"TOM OF THE AJAX!" Great New Story Starts Training-ship in This Issue!

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

The GEM 2D LIBRARY

OF SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES

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CARDEW'S VENGEANCE!

Returning from their ramble in the snow Wally & Co., of the Third Form, find Ernest Levison lying in the snow, the victim of a dastardly outrage. (A dramatic incident from the grand long complete story of Tom Merry & Co. contained in this issue.)

A FEW SEASONABLE WORDS TO MY READERS!

MY DEAR CHUMS,—A Happy and Prosperous New Year to you all! Of course, the start of a new year sets everyone thinking. There comes the question as to the headway that is being made. But the best thing about such a time is that there comes a bigger determination than ever to do better. I hope all my friends will discover that 1924 has heaps of the pleasantest surprises for them. And, talking of surprises, you will see crowds of these during the months ahead in the pages of the good old GEM.

"TOM MERRY'S FOE."
By Martin Clifford.

Next week's programme is immense. We get away with a rattling story of St. Jim's, in which the great feud between Tom Merry and Cardew is carried forward another stage. Cardew, like many another fellow placed in temporary authority, takes his position far too seriously. He has had a rough-and-tumble with Cutts of the Fifth at an earlier period of his career. The dramatic happenings related in next week's fine yarn go further. The part played by Tom Merry in a situation which has its tragic side is more than noteworthy.

NEW FEATURES.

The year of 1924 will be full of good things, and the GEM can be relied upon to come up smiling with a full share of brilliant novelties and happy notions making for enhanced popularity. I have been making arrangements for the grandest serials and most gripping complete stories on record. Just mention what the GEM is doing in this line to a non-reading pal. I shall take such genial recommendation as a kindly New Year offering from true chums.

NOTE THIS!

There will be a topping issue of the "St. Jim's News" next Wednesday. There have been grumbles because the amusing Supplement has of late been left out in the cold. It could not be helped. Next week's number is devoted to "Adventure." They know plenty about adventure at St. Jim's, and the scope of the subject will have generous justice done to it.

THAT REMINDS ME!

A moment ago I pointed out that there had been grousing because the Supplement had been given a miss. All that shows interest, and I should take it as a favour if you would let me have a line on a handy postcard to let me know just what special topic you would like to have handled in the "St. Jim's News." I shall try and oblige.

A CIGARETTE CARD CLUB.

Collecting cigarette cards is a hobby which never palls, and Jack Hall, 248, Stafford Road, Lichfield, Staffs, has met a real want by his Cigarette Card Club for the exchange of cigarette pictures. All those interested should write to him at the address given.

"GAN WAGA'S HUNTING."
By Sidney Drew.

Among the treats for the next number of the GEM you will find this thoroughly typical, rollicking, and sporting story of the amusing Eskimo. Many of Mr. Sidney Drew's most successful tales have been written round the rotund Northerner with his liking for blubber and his quaint mannerisms. You cannot afford to miss this great yarn, chums all. Next week. Dinna forget—as they put it north of the Tweed.

A TALE OF THE TALLANTYRE.

What is the Tallantyre? It is the name of a ship which figures prominently in the rousing new sea serial you will find in the "Boys' Friend." This magnificent romance is the work of David Goodwin, the celebrated author whose name is venerated by everybody. Mr. David Goodwin was too busy fighting in the North Sea as a naval officer during the war. This new story of his—by name, "Topsail Tony"—is his first since the Peace. It is the real goods.

A ST. JIM'S "WHO'S WHO?"

A reader at Pendlebury says it is high time we had a new "Who's Who?" for St. Jim's in the GEM, as lots of new characters have come in since the last was given. This suggestion is under consideration.

RIGHT ON THE SPOT.

A cheery word of encouragement reaches me from Chelmsford. "You seem to know exactly when to give us Mike McAndrews," says this correspondent. "Mike is welcome. As to school stories, these always retain their popularity, possibly because school life offers a greater range for originality." True enough. But there is more in it even than that. I shall have further to say about school yarns shortly.

"TOM OF THE AJAX!"

Tom Gale, the plucky young hero of our wonderful serial, goes through much trouble in next week's thrilling instalment. We see the brute, Stoniky Burr, in his true and most unpleasant colours. The yarn fairly swoops ahead.

