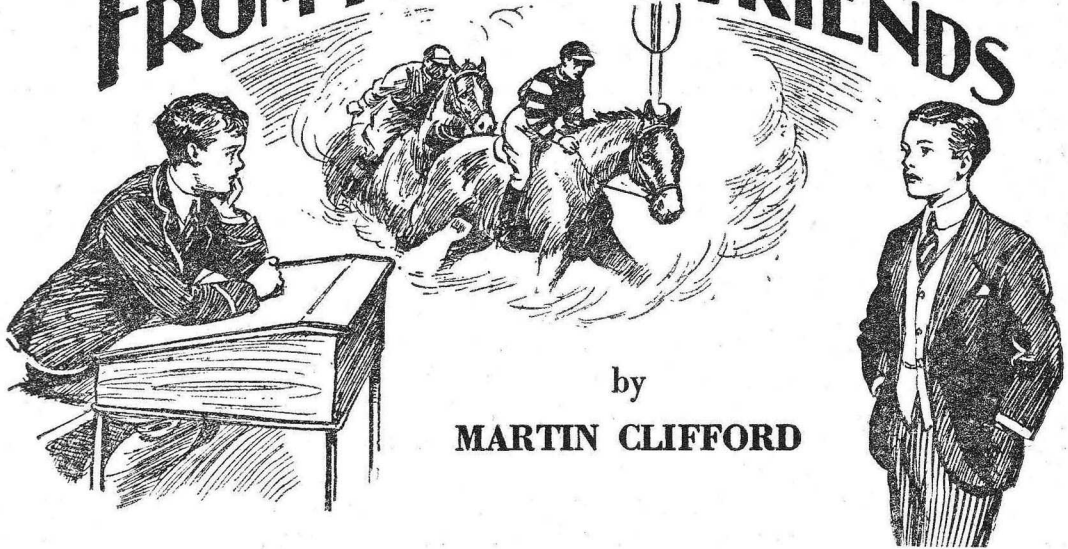
That you may enjoy reading this book as much as we enjoyed writing it, is the sincere wish of

MARTIN CLIFFORD

FRANK RICHARDS

*The Editor very much regrets the error in the story
WHO CARES FOR McCANE? This should, of
course, read McCANN. This, unfortunately, only
came to light when it was too late for alteration.*

FROM FOES TO FRIENDS



by
MARTIN CLIFFORD

CHAPTER I

KNOCK FOR KNOX!

“Go it, deah boys!” shouted Arthur Augustus D’Arcy.

Whiz!

“Oh, my hat!”

“Look out!”

“Gussy, you ass, look out!”

But it was too late for Gussy to look out. The snowball had whizzed from his aristocratic hand. It missed Figgins of the Fourth by a yard. But every bullet has its billet: and doubtless the same law applies to snowballs. That snowball found a billet—fairly in the middle of the features of Knox of the Sixth Form.

It was really a rather exciting moment.

St. Jim’s fellows had streamed out of the form-rooms after third school, to find the old quad glistening with snow. Grass-plots and paths were hidden under snow: there was snow thick on window-sills, thick on the old red roofs and chimney-stacks, thick on the leafless branches of the ancient elms. Evidently, it was going to be a snowy Christmas: and it had started early! Snowflakes whirled on the keen December wind. It had been coming down heavily, during third school, and it was still coming down.

Naturally, in such circumstances, most thoughts turned to snow-balling. Equally, naturally, it was House against House: Tom Merry and Co. of the School House assailing Figgins and Co. of the New House, and getting back as good as they gave from the New House men. The air was almost as thick with whizzing snowballs as with falling flakes.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, of the Shell, Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy of the Fourth, were in the forefront of the battle. A concentrated attack from the enemy drove them back—but more School House men came to reinforce them—Levison and Clive and Cardew, and more and more and more: and the New House crowd were driven back, in their turn. But they rallied, and came on again. Three well-aimed snowballs impinged, all at once, on the noble countenance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, bowling him off his feet. The swell of St. Jim's tottered and crashed. But he was up again in a moment, wildly excited, his eyeglass streaming at the end of its cord, hatless, his hair blowing out in the wind, but as full of beans as if, like Antaeus of old, he derived new energy from contact with his mother earth. The snowball in his hand was hurled, with more haste than accuracy, as he shouted to his comrades to "go it."

It was just ill luck that Knox of the Sixth Form came along at that moment. He frowned at the crowd of merry juniors, giving them rather a wide berth. But that wide berth did not save him.

Arthur Augustus did not even see him. Besides, the snowball was intended for Figgins of the New House. Missing Figgins by a yard or so, it whizzed on like a bullet, and Knox of the Sixth was directly in the line of fire.

Crash!

It landed unexpectedly on Knox's features. He was taken by surprise. That sudden jolt caused him to slip in the snow, and sit down. He sat down suddenly and hard.

"Oh!" gasped Knox. He sat and spluttered, clawing snow from his face.

"Gussy, you ass—!" gasped Blake.

"Gussy, you chump—!" panted Tom Merry.

"By gum, D'Arcy's done it now!" grinned Cardew.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, in dismay. He groped for his eyeglass, jammed it into his eye, and stared at Knox. The snow-battle ceased, for the moment. It was not a light matter to floor a prefect of the Sixth Form with a snowball: least of all Gerald Knox. Good natured seniors, like Kildare or Darrell, might have taken it good humouredly: but Knox was neither good-natured nor good-tempered: and the expression on his face, as he sat clawing snow, indicated that the thunder was about to roll.

He staggered to his feet, red with wrath, and still scraping snow from eyes and nose and mouth, and panting for breath.

"Who threw that snowball at me?" he roared.

"Nobody, Knox!" called back Tom Merry, pacifically. "It was an accident

—it was not thrown at you—”

“Did you throw it?”

“No! I tell you—”

“Bai Jove! It weally was quite an accident, Knox!” said Arthur Augustus. “I thwew it at Figgins, but it missed in some wemarkable way—I weally do not know how it missed—”

“Cack-handed!” suggested Cardew.

“Weally, Cardew—!”

“So it was you!” exclaimed Knox, his eyes glinting at the swell of St. Jim’s. “You fancy you can snowball prefects, do you, you young ruffian?”

“I wefuse to be called a young wuffian, Knox!” exclaimed Arthur Augustus, indignantly. “And I wepeat that it was an accident—I should certainly not have wasted a snowball on you if I could have helped it—”

“Shut up, ass!” breathed Blake.

“Weally, Blake—”

“Go to my study, D’Arcy—!” rapped Knox.

“Weally, Knox—”

“Go to my study at once.”

A junior, on receiving such an order from a prefect of the Sixth Form was expected to obey the same on the spot. But Arthur Augustus D’Arcy did not do as he was expected to do. He stood where he was, gazing at Knox.

“I twust, Knox—!” he recommenced.

“Go to my study.”

“I twust that you accept my explanation that it was an accident, Knox. I wepeat that the snowball was not intended for you, and I wegwet vevy much that you got it instead of Figgins—surely you wealize, Knox, that I should not have wasted it on you if—ow! wow! wow! Leggo my yah, Knox!” yelled Arthur Augustus: as Gerald Knox, apparently out of patience, seized his noble ear between finger and thumb, and twirled him towards the House.

“Look here, Knox—!” exclaimed Tom Merry.

Knox released the noble ear.

“Now go—!” he rapped.

“Bai Jove!” gasped Arthur Augustus, rubbing a crimson ear. And in deep indignation he walked off to the House. Knox, dabbing his face with his handkerchief, followed him. Evidently, the prefect’s ash was to be given some exercise, when they arrived in Knox’s study.

“Poor old Gussy!” said Blake.

“Poor old ass!” sighed Cardew. “Always askin’ for it.”

“Knox is rather a rotter!” muttered Monty Lowther. “Any other Sixth-Form man would have let it pass. I say, I could get him on the back of his cheeky head with this snowball—!”

“Fathead!” said Tom. “You can’t snowball pre’s. Let the New House men have it.”

Lowther nodded, reluctantly giving up the idea of getting Knox of the Sixth on the back of his head. Prefects of the Sixth really couldn't be snowballed by juniors: and Lowther, on second thoughts, proverbially the best, did not want to make closer acquaintance with the prefectorial ash. So he let the New House men have it: and George Figgins received it on his nose.

The snow-battle recommenced: minus Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. That noble youth, after his visit to Knox's study, did not feel quite up to snow-battles: Knox had a heavy hand with an ash. Arthur Augustus was still wriggling a little when the dinner bell rang, and he joined his comrades going into hall.

CHAPTER II

STONY STUDY!

TOM MERRY ran his hands through his jacket pockets, as if in search of something. They emerged empty. Then he ran them through his trousers' pockets. Again they emerged empty. Then he spoke.

"Blow!" he said, expressively.

It was after class that day.

The "Terrible Three" were in their study: No. 10 in the Shell. It was tea-time. The winter dusk was falling. Snow also was falling: innumerable flakes whirling on the December wind, and fluttering against the window-panes.

Roofs and window-sills and leafless branches were ridged with white. It was not yet lockups: but the weather tempted few, if any, fellows out of the House. Still, Tom was prepared to disregard the weather, and cut down to the school shop for supplies for tea, if funds were available for the same. But there was, so to speak, a lion in the path.

Tom Merry had gone through every pocket, with a result that was precisely nil. Manners and Monty Lowther were going through the same process. If any member of the Terrible Three chanced, happily, to be in funds, it was all right for all three. Having failed to find a single coin that might have been overlooked, in a search through one pocket after another, Tom looked inquiringly at his chums.

Manners held up empty hands.

"Nothing?" asked Tom.

"Just exactly that!" said Manners, sadly.

"Sure?" asked Tom. "You had a ten-bob note yesterday."

"That went on films for my camera."

"You and your camera!" sighed Tom. "What about you, Monty?"

Both Tom and Manners looked hopefully at Monty Lowther. If Monty

was in the same stony state, there was nothing for it but tea in hall: the last resource of the needy. Tea in the study was much preferable to tea in hall, when the funds ran to it. But funds would sometimes run out, in the best-regulated studies. Riches take unto themselves wings and fly away: and never more swiftly than in the pockets of schoolboys. Not a single, solitary coin of the realm remained in the possession of Tom Merry or Harry Manners. Monty Lowther was the last hope in No. 10.

Monty was going through his pockets with searching care. He was still searching after his chums had given up the hopeless quest.

"Well?" asked Tom.

"Anything in your pockets?" asked Manners.

There was a crumpling sound of paper in the pocket in which Lowther was groping. Lowther uttered an exclamation.

"Here's something."

He drew something from his pocket, and looked at it. As he held it, his chums could not see what it was, but they heard the crumple, and two faces brightened. If Monty had a currency note, the scramble in hall faded out like an unattractive picture.

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We don't want to join the mob in hall for the door-steps and dish-water. I'll cut down to the tuckshop: and blow the weather. Trot it out, Monty."

"What is it?" asked Manners.

"Only a note," answered Lowther.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Only!" he said. "Half-a-crown would be corn in Egypt, just now. Chuck over that note, fathead, and I'll cut down to the tuckshop and change it."

"I hardly think Dame Taggles would change this note at the tuckshop!" said Monty Lowther, shaking his head doubtfully.

"Not a banknote?" exclaimed Tom, staring.

"Hardly! I don't roll in oof like Gussy! No banknotes about me," said Lowther. "Wish it was! No such luck!"

"Well, Dame Taggles will change a pound note, fathead," said Manners.

"But it isn't a pound note."

"Well, if it's a ten-bobber, all right," said Tom. "Of course Dame Taggles will change it, ass! What do you mean?"

"It isn't a ten-bobber!" said Lowther.

His chums stared at him. If the slip of paper Monty Lowther had taken from his pocket was not, as he said a banknote, it had to be either a pound note or a ten-shilling note, if it was a note at all, so far as they could see.

"Oh, don't be a funny ass, Monty!" said Tom. "Whatever it is, chuck it over, and I'll cut down and get something for tea."

"Well, if you think Mrs. Taggles will change it at the tuck-shop—!" said Monty Lowther, slowly.

"Of course she will, fathead! Chuck it over and don't waste time," said Tom, impatiently. "We're hungry, and we want our tea, ass."

Manners gave Monty Lowther a sharp look, as he still seemed to hesitate about handing over the note.

"Look here, Lowther, if you don't want to shell out, we can go down to hall to tea," he said. "If you're keeping that note for anything special——"

"Oh!" said Tom. "Is that it, you ass?" If it is, you can say so. Do you want to blow it on something, like Manners on his dithering films?"

"Not at all! All I'm afraid of is that Dame Taggles won't change it, and you'd have your trot through the snow for nothing," explained Lowther. "But if you'd like to try your luck, here you are!"

He tossed a slip of paper over to Tom Merry.

Tom caught it, and stared at it. Manners stared at it. For a moment or two they stared at it quite blankly.

It was not, as Lowther had said, a bank-note. Neither was it a pound note or a ten-shilling-note. Undoubtedly it was a note: but it was a very, very different kind of "note". It was, in fact, a Latin note!

On the slip of paper was written, in pencil, in Monty's hand: "Example of the ablative absolute: Teucro duce et auspice Teucro."

Evidently, it was a note Lowther had made, in form with Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell—not bearing the remotest resemblance to currency of the realm. Certainly, Dame Taggles was not in the least likely to change that "note" at the school shop!

Monty Lowther grinned, as his chums stared blankly at the "note".

Tom Merry and Manners did not grin. As they realized that the funny man of the Shell had been pulling their leg, they glared. Lowther, perhaps, had expected them to laugh. But they did not like laughing, or feel like it. Never had one of Monty Lowther's little jokes fallen so utterly flat.

"You ass!" exclaimed Tom.

"You goat!" exclaimed Manners.

"You burbling cuckoo——!"

"You dithering dunderhead!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" protested Lowther. "I didn't say it was cash, did I? I said it was only a note——"

"You howling ass!"

"You gibbering chump!"

"Bang his silly head!" exclaimed Tom.

"Good—let's!" agreed Manners.

Monty Lowther dodged hurriedly round the study table.

Monty never could resist a joke, good, bad, or indifferent. But there were times when his jests failed to find appreciation, in his study.

There was a time for all things: and the time for leg-pulling was not when fellows were hungry, and wanted their tea, and there was nothing in the nature

of provender in the study cupboard, and nothing in the nature of cash in any pockets. Instead of laughing, Tom Merry and Manners looked at the funny man of the Shell as if they could have eaten him.

"Look here, can't you fellows take a joke?" exclaimed Lowther, as he dodged round the table. "Haven't you any sense of humour?"

"Fathead!"

"Ass!"

Tom Merry came round one side of the table, and Harry Manners round the other. They collared Monty Lowther on both sides.

"Now tap his silly head!" said Tom.

"Here goes!"

Tap!

"Whoop!" roared Monty Lowther, as, in the grasp of his chums, his head was tapped on the study table. "Wow! Leggo, you fatheads—leggo—ow—!"

"Give him another," said Manners. "Might knock some sense into his head—you never know!"

"Leggo!" roared Lowther, struggling. "Look here, I—"

Luckily for the too-humorous Monty, there came an interruption at that moment, or certainly his head would have tapped a second time. The most elegant figure at St. Jim's appeared in the doorway, and an eyeglass gleamed into No. 10.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I twust you fellows are not wovin' in this study."

The grasping hands dropped from Monty Lowther, and he backed away from his chums, rubbing his head. Arthur Augustus gazed at him, and then at Tom Merry and Manners.

"Not at all, Gussy," answered Tom, cheerily. "Only showing Monty how we appreciate his little jokes. Monty's too funny to live, sometimes. If you're rolling in wealth, Gussy, you're the right man in the right place. Lend us—!"

"Bai Jove! I am feahfully sowwy, old chap, but I have not a single, solitawy bwown left—!"

"Oh, blow!" said Tom. "Gussy, old man, you're more ornamental than useful."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—."

"Fade away!" said Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—."

"Tea in hall for us," said Tom. "I hope we haven't left it too late, wasting time on that ass Lowther."

"Better dash for it," said Manners.

"You see, I had a ten-shillin' note, but I have just spent it to the last cop-pah," explained Arthur Augustus. "Othahwise, I should have been vewy pleased—"

"Speech may be taken as read!" said Tom. "Come on, you chaps."

"I was goin' to ask you—"

"Nothing doing! This study is as stony as the Sahara!" said Tom. "I hope we're not too late for the last of the door-steps in hall—"

"I was goin' to ask you—"

"Broke to the wide!" said Manners. "Hurry up, you fellows—"

"I was goin' to ask you to tea in No. 6—"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Which?"

The Terrible Three all ejaculated together.

"You see we have wathah a spwead," said Arthur Augustus. "I have blowed the whole of my ten-shillin' note on it, and that is why I have nothin' left. It is wathah a decent spwead, if you fellows would care to come?"

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Would we?" he said.

"Sort of!" grinned Manners.

"Come to my arms, my beamish boy!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

The problem of provender was solved! The unattractive prospect of tea in hall faded out once more. Monty Lowther gave his head a last rub: and the Terrible Three followed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to Study No. 6 in the Fourth. In that celebrated study the table was well spread: and Blake and Herries and Digby gave them a grin of welcome. And all was calm and bright.

CHAPTER III

THE SPORTSMAN OF THE FOURTH

"LOOKS like Christmas!" remarked Levison, of the Fourth.

"It does!" said Clive.

"It does!" sighed Cardew. "Rather too much of a good thing."

They were in No. 9 Study in the Fourth. Ralph Reckness Cardew was standing at the window, looking out into the dusky quad and the falling flakes. He had been standing there some minutes, in contemplation of the wintry scene, when Levison and Clive came across the study, and joined him, rather wondering what interested him in a view of the snowy quad, the frosty trees, and the flakes twirling on the wind. Cardew's face was thoughtful. Many St. Jim's fellows had welcomed the snow, and the prospect of a snowy Christmas. But the dandy of the Fourth did not seem pleased at what he saw.

"Couldn't push out a bike in that!" he remarked.

"Bit late to push out a bike, in any case," answered Levison. "It's not long to lock-ups now."

"Just time to cut down to Rylcombe and back, if a fellow could push out a jigger," said Cardew. "But—a fellow couldn't!"

"What on earth do you want to go down to Rylcombe for?" asked Clive.

Cardew did not answer that question: he smiled faintly, and looked out of the window again. Levison frowned a little.

"Something very important in Rylcombe?" he asked, sarcastically.

Cardew nodded.

"Very!" he answered. "I shall have to foot-slog it."

"If you get out now, you'll be late for roll in hall," said Clive.

"Lines from Lathom!" sighed Cardew. "What a life! I'm loaded up to the ears with lines already! How many did Lathom give me today, Ernest, old bean?"

"Two hundred!" said Levison. "And you haven't touched them."

"Not that I remember!" drawled Cardew. "Lathom will have to wait. 'Fraid I'm too pressed for time to do lines for the little man."

"Don't be an ass!" said Levison, brusquely. "You got Lathom's rag out in form, with your slacking and cheek. You were kept in after class, and you've got lines to do. Better get on with them before Lathom asks after them."

Cardew shook his head.

"Couldn't be done!" he said. "I've got to get down to Rylcombe——"

"What for?" asked Levison, quietly.

"Oh, just to see a man——"

"About a horse?" snapped Levison.

"How did you guess?" asked Cardew, blandly.

Levison's frown deepened: and Sidney Clive gave a grunt. They were pals, in No. 9 Study in the Fourth: but there were times when Cardew put a strain on the friendship. Neither of his study-mates liked his wild and reckless manner and customs: and they made no secret of their dislike of them. The scapegrace of the Fourth did not seem to care—or, if he cared, he did not care enough to throw over his own pursuits.

"You're a bit of a rotter, Cardew," said Clive.

"Only a bit?" smiled Cardew. "You flatter me, old bean."

"Oh, rats!" grunted Clive. "Just as well you were kept in after class, if you're thinking of hiking down to the Green Man. It's too late now. Why can't you chuck up that dingy rot?"

"Why indeed?" said Cardew. "But a man must have a spot of excitement now and then, you know. We're not all old sobersides like you, Clivey, or reformed characters like Ernest. And I'm on to a good thing."

"You'd be on the train home, if the House beak spotted you."

"Quite!" agreed Cardew. "But Railton doesn't know a thing—and won't. I'm not goin' to drop into his study and mention that I'm givin' Bill Lodgey a call." He chuckled. "And I'm really on to a good thing this time, if I get my money on before the odds shorten——"

"Oh, rubbish!"

"Honest Injun!" said Cardew. "If you like to sort out my copy of the *Sporting Snipster* from under the cushion in the armchair, I'll show you what they say about Sunny Skylark—"

"Oh, rats!"

"Not interested?" grinned Cardew.

"Not in the least."

"Sunny Skylark's the gee!" said Cardew. "Odds of six to one—and he's a dark horse. He will win on Saturday, if the snow doesn't stop the racing—"

"Let's hope it will!"

"Look here, Cardew, don't be a fool, if you can help it," said Levison.

"Can I help it?" sighed Cardew.

"There'll be a row if Lathom doesn't get your lines. And another row if you cut rolls, as you must if you go out now. For goodness sake, have a little sense. You can't go out now—"

"Just must!" said Cardew. "Otherwise, I should have to break bounds after lights out tonight—and that would be ever so naughty! You're a good chap, Ernest, and I enjoy your sermons no end: but on this special occasion I'll take the speech as read. Cheerio!"

Cardew crossed to the door.

His chums eyed him as he went. He gave them a cheery nod, and walked out of the study, leaving them frowning. Caring little whether they frowned or smiled, Cardew lounged down the passage to the study landing.

A fag of the Third Form was loitering there, and he called to Cardew as he passed. It was Manners minor of the Third.

"Seen my major, Cardew?"

Cardew glanced round.

"No: lost him?"

"I want to see him, and he ain't in his study," muttered Reggie Manners, sulkily. "I thought he'd be there at tea, but he isn't. Sticking in some other fellow's study, I suppose.

Cardew laughed. Reggie's idea, apparently, was that Manners major should have been immediately available, whenever his minor might happen to want him.

"Too bad!" said Cardew. "You don't bring up your major carefully enough Manners mi. He's getting out of hand, it seems."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" grunted Reggie. "I suppose I shall have to wait for him in his study. Bother!"

Manners minor headed for No. 10 in the Shell: and Cardew, laughing, went down the stairs. He was quite unconcerned by the fact that he was going out close on lock-ups, and could not possibly get back to the school in time for calling-over in hall. That would mean more lines: but Cardew was not thinking of that: he was thinking of the "good thing" he had unearthed in the informative columns of that valuable journal, the *Sporting Snipster*, and his desire to be

"on" while the generous odds of six to one were to be obtained on that "dark" horse. A walk through the snow, a few minutes conversation with Bill Lodgey at the back door of the "Green Man", and the thing was done. A "quid" laid on Sunny Skylark now, would come home on Saturday, with six more along with it: at least the sportsman of the Fourth did not doubt that it would. He was not likely to be deterred by frowning looks in his study, or by the prospects of more lines. He went cheerfully down the stairs.

But the sportsman's luck was out. As he was heading for the junior lobby, for coat and cap, a sharp voice called to him.

"Cardew!"

Cardew breathed hard as he stopped. It was Mr. Lathom's voice, and it had an unusually sharp note in it. The master of the Fourth had not been pleased with Cardew in form that day: which was nothing new. Cardew's eyes gleamed, as he turned, and looked at Mr. Lathom: and he could hardly keep his voice civil as he answered:

"Yes, sir!"

"Where are you going, Cardew?"

"I—I was going across to the New House, sir, to speak to Figgins," answered Cardew. Among his friends, the reckless scapegrace would have scorned to lie: but he had no such scruples in dealing with a "beak".

"You will do nothing of the kind, Cardew! You will go to your study immediately, and write your lines. I shall expect them before preparation," snapped Mr. Lathom.

It was all that Cardew could do, to keep back an insolent answer. Without a word, with set lips, he turned back, and went up the stairs again. Evidently, that walk down to the Green Man was not practicable now. The "good thing" recommended by "Man who Knows" in the *Sporting Snipster*, had to wait for a later opportunity. Cardew's feelings were deep, as he tramped up the staircase, and he kicked open the door of No. 9 Study in the Fourth when he reached it.

Levison and Clive stared at him, as he came in.

"Oh! You're back!" said Clive.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" snapped Cardew.

"Changed your mind?" asked Levison.

"That little beast Lathom changed it for me—I ran into him!" Cardew almost snarled. "Bother the little goat!"

"Well, I suppose he wants his lines—"

"Bother him and his lines!"

Cardew crossed to the armchair, and groped under the cushion that covered the seat. In that hidden spot he kept his copy of the *Sporting Snipster*: which even Cardew was not reckless enough to leave lying about the study. Evidently, he was not thinking of setting immediately to work on those lines. There were much more interesting things in the "Man who Knows" column of the *Snipster*.

"Look here, you ass, get on with your lines," said Clive. "What's the good of getting Lathom's rag out?"

"Lathom can go and eat coke. Where's that dashed paper?" Cardew groped under the cushion, apparently without finding what he sought. He grabbed the cushion and hurried it aside, and scanned an empty armchair.

Then he turned on his chums, a glitter in his eyes.

"Where's my sporting paper?" he asked.

"Isn't it there?"

"No, it's not there! If either of you fellows has done anything with it, there's going to be a row in this study," said Cardew, savagely. "I can stand your sermonizing, but I won't stand meddlin'. Where is it?"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Clive. "I haven't touched your rotten racing rag. I wouldn't touch it with a pair of tongs, if you come to that."

"Nor I!" said Levison.

"It's gone!" exclaimed Cardew. "I left it here—I always keep it here—and it's gone! What meddlin' fool—!" He broke off, staring round the study. He was sure that he had left his racing paper in its usual hide-out: but evidently it was not there now. "Somebody must have shifted it."

"Let's hope it wasn't a beak or a pre., then, or it's you for an interview with the Head!" said Levison, drily.

"Oh, don't be a goat! Where's that dashed paper?" yapped Cardew. "It must be in the study—help me look for it!"

Levison and Clive exchanged a glance, and walked out of the study. Cardew, with a black brow, kicked the door shut after them. For several minutes he rooted about No. 9, looking for that elusive racing paper. But he failed to find it: and at length he gave up the quest, and in the worst temper ever, sat down at last to Virgil and his lines for Lathom.

CHAPTER IV

MAJOR AND MINOR!

"OH!" That sudden ejaculation rather surprised Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, as they came into No. 10 Study, after tea with Blake and Co. in No. 6 in the Fourth. They had not expected to find their study occupied.

But it was!

A fag of the Third Form was seated, or rather sprawled, in the armchair, with a newspaper open in his hands, which he was scanning with deep, indeed intense, interest. So deep was Reggie Manners in that newspaper, that he had not heard, or heeded, the footsteps of the Shell fellows coming back to their study: and he was startled when they came in.

He sat upright in the armchair, and the newspaper he had been reading was whisked out of sight behind him, in a twinkling. So rapid was that action, that the paper disappeared from sight, before the Shell fellows had more than the merest glimpse of it. But they saw the action, and Manners frowned slightly. Reggie looked across at the three, with a faint flush in his face.

"Oh! You've come back," he said.

"Here we are, here we are, here we are again!" chanted Monty Lowther. "Not intruding, I hope?" he added, with gentle sarcasm. "You seem to be making yourself at home, young shaver."

"Well, why shouldn't he?" said Manners. Manners of the Shell was sometimes a little tart, on the subject of his minor in the Third, who was not precisely popular with his study-mates. Manners was a dutiful and affectionate older brother. His people at home expected him to keep an eye on Reggie at school, and Manners did his best: and Tom Merry and Lowther tolerated him good-naturedly for old Manners' sake. "I suppose a kid can come to his brother's study if he likes, Lowther."

"Honoured, my dear fellow," answered Monty.

"Oh, don't be an ass," said Manners, gruffly. "You needn't have shoved that paper out of sight, Reggie. What is it?"

"Well, you jaw me when you see me reading a comic," said Reggie, with a rather stealthy look at his major. "I don't see why I shouldn't, if I like."

"You can please yourself, though you might find something better," answered Manners, "No need to be surreptitious about it."

Tom Merry and Lowther exchanged a glance, and made a movement towards the door. Manners had observed Reggie's action in whisking the paper out of sight, and knew that his friends must have observed it, and he was not feeling pleased. They decided, tactfully and tacitly, to leave him alone with his minor. But Manners looked round at them.

"No need for you fellows to go," he said, acidly. "Reggie won't bite you. What's the trouble, Reggie—bottled in Latin?" It was not uncommon for Manners minor to come to No. 10 in the Shell, when he was "bottled" in Latin. Manners major was always ready to lend aid, which not infrequently saved Reggie from a spot of trouble with his form-master, Selby.

"No! No!" answered Reggie. "I—I wanted to speak to you, and couldn't find you. I've been waiting here a jolly long time," he added, sulkily. "Wally and Frank are expecting me in the locker-room all this while."

Monty Lowther winked at Tom Merry, who smiled. Manners, unluckily, caught both the wink and the smile and his brow darkened.

"What about having a peg put up in this study?" asked Monty Lowther, with a thoughtful air.

"A peg!" repeated Tom. "What on earth for?"

"For Manners to hang on, so that his minor can always take him down when he may happen to want him," explained Lowther.

"Chuck it, you ass!" murmured Tom, hastily.

Manners gave Monty Lowther a look, and then turned to his minor in the armchair again.

"Don't be a young ass, Reggie," he said. "How was I to know you wanted me. Well, what is it? Not in a row with Knox?" Manners asked that question rather anxiously. Manners minor fagged for Knox of the Sixth: and was sometimes in hot water in Knox's study. Gerald Knox was about the last senior at St. Jim's to display patience when his toast was burned, or his tea-cups cracked.

"Oh, no! Blow Knox!" said Reggie, "Tain't Knox. I—I—I—" Reggie hesitated, looking at Tom Merry and Lowther. It was plain that he would have preferred to speak to his major alone.

Again Tom and Monty made a movement towards the door. Again Manners stopped them with a look.

"If you fellows can't stand my minor's company for a few minutes—!" he said.

"My dear man, we're enjoying it!" said Lowther, solemnly.

"Look here, Reggie, what's the trouble?" asked Manners, sharply. "Cough it up, can't you?"

"I—I want you to lend me something," stammered Reggie. "I—I've run out of money. I—I owe Dame Taggles something at the shop and—and—"

"Oh!" said Manners. He looked relieved. "You haven't been dabbling in those silly football pools again?"

"No, I haven't," snapped Reggie.

"Well, it's all right, then," said Manners. "How much do you want?"

"A pound," muttered Reggie.

Manners stared at him. Often—only too often!—Reggie annexed a shilling or a half-crown from his major. But a pound was a very unusual demand.

"A pound!" repeated Manners. "You young ass! How often do you think I have a whole pound? I've got nothing at all, at the moment. We're all stony in this study. But it's all right—I'll speak to Mrs. Taggles in the morning, if she's been dunning you, and she'll wait till I get something from home."

"I don't want you to speak to her!" exclaimed Reggie, hastily.

"Why not?"

"Well, I don't!" said Reggie, sulkily.

"I don't see why not. But I can't do anything else—I tell you I'm stony, and haven't so much as a threepenny bit," said Manners, impatiently.

Reggie Manners looked so expressively at Tom and Monty, that once more they made a strategic movement towards the door. But once more Manners' eyes shot round to them.

"What are you going for?" he asked. "Think I want to make a mystery of it? Is there anything particularly awful, in your opinion, about a silly fag running up a bill at the tuck-shop?"

"Of course not, fathead," said Tom.

"We've been there ourselves, in our time!" sighed Monty Lowther. "I believe I owe Dame Taggles seven-and-six at this very minute as ever was!"

"She shouldn't let a kid in the Third run up a pound," said Manners, frowning. "Look here, Reggie, I think I'd better speak to her—"

"You jolly well won't!" said Reggie, shrilly. "I'm not going to have you butting in, making out I'm a kid you have to look after. Pretty fool I should look in the Third."

Manners breathed rather hard.

"You could help me out if you liked," said Reggie, sulkily.

"How?" snapped Manners.

Reggie paused a moment or two. Very plainly he would have preferred Tom and Monty to be elsewhere before he went on. But there they were: and he got it out at last.

"Couldn't you borrow a quid?"

"No, I couldn't," said Manners, shortly. "I can't borrow money for you, Reggie, and I've told you we're all stony in this study, anyway."

"D'Arcy would—!" began Reggie.

Manners held up his hand.

"Chuck it at that," he said, sharply. "You young ass, think I could go round borrowing money from a fellow in another form? It's not necessary, either—I tell you, if I speak to Mrs. Taggles, it will be all right for you. Why not?"

"Oh, chuck it," said Reggie. "If you won't help me out, you won't: and I've come here for nothing, and wasted my time."

Reggie Manners made a movement to rise from the armchair, his hand still behind him with the paper in it. All three pairs of eyes in the study were on him: and Reggie's anxiety to keep that paper out of sight was palpable. When at length he rose, he had slipped it under his jacket.

Tom Merry turned to the window, and looked out at the snow-flakes whirling in the dusk. Monty Lowther followed him, apparently equally interested in the wintry scene. But Manners' eyes remained fixed on his minor, with growing suspicion. Manners was no fool: and he knew that his friends were deliberately avoiding seeing what he knew they could not help seeing. And as the sulky fag crossed to the door, with the paper under his jacket, Manners stepped in his way, and Reggie had to stop.

"What's the paper, Reggie?" asked Manners, very quietly.

"No business of yours," snapped Reggie.

"If it's one of your silly comics, no. Is it?" asked Manners, in the same quiet tone. "You young ass, are you dabbling in football pools again, after the row there was last time? Show me that paper."

"Shan't!" retorted Reggie.

"Why not?" Manners' tone was still very quiet.

"Because I don't choose! Think you're my master?" demanded Reggie,

shrilly. "I was a fool to come here—I might have known you'd only jaw a fellow instead of lending him anything. Let me pass, will you?"

"No!" said Manners. "Not till I've seen that paper. If you're landing yourself in trouble again, I've got to see that you don't! Hand me that paper."

"I won't!" yelled Reggie.

"You will, you young sweep!" said Manners. "Stop!" he added, as Reggie made a rush round him at the door. And as Reggie did not stop, he caught him by the collar, which effectually stopped Reggie.

The fag struggled and wrenched in his grasp. From under his jacket, the hidden paper slipped, and fell to the floor.

Reggie pounced on it: but Manners was first. With his left hand he pushed Reggie away, with his right he caught up the paper. And the fag backed away with quite a scared look at the expression on Harry Manners' face as he stared at *Sporting Snipster*.

CHAPTER V

THE HEAVY HAND!

"MANNERS!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Manners, old boy!" exclaimed Lowther.

They turned hurriedly from the window. The look of Manner's face rather alarmed them, as well as Reggie. Seldom, or never, had they seen such a look there. Manners, in the opinion of his chums, was too easy-going with his cheeky and irritating minor: but he looked now as if Reggie was in dire danger of the thrashing he undoubtedly deserved.

Manners' face was almost pale, as he stared at the racing paper. It was not football pools this time. Reggie, apparently, had discovered another method of "getting rich quick". The *Snipster* was folded open, displaying a list of horses entered for a race: and against the name of one—Sunny Skylark—was a pencil-mark. Somebody, it seemed, had selected that "gee" for the purpose of backing.

It was not a "comic" that Reggie had been reading in No. 10 and that he had so suddenly whipped out of sight when the Shell fellows came in. He had not exactly said so, but he had certainly led them to believe so. But the wretchedest "comic" that ever exuded from the United States, could not have given Manners such a shock as this.

"You young rascal!" Manners found his voice. "So that's it! So you're backing horses, are you?"

"Find out!" snarled Reggie.

"Where did you get this rag?"

"Find out!" repeated Reggie.

"Did some fellow give it to you?"

"Find out!" said Reggie, for the third time.

"I'm going to find out," said Manners, grimly. "There's some bad hats in this House, and if you've got mixed up with one of them, I'm going to see him and talk to him about it. You're not going to be led into this, by some rotter like Racke or Cardew or Crooke."

Monty Lowther was tempted to bestow another wink on Tom Merry, as he heard that. Even in his angry excitement, Manners was finding excuses for the young rascal of the Third. Somebody unknown that "led" Reggie into his latest escapade. Somebody else was more to blame than Reggie! Manners took that view automatically, as it were—a view not shared by his chums. But they refrained from saying so.

"Will you tell me how you got that rag?" asked Manners.

"No, I won't."

"Can't you understand that if you were seen with it, your house-master would take you to the Head?"

"You can go and sneak to Railton, if you like!" jeered Reggie.

Manners seemed to choke, for a moment.

"Shut up, you young ass!" muttered Tom Merry.

"You keep your oar out, Tom Merry," retorted Reggie. "Give me my paper, and I'll get out of this study fast enough."

Manners crumpled the paper in his hand.

"This rag is going back where it belongs," he said. "And I want to know where it belongs. Whose is it?"

"I bought it in Rylcombe," muttered Reggie.

"Don't tell me any more lies," said Manners, savagely. "This kind of rag isn't on sale at the village newsagents. It would have to be ordered—and they wouldn't take such an order from you."

"I—I mean in Wayland," stammered Reggie.

"Oh! You mean in Wayland, do you?" snapped Manners. "You've been over to Wayland, the other side of the wood, in a snowstorm, have you? Will you tell me where you got this rag?"

"No, I won't."

"Won't you?" said Manners. He tossed the paper on the study table. "Hand me that fives bat from the shelf, Tom."

"My dear chap—!" said Tom.

"Hand it to me, will you?"

"Look here, Manners, old fellow—"

"Oh, pack it up!"

Manners strode across to the shelf, and picked up the fives bat. Reggie made a dash for the door. But a grasp on his collar swung him back before he could touch the door-handle.

"Let go!" yelled Reggie. "Let me get out of this study, you—you bully! I'll hack your shins if you don't let go!"

Manners did not heed that. His left hand grasped Reggie's collar in a grip like steel: his right grasped the fives bat. He did not look, at that moment, like a fellow who was too patient with airs and graces from a troublesome minor. Never had Manners of the Shell looked so savage.

"Now will you tell me whose paper this is, Reggie?" he said, in low, concentrated tones.

"No!" yelled Reggie.

Whack! Twisted over in his major's grip, Reggie received the fives bat on his trousers. It was a hefty whack, and it was followed by a yell from Reggie.

"Now will you tell me?" snapped Manners.

"Let go, you bully—"

"Will you tell me—?"

"No!" shrieked Reggie.

Whack! whack! whack!

Reggie Manners struggled, and kicked, and yelled. Unheeding, Manners of the Shell laid on the fives bat. Tom Merry and Monty Lowther looked on in dismay.

"Manners, old chap—!" exclaimed Tom.

"Draw it mild, old bean," murmured Lowther.

Manners gave them a fierce look.

"Do you think I'm going to let my young brother get himself sacked from this school?" he almost shouted. "What do you think they would say at home, if he was turfed out? I'm going to find out who gave him that rotten rag, and I'm going to thrash him till he tells me. Then I'm going to deal with the blackguard it belongs to. Reggie, you young rotter—!"

"Nobody gave it to me!" yelled Reggie. "You fool!!" The man it belongs to doesn't know I borrowed it."

"Who was it?"

"You're not going to kick up a row in the Fourth about me—"

"Oh! Some man in the Fourth, was it?" said Manners. "Which?"

"Find out."

Whack! whack! whack!

Yells and struggles from Reggie! Tom Merry and Lowther gazed at their chum, almost in wonder. They had never seen Harry Manners like this before.

"Reggie, you young ass," said Tom. "Tell your brother where you got that rag. He's got to look into it, now he knows—"

"Shan't!" howled Reggie.

Whack! whack! whack!

"I tell you I borrowed it!" yelled Reggie. "The man doesn't even know—I knew where he kept it hidden, in his study, and I—I borrowed it. He wouldn't have lent it to me if I'd asked him."

"That won't do," said Manners. "You couldn't know where a thing was hidden in a Fourth form study—you've nothing to do with the Fourth."

"I—I was there with Frank Levison, and happened to see it—"

"Was it Levison's study, then?"

"I'm not going to tell you. I won't have you dragging me into a row with him!" yelled Reggie. "Mind your own business."

"This is my business," said Manners. "You came here telling me lies about an account at the tuckshop, to get money out of me to put on a horse. You couldn't do that yourself—some older fellow—"

"Nothing of the kind! I tell you he doesn't know I borrowed the paper. I happened to sit in the armchair while I was waiting there with Frank for his major to come in, that's all and found it. I tell you—"

"Is it Levison's?"

"No, it isn't."

"Cardew's?"

"Find out."

"I'm going to. Does that rag belong to Cardew of the Fourth?"

No answer from Reggie.



... Manners laid on with the fives bat.

Whack! whack! rang the fives bat. Reggie yelled with anguish.

"Ow! ow! Oh, you rotter! You bully! Yes, it's Cardew's: and if you go there kicking up a row, I jolly well hope he will kick you out of his study, and give you a jolly good hiding too!"

"I'll give him a chance," said Manners. He threw down the fives bat, and pitched the study door open. "Get out—!"

"You cheeky, meddling, bullying—"

"Get out!" roared Manners.

Reggie got out.

Manners stood for a few moments, breathing hard. Then he turned up the racing paper from the table, and crumpled it into a pocket, and turned to the door.

"Where are you going, old chap?" asked Tom uneasily.

"I'm going to take Cardew's paper back to him," answered Manners. "It's his, and he's going to have it back, if it's his."

"For goodness sake, don't be too hasty," urged Tom. "You can't be sure—" He paused, and Manners' lip curled bitterly.

"No: I can't be sure that I got the truth out of that young sweep—though I think I did! I'll make sure before I handle Cardew. You fellows can come along and see fair play, if you like."