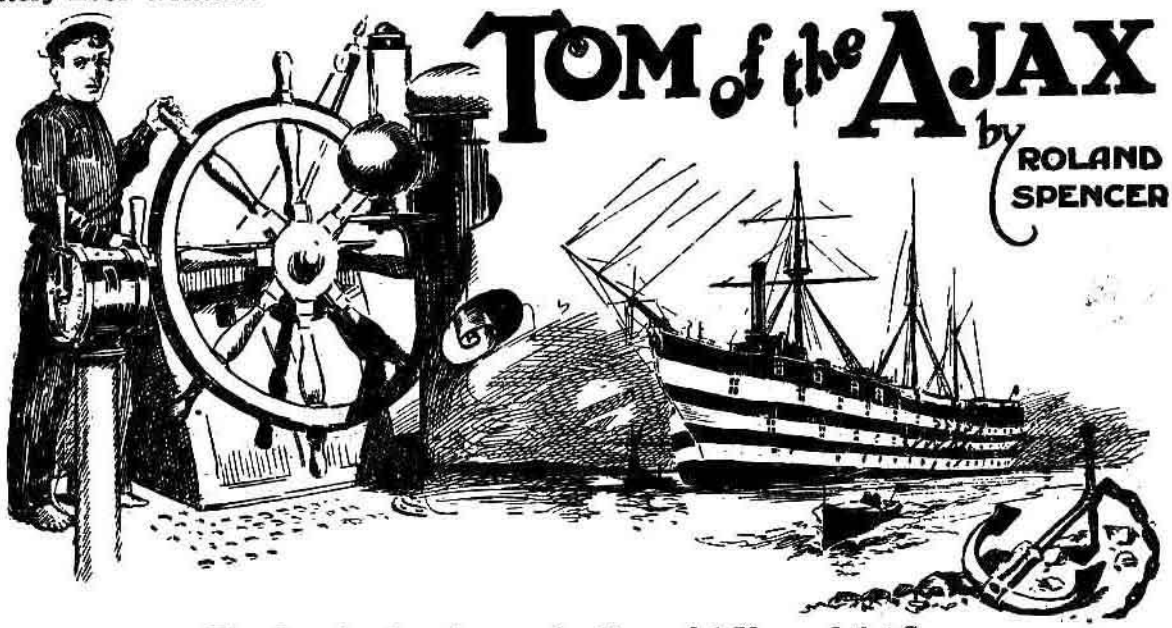
THE TUCK HAMPER.

Naturally the splendid Tuck Hamper feature will remain a leading attraction during the New Year. Send in your brightest yarnlet. It is always wise to have a shot at winning something really worth while, and that description fits a Tuck Hamper like the proverbial glove.

YOUR EDITOR.

The Greatest Training-Ship Story Ever Written!

STARTS TO-DAY!



TOM of the AJAX

by ROLAND SPENCER

The Opening Instalment of a Powerful Yarn of the Sea.

CHAPTER 1.
The Bully of the Ajax!

CHIEF PETTY OFFICER Tom Gale chuckled.

"Well, of all the luck!" he said. "Hanged if this doesn't take the jumping biscuit!"

His chum—a cheery-looking, stocky youngster with bright red hair—grunted.

"I should say it does take the biscuit—and a whole shopful of buns as well! I was hoping they'd put you and me down as hares, Tom; and, instead of that, hanged if they've not put you and old Stoniky Burr together! That's a good one!"

The two youngsters in the smart blue uniform of the training-ship Ajax were looking at the green baize notice-board on the mess-deck. Several notices were pinned there. But the one on which their eyes were fixed announced the details of the cross-country hare-and-hounds that was to take place that afternoon.

And though Tom Gale laughed good-humouredly, his chum, Dicky West, was still grumbling as they turned towards the ladderway that led down to the orlop deck.

Not that that meant anything. Dicky West was as cheery a youngster as could be found in the starboard watch, but he always grumbled—it was just his way.

"Oh, chuck grousing," grinned Tom. "Stoniky Burr mayn't be the ideal companion for a run, but it'll be worth while just to see his face."

Stoniky Burr, also a chief petty officer of the starboard watch, though in another division, was commonly known on the training-ship among the youngsters as the bully of the Ajax—a title he had done everything to deserve. As chief petty officer of the Blake division, he had a good deal of opportunities for his favourite pastime—that of making things hot for boys smaller than himself. That was why he was known as "Stoniky"—stoniky being slang on board the Ajax for a rope's end, which was one of his favourite weapons when there was no ship's officer about. And Stoniky Burr and Tom Gale, who was of the Hood division, had had more than one little argument on the subject of bullying.