With that, Manners tramped out of the study. Tom Merry and Monty Lowther, with uneasy faces, followed him down the passage, and across the study landing to No. 9 in the Fourth.

CHAPTER VI

NOT CARDEW'S FAULT!

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW sat at the study table in No. 9, with Virgil propped open before him, dashing off lines. His brow was dark and angry as he scribbled.

It had not been a lucky day for the sportsman of the Fourth.

In form, he had, from sheer careless impertinence, evoked his form-master's wrath, with the result of being kept in after class, which had prevented him from going out before tea. Also he had been given two hundred lines to write, which he had been prepared to disregard as carelessly as he was prepared to disregard lock-ups: but Mr. Lathom had put "paid" to that. Sent back to his study, he would have chosen to con over the valuable information in the columns of the *Sporting Snipster*: but the sporting paper was missing from its accustomed hiding-place. He was well aware how his study-mates regarded his sporting speculations, and he suspected that one of them had got rid of that

precious journal—how else could it be missing from the study? Added to all this, he was debarred from getting out of the school to call upon Mr. Bill Lodgey and get “on” while that attractive “gee”, Sunny Skylark, was still at long odds. Which meant that he had to give up the idea, or else “break out” after lights out: and it was the latter course that he decided upon without a moment’s hesitation, aware of the risk, but giving it little heed. Altogether, everything seemed to have combined to annoy and irritate him: as he sat at his lines, he scowled at Virgil as if that great poet had done him some personal injury.

In that disgruntled mood, he was not likely to be pleased when his study door opened suddenly with a crash. There had not been a tap at the door—it was hurled open in the most unceremonious manner, and so suddenly that it caused Cardew to jump and drop blots on his imposition.

His eyes glittered at Manners of the Shell, as Harry Manners tramped in, and at Tom Merry and Monty Lowther, in the doorway behind him. Why a Shell fellow hurtled into his study in that way, he had not the faintest idea: but less than that would have roused his angry resentment, in his present mood.

“Oh! You’re here,” snapped Manners, staring at him across the table.

“Here,” answered Cardew, with a nod. “Do they always come into a room like that, Manners, in the slum you were brought up in?”

“Is this yours?”

Manners dragged a crumpled newspaper from his pocket, and flung it on the table. It landed on Cardew’s imposition, smudging wet ink. For that Manners cared nothing, or less than nothing.

Cardew stared at it, and picked it up. He recognized his missing *Sporting Snipster*. Then he stared again at Manners.

“Where did you get this?” he snapped.

“Is it yours?”

Cardew looked at him coolly. He could see that Manners was savagely angry, though he could not begin to guess the cause. He did not care a jot or tittle, for the Shell fellow’s anger, or anyone else’s. He was angry himself: but his manner was quite cool and nonchalant: chiefly because that was likely to make an angry and excited fellow still more excited and angry.

He did not answer: and Manners clenched his fists hard. Tom and Monty came quickly into the study, and Tom threw the door shut. Manners looked as if he might need a restraining friendly hand.

“Will you answer me, Cardew?” breathed Manners, controlling himself with difficulty. “I asked you a question.”

“Yes, I heard you!” assented Cardew.

“Well, answer it.”

“Has the Head been appointin’ prefects from the Shell!” asked Cardew. “First I’ve heard of it.”

"Don't be an ass, Cardew," said Tom Merry. "If that rag's yours, you can say so."

"If I choose!" smiled Cardew. "But perhaps I don't! If Kildare or Darrell asks me questions, I'm bound to answer, as a dutiful junior obeyin' a respected prefect. I don't choose to be cross-examined by a fellow in a junior form. So unless Manners has been made a prefect—!"

"Well, you needn't answer, if you don't choose," said Manners. "I know it's yours, even of you're afraid to own up to it."

Cardew's eyes gleamed. But his manner remained cool.

"If you put it like that, the answer's in the jolly old affirmative," he drawled. "It's mine! And you've asked me a question, I'll ask you one—what the dickens do you mean by pinching a newspaper from my study?"

"I!" exclaimed Manners, taken aback.

"Yes, you!" said Cardew. "I'd have lent you the paper, if you're interested—no feed to sneak it like a pilfering fag. Have you chucked photography as a hobby, and taken to backing horses? If that's it, I don't mind telling you that Sunny Skylark's the gee to put your shirt on, next Saturday."

Manners made a quite convulsive movement: and Tom Merry caught him by the arm. Manners shook off his hand. It was plain enough to Tom and Monty that Cardew had not the least idea that his precious paper had been in the hands of Manners minor. But Manners major was not in a very reasonable mood.

"You rotter!" he breathed. "You blackguard! You ought to be sacked from St. Jim's. You would be, if Railton knew what I could tell him."

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"Go and tell him!" he suggested.

"I found my minor reading that paper!" breathed Manners.

"Your minor!" repeated Cardew, blankly. "That kid in the Third?"

"Yes, that kid in the Third, reading that rotten racing rag that you ought to be sacked for bringing into the school."

Cardew knitted his brows.

"If that's so—!" he said.

"I've said it's so!" almost snarled Manners.

"And I've said, if it's so!" drawled Cardew. "If it's so, dear man, you'd better tip your minor not to pinch from Fourth-form studies. If I'd caught him here rooting about after my things, I'd have kicked him the length of the passage. Have you come here to row with me, because your minor's a pilfering little rascal?"

Manners, taken aback again, stared at him. He was as angry as ever: but Cardew, somehow, seemed to be putting him in the wrong.

"That kind of thing is kept carefully out of sight in this study," went on Cardew, with the same irritating drawl. "I hardly dare let even Levison and Clive see such naughty things—it shocks them, and they give me sermons."

Your minor must have rooted about pretty thoroughly, to disinter it from under the cushion in that armchair. I wish I'd caught him at it! Then, suppose, you'd have come along to rag me for booting your precious minor?" added Cardew, laughing.

"Come away, old chap," murmured Tom Merry. "You can see that Cardew knew nothing about it—"

"I know that he had that rotten rag here, and that Reggie got hold of it, and tried to stick me for a pound to back a horse!" snapped Manners.

Cardew gave a whistle.

"Oh, gad!" The young scoundrel's beginnin' early!" he said. "You'd better keep an eye on that minor of yours, Manners. Horrid little rotter."

"Not such a rotter as an older fellow leading him into it!" flamed Manners.

Cardew gave quite a jump.

"Oh! Is that what you've got in your head?" he exclaimed. His nonchalant manner dropped from him like a cloak, and he started to his feet, his eyes flashing, "Why, you fool—you rotter—you babbling idiot—Get out of my study! Do you hear? Get out before I throw you out."

"Get on with it!" said Manners, savagely. "I can't get the truth out of Reggie, or out of you either—but I know that rag's yours, and I know that my minor had it. You can get yourself sacked, as soon as you like, and the sooner the better: but you're not going to land my young brother in it."

"You fool!" said Cardew. "I'll tell you—"

"You needn't tell me anything, as I couldn't believe a word you say!" snapped Manners.

"I'll tell you this—that you'd better tip that precious minor of yours to keep his hands from pickin' and stealin'," said Cardew, contemptuously. "He might pinch something more valuable than a newspaper, next time."

"Why, you—you rotter—!" gasped Manners.

"Oh, pack it up!" said Cardew. He looked at Tom Merry and Monty Lowther. "You fellows don't think what that blockhead thinks—or fancies he thinks—you do? I tell you that racing paper was kept hidden out of sight, under the cushion in that armchair, and when I missed it, I thought that Levison or Clive had done something with it, though they said they hadn't. Are you fools enough to think that I'd have anythin' to do with a silly fag in a fag form?" He gave a contemptuous laugh at the idea.

"No!" said Tom: and Monty shook his head.

Cardew was a "bad hat" in many ways: but they had not the slightest doubt that the matter was exactly as he had stated. The young rascal of the Third had rooted out that racing paper without his knowledge. They knew, too, that it would have been as clear to Manners, as it was to them, but for their chum's anxious desire to find somebody who was more to blame than Reggie.

"Chuck it, Manners, old man," urged Monty Lowther. "Nothing to row about, you can see. Cardew couldn't help—"

"He could help having the rotten thing here at all," snapped Manners.

"Well, yes, but—"

"Reggie knew where to look for what he wanted, at any rate. Think he'd have looked for a racing paper in our study, or D'Arcy's, or Talbot's? He got the rotten thing here, whether Cardew knew about it or not."

"Well, he shouldn't have," said Lowther, rather tartly. "No business of ours if Cardew chooses to play the fool, and no business of your minor's either."

"Look here—!"

"Oh, let him run on!" sneered Cardew. "We're all to be on our best behaviour, it seems, in case Manners minor comes rooting about our studies when we're out of the House. Mustn't I even keep a crib to Virgil in my study, Manners?"

"What do you mean, you dummy?"

"Your minor might pinch it, and take to cribbin'!" said Cardew. "That would be my fault too, wouldn't it?"

Manners breathed hard.

"Come on, Manners, old man," said Tom Merry, half-laughing.

"I've a jolly good mind—!" muttered Manners, his eyes smouldering at Cardew across the table. Manners, generally the most peaceable fellow in his form, seemed reluctant to leave No. 9 Study without a "row".

"Come on, I tell you," said Tom.

And as Manners still hesitated, his comrades took him by the arms, and fairly walked him out of the study.

Manners went reluctantly: but he went. He gave Cardew a black look as he departed, to which the dandy of the Fourth responded with a light laugh: which almost made Manners turn back into the study. However, he allowed his chums to march him away, and to march him back to No. 10 in the Shell.

Cardew, for a few moments, stood in frowning thought, when the door had closed on the Shell fellows. Wild and reckless as he was, unscrupulous even, Manner's suspicion that he was capable of leading a younger boy into his own reckless courses, was bitter to him: and he—like Manners—rather regretted that he had allowed the scene to end without blows. But he dismissed the matter from his mind with a shrug of the shoulders, and sat down again to his lines for Lathom.

CHAPTER VII

SIX!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY looked this way, and he looked that way. His look was cautious and watchful: so very cautious, and so very watchful, that anyone who had seen him at that moment would not have needed telling that

Gussy was "up" to something. Luckily, no eye fell on him, as he stood at the corner of the Sixth-form passage, scanning his surroundings so warily.

Satisfied that he was not observed, Arthur Augustus trod quickly along the passage, and stopped at the door of Knox's study. He was aware that that study was untenanted, having observed Knox of the Sixth going into the Prefects' Room a few minutes earlier. It was, in fact, because Gerald Knox had gone into the Prefect's Room, that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was going into Gerald Knox's study.

He stepped in, and shut the door after him.

The room was dark: only a faint glimmer coming from the window. But Arthur Augustus did not need more than a glimmer for what he had to do there. A faint glow from the fireplace guided him, as he groped round the table, and came to a halt by Knox's armchair.

There he groped in a pocket, and produced therefrom a large bottle of gum. From that bottle he proceeded to extract the cork.

"The wottah!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "The uttah wottah! Thwee swipes on the bags for a pure accident—the wuffian! I wondah how he will like this gum on his own bags, the brute!"

Knox of the Sixth probably had forgotten all about the application of the prefectorial ash to Arthur Augustus' aristocratic "bags" that morning for the accident with the snowball. To Knox, it was a trifle light as air, and not likely to linger in his memory. Naturally it lingered longer in Gussy's, as he was still feeling some reminiscent twinges.

Not that Arthur Augustus was the fellow to owe grudges. Whops from a prefect, for just cause, were all in the day's work, if they came a fellow's way. But there had been no just cause in this case: for how could Gussy have helped that snowball landing on Knox's features, if Knox put them into line of fire? Arthur Augustus would gladly have punched Knox's nose, had a prefect's nose been punchable, so to speak. As it was, he was going to deposit half a pint of gum in Knox's armchair: and he did not doubt that Gerald Know would feel properly sorry for himself when he sat on it.

He twisted at the cork of the gum bottle. It seemed a rather obstinate cork. It had not occurred to Gussy's noble brain to loosen it before coming to Knox's study: and naturally he was not provided with a corkscrew. To his considerable dismay and irritation, the cork refused to emerge. Arthur Augustus did not want to linger in that study: he wanted to get through and go. He could not know how long Knox would stay in the Prefect's Room: and it would be more than awkward if the Sixth-form man came back and caught him in the study. Three from Knox's ash that day were more than Gussy wanted: and most certainly he did not want any more.

"Bothah the thing!" breathed Arthur Augustus.

He groped in a pocket again, and drew out a penknife. Opening the blade, he jabbed at that obstinate cork.

"Ow! wow!" A sudden howl broke the silence of the dusky study. Jabbing an obstinate cork with a penknife required care. Apparently Gussy had not been sufficiently careful. "Ow! My fingah! Oh, cwikey!"

Operations on the cork were suspended, while the swell of St. Jim's sucked his finger in anguish, where the penknife had jabbed. He was still sucking it to alleviate the anguish, when there was a footstep outside the study door.

"Oh!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

He forgot even the pang in his noble finger at that. If it was Knox coming to the study—to discover him there with the bottle of gum—!

He fairly spun away from the armchair. It might be only Knox's fag, Manners minor, who was coming in. But if it was Knox—!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's aristocratic brain did not always work quickly. But peril spurred it now into unusual activity. Almost in a twinkling, he whirled round the big armchair, and ducked below the high back.

The next moment the door opened, and the light was switched on. Arthur Augustus had hunted cover only just in time.

A heavy tread came in. Behind the armchair, Arthur Augustus could not see who entered: but that tread was too heavy for a fag in the Third Form. It was not Manners minor: it was Knox.

"Oh, cwumbs!" breathed Arthur Augustus inaudibly.

He made no sound. He could only hope that Knox had stepped into the study for something, and would step out again. If he remained, the prospect for the swell of St. Jim's was bleak!

The newcomer strolled across the study to the desk by the window. Arthur Augustus glimpsed him now, round the chair-back. Undoubtedly, it was Knox. Luckily, he had his back towards the armchair. Evidently he had, so far, no idea whatever that anyone was in the study.

Arthur Augustus hardly breathed as he watched him. Knox, apparently, was going to take something from the desk. If he would only go, when he had taken it—!

The senior had opened the lid of the desk, and was fumbling at a little drawer within. Arthur Augustus heard a chink of coins, and a rustle of paper. He guessed that Knox kept money in that interior drawer. Probably he was in want of change, and that was why he had come. Arthur Augustus heard a sound as of shillings and half-crowns clinking into Knox's trousers' pocket.

There was a snap, as the little drawer was shut. Then there was a louder snap, as Knox shut down the lid of the desk. He turned away from it, and to Arthur Augustus's infinite relief, he turned in the direction of the door, without a glance round. He was going.

But at the door, he stopped again, and looked round, and Arthur Augustus heard an angry mutter.

"That lazy young sweep!"

He wondered whether Knox was alluding to Manners minor: who certainly

was not the most industrious of fags. To his dismay, Knox came across the study from the door to the fireplace. The armchair barred him from view, but Gussy heard him pick up the poker and jab the fire. No doubt he had noticed that it was almost out: and Knox had work to do in that study later, and it was bitter December weather. He jabbed at the fire, and then there was another mutter:

"Where's that dashed coal-bucket?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy almost gasped aloud. He knew where the coal-bucket was, if Knox did not: it was just at his elbow, as he crouched behind the armchair! If Knox looked for that coal-bucket—!

The next moment, Knox was twirling the armchair out of the way, on its castors. Then he gave a sudden jump.

No doubt he had expected to see the coal-bucket. But he certainly had not expected to see a Fourth-form junior.

That, however, was what he saw. He stared blankly at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who stared back. The game was up, now.

"You young ass! What are you doing in my study, hiding behind the armchair?" exclaimed Knox. "Come out of it."

Arthur Augustus came out of it, in the lowest spirits. Knox, staring at him, noted the gum bottle in his hand. He hardly needed telling more.

"You young rascal! What are you up to here?" he exclaimed. "What were you going to do with that gum?"

Arthur Augustus did not reply to that question. It was not useful to tell Knox that he had intended to leave a sea of gum in the armchair for him to sit in. Nor was it necessary: for, clearly, Knox guessed.

A grim look came over the prefect's face, and he picked up his official ash from the table. Arthur Augustus watched that action sorrowfully.

"Put that bottle on the table," said Knox.

Arthur Augustus obeyed, in silence.

"I daresay I can find a use for it," added Knox, with ferocious geniality. "Thanks for bringing it here."

"Weally, Knox—"

"I gave you three this morning for chucking a snowball at my head—"

"That was quite an accident, Knox—"

"And that bottle of gum is another accident, what?" grinned Knox. "As you're not satisfied with three, I'll make it six this time. Bend over that chair."

There was no help for it. Arthur Augustus had been caught fairly in the act, and he had to take what was coming. In sorrowful silence, he bent over the chair: and Knox swished the ash.

Whop, whop, whop, whop, whop, whop!

"Ow-wow-wow-wow-wow-wow!"

"Now get out," said Knox, laying the ash on the table.

Arthur Augustus was glad enough to get out. He wriggled as he got! He

was still wriggling when he arrived in Study No. 6 in the Fourth, where Blake and Herries and Digby stared at him as he wriggled in.

"What's the game?" asked Blake. "New thing in physical jerks?"

"Ow! wow! Oh, cwikey! Wow!"

"Did you give Knox the gum?" asked Herries.

"Ow! wow! wow!"

"Knox catch you?" asked Dig.

"Ow! wow! wow! ow!"

"Poor old Gussy!" sighed Blake. "Always asking for it, and always getting it! You'll have to do your prep standing up, like a horse, old chap!"

To which Arthur Augustus's reply was the mixture as before, so to speak.

"Ow! wow! wow! ow! wow!"

CHAPTER VIII

NO TAKERS!

"**N**ox and Knox and knocks!" said Monty Lowther.

"Eh?"

"What?"

It was prep in the School House.

In No. 10 Study, in the Shell, Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were at work on the section of the Aeneid assigned by Mr. Linton, their form-master, for that evening's preparation. Or, to be more accurate, Tom Merry and Manners were at work on it, and Monty Lowther ought to have been, but wasn't.

Giving Virgil a miss, Monty Lowther seemed to be meditating, with a cheery grin on his face, which indicated that he was thinking of something more entertaining than Virgil's deathless verse.

Had his chums observed that cheery grin, no doubt they would have guessed that the funny man of the Shell was thinking out one of the japes in which he seemed to live, and move, and have his being. But they were deep in prep, if Lowther was not, and they did not look up, till Monty broke the silence with that cryptic remark, which caused them to stare at him.

"Knox and Knox and Knox!" repeated Tom Merry, blankly. "There's only one Knox in the House, that I know of."

"And that's one too many!" remarked Manners.

Monty Lowther smiled.

"You don't quite follow, my beloved 'earers," he said, "N-O-X, nox—that's Latin for night—if you don't happen to know—"

"We do happen to know," said Manners.

"K-N-O-X—that's that toad in the Sixth who whopped Gussy this morning for an accidental snowball," pursued Lowther. "And K-N-O-C-K-S—that's knocks, that we're going to give him." He laughed. "See it now—Nox and Knox and knocks, see?"

Monty Lowther seemed to expect his chums to join in the laugh. That play upon words seemed quite funny to him. But perhaps their sense of humour was not so highly developed as Monty's. Or perhaps Monty's little jokes seemed funnier to him than to others. At all events, Tom Merry and Manners only looked puzzled.

"But what do you mean?" asked Tom.

"If anything!" added Manners.

"I mean what I say," yapped Lowther. "Wouldn't you like to Knox something back for jumping on poor old Gussy as he did?"

"Oh! Yes! Perhaps!" said Tom. "But you can't hand things back to a pre. What about prep—?"

"Blow prep!" said Monty Lowther, crossly.

"You can't blow Linton in the morning!" Manners pointed out.

"Bless Linton! I tell you I've been thinking it out!" said Monty Lowther. "Nox and Knox and knocks—that's it in a nutshell. What do you think Knox would feel like, if he was suddenly woke up, about midnight, with snowballs—!"

Tom Merry and Manners jumped.

"Snowballs!" ejaculated Manners.

"At midnight!" stuttered Tom Merry.

"That's the big idea!" said Monty Lowther, complacently. "I had a jolly good mind to shy one at his head this morning; but of course you can't, with a pre—not just like that! That's where Nox—N-O-X—comes in. Knox of the Sixth isn't a cat, to see in the dark. He will get the knocks—K-N-O-C-K-S—but he won't know whom they came from—see? We turn out of bed in our dorm about eleven to-night—"

"Do we?" said Tom Merry, very doubtfully.

"And trickle down to the Sixth form studies—"

"Do we?" said Manners, still more doubtfully than Tom Merry.

"We do! We shan't need a light—we know exactly where Knox's bed is, in his room. We let him have a couple of snowballs each—and mizzle while he's digesting them—see?"

Tom Merry and Manners gazed at their chum. Monty Lowther was the man for japes, and sometimes his japes were near the limit, and sometimes a little over it. But of all the merry jests that Monty had ever propounded in No. 10 Study, this seemed to his friends the furthest over the limit. Snowballing a Sixth-Form prefect, in bed, in the middle of the night, was a rather remarkable idea, even for Monty Lowther.