In consequence, Stoniky Burr hated Tom Gale, and Tom knew it. Tom was still chuckling as he descended into the orlop deck at the thought that he and his sworn enemy were to run together that afternoon as the two hares.

In that section of the orlop deck—the lowest deck in the ship, just above the stores—that was apportioned to the Hood division, a group of laughing, talking youngsters were already changing into their running togs.

"Seen who you're running with, Gale?" called one of the division.

Tom nodded and grinned.

"I should say so!" he said. "I'm just going along to break the glad news gently to old Stoniky."

The Blake division was some way down the deck, and together the two chums strolled towards it. Stoniky Burr was already changing, and he looked up with a scowl as Tom hailed him.

"What-ho, Stoniky! Seen the board?"

"Of course I have!" growled Stoniky. "Dashed bad luck for me, too, put in with a wet like you! Think you can last the run?" he sneered.

Tom smiled more broadly. Slim and athletic, he knew that he could outrun Stoniky, who, though a good long-distance man, was too big and heavy to touch the Hood youngster. And the sight of Tom's laughing face, with its fair hair and merry blue eyes, made Burr growl again as he turned away.

Already the orlop deck was a medley of voices as the youngsters of the various divisions—each named after a famous British admiral, and consisting of about thirty boys, with one chief petty officer and two petty officers—poured down from the upper decks to change into their running togs.

Tom returned, grinning, to the Hood division. Ever since he had been a "newjee" he had made friends, and now that he was a "mower," as an old hand is called aboard the training-ship, and had been promoted to the position of chief petty officer, he was one of the most popular youngsters of the starboard watch—or of the whole ship, for that matter. Like a great number of the training-ship boys, Tom had been a waif before he had been drafted from a charity school on to the Ajax, and knew nothing of his birth or parentage. He was named Gale simply because he had been found in a gale of wind—a brain-wave on someone's part! His earliest recollection was of a crèche in the Walworth Road. Not that his origin worried him—he had grown so used to the idea of being alone in the world as far as relations were concerned.

The Ajax was moored on the southern bank of the River Thames, a quarter of a mile down the river from Fleethithe. She was a fine big vessel, built for the purpose, after the style of an old-time battleship, the "wooden walls of Old England," as they were called in Nelson's day. A fair stretch of water separated the training-ship from the stone causeway opposite, with its wooden jetty and hutments at the shore end.

"Now for it!" remarked Tom Gale a quarter of an hour later, as he and Stoniky Burr landed from the gig that had rowed them across to the jetty. "We've got to show a clean pair of heels, and no mistake!"

Without waiting an instant he led the way at a swift trot along the sea-wall that fronted the river at that part, his haversack of "scent" bobbing at his side. Stoniky followed, a sullen scowl still on his face. He was none too

pleased at having Tom for a companion, and he did not mean to let Tom forget the fact.

A broad stretch of undulating country lay at their disposal, with plenty of cover. Before plunging down a winding, hedge-bordered lane that came down to the water just opposite the training-ship, Tom glanced back. Already, with a splash of oars and the water creaming from their bows, half a dozen cutters had put off from the Ajax in swift pursuit, lashing the water to foam with their oars in their efforts to minimise the lead that the hares had already got.

Pulling fiercely, the cutters came shooting up to the jetty, and the swarm of hounds scrambled out, some leaping on shore when the boats' noses were still more than a yard from the wooden staging. Dicky West, Tom's chum, was among the first to pour into the lane after those two white figures ahead, already swallowed up several minutes ago among the trees.

But already Tom Gale and the bully of the Ajax had sprinted through a gap in the hedge at the side of the road, and had cut across a short field to the cover of a wooded hill. Swiftly Tom laid a false trail towards the main road, then they doubled back and plunged down towards the second copse below them. The hares were well away!

Tom was a fine runner; it was chiefly through his powers in that direction that one of the many challenge cups and shields owned by the Hood division had been carried off in triumph. The Hoods considered themselves the crack division of the Ajax, and had some grounds for doing so.

Though sailors in the making, the boys of the Ajax were well up to the mark where land sports were concerned. They were as proficient at football and cricket and running as they were at their own pet sports of swimming and sailing. So, although it was a stiff course that the hounds had to follow in pursuit of Tom Gale and Burr, they raced over the uneven country in fine style. At the end of an hour the majority were still going as strongly as ever.