"You ass!" said Manners.

"Look here, Manners—"

"You mad ass!" said Tom Merry.

"Look here, Tom—!"

"Forget it!" said both Monty's chums together: and they gave their attention to prep again: dismissing that big idea as if it were a matter of little moment.

Monty Lowther frowned.

"Look here, I tell you it's the big idea," he persisted, addressing two bent heads, "That tick Knox will be fast asleep in bed—till he gets the snowballs. All the other pre's will be fast asleep, and the beaks too. Safe as houses—everybody fast asleep. We let Knox have it, and cut, long before he can get a light on. He won't have the slightest idea who snowballed him. All we've got to do is to push into his study and let him have the snowballs—"

"Taking the snowballs to bed with you?" Manners paused in prep for a spot of sarcasm. "Parking them in your pyjama pocket?"

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Oh, don't be an ass," exclaimed Lowther. "That's easy! All the window-sills are caked with snow to-night. We stop at the Sixth-Form lobby on our way to call on Knox. Easy enough to push up the window there a foot or so, and help ourselves to all the snow we want for half-a-dozen snowballs."

Evidently, Monty Lowther had thought it out.

"Easy as falling off a form," he urged. "Knox has asked for it! He's a worm! He jumped on Gussy for nothing—well, next to nothing! He smacks the fags' heads! Smokes in his study—!"

"No business of ours," said Tom. "We're not here to bring up the Sixth in the way they should go."

"Well, I mean he's a bad hat all round, and jolly well deserves what comes to him. Think how it will surprise him to be woke up with snowballs whizzing at him—"

Lowther chuckled. "And think how wild he will be, not being able to begin to guess who did it—!"

"Fathead!" said Tom, shaking his head. "There would be no end of a row, snowballing a pre in the middle of the night. The house-master would take it up."

"Railton couldn't know a thing, if he did."

"My dear chap, forget it, and let's get on with prep," said Tom: and he resumed P. Vergilios Maro.

"Now listen to me, Tom—!" urged Lowther.

"Defessi Aenadae—!" murmured Tom.

"Will you listen to me, Manners?"

"Quae proxima litora—!" murmured Manners.

"Tom, you ass—"

"—cursu contendunt petere—"

"Manners, you fathead—"

"—et Libyae vertuntur ad oras—"

Monty Lowther breathed hard, and he breathed deep. He glared at the bent heads of his chums with a very unchummy glare.

Murmured fragments of the Aeneid were all that he received in reply from them. Big as that idea was, evidently there were "no takers" in No. 10 Study. It was altogether too wild and reckless a stunt to appeal to his chums. They only wanted Monty to forget all about it.

"I tell you it's the big idea of the term!" hooted Lowther, "and I think you chaps in my own study might back a fellow up. I tell you we'll give that tick Knox the surprise of his life. Look here, are you going to listen to a chap, or are you sticking to that tosh?"

"Est in secessu longo locus!" murmured Manners.

"Insula portum—!" mumbled Tom.

Plainly, Monty Lowther's chums were not going to listen! They were sticking to the tosh!

"All right!" said Monty Lowther, in a tone which indicated that, so far from being all right, it was all wrong. "All right! If you fellows won't join up, I'll go it alone. Knox is jolly well going to have those snowballs."

"My dear chap—!" said Tom.

"My dear ass—!" said Manners.

"Br-r-r-r-r-r!" growled Lowther.

And, at last, he gave belated attention to prep: a less important matter, no doubt, than japing Knox of the Sixth: nevertheless, a matter to which a fellow had to give a spot of attention.

CHAPTER IX

AFTER LIGHTS OUT!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY turned in his bed, mumbled sleepily, and woke. All was dark and silent in the Fourth-form dormitory in the School House. Only a glimmer of stars in a wintry sky came in at the high windows, through frosty panes, and a glimmer of falling flakes. There was a sound of regular breathing from the long row of beds, and an occasional snore from Baggy Trimble. It was long past lights out: and all the Fourth—or almost all—were fast asleep.

But Arthur Augustus was not sleeping so soundly as usual that night. Possibly some twinges from that "six" in Knox's study lingered: for undoubtedly that unpopular prefect had laid it on hard. In Study No. 6 in the Fourth, Blake and Co. had debated the possibility of giving Knox something back for that six: though certainly they had never thought, like Monty Lowther, of snowballing him in the middle of the night. Such stunts as that were likely to

occur to no one but the too-playful Monty. Arthur Augustus, however, was not thinking of Knox, or that "six", as he turned his noble head on the pillow: he was only thinking of seeking elusive slumber. But, as he half-lifted his head, a moving shadow against the glimmer of wintry starlight caught his eyes, and he jumped.

The next moment, he was sitting up in bed, staring into the shadows with startled eyes.

"Bai Jove! Who's that?" he ejaculated.

There was a hurried suppressed breath in the gloom. Someone had been as startled by D'Arcy's sudden ejaculation, as Arthur Augustus had been by the moving shadow.

"Quiet, you ass!" came a whispering voice.

"Is that Cardew?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. The voice came in a whisper almost a hiss. But he knew it.

"Yes, ass! Can't you keep quiet?"

"I wefuse to keep quiet, Cardew," snapped Arthur Augustus. "What are you doin', turnin' out at this houah of the night?"

"Find out!"

"If you are going out of bounds, Cardew—"

"Will you shut up? Do you want to wake the whole dorm, you blathering ass?" came another hissing whisper from Cardew.

"I am quite indifferent on that point, Cardew," answered Arthur Augustus. "I wegard you as an uttah wottah, and it would serve you wight if Wailton dwopped on you. I considah—"

"What's that row?" came a sleepy voice from Blake's bed. "Talking in your sleep, Gussy?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Hallo! Is that somebody up?" Jack Blake sat up, and stared, at a dim figure that was hurrying on clothes in the gloom. "Who's that?"

"That is Cardew, Blake, goin' to bweak bounds—"

"Oh, that tick!" grunted Blake.

"That worm!" came a grunt from Herries' bed.

"Nice night for a walk down to the Green Man!" came from Digby.

Ralph Reckness Cardew, in the gloom, gritted his teeth. He had turned out of bed, after eleven had boomed from the old clock-tower, without a sound. In a few minutes he would have gone, his departure unseen and unsuspected, had not Arthur Augustus D'Arcy unfortunately awakened at that moment. Not that the scapegrace of the Fourth cared for Arthur Augustus or his opinion, or for that of his form generally. But he did care, if only a little, for the opinion of his own chums, Levison and Clive, and he preferred very much to leave them in ignorance of his nocturnal excursion. But there was no chance of that now. The voices were awakening sleepers all along the dormitory.

"You're not up, Cardew?" came a voice from Ernest Levison's bed.

Cardew made no answer.

"Cardew!" called out Clive.

Both of them were sitting up, staring in the gloom. Almost the whole of the Fourth Form dormitory had awakened now.

"For goodness sake, Cardew, go back to bed, and don't play the goat!" exclaimed Levison, sharply.

"Oh, shout!" said Cardew, sarcastically. "Do you want Railton up here to ask what the row's about?"

"Look here—!"

"Can't you keep quiet?"

"Are you going out of bounds?" asked Levison, very quietly.

"Oh, no! I've got up and dressed, just to take a stroll round the dorm. Any more fool questions you'd like to ask?" snapped Cardew. "If you're frightfully curious, I've got to see a man about a horse, and it won't wait! Now go to sleep and leave a fellow alone."

"Weally, Cardew—!" came from Arthur Augustus.

"Shut up!"

"I wefuse to shut up, Cardew, I wegard you as a wottah, and a wat, and an uttah wapscallion!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, indignantly. "I wegwet vevy much that you are a relative of mine—you are a disgwace to the House, and it would serve you wight if a pwe. caught you bweakin' bounds aftah lights out, and walked you off to the Head. Bai Jove! I have a great mind to turn out, and pitch you back into your bed—"

"Idiot!"

"Weally, Cardew—"

"Burling blitherer!"

"Bai Jove! That does it!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, wrathfully, and he threw his bedclothes aside, and scrambled out.

Swipe!

The next moment, Arthur Augustus would have been hurling himself at Ralph Reckness Cardew. But in that moment, a pillow swiped on his noble countenance, unexpectedly and forcefully, and the swell of St. Jim's went over backwards on his bed, with a startled howl.

"Oh! ow! Oh, cwikey! Woooooogh."

There was a low laugh in the gloom, and the sound of a shutting door. Arthur Augustus, in towering wrath, scrambled up, and stared round for Cardew. But no dim figure was to be discerned in the gloom now.

"Bai Jove! Where are you, you wottah?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I am goin' to thwash you, Cardew—I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin'. Where are you, you uttah wottah—?"

"Quiet, for goodness sake!" exclaimed Levison.

"Do you want to bring the pre's up here, fathead?" exclaimed Clive.

Both of them were anxious for their chum. Cardew's ways were not their ways: but the bond of friendship in No. 9 Study in the Fourth was strong. They had to admit that if the scapegrace of St. Jim's was caught, he deserved what would come to him. But they did not want him to be caught.

"Wats!" hooted Arthur Augustus. "I wepeat that I am goin' to thwash that uttah wottah, and pitch him back into his bed—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from several beds.

"Weally, you fellows, there is nothin' to laugh at!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, indignantly. "A fellow bweakin' bounds aftah lights out is not a laughin' mattah, especially when he is a wrelative of mine. I am goin'—"

"Fathead!" hooted Blake. "He's gone."

"Didn't you hear the door shut, ass?" asked Herries.

"I wefuse to be called an ass, Hewwies, and I did not notice the door shut. But if the wottah is gone—!"

"He's gone," growled Levison, "and if you don't keep quiet, somebody will come up, and find his bed empty. Do you want him to go home sacked for the Christmas holidays?"

"Weally, Levison—"

"Quiet!" said Clive.

"Certainly I do not want a wrelative of mine to go home sacked for the Chwistmas holidays," said Arthur Augustus, "although Cardew wichly deserves it. Vewy likely he will be copped, anyhow, if there is a pwe. on the pwowl—"

"Quiet!" breathed Blake. "Somebody's coming."

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus shot back into bed. All voices were silent now: and all ears listening to a sound in the corridor without. Somebody, certainly, was coming: and it sounded as if that somebody was coming in haste. A moment or two more, and the dormitory door was flung open.

The juniors expected the light to flash on. The same thought was in all minds: that some master or prefect, up unusually late, had heard sounds from the dormitory, and had come up to investigate. If that was the case, Ralph Reckness Cardew's number was up, for his absence could not fail to be discovered: and it was the end of the scapegrace's reckless career at St. Jim's.

But the light did not flash on.

The listening juniors heard the door close again, still in the dark. Then there was a sound of someone hastily scrambling into bed. Obviously it was not a master or a prefect: it could only be Cardew, unexpectedly returning. They could hear his panting breath in the darkness, as he hurriedly dragged bedclothes over him.

Arthur Augustus sat up.

"Is that you, Cardew?" he called out.

"Quiet, you fool—!"

"Weally, Cardew—"

"Will you be quiet?" came a snarling whisper. "The pre's are up—I ran into one in the dark—will you be quiet? They may look this way—I cut back as fast as I could, but they may have heard me—keep your mouth shut, will you?" Cardew panted, "Do you want a fellow sacked, you fool?"

"It would have served you wight—"

"Chuck it, Gussy," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Pack it up!" said Herries.

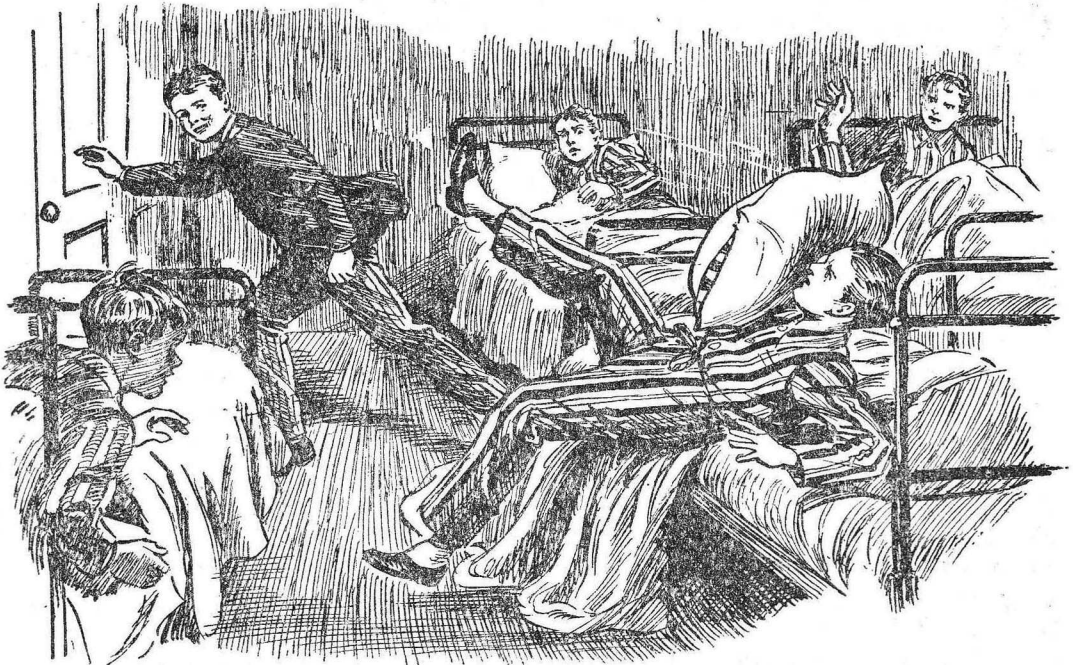
"Weally Hewwies—"

"Oh, let him run on," said Cardew, bitterly. "If they come this way, and hear him chattering, they will know somebody's been up in this dorm. I expect that's what he wants."

"Nothin' of the kind, Cardew," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, warmly. "I wegard you with vevy gweat contempt, but I certainly would not give you away to a pwefect. But I considah—"

"Put a sock in it!" snapped Levison.

"Weally, Levison—"



A Pillow swiped his noble countenance.

"Shut up, you ass!" breathed Sidney Clive.

"Weally, Clive—"

"If you don't dry up, Gussy, we'll get out and pillow you!" said Blake, in concentrated tones.

"I should wefuse to be pillowed, Blake! Howevah, I will say no more," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity: and much to the relief of the whole dormitory. And he laid his noble head on the pillow.

For long minutes, most of the juniors listened, wondering whether the scapegrace of the Fourth who seemed to have had a narrow escape would be followed up to his dormitory. But there was no sound of alarm, and they dropped off to sleep one by one. Ralph Reckness Cardew was the last to sink into slumber: but he too was reassured at last, and he closed his eyes and slept.

CHAPTER X

UNEXPECTED!

MONTY LOWTHER hardly knew what happened.

It was utterly unexpected. And he was dazed by the sudden blow that crashed in his face in the dark. It was the last thing he could have expected, or of which he could even have dreamed.

Up to that point, all had gone according to plan. Lowther had left the Shell dormitory, after eleven had struck, without waking a single fellow: having better luck than Cardew in the Fourth. Tom Merry and Manners, having turned down Monty's stunt so emphatically in No. 10 Study at prep, had given no further thought: but Monty had by no means given up his plan. Leaving his chums fast asleep with the rest of the Shell, the japer of the School House trod silently out of the dormitory, and tiptoed away to the stairs.

He grinned in the darkness as he went.

So far as Monty Lowther could see, it was not only no end of a jape on an unpopular prefect in the Sixth Form: not only a just reprisal on Knox, but it was as safe as houses—absolutely safe and sound and fool-proof, without a possibility of a hitch anywhere. The whole House was asleep: there was no eye open to see him, no ear on the alert to hear him: nothing to stop him from stealing down on toptoe to the Sixth-form lobby, and there gathering snow from the window-sill: after which, it would be a matter of only moments to step along silently to Knox's study, and carry out the rest of the programme. The Sixth-form studies, on the ground floor, were bedrooms also for their occupants: and though it would be quite dark in Knox's study, Lowther knew just where the bed was, in the alcove: and his snowballs would whiz direct to their destination.

Certainly, he would have preferred to let Knox have half a dozen, if his chums had joined in the jape. But a couple of good ones would wake Knox up with a far from agreeable awakening, and no doubt make him feel sorry for himself. Having delivered the goods, so to speak, Lowther was going to vanish like a ghost at cock-crow, leaving Knox to guess who had paid him that nocturnal visit. It was as safe as houses—there couldn't be a clue.

So Monty Lowther grinned in cheery anticipation as he tiptoed down dark stairs, and groped his way to the Sixth-Form quarters.

To reach the lobby, which had a door and window on the quad, he had to pass several of the Sixth-Form studies, in which prefects were sleeping: and he passed them with the lightest of treads. He did not want to wake up Kildare, or Darrell, or North, or any of them: least of all Knox. At Knox's door he paused, for a moment or two, to listen: but there was not the faintest of sounds from the room, and he had no doubt that Knox was fast asleep. Certainly, had Knox chanced to be sitting up unusually late, Lowther would have had to abandon his game. But that was unlikely: and he was soon assured on that point: there was no light and no sound in Knox's study.

He trod silently into the lobby.

In the lobby there was deep darkness, broken only by a snowy glimmer at the little window. That window was Lowther's objective. He had only to push up the sash, to help himself to all the snow he wanted, as he had told his chums in No. 10. And he walked straight across to the glimmering window. And then—!

That there could be any person up at that hour, above all that there could be any person lurking in that lobby in the dark, for no imaginable reason, assuredly had never occurred to Monty Lowther.

It was a sudden, almost electrifying shock to him, walking across to the window, he walked right into an unseen form in the dark. He was so utterly taken aback, that for a moment, he was fairly paralysed.

He heard a startled gasp.

The next moment it came—a clenched fist that lashed out. The blow landed on Lowther's nose, and knocked him backwards.

"Oh!" gasped Lowther.

He landed on his back on the floor, utterly dazed. His hand went to his nose, and came away wet—it was streaming red. As he lay with his senses swimming, he heard a faint sound of running feet.

Whoever it was he had walked into the dark, whoever it was that had knocked him down with that sudden blow, had not lingered. Whoever it was, he had dodged out of the lobby, and was running up the Sixth-Form passage.

"Oh!" breathed Lowther.

The footfalls he heard were swift, but faint—whoever it was, he was running with caution, anxious not to be heard. They died away almost in a moment.

Lowther raised himself on his elbow. For the moment he was too dazed to get on his feet.

But he struggled up at last.

He dragged a handkerchief from his pocket, and dabbed his nose. He had a severe pain there, and the crimson was flowing freely. That sudden, utterly unexpected attack in the dark had shaken him utterly.

The thought of burglars was in his mind for a moment. But only for a moment: he knew it was not that. Some other fellow had been up at that late hour: certainly not a japer in search of snow for snowballs like Monty himself. It was some fellow breaking bounds after lights out: either going out, or coming in, just as Lowther groped across the dark lobby: and no doubt he had been scared almost out of his wits by Monty walking into him in the dark. Likely enough, he, whoever he was, had feared that it was a prefect, and that he was caught. Some reckless scapegrace like Cardew of the Fourth, or Racke of the Shell, or Cutts of the Fifth. Lowther would have given a good deal to guess who it was. But he had not the remotest idea of his assailant's identity.

He dabbed and dabbed with the handkerchief.

No sound reached his ears, save the sough of the December wind in the old elms without. His assailant had vanished, whoever he was. And at length, pulling himself together, Lowther groped out of the lobby.

He was not thinking now of carrying on with his jape on Knox. In fact, he had almost forgotten Knox, and his stunt of waking him up with snowballs. His nose felt as if it had been knocked into his head like a nail. That unexpected and disastrous episode had quite washed all idea of japing out of his mind. He was only anxious to get back to his dormitory, and bathe his nose. With his handkerchief held to it, he groped up the passage, and up the stairs.

All was silent in the Shell dormitory, as he had left it, when he trod quietly in. He could not venture to turn on the light, to stream from the windows: but he knew where to find a candle, and he struck a match and lighted it, and set it on his wash-stand. In the glimmer of the candle he poured water into the basin, and proceeded to bathe his suffering nose. Five or six fellows woke and stared at him in the candle-light.

"Monty!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Lowther! What—?" exclaimed Manners.

Monty Lowther turned a face, streaming with reddened water, towards them.

"Don't yell!" he said. "It's all right—only a punch on the nose—"

"Did you go—?"

"Yes, I did."

"You ass!" said Manners. "But what—run into the banisters in the dark, or what?"

Lowther set his lips.

"No!" he answered. "I ran into some rotter breaking bounds after lights out, and he handed me a punch in the dark, and knocked me over."

"Who—?"

"I don't know who! But I'm going to try and find out to-morrow, and give him something back for this!" said Lowther. "Ow! I shall have a nose like a tomato to-morrow! Ow!"

His friends sat in bed, gazing at him, as he bathed his nose. It looked red and raw: and was undoubtedly going to be very conspicuous on the morrow.

But the flow of crimson ceased at last: and Monty Lowther towelled his face, blew out the candle, and turned in—perhaps wishing that he had never turned out! Slumber settled once more on the Shell dormitory: undisturbed again till the rising-bell rang out in the snowy December morning.

CHAPTER XI

THE WAY OF THE TRANSGRESSOR!

"HEARD anything?"

"What about?"

"About last night, you fathead," muttered Cardew.

"Nothing," said Levison. And Clive shook his head. Both of them looked very curiously at Ralph Reckness Cardew.

It was morning break.

Snow had ceased to fall, but the old quad was carpeted with white. Blake and Co. were exchanging snowballs with Figgins and Co. of the New House. Cardew was not thinking of anything so light-hearted. He was tramping under the frosty old elms, by himself, his hands driven in his pockets, a deep line in his brow, when his friends came up. He shot his question at them eagerly.

"I can't make it out!" he muttered. "I expected a fearful row this morning—but—nothing seems to have happened. I can't make it out."

"I don't see why," said Levison. "You got back to the dorm—you couldn't have been seen, or they'd have been after you—"

"I know I wasn't seen—it was too dark for that in the Sixth-Form lobby. But—but—after what happened—!"

"What happened?" asked Levison, very quietly. So far, all they knew was that the scapegrace of the Fourth had "run into" someone in the dark, the previous night, and had cut back in haste to his dormitory, giving up his excursion out of bounds. Both Levison and Clive realized now that there had been something more than that.

Cardew cast a glance round him, before he replied. There was no other fellow near at hand: but his voice was low, as he spoke.

"I told you I ran into a pre—or rather, he ran into me. I should have been collared, but—?" He paused.

"But what?"

"I knocked him over and cut."

"You—you knocked him over!" gasped Clive.

"What else could I do?" muttered Cardew. "I was fairly startled out of my wits when he suddenly barged into me in the dark. He would have had me. I—I just landed out, and cut."

His friends gazed at him in something like horror.

"You mad fool!" breathed Levison.

"I tell you, he would have had me—whoever he was—Kildare, I suppose, or Darrell, or North—goodness knows! But—but I can't understand why there's no row going on. I expected every pre. in the House to be in a flap about it—and the beaks on the trail—but—nothing's happened."

Levison shook his head.

"It couldn't have been a pre.," he said. "The House would be ringing with it, if a pre. had been knocked out by a fellow getting out of bounds. Somebody else must have been up—"

"It was in the Sixth-form lobby—I was going to get out of the window there, when he barged in. Who but a pre.—?"

"Some other shady waster like yourself, going out of bounds, perhaps," said Clive, with a curl of the lip.

"Thanks!" said Cardew. He looked relieved. "I—I suppose that's possible. But—it wasn't a Fourth Form man—nobody was out of our form. Who the dickens could it have been, then?"

"Not a pre. at any rate," said Levison, shaking his head again. "We should have heard about it before this. Lucky for you!"

Cardew nodded.

"Whoever it was, I fancy he's got a mark on him," he said. "But who—if it wasn't a pre. on the prowl, who the dickens—"

He broke off suddenly, as three Shell fellows came up. Tom Merry and Manners and Monty Lowther had grim expressions on their faces—and Monty, in addition, had a nose that fairly flamed in the wintry sunlight. Cardew's eyes fixed on that nose, as did Levison's and Clive's.

"Looking for you, Cardew," said Tom Merry, quietly.

"You've found me, dear man!" drawled Cardew. He was his nonchalant self again at once. "What's the trouble this time? Your minor been rooting in my study again, Manners?"

Manner's eyes gleamed, but he did not answer that.

"We've been looking for a fellow who was out of his dorm last night," said Tom, in the same quiet tone, "and we hear that you were, Cardew. Isn't that so?"

"I asked you yesterday if the Head had been appointin' pre's from the Shell," remarked Cardew. Has he?"

"Don't beat about the bush," said Tom. "We want to know who was the sneaking rat who hit a fellow in the dark, and we're going to know, and deal with him."

"We are!" said Monty Lowther, with emphasis.

Cardew drew a deep, deep breath. He knew now! The sight of Lowther's flaming nose had made him wonder whether, by some strange chance, it was Lowther he had knocked over in the dark—for it was clear that Monty had picked up a hefty knock from somewhere. And now he knew.

It was a tremendous relief to him. Even the cool, careless scapegrace of St. Jim's had been deeply disturbed and uneasy, in the belief that it was a "pre. on the prowl" who had collided with him in the dark in the Sixth-Form lobby and whom he had knocked over in making his escape. If it was that, it was the "sack" that loomed over him, if he found out: and such an occurrence must have been followed by untiring inquiry and investigation. Now he knew that it was only a Shell fellow who had gone over under that sudden jolt, and that he was in no danger. He smiled.

"It was you!" said Tom Merry. "No use denying it, Cardew—we've had it from half a dozen fellows that you were out of your dorm at the time—"



He was rolled over and over.

"My dear man," drawled Cardew. "Who's denyin' it? Was it your nose that stopped my knuckles last night, Lowther?"

Monty passed a tender hand over his flaming nose.

"It was!" he said.

"Sorry!" said Cardew, lightly. "What was I to think, when I was suddenly barged into so near the prefects' studies? I thought Kildare or Darrell had got me, and I hit out and got away. You don't fancy I knew it was you, do you? I hadn't the foggiest idea that you were following in my footsteps. If I'd known it was you, at the same game—"

"Don't be a fool, if you can help it," said Tom Merry, contemptuously, "Lowther went down last night for a jape on a Sixth-form man—that's why he was there—"

"Not breakin' out, like naughty me?" smiled Cardew. "What is it jolly old Horace says—*Apella credat, non ego*—"

"You can pack that up," said Tom. "If you like to think other fellows as blackguardly as yourself, you can get on with it. But you can't hit a man a cowardly blow in the dark, and get away with it."

Cardew's eyes flashed.

"I tell you, I thought it was a pre. and I had to get away, anyhow I could. How was I to know that it was only Lowther playing the fool? Yesterday you were kicking up a row because Manners Minor pinched a newspaper from my study when I was out, as if I could help what the young rascal did. Now it seems I'm to blame because I couldn't recognize Lowther in the dark. He shouldn't have been there—"

"You gave me this nose!" said Lowther, rubbing it.

"You're welcome to it," said Cardew.

"So you thought it was a pre. you were punching in the dark," said Manners. "Lucky for you it wasn't—you'd have started home early for the Christmas holidays, and stayed there. Pity it wasn't so, if you come to that."

"Thanks," yawned Cardew. "You fellows mind clearin' off? I hate to mention it, but you're beginnin' to bore me."

"We're not through yet," said Tom Merry. "You can carry on with your shady stunts, backing horses and breaking out at night, till you're found out and sacked—that's not our business—"

"So glad you can see it!"

"But when it comes to knocking a fellow out in the dark, that's a horse of another colour," said Tom. "You're going to be ragged for that, Cardew, and you're going to get it now. Collar him!"

Cardew made a backward jump: but in a moment he was in the grasp of the Terrible Three, and whirled off his feet. He came down with a bump into a mass of snow piled under the elms, and rolled in it, spluttering.

"Roll him over!"

"Rag him!"

"Give him jip!"

Cardew struggled frantically as he was rolled in the snow. Levison and Clive made a movement—but stopped. Cardew yelled to them.

"Rescue! Back up. Help me, you rotters."

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"You've asked for this!" he said. "May be a lesson to you! I've a jolly good mind to lend a hand myself. Come on, Clivey."

Levison and Clive walked away, leaving Cardew to it. Evidently, in their opinion, the scapegrace of the Fourth had asked for what had come to him: and they had no intention of intervening. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther did not heed them. They gave all their attention to Cardew.

The next five minutes were hectic ones, for the luckless breaker of bounds. He was rolled over and over in the snow, struggling, panting, his cap and tie gone, his collar hanging by a single stud, his hair a wild mop mixed with snow, his eyes and ears and nose and mouth full of it. When the Terrible Three left him, at last, he sat in the snow, smothered with it from head to foot, panting and panting for breath, and almost spitting with rage.

"That's a tip!" said Tom Merry: and with that, the chums of the Shell walked away, leaving Cardew looking the most dismal and dilapidated object that had ever been seen within the walls of St. Jim's.

It was long minutes before Cardew was able to crawl to his feet and limp away to the House. And his feelings, as he went, could not have been expressed in words.

CHAPTER XII

A GOOD THING!

"ROT!" said Wally of the Third.

"Rubbish!" said Frank Levison.

Reggie Manners looked dogged and sullen.

The three fags were in the locker-room, after school. Hobbs and Frayne and two or three other Third-formers were in the room, but not near at hand. But Reggie, who had been speaking, had been speaking in a low tone. He did not want other ears to hear what he was confiding to his two special chums, D'Arcy minor and Levison minor.

"I tell you it's a cert!" he said. "You know I got that paper from Cardew's study yesterday—"

"I know Cardew would get into a fearful row if his beak knew he had it there," said Wally D'Arcy, with a sniff, "Serve him jolly well right, too. Railton would give him six, or send him up to the Head."

"Never mind that now—"! said Reggie, irritably. "Tain't our business what a Fourth-form man does, is it?"

"It's our business what a Third-Form man does!" retorted Wally. "And I can tell you, Manners mi that you're a young rotter to think about it at all."

"Why shouldn't I, if other fellows do?" muttered Reggie. "Cardew does, and Racke of the Shell, too, as we jolly well know—and I've heard that Cutts, of the Fifth—"

"No reason why you should!" said Levison minor. "Your major was quite right to take that paper away from you, and you'd better forget all about it."

"Think of six pounds in a lump!" said Reggie, with glistening eyes. "I tell you I can get six to one against Sunny Skylark, and he's sure to win—"

"I can see the bookies giving six to one, if he was!" said Wally, derisively.

"You see, he's a dark horse—they don't know his form yet—"

"And you do?" grinned Wally.

"Yes, I jolly well do!" snapped Reggie. "And I tell you I'm going in for it, and all the more, too, because my major gave me the fives bat. I'll jolly well show him whether he can bullyrag me! I tell you, Cardew had that horse marked in the list, and he knows a lot about gees. And then the Man who Knows, in the paper, said he was a jolly good bet, and that the odds would shorten later in the week. But it's all right if I get on early, I can get six to one now. I tell you it's a good thing!"

Wally sniffed, and Frank frowned.

"Keep clear of it," said Wally. "It's against all the rules, as you jolly well know, young Manners—"

"You never do anything against the rules?" sneered Reggie. "Ain't it against the rules to put gum in Selboy's inkpot?"

"Tain't the same thing," said Wally. "A lark's a lark, but backing horses is outside: right outside. It's not done, as you know as well as I do. I don't know whether they'd sack a kid in the Third: but you'd get an awful whoppin' if it came out—"

"It wouldn't come out" said Reggie. "Look here, you two, I don't want to keep a good thing like this to myself. You two come in with me—"

"Rot!" said Wally.

"I'll watch it!" said Frank.

"You won't get us doing anything of the kind," said Wally. "Besides, you talk about getting on, and such rot, and how are you going to do it? Going to ask Railton to let you use his telephone to ring up a bookmaker?"

Frank Levison chuckled.

"Well, I might get some chap to do that part for me," said Reggie. "I know that ain't easy. I—I know that man Lodgey by sight but I've never spoken to him. I might get an older chap—Cardew might—"

"More likely to smack your head for asking him!" said Wally. "I know I would, in his place."

"Same here," said Levison minor. "Hard, too!"

Reggie Manners gave them both unpleasant looks. Evidently, his friends in the Third had no sympathy whatever with his sporting speculations.

"And you talk about six pounds," went on Wally. "That means putting a pound on, even if the geegee won, which he wouldn't. Where are you going to get a pound?"

"I—I thought I might get it from my major!" muttered Reggie. "But—but that's a wash-out, now. If you two come into it with me, we can raise it together—tain't a lot among three. I know you've both got some tin."

"So that's it, is it?" snorted Wally. "Well, I can jolly well tell you this, young Manners, my tin's going to stay in my trouser's pocket."

"Mine, too!" said Frank Levison.

Reggie's face grew more and more sullen.

"Now, you listen to me," went on Wally. "Just wash it right out, and forget all about it. You jolly near got into a ghastly row last term monkeying about with football pools. Now you fancy yourself at backing horses. You're simply a blithering young ass, Manners mi., and a good bit of a young blackguard too, and I can tell you that you'd better mind your step, or you'll jolly well land in a bad spot of trouble."

"Chuck it up, Reggie," said Frank Levison.

"Shan't!" said Reggie.

"Well, you'll have to!" said Wally. "You haven't got a quid, or anything like it, and it's not much use trying to stick your major for it, after what you've told us. That man Lodgey might take you on for cash, though it's jolly well against the law: but he wouldn't take you on on tick. I can see him doing it! How much money have you got?"

"Twopence!" said Reggie, reluctantly.

D'Arcy minor laughed.

"Well, that settles it," he said. "Even if you got on and the gee won which he wouldn't, six to one in tuppences wouldn't make you a millionaire. So the sooner you put it out of your head the better."

"I could borrow a quid, if I liked," said Reggie.

"Not from your major, now he's spotted what you're up to——"

"Oh, he's hard up, anyhow," snapped Reggie. "He hasn't a bean. I know where to borrow a quid, all the same, if I want it. I could pay it back in a few days—Sunny Skylark runs on Saturday. But—but I'd rather go into it with you two, if you'll go whacks in it with me——"

"Rats!" said Wally.

"Rot!" said Levison minor.

They rose, apparently they had had enough of Reggie's talk about horses.

"Hold on a minute," urged Reggie. "Look here, I'll tell you what I read in Cardew's paper about that horse——"

"Keep it parked," said Wally. "We don't want to hear it. Look here, let's get out—tain't snowing now."

"I don't want to get out—!"

"I do, and I can tell you I'm fed up with your rot about geegees. You coming, Frank?"

"I'm coming," answered Levison minor. "Come on, Manners mi."

And they went.

Reggie Manners do not follow them. He was left with a frowning face. For some time he sat there, discontented and sullen. Wally of the Third, and other exuberant spirits of the Lower School, were snowballing in the quad, in the falling dusk: but Reggie was not in the least disposed to join them. He had weightier matters on his mind. A spoiled little boy at home, and a thorn in the side of his brother at school, Master Reggie was accustomed to having his own wilful way: and he was going to have it now, if he could—all the more because Manners major had come down on it with so heavy a hand. Master Reggie was jolly well going to do as he jolly well liked, whatever Manners major might say or do, and whatever his friends in the Third might think and say.

The bell was ringing for tea when Manners minor, at last, left the locker-room. But he did not head for hall with the other fags. He headed for the stairs, his destination the Fourth-form passage and No. 9 Study.

CHAPTER XIII

A JOLT FOR CARDEW!

TAP!
Cardew of the Fourth gave an irritated grunt.

He was alone in his study. Since the ragging in the snow that morning, when Levison and Clive had walked away and left him to the tender mercies of the Terrible Three, he had not spoken to either of them. Neither did they seem very keen to speak to him: for patient as they generally were with their wayward chum, they showed very plain signs of being fed up, since his latest exploit, and its result to Lowther of the Shell. After class, they had left Cardew to himself: and now they had gone to tea in hall, still leaving him to himself.

He was not in a cheery mood.

His feelings towards Tom Merry and Co. were dark and bitter, and especially towards Harry Manners. And as his study door opened after the tap, and Manners minor appeared in the doorway, his dark brow grew darker. Why the fag had come there, he had no idea—unless the young scamp was looking for another racing paper! At all events, he had had quite enough of the Manners' family, and his look could not have been more unwelcoming.

"What do you want?" he snapped.

"I—I say, Cardew, can I speak to you?" asked Reggie, timidly. "It—it's rather important."

"You pinched a paper from this study yesterday—"

"I was going to bring it back—I only borrowed it," pleaded Reggie. "I—I just wanted to look at it, that's all. I—I couldn't help it if my major took it away from me. He whopped me with a fives bat."

"Well, what do you want?"

Reggie insinuated himself into the study, and closed the door. Cardew half-rose, with the intention of pushing him out again. However, he sat back in the armchair, his eyes curiously on the fag.

"You shouldn't come here," he said. "Your major would kick up another row, if he found you in this study."

"I know! I don't care for him," said Reggie. "I'm not going to let him order me about, just because he's my major. I—I say, Cardew, I—I want you to do me a favour, if you would."

"Better ask your major."

"Oh, he wouldn't—he's pi."

Cardew sat upright in the chair, staring at the fag. Apparently Reggie had come to ask something that he could not ask of his brother, because Manners major was "pi." It gave Cardew a disagreeable jolt.

"What the dickens do you mean, if you mean anything?" he snapped.

"It's about a horse—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"I—I know you know that man Lodgey, at the Green Man," Reggie hurried on. "Lots of fellows know. I say, you're in touch with him, and—and I'm not. I—I want to put a quid on Sunny Skylark for Saturday. I know you're backing that gee—I saw your mark in *Sporting Snips*. I—I say, will you put it on for me when you see Lodgey?"

Cardew did not speak.

He sat staring blankly at Manners minor. A deep flush came into his cheeks: more of shame than of anger. Manners major had suspected him, almost accused him, of leading Reggie into bad ways. Certainly he could never have dreamed of any such base action, and Manners' suspicion rankled bitterly in his mind. Yet what he never would have done intentionally, had not his example done? What was this little fool doing but following in his footsteps?

He sat utterly taken aback, staring at Reggie. He seemed incapable of speech, for the moment.

Reggie looked at him hopefully. Possibly he was taking Cardew's silence for consent.

"It wouldn't hurt you, to put it on for me, when you see Lodgey," Manners minor went on, "I—I can trust you, Cardew. There's nobody else I can ask, is there? You'll do it, won't you?"

Reggie's look and tone were pleading and persuasive.

Cardew still sat looking at him. But he spoke at last.

"You mad young ass—"

"I—I—I don't see why I shouldn't—"

"You're asking me to put money on a horse for you—you, a kid in the Third Form—a silly little idiot that ought to be spanked—"

Reggie reddened. Reggie, in his own eyes at least, was a sporting fellow—quite a sportsman:—nothing at all like a silly little idiot that ought to be spanked! Such a description was quite a shock to him.

"You've got the neck to come here and ask me to do such a thing—you cheeky little scoundrel—"

"Well, why shouldn't I?" said Reggie, sullenly. "Think I don't know that you back horses yourself? Lots of fellows know. Think I don't know that you're going to see that man Lodgey and put your money on? Think I don't know that you've picked out Sunny Skylark, same as I have, and that you're going to get out of the school to see Lodgey about it? What's the good of gammon?"

Cardew breathed very hard.

It was true enough. It was his racing paper from which Reggie had derived knowledge of that "dark horse"—without his leave certainly. It was his own selection of a "gee" that the foolish fag had adopted. And but for his misadventure in the Sixth-form lobby the previous night, and his unexpected encounter with Monty Lowther in the dark, he would already have seen Bill Lodgey and put his money on. That intention was only postponed: he intended to see Lodgey this very afternoon: there were no "lines" to-day, and he had ample time to cut down to Rylcombe, and back, before call-over in hall. He had been thinking of that when Manners minor came in. What, as Reggie said, was the good of "gammon?"

His angry indignation died out. It was replaced by a sense of shame. He was, after all, no better than the fag supposed him to be: the cheeky little rascal was only asking him what he had often done on his own account.

"If you won't—!" muttered Reggie.

Cardew answered him almost gently:

"Look here, kid, don't be such a silly little ass! Keep clear of that kind of thing. It will land you in bad trouble."

Reggie sneered.

"I like that—from you!" he said. "Do you keep clear of it?"

Cardew breathed hard again.

"Never mind that," he said. "If you want to pick an example in the Fourth Form, you'd better pick my relation, D'Arcy, not me."

Another sneer from Master Reggie.

"D'Arcy! He's as pi as my major," he said. "Look here, I jolly well know that your pals give you sermons, but a sermon from you is too jolly thick. What are you getting at?"

Cardew controlled a desire to kick the cheeky young rascal out of his study.

"Have a little sense, Manners mi.," he said. "If you've got a pound, keep it, and spend it among your fag friends." Then he laughed. "Weren't you trying to stick your major for it?" You can bank on it that he won't lend you a red cent, now he knows what you want it for. Or—" He laughed again. "Were you thinking of raising it here?"

"No, I wasn't," retorted Reggie, sullenly. "I can borrow a pound, if I like—that's all right. I'm not asking you to lend it to me. All I want you to do is to put it on for me, and I don't see why you shouldn't. If you won't, I'll find some other way. Why won't you?"

"For goodness sake, you young ass, chuck up the idea," exclaimed Cardew, impatiently. "And now, get out of my study."

Reggie Manners gave him a dark, resentful look, and turned to the door. Then he turned back again:

"Will you lend me that paper, Cardew?" he asked.

"What?"