But where the two hares were concerned, one, at any rate, had bellows to mend. Stoniky Burr was finding the pace a bit too warm, for he was out of condition, largely due to the "drags" he was partial to when a chance came. Drags—or fags, as a land youngster would call them—were rather a hobby of Burr's.

"Come on, for the love of Mike!" urged Tom good-humouredly, when he found that Burr was beginning to lag.

They had come round in a huge semi-circle, so that now they were back near the river once more. Beyond a line of trees they could see the broad waters of the Thames ebbing swiftly to the sea. The sun played on the water and on the brown sails of the barges that were driving seawards before a good capful of wind; but, though it was a fine sight, Tom and Burr were too busy just then to pause and admire the view.

"I can't come on any quicker, blow you!" snarled Burr.

Tom said nothing; but ran on, slowing his pace slightly to suit Burr's lagging steps.

They were running along a rough valley studded with bushes, but without sufficient cover to hide them if the hounds should appear on the higher ground behind them, as they might do at any moment. They had risked the open stretch in order to gain the thick cover beyond, where the ground was broken into craggy hillocks and dips that would be a fine place for throwing the hounds off the scent again. But if Burr was going to give in before that cover was reached——

Tom glanced round. A swift exclamation escaped him, and he gripped Burr's arm.

"Look! There they are!"

A scattered group of white figures had appeared on the hill behind them, running steadily in pursuit. So far, it seemed to Tom, they had not been seen. But there were still a couple of hundred yards or more for the hares to cross before they again reached cover, and unless luck were with them they would be spotted at any moment now.

"Get a move on!" cried Tom. "Can't you sprint this last bit?"

Burr couldn't—or wouldn't. And a far-off shout told the two youngsters that the hounds had seen them. There were some strong runners on their track—already they were near enough for Tom to distinguish the flaming red hair of Dicky West for one—and now that the hounds were no longer hampered by having to look out for scent it was touch-and-go with Tom and Burr.

Again Tom urged on his companion. A snarl was his only answer. Burr was in a bad temper, and his face showed it.

But at last they plunged in among the gullies ahead, though the hounds were pouring after them in a long line, with the leading man scarcely five hundred yards behind. Something had to be done, and done quickly.

"We've got to throw 'em off the track; we're dished otherwise as sure as eggs!" panted Tom. "There's just time—only just! I'll lay a false scent down this gully here, you lay another into those trees! Then double back here like mad, and we'll get away round to the left."

It was the best scheme under the circumstances, and Burr knew it. But he snarled:

"Who do you think you are—giving orders? Just because you're a chief petty officer now, you needn't stick on side, hang you! I'm a chief P. O., too, so——"

Tom ground his teeth, and his strong, determined mouth closed tightly. His eyes met Burr's, and he read there the sullen bad temper of his companion. With a shrug, Tom swung on his heel.

"Right-ho!" he said shortly. "If you can't play the game, I suppose you can't! I'm laying a false trail here, though, and you can do as you like!"

Burr's eyes were alight with an ugly gleam. All his old hatred of Tom was coming to the surface. But he said nothing, and Tom got on with the job on hand. Returning to Burr, he raced off without a word by the bully's side.

The gully they had taken opened out into a damp, marshy stretch by the side of a narrow creek, called the Fleet, that ran down to the river, emptying its muddy waters into the mother stream near the Ajax. A couple of planks spanned it at this narrow part, where the sluice and dam gates were, and together they raced on to them. Cover in plenty—trees and rising ground—lay on the farther side, and so far their pursuers were not in sight again. Hope revived in Tom. Perhaps they could get back to the jetty, after all!

His feet padded softly on the plank bridge, scarcely three feet wide. Burr's laboured breathing sounded in his ear, and at that moment a sudden impulse seized the bully of the Ajax.

To Tom it was all so sudden and unexpected that he had no chance of keeping his balance. Burr lurched heavily into him. The next instant, with fingers clutching the air, and a startled exclamation breaking from him, Chief Petty Officer Tom Gale of the Hoods had gone crashing into the dark water of the creek with a mighty splash!

Chapter 2.
The Man with Green Spectacles!

BURR stood on the narrow plank bridge looking down at Tom, with a queer gleam in his little eyes.