"That paper my major took away from me—he said he was going to bring it back to you. I'd like to look up what the man says about Sunny Skylark—"

Cardew, with a glitter in his eyes, jumped up from the armchair, and threw the study door wide open.

"Get out!" he rapped. He drew back his foot.

"Look here—Wow!" roared Reggie, as Cardew's foot landed. "Why, you rotter—you beastly bully—wow!" Reggie shot out of the study.

Cardew slammed the door after him.

He crossed to the window, and stood looking out into the snowy dusk, with a black brow. It was time to get out, if he was to get back in time for roll. He had to see Bill Lodgey without further delay, if he was to be "on" that dark horse, Sunny Skylark, while the odds were still so favourable.

But he did not stir from the window.

That interview with Manners minor seemed to have blotted out the attraction of backing Sunny Skylark. It had made Ralph Reckness Cardew see himself, if only for the moment, as others saw him—as the wretched fag saw him, as his friends Levison and Clive saw him. And that sudden flash of self-knowledge was discomforting in the extreme. For once, if only for once, the dismal dinginess of his pursuits had come home to his mind, and he felt something like loathing for the whole thing—for this surreptitious dodging round to the back door of the Green Man: for Bill Lodgey's beery face: for Sunny Skylark at six to one: for the whole disreputable game. He stood staring for a long time at the snowy quad and the falling dusk: and then, at length, he stirred.

He crossed to the armchair, groped under the cushion, and drew out a folded newspaper. He flung that folded newspaper into the study fire, and stirred it in with the poker. The *Sporting Snipster* disappeared in smoke.

Cardew was still in the study, when Levison and Clive came up after tea. He had not been out: and he was not going out.

CHAPTER XIV

K.O.

“REGGIE.”
Manners of the Shell spoke very mildly.
His minor did not reply.

It was Saturday afternoon, and tea time. Most St. Jim's fellows were at tea, in hall or in their studies. Manners minor was apparently not thinking of tea. He was leaning against the passage wall near the door of Masters' Common-Room, where a number of the “beaks” were at tea. Why Manners mi. had chosen that particular spot to loaf in, would have been difficult for anyone but Manners mi. himself to explain. But there he was: leaning on the wall, with his hands in his pockets, like a fellow waiting for something. There the “Terrible Three” found him.

He did not trouble to turn his head, as Tom Merry and Monty Lowther and Harry Manners came up the passage. Neither did he take the trouble to answer his major. Master Reggie remained loftily indifferent to all three of them.

Manners frowned a little. Monty Lowther winked at Tom Merry, who smiled. Reggie did not waste a glance on them.

“I spoke to you, Reggie,” said Manners, a little less mildly.

“I'm not deaf!” said Reggie, without looking round.

“I've been looking for you.”

“You needn't have.”

“We want you to come to tea in our study, kid!” said Tom Merry, as pleasantly and genially as he could.

“Do you?”

“Honoured if you'll come,” said Monty Lowther, solemnly.

Reggie sneered.

An invitation to tea in a Middle School study was quite an honour for a fag of the Third Form. Master Reggie was absolutely indifferent to it.

“So you ain't so hard up now?” sneered Reggie. “Well, I don't want to come. Thanks all the same,” he added, sarcastically.

“What are you hanging about here for?” asked Manners.

“Find out.”

Harry Manners breathed hard. But he did not give way to wrath. Manners was, in fact, worried about his minor. Ever since that interview in No. 10 Study, in which the fives bat had been featured, Reggie had avoided him, nursing his sulky resentment. Reggie had not even asked his help in Latin, or told him what a swob Knox of the Sixth was. He had steered quite clear of No. 10 in the Shell and the dwellers therein. Manners, as a dutiful major, felt that it was up to him to keep an eye on his minor: especially since the inci-

dent of the *Sporting Snipster*. But it was not easy to keep an eye on a sulky fag who deliberately kept out of his way. However, now he had run him down.

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther, undoubtedly, did not yearn for the company of a cheeky, sulky fag at tea in No. 10. But they felt a chummy sympathy for old Manners, and played up loyally. So they joined him in looking for Reggie—though it was some time before they found him, in that unexpected spot.

"The beaks don't like juniors hanging about here, Reggie," said Tom.

"Don't they?" said Reggie, indifferently.

"You know they don't, you young ass!" said Monty Lowther.

"They can lump it, then," said Reggie.

"Look here, Reggie, come up to our study," said Manners. "We've got a decent spread—Tom's had a hamper from home—"

"I don't want his hamper."

"Welcome as the flowers in May, young 'un," said Tom, with resolute patience and good-temper. "You can bring your pals if you like—D'Arcy mi. and Levison mi. asked us if we'd seen you, when we looked into the locker-room—they seem to have missed you—"

"They can go on missing me."

"We've got a tremenjus cake in our study!" said Lowther, temptingly.

"You can keep it."

"Won't you come?" asked Tom Merry.

"No, I won't."

"And why not?" asked Manners, acidly. "Are you still sulking, you sulky little swob, because I gave you the fives bat? I'll give it you again if you have anything to do with Cardew."

"Come on, old chap," said Tom, hastily. Manners had been looking for Reggie, olive-branch in hand as it were: but it looked now more like war than peace. "If the kid doesn't want to come, it's all right."

"I've a jolly good mind—!" breathed Manners. Undoubtedly, it looked more like war than peace!

"Oh, come on," said Lowther. And he slipped an arm through Manners'. The three Shell fellows walked away, leaving Master Reggie to his own devices. He cast a sneering glance after them, as they went, and then dismissed them from mind.

Master Reggie had much weightier matters on his mind than tea in a study, even so distinguished a study as No. 10 in the Shell. Manners major, perhaps, might have guessed as much, had Reggie been in funds—he had not forgotten that dark horse, Sunny Skylark, and Reggie's desire to put a "quid" on him. But he was well aware that Reggie was not in funds,—it was because he was not in funds that he had visited No. 10 Study. It did not cross his mind for a moment why Reggie was hanging about near the door of Common-Room—where the evening papers had lately been delivered!

Reggie, left alone by the Shell fellows, continued to lean on the wall and wait. The door of Common-Room opened, about ten minutes later, and Mr. Linton came out. Mr. Linton glanced rather expressively at the loitering fag: but Reggie was not in his form, and he passed on without speaking.

Manners mi. continued to wait—impatiently. Once the beaks were finished tea, there was a chance of dodging into Common-Room and getting hold of one of the evening papers. Reggie was anxious to get hold of one: and see the result of the three-o'clock. He was sure, quite sure, that that dark horse, Sunny Skylark, had won—had romped home, simply walking away from the field: he was assured of that but he was feverishly eager to see it in print, so that there could not be the slightest shadow of doubt about it. That eagerness indicated, perhaps, a lurking, terrifying doubt at the back of his mind—a doubt he dared not admit to himself.

Would the beaks never have done? Linton had gone, but the door did not open again. Sometimes two or three of them would remain chatting over the tea-table—or looking at the evening papers—how long were they going to keep him?

Reggie moved at last. He could not stand the suspense any longer: and, since Linton had gone, he had thought of an excuse for getting what he wanted. He moved along the passage, tapped at the door of Common-Room, and opened it. Three or four masters, at the round table glanced at him.

“What is it, Manners mi.?” asked Mr. Selby.

“If you please, sir, may I take an evening paper to Mr. Linton’s study,” said Reggie.

“Certainly.” Mr. Selby held out a paper. Reggie advanced, and took it, and was out of Common-Room in a moment more. It had been quite easy: the masters present had no doubt that Mr. Linton had sent him for the paper.

In the passage, with the door closed, Reggie clutched the newspaper with trembling hands. He hurried along the passage, and stopped at the corner. He was too impatient to go further: risky as it was to take the chance of a beak coming along and seeing him peering at the “Stop Press” column.

The newspaper rustled and shook in his hands, as he held it up to the light. The “Stop Press” was on the back page: easy to find. There it was—and the fag scanned it feverishly. There was the one o'clock—the one-thirty—the two-o'clock—the two-thirty—Oh, here it was, the three o'clock—**SPANNER, SILVER CHIME, ROOKERY.**

The printed words danced before the wretched fag’s eyes.

What did it mean?—Spanner, Silver Chime, Rookery? Where was Sunny Skylark? Was it a mistake? It was a rotten shame to make such mistakes and make a fellow all jumpy! If it wasn’t a mistake—

Reggie felt a cold chill.

It was no mistake—he knew that! The three o'clock race had been won by Spanner, with Silver Chime and Rookery second and third. So far from having

won, Sunny Skylark had not been "placed". Sunny Skylark was nowhere.

"Oh!" muttered Reggie. "Oh!"

He could hardly believe it. But he had to believe it. He was not thinking of the money he had hoped to win. He was thinking of the pound he had lost—a pound that was not his own! He had been so sure—so certain—that he had spotted a winner. "Man Who Knows" in the *Sporting Snipster* had thought so—Cardew had thought so—and now—now it was the K.O.

"Oh!" moaned Reggie, again.

The newspaper slipped from his hands, and fell to the floor. He hardly noticed it. If any master had come along at that moment, he must have taken heed of the white-faced fag standing there, white as the snow on the window-sills, and would certainly have stopped to ask questions. Luckily for Reggie, no one came along. He stood for a long minute in a stunned state, and then slowly moved away—leaving the evening paper lying forgotten where it had fallen. Sunny Skylark had lost—and what was he going to do?

"Oh, here you are!" Wally of the Third came up, at the corner of the locker-room passage. "You young ass, where have you been? Knox has been calling "Boy" for two or three minutes. You'll catch it."

Reggie only stared at him. Wally stared back, puzzled.

"Deaf?" he asked. "I tell you Knox is calling Boy—" He was interrupted by a loud call from the direction of the Sixth-Form studies, in Knox's well-known acid voice. "Boy!"

"Hear him?" said Wally. "Why don't you cut off?"

"Boy!" came again from the distance.

"Look here, Manners mi., if you want Knox's ash on your pants—"

"Leave me alone!" muttered Reggie.

"Knox is calling Boy, I tell you—"

"I don't care."

Reggie slouched away, leaving D'Arcy minor staring.

"Well, my only Aunt Jane!" ejaculated Wally. "Mad, I suppose! Knox will take the skin off him if he doesn't go! If he jolly well thinks that I'll go, when I don't fag for Knox, I can jolly well tell him—!"

"Boy!" came again from Knox afar.

Wally of the Third snorted angrily; then, friendship supervening over annoyance, cut off to obey the call in place of Knox's fag. Reggie Manners, overwhelmed by his disaster, forgot Wally, and forgot even Knox. What was he going to do?

CHAPTER XV

NOTHING DOING!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY paused, in his elegant saunter, and glanced at a diminutive figure under the frosty old elms that glimmered in the sunlight. Then he adjusted his celebrated eyeglass in his noble eye, and glanced again. Then he murmured:

"Bai Jove!"

It was after third school on Monday. Arthur Augustus, sauntering in the quad, was thinking chiefly of the Christmas holidays, now close at hand. Gussy had made up a list of quite a large party for the "hols" at Eastwood House: Blake and Herries and Dig, of course; Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, almost equally of course; old Talbot, and Kangaroo, and one or two others. Now he was considering whether to add his relative, Ralph Reckness Cardew, to the list. He liked Cardew very little, and approved of him still less: but after all, Christmas was Christmas, the time of peace and goodwill to all men. Only a few days ago he had been very near punching that relative of his, in the dormitory: but really that was an additional reason for burying the hatchet at Christmastide. His ponderings over this matter was interrupted by the sight of Manners minor under the frosty trees, slouching there by himself, his eyes on the ground, and his face expressive of the deepest, gloomiest pessimism.

Manners mi. was generally to be found, out of class, in company with Wally and Frank of the Third: the three minors were wont to move in a bunch. But Manners mi. evidently had no use for Wally and Frank now. It was very unusual for a fag of the Third to seek solitude: but Reggie was seeking it now, evidently a prey to dismal and miserable thoughts. That look on so youthful a face touched Arthur Augustus's tender heart, and he forgot all about holidays and Christmas parties and walked across to Reggie.

"Weggie, deah boy!" he began.

Manners minor gave a start. He had been buried in wretched thought, and he had not heard D'Arcy's footsteps on the snow under the elms. He looked up quickly, with a startled, furtive look, without speaking.

"Anythin' the mattah, kid?" asked Arthur Augustus, kindly.

"No!" muttered Reggie.

"You look wathah as if somethin' was w'ong," said Arthur Augustus, gently. "Your majah is wathah a fwiend of mine, Weggie, and if there is anythin' w'ong, pewwaps I can help. It is a wow with Selby?"

"No!" muttered Reggie, again.

"Knox been waggin' you?" asked Arthur Augustus, sympathetically.

"No!" came another mutter.

"Knox is wathah a bwute," said Arthur Augustus. "He gave me whopes last week, the wuffian. But if it isn't Knox, what is it, kid?"

"Nothing," mumbled Reggie.

He moved off and then, as if struck by a sudden thought, turned back. His eyes eagerly and somewhat stealthily on D'Arcy's face.

"I—I say, D'Arcy, I—I'm rather in a scrape—you could help me if you liked," he muttered.

"That is what I want to do, kid," answered Arthur Augustus, benevolently. "Pway tell me what is the mattah."

Reggie paused a moment. Then he made the plunge.

"I—I—I'm hard up!" he muttered. "I—I—I happen to want some—some money. If—if you'd lend me something—I—I can pay it back after the hols—I know I shall get some Christmas tips. If—if you'd—" His voice trailed off.

Arthur Augustus smiled.

"If that's all, all wight," he said. "Half a cwown all wight?" He slipped his hand into his pocket.

Reggie coloured.

"I—I—I want a pound—"

"Eh?"

"If—if you could lend me a pound note—!"

Arthur Augustus stared, and then smiled again.

"I am afraid that I couldn't, Mannahs mi.," he answered. "What on earth does a kid like you want a pound for? As I have only thwee-and-six, I weally couldn't, you see. Look here, Weggie, if you have been wunnin' into debt, the best thing you can do is to speak to your majah about it—"

"Oh, don't jaw!" snarled Reggie. Evidently, there was nothing doing: and Reggie had no politeness to waste upon a fellow who was of no use to him.

Master Reggie walked off: turning his back on the swell of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus gazed after him. Reggie's manners, undoubtedly, were deplorable: especially as the kind-hearted Gussy had been prepared to hand over half a crown out of the total sum of three-and-sixpence which he possessed.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "The wude young wapscallion! I have a gweat mind to smack his head. A vewy gweat mind indeed. Of all the wude young wottahs, I must say—yawoooooooooh!"

Arthur Augustus ended up quite unintentionally with a loud yell, as a snowball impinged on the back of his noble head.

He spun round and fixed his eyes, and his eyeglass, in wrath, on three Shell fellows coming up the path under the frosty elms. Tom Merry was smiling, Monty Lowther grinning: Manners was frowning.

"You uttah asses," howled Arthur Augustus, rubbing snow from the back of his aristocratic neck, "If that was you, Tom Mewwy—"

"Not guilty, my lord!" said Tom, laughing.

"If it was you, Mannahs—"

"Fathead!" was Manners' reply.

"Then I pwesume that it was you, Lowthah, you funnay ass. Pewwaps you think it funnay to catch a fellow on the back of his nappah with a snowball. Pewwaps you would like me to punch that wed nose of yours, and make it a little weddah. I have a gweat mind—"

"You have?" ejaculated Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah. I have a gweat mind—"

"Gammon!" said Lowther, shaking his head. "I never knew that you had one at all, let alone a great one. Where do you keep it?"

"Bai Jove! If Cardew did not make your nose wed enough for you, Lowthah, I will make it weddah! I will—"

Manners interposed.

"Chuck it, Gussy! I want to speak to you." Monty Lowther had not been able to resist the temptation to take Arthur Augustus by surprise with that snowball. But Harry Manners, evidently, was not in a playful mood. He was frowning angrily. "Don't play the goat. Look here—"

"Weally, Mannahs—!"

"I saw my minor speaking to you," rapped Manners, "and I saw you shove your hand into your pocket. Has young Reggie been trying to stick you for money?"

"Weally, Mannahs, there is nothin' to get into a tempah about—"

"Will you answer me?" snapped Manners.

"I weally fail to see—!"

"Cough it up, Gussy," said Tom Merry, "Manners is worried about his minor—the young ass has been kicking over the traces, and Manners is afraid he may be landing in trouble.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus became grave at once. "I am vevy sowwy to hear it. I thought the young duffah was lookin' vevy distwessed, and asked him what was the mattah. It seems that he is hard up for a pound."

"A pound!" repeated Manners, between his set lips. "You haven't been idiot enough to lend him a pound, have you?"

Arthur Augustus raised his eyebrows.

"I should not wegard it as idiotic, Mannahs, to lend a kid a pound if he has wun up somethin' he cannot pay—"

"Have you or not?" snapped Manners.

"As I have only thwee-and-sixpence, Mannahs, of course I couldn't. Neithah should I lend a little kid so much as a pound without inqwiwin' into the mattah first," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "But as I have only thwee-and-six—"

"The young rotter!" breathed Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Br-r-r-r!" grunted Manners, and he walked on—in the direction Reggie had taken. Tom Merry and Lowther hurried after him, and Tom caught him

by the arm.

"Keep your temper, old man," said Tom.

Manners' eyes glinted.

"You heard what that ass said? Reggie was trying to stick me for a pound, in the study, to put on a horse—all through that rat Cardew. Now he's been trying to borrow it from D'Arcy. That means that the fives bat did him no good—I've a good mind—"

"No good ragging the kid," said Tom. "He's a young ass, but—even if he's sticking to that rot, he won't borrow a pound in a hurry. Who'd lend a pound to a kid in the Third?"

"That's so," assented Manners. "But—but—it's all Cardew's fault. I've a jolly good mind to look for him, and punch his face—it was he put this rot into Reggie's mind, whether he meant to or not. He ought to be sacked from the school."

"Let's go and give him a few snowballs!" suggested Monty.

"Fathead!" grunted Manners. Evidently, he would have liked to give Ralph Reckness Cardew something more drastic than a few snowballs.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood gazing after the three Shell fellows, with a face pink with indignation. The manners of Manners major seemed to him as deplorable as the manners of Manners minor. He walked away at last, and joined Blake and Herries and Dig in the quad, and confided to them his opinion that both the Manners, major and minor, were wude wagamuffins.

CHAPTER XVI

GOOD SAMARITAN!

R ALPH RECKNESS CARDEW gave a sudden start.

For a moment, he could not believe his ears. The sound he heard was strange and unusual: very unusual at St. Jim's. It was the sound of a sob.

He stood quite still, and stared into the shadows.

The winter dusk was thickening, but the bell had not yet rung for lock-ups. Cardew was strolling rather moodily on the path under the elms, in anything but a pleasant mood.

Somehow, he hardly knew how, that talk with young Manners in his study, a few days ago, had made a difference to him. He had burned his *Sporting Snipster*: he had avoided a meeting with his racing acquaintance Bill Lodgey: he had seen himself for once, as others saw him, and the sight had not been grateful or comforting. He was disposed to laugh at himself for even thinking of the path of reform: and yet he was following it. But he was not following it contentedly or happily. He was annoyed and irritated and restless.

It was a compensation, in a way, that he still had in his pocket the pound note he had intended to put on Sunny Skylark. He was aware now that that elusive "gee" was not the "dark horse" he had fancied him, since he had failed to get even a place in the three o'clock on Saturday.

But he was not thinking of that. He cared very little about it. He was restless and dissatisfied: and the thought was in his mind, as he lounged moodily in the dusk, of dismissing his half-formed new resolutions and resuming the old way. He walked under the leafless branches, irritably kicking at the snow, dissatisfied with himself and with everybody else. But he stopped dead at that faint unexpected sound from the gloom.

He had believed himself alone: but evidently someone else was out of the House, in the wintry dusk under the trees. His lip curled sarcastically. Some silly fag who had had a whopping, and retired to that lonely spot to "blub"—ashamed to let other fags see that he could not "take" it. That, no doubt, was what it was: and no concern of his.

Nevertheless, he stopped, and peered into the dusk.

Among his form-fellows, Cardew was supercilious: he had a bitter tongue and a ready sneer, which even his friends did not always find it easy to tolerate. Few would have guessed that he was the fellow to concern himself about a "lame duck". But somehow, that sound of a sob in the lonely dusk went to his heart. Some wretched little fag in the depths of woe, because he was not tough enough to take what came to him—that was it, he supposed. He stood still for some moments, and then made a move to walk on, unheeding. But he turned back. After all, a cheering word or two to the poor little wretch—

A small figure was huddled under one of the elms. Cardew peered at a white face that glimmered in the dusk: and gave almost a jump as he recognized it. It was Manners minor of the Third.

His brow darkened.

Manners mi—whom Manners major had as good as accused him of leading astray! The cheeky little scoundrel who had had the nerve to come to his study, and ask him to put money on a horse, and made him feel more ashamed than he had ever felt in his life before. He wanted nothing to do with any of the Manners—major or minor. He backed away a step.

But he stopped again.

There was something in that little tear-stained, frightened face that touched him strangely.

Manners minor saw him, and looked at him: but did not speak. All he did was to make an effort to control the sob that was coming. But the effort failed, and it came.

"Don't, kid!" muttered Cardew. "What's the row? What is it? Has that bully Knox been whopping you, or what?"

Sob!

Cardew knew that it was not that. Reggie Manners was not so tough as

his chum Wally of the Third: but he was not the fellow to cry in a corner because he had been whopped. It was something more serious than that. Remembering what had been said in his study, Cardew had an idea what it was.

"Will you tell me what's up, Manners mi?" he asked, very quietly. "Perhaps I can help you out."

Reggie found his voice.

"You!" he muttered. "Fat lot you'd help a fellow!"

"I'll try," said Cardew, with a patience that would have surprised his friends, if they could have heard. "Look here, what have you been doing?"

"You know!" gulped Reggie.

"How should I know?"

"You know because I told you! I—I—I was on Sunny Skylark, that's all. You wouldn't do it for me, but I—I hung about Rylcombe Lane till I saw Lodgey, and—and he took me on."

"Then you lost your money?"

"Yes," whispered Reggie.

"Good gad!" Cardew stared at him, his sympathy vanishing. "You're blubbing like a baby because you put your money on a horse and lost? You weak-kneed little fool, why didn't you steer clear as I told you to do? You blubbering little idiot, do you think it's the end of the world, because you've lost a pound?"

Reggie's face crimsoned through his tears.

"Tain't that!" he gasped. "Tain't that! I don't care about the pound. Only—only—only—I—I—I borrowed it."

"Is that all? The fellow you borrowed it of won't skin you alive if you don't pay till next term, will he?"

"He—he—he doesn't know."

Cardew jumped.

"Wha-a-t?" he stuttered.

He stared at the wretched fag in horror, as the meaning—the only possible meaning—of Reggie's words sank into his mind.

"He doesn't know!" repeated Cardew. "You awful little rascal, do you mean that you—you—that you—!" He could not put it into words.

Reggie shrank back.

"Leave me alone!" he muttered. "You made me tell you! Leave me alone! I—I—I'm not a thief, if that's what you think. I tell you I borrowed it—I only borrowed it—I was going to put it back afterwards,—Knox didn't want it to spend—it was all right if I put it back, but—but—but—"

"Knox!" repeated Cardew. He remembered that Manners minor fagged for Knox of the Sixth. "Was it Knox's—"

"Leave me alone! I didn't want to tell you—you made me! Oh!" Reggie's voice broke, in a sob. "Oh! What shall I do? I'm done for here—what shall I do?" The tears were running down his face.

Cardew took a step back, again. He was strongly tempted to go, and leave the wretched fag to his dingy misery. But again he paused. He stood looking at the white frightened tearful face, glimmering in the dusk. Reggie of the Third was no longer a sportive sportsman. He was a terrified little boy, on the verge of hysterics. Compassion mingled with contempt and disgust in Cardew's face. He did not go. He could not leave the kid like that.

"Pull yourself together," he said, quietly. "Tell me what you've done, and perhaps it can be set right. Your brother can help you—"

"He wouldn't!" panted Reggie. "I wouldn't dare tell him—and he wouldn't either. Don't you tell him! I didn't want to tell you—you made me—"

"What have you done?"

"It—it was in the drawer of Knox's desk," breathed Reggie. "He keeps money there—loose change, and—and some currency notes in an envelope. I—I know, because I fag for him, you know. I—I've seen him take change from the drawer, when he sent me to the tuck-shop for things. Well, I—I knew—I—I mean I believed—it would be all right on Saturday, when Sunny Skylark won—and there were three pound notes in the envelope in the drawer, and—and I knew from something I heard Knox say that he was keeping it for the hols, so—so—so I knew he wouldn't miss it at once, and so—so—I—I—I borrowed a pound note—I—I only borrowed it—I only meant to borrow it—"

"Cut that out!" said Cardew, roughly. "You pinched it?"

"I—I didn't—Oh, I didn't!" moaned Reggie. "I tell you I was going to put it back on Saturday, and Knox wouldn't have known—one pound note is as good as another—I just borrowed it—I—I tell you I'm not a thief." He shuddered from head to foot. "I'm not a thief—I didn't mean to be one—Oh, I was a fool—but I thought that beastly horse was going to win—I—I—But when Knox misses it, he will know that it was I—"

His voice trailed away.

"Good gad!" muttered Cardew. "You little idiot—you little rascal! Don't make lying excuses—you know as well as I do that touching another fellow's money is stealing—fat lot of use telling Railton that you only borrowed it—"

Reggie trembled.

"You've told me the lot?" asked Cardew, suspiciously. "You helped yourself to a pound note from Knox's desk, and lost it to Bill Lodgey—you crass young ass! Is that the lot?"

"Yes," whispered Reggie.

"Could you put it back, if you had it?"

"Of course I could. I was going to, when Sunny Skylark won—only—only he didn't—"

"Will you promise me, honour bright, never to do anything of the kind again, if I help you out of this?"

Reggie stared at him, with wet eyelashes.

"You can't help me—unless you give me a pound." Evidently Reggie had no hope of that!

Cardew groped in his pocket. From his wallet, he drew a pound note—still his, though it had had a narrow escape of becoming Bill Lodgey's. He pressed it into the hand of the staring fag.

"Promise!" he snapped.

"Oh! Yes! Honour bright!" Reggie peered at the note, and peered at Cardew, hardly able to believe what had happened. "Oh! Yes, I promise! As if I'd go through this again! Oh, if—if you mean this—"

"Keep your promise, that's all!" said Cardew, and he walked away, and disappeared into the shadows.

Reggie peered and peered again at the pound note. He still seemed hardly able to believe in it. But at last he slipped it into his pocket, and cut away towards the House. The bell was ringing now for lock-ups: and he hurried in. D'Arcy minor called to him, as he came in out of the dusk, blinking in the lighted House.

"Here, young Manners—"

"Seen Knox?" breathed Reggie.

"Knox! Yes, he just went into hall with Darrell—"

"Sure he's in hall?"

"Of course. I've been looking for you. Young Levison's got a bag of doughnuts in the locker-room—where are you going?"

Manners mi. did not stop to explain where he was going. He had something to do in Knox's study, while Knox was in hall. He cut away, leaving Walter Adolphus D'Arcy staring.

CHAPTER XVII

CALLED TO ACCOUNT!

"THAT cad!" muttered Manners.

It was morning break, the following day. Bright wintry sunshine, from a steely sky, shone down on a snowy landscape. Manners of the Shell was standing at the window of the junior day-room, looking out. His eyes fixed inimically on a Fourth-form man sauntering in the quad. Manners never caught sight of Cardew of the Fourth, these days, without angry dislike coming into his face.

"Eh! who?" asked Tom Merry, glancing round.

"What and which?" asked Monty Lowther.

They came over to the window.

"That rotter!" muttered Manners. "Swanking about, as usual, when he ought to be turfed out of the school."

Tom and Monty glanced out at Cardew. He was not exactly "swanking" as Manners expressed it. He certainly did look nonchalantly easy and self-satisfied, but that was Cardew's usual aspect. Baggy Trimble had remarked that Cardew walked the earth as if it belonged to him, and perhaps he did. Manners seemed to be sharing Trimble's opinion. Dislike and contempt mingled in his look, as he eyed the dandy of the Fourth lounging in the sunshine, looking as if he had not a care in the world.

Manners had been thinking of printing out photographs at the window, in the sun, and was considering whether the light was quite good enough: when he caught sight of Cardew: whereupon he forgot photographs and concentrated on the scapegrace of St. Jim's. Tom Merry smiled faintly, and Monty Lowther suppressed a yawn. Neither of them liked Cardew, nor admired him: but they saw no reason for the bitterness of their chum's feelings towards him. They, if not their chum, could see that Reggie was at least as much to blame as Cardew over the episode of *Sporting Snipster*. As for Manners' suspicion that he influenced Reggie, or gave single thought to the wilful fag, they scouted it. In fact they realized, as Harry Manners did not, that he had an unconscious urge to lay all blame on some person other than Master Reggie.

Manners gave them a rather dark look.

"I tell you that fellow is a cad and a rotter," he snapped.

"Passed nem. con," said Monty. "But give him a rest, old bean."

"I won't have him having anything to do with my minor."

"Manners, old man, he wouldn't touch your minor with a barge-pole," said Lowther. "I don't suppose he's spoken to him this term. They hardly know one another—a kid in the Third, and that supercilious ass who thinks the earth hardly good enough for him to walk on. Forget it."

"I'm not so sure," grunted Manners. "It would amuse a cad like that—"

"Rot!" said Tom Merry.

"Look here, Tom—!"

"Rot!" repeated Tom. "I tell you, Manners, old man, that it's all rot. Reggie may have picked up his silly nonsense from seeing the way Cardew carries on, that's all—Cardew had nothing to do with it—"

"That's bad enough," said Manners. "If that's all! But—why, there's Reggie now! Look!"

Manners' eyes fairly blazed. Tom and Monty stared. Manners' minor had come along, in sight of the day-room windows. He stopped to speak to Cardew, under the eyes of the three Shell fellows looking out.

Monty Lowther gave a low whistle. He had said that he did not suppose that Reggie had spoken to Cardew at all that term. This, certainly, did not look like it. Reggie's manner was quite eager, as he stopped to speak to the Fourth-former, and Cardew stopped, too, to listen to what he had to say. Neither of them looked towards the windows unaware of the eyes on them.

Harry Manners' brow set, black and bitter.

"That looks as if they don't know or speak to one another, doesn't it?" he said, between his teeth. "What are they talking about, do you think? What has a Fourth-form man to talk about with a fag of the Third? Comparing notes about a gee—they're in it together, I tell you."

Manners swung away from the window, and almost ran for the day-room door. Tom Merry and Lowther followed him.

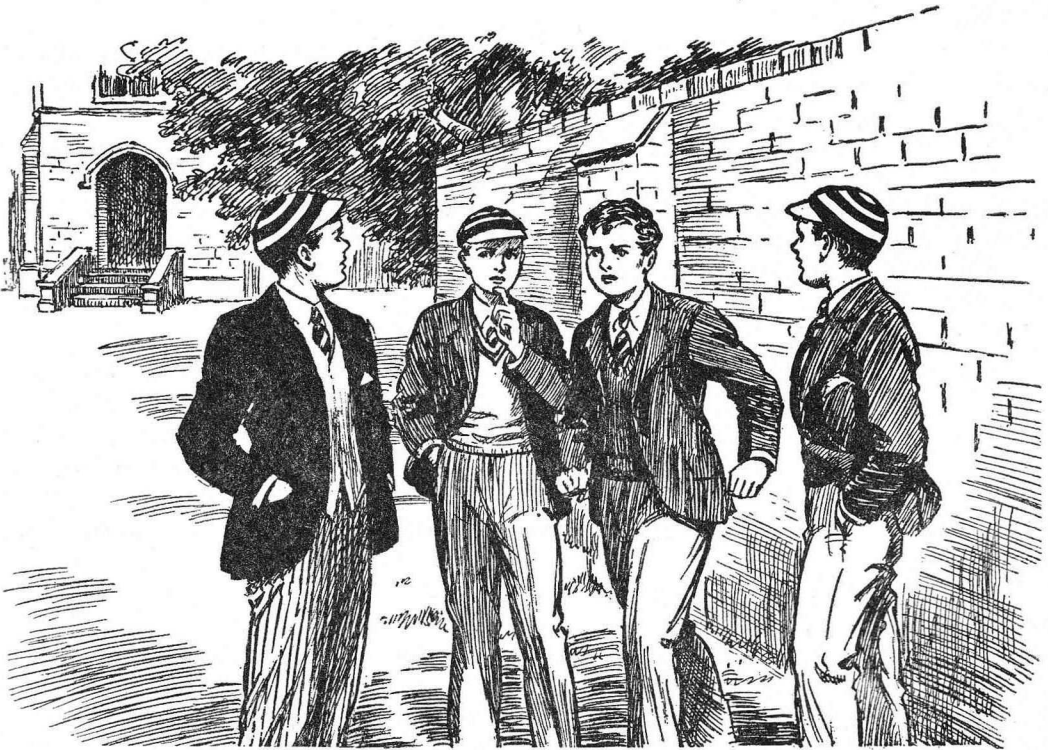
"Manners, old chap!" exclaimed Tom.

His chum did not heed. He cut out of the day-room, obviously with the intention of interrupting that colloquy in the quad.

His suspicions of Cardew were more than confirmed. That slacking, supercilious, blackguardly waster found it amusing to lead a silly fag into his own ways—that had been Manners' suspicion, and now it was a certainty. Manners was going to put a stop to that, by the most drastic measures.

He ran into the quad.

Reggie was speaking to Cardew as he came breathlessly up. Manners caught a word or two before he interrupted.



Cardew . . . stood where he was.

"—it's all right—but if you hadn't let me have that pound, I—" Reggie broke off, as his shoulder was grasped, and he was spun away from Cardew.

He stared round at his brother.

Cardew raised his eyebrows.

"Get out of this, Reggie!" snapped Manners. "I'm going to talk to Cardew. You get out of it."

"Shan't!" howled Reggie, shrilly. "Leave me alone! Can't I speak to Cardew if I like?"

"No, you can't! Get out of it."

"Why, you interfering silly fathead—"

"Will you get out?" roared Manners.

"No, I jolly well won't—!" yelled Reggie. "I'll do as I like, and you ain't going to bully me, and—Ow!"

Smack!

Reggie yelled, as his major smacked his head. Manners was in no mood to take cheek from Master Reggie.

"Now get out," he exclaimed, savagely. "And if I ever see you speaking to that cad again, I'll give you some more, and harder. Get out."

"You bully—!"

Manners strode at him, with uplifted hand. Reggie backed away, and retreated. He realized that he had better go, and he went. He cast a bitter look at Manners, as he went: but he went.

Cardew, his hands in his pockets, a faintly contemptuous smile on his face, stood where he was. A "row" was coming, that was clear: for which the dandy of the Fourth did not care a straw. If Manners of the Shell wanted a row, Cardew was more than ready to oblige him.

Manners turned on him, with gleaming eyes, as Master Reggie faded out of the scene.

"You rotter!" he breathed.

"Anythin' up?" drawled Cardew. He glanced at Tom Merry and Monty Lowther, as they came up. "What's bitin' that silly ass now. Happen to know?"

"You fellows can keep out of it," said Manners. "I'm dealing with this rotter. You rat—you worm—can't you be satisfied with disgracing your House, and your school, without dragging a silly kid into your rotten ways. You've been lending my minor money—I heard what he said—and I know what it was for."

Cardew breathed rather quickly.

"You know—?" he said.

"Think I can't guess—after *Sporting Snipster*, and that young rascal trying to stick me for money to put on a horse?" hissed Manners. He gave Tom and Monty a glare. "Do you still think that Cardew has nothing to do with my minor—now that I know he's been lending him money. What do you think it was for?"

"Rot!" said Tom, uneasily. "Cardew wouldn't—"

"I tell you Reggie was speaking about a pound that Cardew let him have, as I came up!" hissed Manners.

"Oh!" said Tom. "Cardew! You didn't—you haven't—?"

Cardew did not speak.

At that moment, he could have kicked himself, for having bothered his head at all about Manners' minor and his dingy scrape. Yet he could not be sorry that he had saved the wretched fag from utter disaster. But assuredly he was not going to say a word about it: Reggie's guilty secret was his own: and not for worlds would he have admitted having played the part of the Good Samaritan. Cardew's peculiar nature made it harder to confess to a good deed than to a bad one.

"Look here, Cardew," said Tom Merry, after a pause. "We've got to have this out. You know what Manners thinks—"

"I'm not responsible for what every fool thinks, am I?" drawled Cardew.

"If you've been lending that kid money, it looks as if Manners was right, though we couldn't think so," said Tom.

"You knew what he wanted it for," said Lowther. "Even if he sneaked that racing paper from your study without you knowing, as you said, you knew jolly well what he wanted money for."

Cardew was silent.

"You can answer, I suppose," said Tom. "Give us a plain answer—have you been lending Manners mi. money, or not?"

No reply.

"He can't answer," said Manners, scornfully. "He knows I heard what Reggie said. Reggie couldn't get the pound he wanted from me, and he's got it from Cardew. He was trying to stick D'Arcy for it, as you know. Now that rat has let him have it—it amuses him to see a silly kid following his example."

Cardew flushed crimson.

"Is that how it is, Cardew?" asked Tom Merry, very quietly.

"No!" said Cardew, speaking at last. "That isn't how it is. But—"

"But what?"

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothin'," he said.

"You've nothing to say?"

Tom drew a deep breath.

"Well, I suppose it's no use telling you what we think of you," he said. "That wouldn't hurt you, I suppose. I couldn't think that Manners had it right—but it's plain enough now. In Manners' place, I'd give you such a hiding that you'd never think of anything of the kind again."

"Hear, hear!" said Monty Lowther.

Cardew laughed.

"Manners is welcome to get on with it, as soon as he likes," he drawled. "I'd rather like to punch his silly, cheeky head, if he's keen on it."

"You won't have any choice about that," said Harry Manners, grimly. "I'm going to thrash you, Cardew, as a tip to leave my minor alone. If I've got it in me, I'm going to give you such a hiding that you won't be able to crawl afterwards. When will it suit you?"

"Any old time!" drawled Cardew. "Now, if you like, you booby."

"The bell will be going in a minute," said Tom Merry. "After dinner, in the corner behind the gym—that suit you, Cardew?"

"Oh, quite!"

Manners' hands were clenched: he seemed to have hard work to keep them off the cool, mocking dandy of the Fourth. But his friends walked him away, and Cardew, with an indifferent face, resumed his lazy saunter.

CHAPTER XVIII

MYSTERIOUS!

"**A** FIGHT!" said Jack Blake.

"Who—?"

"Manners of the Shell, and that swanking ass in our form, Cardew."

"What about?"

"Goodness knows."

The news had spread, after third school. Nobody, or few, knew precisely what the "row" was about, but almost everybody knew that a fight was on, between a Shell man and a Fourth-form man. Study No. 6 were interested: in fact, everyone was interested: and a crowd of School House juniors intended to be present, when the foemen met in the secluded corner behind the gym, to watch the combat. But what most of the juniors knew was carefully kept from the knowledge of seniors. Nobody wanted a prefect butting in and interrupting the proceedings.

"Mannahs and Cardew!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, thoughtfully.

"As a wule, deah boys, I should back up a man in our form, but I have vewy little doubt that Mannahs is in the wight whatevah it is about."

"Bank on that!" agreed Blake.

"Queer, though," said Herries. "Old Manners is the most peaceable chap in the House—he's never in a row."

"Cardew's the chap to make a fellow want to punch his head," remarked Dig.

"Yaas, wathah!" assented Arthur Augustus. "I am sowwy to say it, as

the chap is a distant wrelative of mine: but he is vewy iwwitatin' at times. I came vewy neah punchin' his head in the dorm the othah night, you know. But it is wathah wemarkable for an old sobersides like Mannahs to get his wag out in this way. Is it because Cardew gave his pal that red nose last week?"

"Rot!" said Blake. "They ragged Cardew for that—anyhow, Lowther could stand up for himself, if that was it. I expect Cardew's trodden on his toes somehow—he's always treading on somebody's toes."

"Yaas, wathah! But—" Arthur Augustus shook his noble head. "It is wathah awkward, you know. I was thinkin' of askin' Cardew to join the party at my place this Chwistmas, but Mannahs will be there, and with the two of them at daggahs dwawn, it would be wathah an awkward posish. I weally do not see what they have to wow about, and pewwaps it is a misunderstandin'. Pewwaps a word in season might set the mattah wight. When are they scwap-pin', Blake, do you know?"

"After dinner, behind the gym, I've heard."

"Pwobably it is only some twiflin' disagweement," said Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps a fellow of tact and judgment might be able to pour oil on the twoubled watahs, what?"

"Perhaps!" grinned Blake.

"I will twy it on, at any wate!" said Arthur Augustus. "Chwistmas is comin', you know, and weally Chwistmas is not a time for scwappin'. I twust I may be able to set it wight."

And Arthur Augustus ambled away, with that excellent intention: leaving Blake and Herries and Dig grinning. They wished Gussy luck in the role of peacemaker, but they did not expect him to meet with much.

"Mannahs, deah boy—!"

Manners was in the quad with his comrades, when the swell of St. Jim's ambled gracefully up. There was a dark, set look on his face, which did not augur well for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's efforts at peacemaking. His set face did not relax, as he glanced round at D'Arcy.

"What is this I heah, Mannahs?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"How should I know?" grunted Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

Arthur Augustus breathed rather hard. Manners' manners seemed as deplorable as on the previous day. However, he went on:

"I heah that you are in a wow with my wrelative, Cardew, Mannahs. I twust that it is not a sewious mattah?"

No answer from Manners.

"I twust," went on Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "that it may be possible to set the mattah wight. What are you wowin' with Cardew about, pway?"

"If you want to know—"

"I am askin' you, Mannahs."

"It's because he's a rat, and a rotter, and a worm, and a rank outsider, and has been asking for it," growled Manners. "Is that clear?"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Nothing doing, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "It wouldn't do Cardew any good, to shout it out all over St. Jim's what the row's about. Don't butt in, old boy."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"That jolly old relative of yours is the limit, Gussy," said Monty Lowther. "If you want to know what the row's about, go and ask him—he'll tell you, I don't think."

"You are bewy mystewious about it," said Arthur Augustus, perplexed. "I weally do not see any weason to make a mystewy of it."

"Lots of things you don't see!" grunted Manners.

Arthur Augustus gave him a look, and turned away. Evidently, it was of no use playing the peacemaker with Manners of the Shell. He decided to see what could be done with the other belligerent. Leaving the Terrible Three, Arthur Augustus walked away to the House in search of Cardew, who was not to be seen in the quad.

"Know where Cardew is, Twimble?" he asked, as he came on the fat Baggy in the doorway of the House.

"Gone up to the studies," answered Trimble.

Arthur Augustus proceeded up to the Fourth-form studies. He tapped at the door of No. 9, and opened it. Three juniors were there: Cardew, Levison, and Clive. Cardew looked his accustomed nonchalant self: but his friends were looking very grave and somewhat perturbed. The news that Cardew was booked for a "scrap" with the quietest and most peaceable fellow in the House had not been palatable to them. There had been rather a rift in the lute, in No. 9 Study, of late: but Levison and Clive were standing by their chum, now that a "row" was on. But they were not feeling comfortable about it.

All three looked round at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as his eyeglass gleamed in the doorway.

"I twust I am not intwudin'," said Arthur Augustus.

"What a trustin' nature!" murmured Cardew.

"Weally, Cardew—"

"Of course not, old fellow," said Clive, with a frown at Cardew. "Trot in."

"I have just heard that there is a scwap on," explained Arthur Augustus. "I quite fail to see why you should be wowin' with a man in the Shell, Cardew. If it is only some twiflin' misunderstandin', pewwaps it could be set wight."

Cardew grinned, for a moment. Then his face became grave, and he shook his head seriously.

"Far from a trifle, Gussy," he answered. "Couldn't be more serious, in fact."

"I am sowwy to heah it, Cardew."

"And I'm sorry to say it," said Cardew. "But there it is. Not at all a trifle—quite deep and deadly."

Levison and Clive looked at him. Cardew closed one eye at them. Arthur Augustus, quite concerned, pursued his inquiries.

"But what is the mattah, then?" he asked. "What have you got up against old Mannahs, Cardew?"

"It's the way he does his back hair," said Cardew, gravely.

"Wha-a-at?"

"The way he does his back hair," repeated Cardew, with the same air of gravity, while Arthur Augustus stared at him, bewildered.

Levison and Clive burst into an involuntary chuckle. Cardew's face remained as grave as that of a graven image. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's became pink.

"You uttah ass!" he exclaimed, as it dawned on his noble brain that Cardew was pulling his leg. "I did not come heah to be made a fool of, Cardew—"

"Not at all" agreed Cardew. "That was a finished job, long ago."

"Bai Jove! I wegard you as a wude wottah, Cardew, and I twust that Mannahs will give you a feahful thwashin'!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, indignantly. And, quite forgetting his role of peacemaker, the swell of St. Jim's retired from the study, banging the door after him.

He walked away to the stairs, frowning. A fag of the Third form, loitering on the middle landing, called to him as he passed.

"Know if Cardew's in his study, D'Arcy?"

Arthur Augustus glanced at Manners minor.

"Yaas!" he answered: more brusquely than he was wont to address even a fag of the Third.

"Is he alone there?"

"No!"

"Oh!" said Reggie.

Arthur Augustus passed on, leaving Reggie loitering. He went out into the quad with a frowning brow, not in the least pleased by his interview with his relative in No. 9. He rejoined Blake and Herries and Dig, whom he found with the Terrible Three. Blake and Co. were inquiring the cause of the "scrap", without receiving more information than Arthur Augustus had received. Manners did not want his minor's exploits as a bold bad sportsman to become a topic, and his friends agreed with him, that the less said about it, the better. But that did not quite satisfy fellows who wanted to know.

"What rot!" said Blake. "You're going to scrap with Cardew—I suppose you've got a reason."

"Lots!" said Manners, shortly.

"Well, what, then?"

"I don't like him."

"You never have," said Blake. "That's nothing new."

"Both the silly asses seem to be keepin' it a secret," said Arthur Augustus, crossly, "I have just asked Cardew, and he only talked his usual silly wot instead of tellin' a fellow. What do you want, Wally?" he added, as Wally of the Third came up to the group.

"Only to speak to Manners," answered Wally. "Know where your minor is, Manners?"

"No!" snapped Manners.

"The young ass!" said Wally. "We're making a slide behind the elms, and young Manners was going to join up, and he's gone off somewhere. Haven't you seen him?"

"No, I tell you."

"Oh, bother him!" grunted Wally. "I'm jolly well not going to hunt for him, I know that. I—"

"He's gone up to the studies, Wally," interjected Arthur Augustus. "I passed him on the landin'."

"What the thump has he gone up to the studies for, then?" growled Wally.

"I weally do not know, Wally, only that he was goin' to Cardew's study—"

"Bother him—he can stay there, and be blowed!" grunted Wally, and he walked away to rejoin a horde of fags behind the elms: evidently disinclined to go up to the studies in search of Manners minor.

But if Wally of the Third was not interested, Manners of the Shell undoubtedly was. The look that came over his face quite startled the group of juniors. He made a step forward, and caught Arthur Augustus by the arm.

"Weally, Mannahs—!" ejaculated the surprised Gussy.

"Did you say that my minor had gone up to Cardew's study?" breathed Manners.

"Eh? Yass! What does it mattah?"

Manners did not answer that. With a set, savage face he strode away towards the House. The juniors stared after him, blankly.

"Bai Jove! What's the mattah with Mannahs, Tom Mewwy?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in astonishment.

Tom Merry did not answer. He was hurrying after Manners, and Monty Lowther followed him. Blake and Co. were left to wonder what was the matter with Manners!

CHAPTER XIX

LIGHT AT LAST!

CARDEW smiled when the door of No. 9 banged after his relative. He turned to Levison and Clive, the smile still on his face. The gravity of their looks seemed to amuse him.

"Backin' me up, what?" he inquired. "I shall want a second, you know, when I stand up to that fierce devourin' lion in the Shell."

"We're backing you up," said Levison, slowly, "But—"

"But—!" mimicked Cardew.

"Look here, what's it about?" exclaimed Sidney Clive, abruptly, "What have you done to Manners?"

Cardew laughed.

"What have I done to Manners?" he repeated, "Not what has Manners done to me? How pally to take it for granted that I'm in the wrong."

"You are!" said Clive. "If you want us to believe that a peaceable chap like Manners has picked a row with you for nothing, you've got another guess coming."

"What is it all about, anyway?" asked Levison. "If you're going to fight Manners I suppose you can tell us why."

Cardew shook his head.

"It isn't because I don't like the way he does his back hair, as I told Gussy!" he said lightly. "But—"

"Well, what?" snapped Levison.

"My dear man, I'm not the challenger," said Cardew. "I'm quite as keen to knock that cheeky Shell blighter's face through the back of his head: but the invitation to a meeting behind the gym did not come from me. Could I say no!"

"He must have had some jolly strong reason," said Clive.

"Or fancied he had!" said Cardew.

"Well, what?" repeated Levison.

Cardew seemed to consider for a moment.

"Well, I'd rather not go into details," he said. "I'm pretty sure Manners won't, and I won't either. But if you're curious, I'll tell you this much—I've so far departed from my usual manner and customs, as to do a good deed—"

"What-a-a-t?"

"Quite a good deed!" smiled Cardew, while Levison and Clive stared at him. "One of the best really! Not in my line at all—but we all have our weak moments. Having done this good deed, like a dutiful Boy Scout doin' his good deed for the day—"

"Can't you be serious?" growled Clive.

"Sober as a judge!" protested Cardew. "Havin', as I've said, done this good deed, rather to my own surprise, I've been misunderstood. I'm afraid," sighed Cardew, sadly, "that I'm not the sort of chap fellows expect good deeds from. So I'm misunderstood. Tough ain't it?" He grinned at his study mates. "More than once I've been called to account for bad deeds. Now I'm called to account for a good one. All my own fault for startin' in such a very new line. But there it is!"

"If there's a word of sense in that—!" said Levison.

"Honest Injun!"

"And what was it you did?"

"Helped a lame dog over a stile."

"And Manners is down on you for it?" asked Clive, sceptically.

"Like a ton of coke."

"You don't expect me to believe that, I suppose?"

"Not at all," said Cardew, amiably. "Please yourselves."

"I suppose you must always be talking airy tosh," said Levison, impatiently, "but if it's as you say—"

"If!" sighed Cardew. "Such is friendship!"

"Yes, if!" snapped Levison. "If it's as you say, there's a mistake somewhere, and it can be explained, and this fight needn't come off. Manners is a reasonable chap enough, and would listen to reason. If Manners knew how it was—"

Cardew chuckled.

"If Manners knew how it was, old man, he would fall on my neck and weep briny tears!" he said. "But he doesn't—and won't!"

"Why not tell him, then?"

"I'll watch it! The dear man wants to punch my face," said Cardew, "and to be quite candid, I want to punch his. Hard!"

"You'd rather fight him than explain?"

"Much rather."

"Well, you can't expect us to believe a word of all that rot," said Clive. "If you'd talk sense—"

"We shan't get any sense out of Cardew," said Levison. "If you're determined on this, Cardew, it will have to go on, and we'd better get along and fix it up with Manners' seconds. Come on, Clivey."

"Do!" assented Cardew.

Puzzled, perplexed, and considerably irritated, his two friends left the study. Cardew shrugged his shoulders. He had, in fact, told his friends the truth of the matter: but in such a way as to leave them more in the dark than ever: which was his intention. Neither of them could believe a word of it, without further details, which he certainly did not mean to give. He had simply been amusing himself by perplexing them.

A minute later, the study door opened and he looked round, supposing that one of his friends had returned. But it was not Levison or Clive who looked into the study. It was Manners minor of the Third. Reggie had loitered on the landing till he saw Levison and Clive go down: he did not want to speak to Cardew in the hearing of others.

"I—I say, Cardew—?" gasped Reggie. He paused at the doorway discouraged by Cardew's grim, unwelcoming look.

"You young ass! What have you come here for?" snapped Cardew. "Haven't you sense enough to keep clear of this study?"

"I—I had to speak to you!" faltered Reggie. "I say. I've heard that my major's rowing with you—there's going to be a fight—"

"What about it?"

"Is it because—because—?" stammered Reggie.

"Yes, it's because—because!" mimicked Cardew. "Your major's got his silly back up—and quite right, too, if matters were as he thinks. Your major can't help being a fool, any more than you can help being a young sweep. Now cut!"

"But I—I—I—oh, it's too rotten!" mumbled Reggie. "After what you did for me—after that—"

"Oh, forget it."

"I can't forget it," muttered Reggie, "Where should I be now, but for you? I tell you Knox went to that money-drawer yesterday evening, while I was fagging in his study—not an hour after I'd put it back—"

"Lucky you were in time."

"Yes, yes, yes, but—but if it hadn't been there, he would have missed it, and—and—and—I—I—had thought he wouldn't want the money, because I'd heard him say he was keeping it for the hols. But—but—he did—he went to that money-drawer, and—and—if it hadn't been there—" Reggie's voice trailed off in a whimpering whisper.

"A miss is as good as a mile," said Cardew. "Forget it."

"They'd have sent me home," breathed Reggie. "It—it would have been all up with me. They—they'd have thought me a thief—but I never meant—you know I never meant—Oh, I never—"

"You're safe now," said Cardew.

"I know! I know! But, if you hadn't helped me out, where should I be now?" muttered Reggie. "And—and now you're in a fight with my major, because—because—oh, it's too rotten. I'm sorry—I wish I could do something—"

Cardew laughed.

"You young ass, what does that matter? Do you think I'd funk a scrap with your major?"

"Oh! No! But—but—it isn't fair, pitching into you like this, after what you did for me—I—I wanted to tell you I'm sorry, Cardew—I don't know why you did it for me, but you did—"

"I don't know, either," drawled Cardew. "I don't like you, and I don't like your major—and I'd be glad to see the last of both of you. Now cut. If your major found you in this study, you'd get the fives bat again. Is that what you want?"

"I—I—I—"

Reggie's stammer was interrupted by a rush of running feet in the passage. The next moment Manners of the Shell, with a flaming face, burst into the study. He gave Cardew one black and bitter look, and then grasped the fag by the collar.

"You young rascal, so you're here, are you?" he panted. "By gum, I'll give you a lesson about consorting with that blackguard."

"Let go my collar!" yelled Reggie.

"Manners old man—" Tom Merry and Monty Lowther arrived breathless at the door.

Manners did not heed them.

With a fierce grasp on his minor's collar, he was shaking the fag, rather like a terrier shaking a rat. Reggie struggled and yelled. Cardew, his hands in his pockets, looked on, with a cool, contemptuous smile. Tom and Monty came into the study, and Lowther kicked the door shut.

"Look here, Manners—!" he exclaimed.

"Oh shut up!" roared Manners. "Do you think I'm going to see my minor sacked to amuse that grinning blackguard. I'm going to thrash him, and then I'm going to thrash Cardew, here and now. By gum, I'll make him sick of coming to this study."

"You fool!" yelled Reggie. "If you knew—"

"That's enough from you, you young sweep." Manners changed his grip on Reggie's collar to his left hand, and, with his right, caught up a ruler from the table. The yelling fag was bent over the edge of the table, and the ruler rose in the air.

Swipe!

"Draw it mild, Manners," exclaimed Tom.

"Manners, you ass—!" exclaimed Lowther.

"Mind your own business!" snapped Manners. And the ruler rose and fell again, with a resounding swipe. Reggie yelled frantically.

"That's for coming to this study!" Swipe! "That's for palling with the rottenest rotter at St. Jims." Swipe! "That's for borrowing money of Cardew!" Swipe! "That's for backing horses!" Swipe! "Now shell out what you've borrowed from Cardew, and give it back to him." Swipe!

"You fool!" yelled Reggie. "If you knew—"

Swipe!

"You fool! You fool! Cardew lent me the pound to put it back in Knox's desk," shrieked Reggie. "Knox would have found out, if he hadn't, and I should have been sent home. He never lent me anything else, and I should have been sacked if he hadn't lent me that pound to put back in Knox's desk. You wouldn't help me, with all your meddling, but Cardew did—"

"Wha-a-a-t!"

"You fool!" panted Reggie. "Did you want me to be sent home for pinching? I should have been, but for Cardew! If he hadn't given me that pound, I should have been up before the Head last evening, and sacked. Now you know!"

Manner's grasp had fallen from the fag's collar. The ruler dropped from his hand, with a thud to the floor. Manners of the Shell stood as if spell-bound. But for the fag's whimpering, there was a dead silence in No. 9 Study.

CHAPTER XX

PEACE AND GOOD WILL!

TOM MERRY was the first to break the silence.

"If that's true—!" he said, in a low voice.

Monty Lowther whistled.

Manners stood dumb. It seemed as if what Reggie had said was slow to sink into his mind. But it was sinking in. His face which had been crimson, had grown pale. He looked at the whimpering fag, and looked at Cardew, who shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"If that's true—!" repeated Tom Merry.

"It can't be true." Manners found his voice. "Reggie wouldn't—he couldn't—even that young rascal—he couldn't—he couldn't—. Reggie, tell me the truth. You never took Knox's money from his desk—."

"I borrowed it—!" faltered Reggie.

"Borrowed it!" repeated Manners.

"I—I never meant to take it—I'm not a thief—I—I—I borrowed it, thinking I could put it back on Saturday, only I couldn't—and then, last night, Knox went to the money drawer, and he'd have found out, if—if I hadn't put it back in time—."

"You put back what you had taken?"

"How could I, when I'd lost it—the horse never won—."

"Oh!" gasped Manners.

"I put back the pound note Cardew gave me, when I told him—."

"Why didn't you come to me?" breathed Manners.

"You!" Reggie gave a jeering laugh. "You—think I wanted any more of the fives bat in your study? And I knew you hadn't any money, too. I never went to Cardew, either—he came across me, under the elms—I was down and out, and he asked what was the matter, and I told him, never thinking that he would help me—but he did—He gave me a pound note, to put back, and if he hadn't—!" Reggie shivered. "I shouldn't be here now, if he hadn't—I should be at home, with the pater storming, and the mater crying over me—is that what you'd like?"

"Oh!" breathed Manners.

"And that's all you've had to do with Cardew?" asked Tom Merry.

Reggie gave him a glare.

"Of course it is! He never knew I'd borrowed that rotten paper from his study, and when I came here afterwards, he kicked me out. And I only came here now to tell him I was sorry he was in a fight because he'd helped me—my major rowing with him because he saved me from getting sacked—."

"Oh!" breathed Manners, again.

He looked at Cardew.

Cardew yawned.

Reggie made a rather stealthy movement towards the door: with a wary eye on his major. Perhaps, after his confession, he expected a little more from the ruler. But Manners was not thinking of the ruler now.

“So now you know!” added Reggie, with his hand on the door-handle, “I wasn’t going to tell you, but now I have, and I’m jolly glad I have too. And I jolly well hope Cardew will lick you behind the gym, so there!”

With that Parthian shot, Master Reggie departed from the study, rather hastily. But Manners did not even look at him. He stood with his eyes fixed on Cardew, the colour deepening in his face.

Cardew glanced round the study with a thoughtful air.

“Better shove the table in the corner!” he remarked, “and the armchair will go into the window alcove. That will make room.”

“Room for what?” asked Tom Merry.

“Didn’t Manners say something about getting on with it now, instead of waiting till after dinner behind the gym?” drawled Cardew, “I’m anxious to oblige. With or without gloves, Manners?”

Manners seemed to swallow something.

“I’m not going to fight you,” he said, shortly.

Cardew raised his eyebrows.

“Not?” he asked.

“No!”

“Why not?”

“Oh, don’t be an ass, Cardew,” said Tom Merry. “Manners was going to scrap with you, because he was thinking—!”

“Gammon!” said Cardew. “I’m not a doubting Thomas, I hope: but don’t tell me that Manners did any thinking! I couldn’t swallow that.”

Manners made a visible effort.

“I’m sorry!” he said, “If I’d had the least idea how the thing was—but I—I hadn’t! I—I’ve got to thank you for saving that young sweep from—from what was coming to him—.”

“Pack it up.”

“I’ve got to say—.”

“Speech may be taken as read!” interrupted Cardew. “If you want to call the scrap off, call it off: I don’t care a straw either way. There’s just one thing you can do—.”

“What’s that?”

“Keep your minor out of my study, and keep out yourself.”

Harry Manners breathed very hard.

“Very well,” he said. “I’ll only say this—you’re not the rotter I thought you were, and I’m sorry. We can’t be friends, and I’m sorry for that too.” He turned to the door.

A mocking reply rose to Cardew's lips. But for once he checked it and his better nature came to the fore.

"I'm sorry too," he said. "But after all, why shouldn't we be friends? Let's try it on, till Christmas, and see how it works—what?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Try it on, and it may work," he said.

"If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again!" chanted Monty Lowther.

Manners smiled.

"Let's!" he said.

The study door opened, and Levison and Clive came in. They stared at the Shellfellows.

"Oh, here you are!" said Levison. "We've been looking for you, to fix up about the scrap—."

"Too late!" grinned Cardew. "It's off, old bean."

"Off?" repeated Clive.

"Definitely off. Manners and I have decided to leave each other's features just as they are, over the hols, instead of taking home a collection of thick ears and swollen noses for the Yuletide festivities!" explained Cardew. "Ever so much better idea, when a fellow comes to think of it. What?"

"Ever so much!" said Manners.

And that was that.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY polished his eyeglass thoughtfully.

"It's all wight, aftah all," he told Blake and Herries and Dig.

"What and which?" inquired Blake.

"About Mannahs and Cardew, you know. The scwap's off, and they seem to have made fwiends instead. I had no ideah that my wemarks had pwoduced so much effect," said Arthur Augustus, "But it is wathah lucky that a fellow of tact and judgment took the mattah in hand, as it turns out. When I spoke to them, Mannahs seemed wathah watty, and Cardew talked his usual wot—but it appeahs that my wemarks had an effect, all the same—."

"Had they?" grinned Blake.

"Evidently, deah boy, for they have made fwiends instead of scwappin' aftah all. And I am vevy glad of it," continued Arthur Augustus. "I shall now be able to ask Cardew to join the Chwistmas party at my place, now that they are on a fwiendly footin'. I am vevy glad I took the mattah in hand. A spot of tact and judgment goes a long way when fellows fall out about nothin', or next to nothin'—I wegard this wresult as vevy satisfactory and it is going to be a Mewwy Chwistmas!"

And it was.

THE END.