For the moment he seemed almost frightened at the success of his caddish act. Then he saw Tom rise to the surface and spit out the dirty water as he struck strongly for the bank.

But the banks above the dam were high and slippery with thick, black mud. Burr offered Tom no help, but stood watching savagely as the other tried to scramble up. His lips were curled in a sneer, his hands clenched.

But at last, covered with mud, his clothes running with water, Tom managed to gain the top of the bank. Then only did Burr step back off the planks, as if in sudden alarm. But if he had expected Tom to go for him there and then he was mistaken.

Tom's first natural impulse had been to do so. But, though he was burning with rage, he was first and foremost a sportsman. He had others to consider just then, and he did not mean to let his own feelings stand in the way of the enjoyment of the others, the hounds. His voice was quite quiet—dangerously quiet—as he said curtly:

"Stoniky, you're about as low a cad as I've had the bad luck to run across. But I'm not going to muck up this run because of you. We've got the other chaps to think of. But when we're back aboard the Ajax I'll give you about the soundest thrashing you've ever had! See?"

Already Tom could hear the distant shouts of their pursuers as the hounds came across the false scent. Tom, without another word, turned to run on. But Stoniky Burr stood his ground.

"I always knew you were a coward, Gale," he sneered. "Afraid to fight, eh? Well, I'm not surprised."

Tom came to a standstill. His eyes and cheeks were burning, his fists clenched. He longed at that moment, above all things, to throw down the bag of scent—dripping water like a sponge now—and go for Burr. But still he kept control of himself.

"Don't talk like a fool!" he said, coolly enough. "You know that's a codge up—just a rotten lie. I'll have you out right enough when we get back, but now we've got to play the game by the others."

He was standing close to Burr, whose face was thrust forward aggressively. The contemptuous look on Tom's face stung the bully beyond endurance. The next instant Stoniky Burr had lifted a clenched fist and driven it straight between Tom's eyes.

The youngster staggered back, blinded. He heard Burr's harsh laugh, and then Tom saw red. He had controlled himself to the limit, human nature could stand no more. Forgetting everything for the moment, he flung off his haversack of scent and raised his fists, in spite of the mists that were still swimming before his eyes as a result of that cowardly blow.

"Put 'em up!" he cried between clenched teeth.

Burr put up his fists readily enough. An inch taller than Tom, and longer in the reach, with muscles that could find no match on board the training-ship, the bully had no doubts as to his ability to lick the Hood fellow. He advanced threateningly, and in a moment the two were at it hammer and tongs.

But Tom, slim of build though he was, had muscles of steel. He had a far quicker brain than Burr, and was more nimble. He fought with his head and feet as much as with his fists, and this time Burr found in a very short time that he had met his match.

It was an unpleasant surprise to Stoniky Burr when he felt Tom's fist, hard as iron, crash into his ribs, driving him back. The next instant Tom had followed up with a straight left to the chin that sent Burr reeling.

With a cry of rage Burr flung himself forward. He got to his opponent's chest, but he could not reach Tom's face. Try as he might, Burr always found Tom's head jerked aside in just the right fraction of a second, and his blows, for the most part, fell on air.

Tom was smiling as he fought—a smile that his chum Dicky West knew of old as a danger signal. When Tom Gale wore his fighting smile it meant trouble hot and strong for someone, and in this case it was Burr who learnt that painful lesson.

Again Tom's fist crashed into the other's ribs, and Burr's answering blow struck air as the Hood fellow stepped aside like a streak of light. Again and again. Burr panted for breath, his guard running wild. And then Tom put all his lithe strength into a straight left that smashed home on Burr's mouth. Burr tottered where he stood, and then fell with a crash, just as the foremost of the hounds came running into sight at the end of the gully.

Burr lay where he had fallen. He had learnt his lesson—a lesson richly deserved if ever one was. But black rage filled his heart, hatred deep and bitter for the youngster who now stood looking down upon him with relaxed fists. Tom knew that he had ended the fight with that final flashing blow.

There was a shout of amazement from the leading hounds as they came racing over the bridge. The hares were caught right enough, and Tom felt sick that a fine run had been ruined in such a way. He turned away with tight lips, and at that moment Dicky West came panting up.

"What the policeman!" panted Dick in amazement. He scratched his red head in perplexity as he stared at Burr, now struggling slowly to his feet. "What's happened, Tom?"

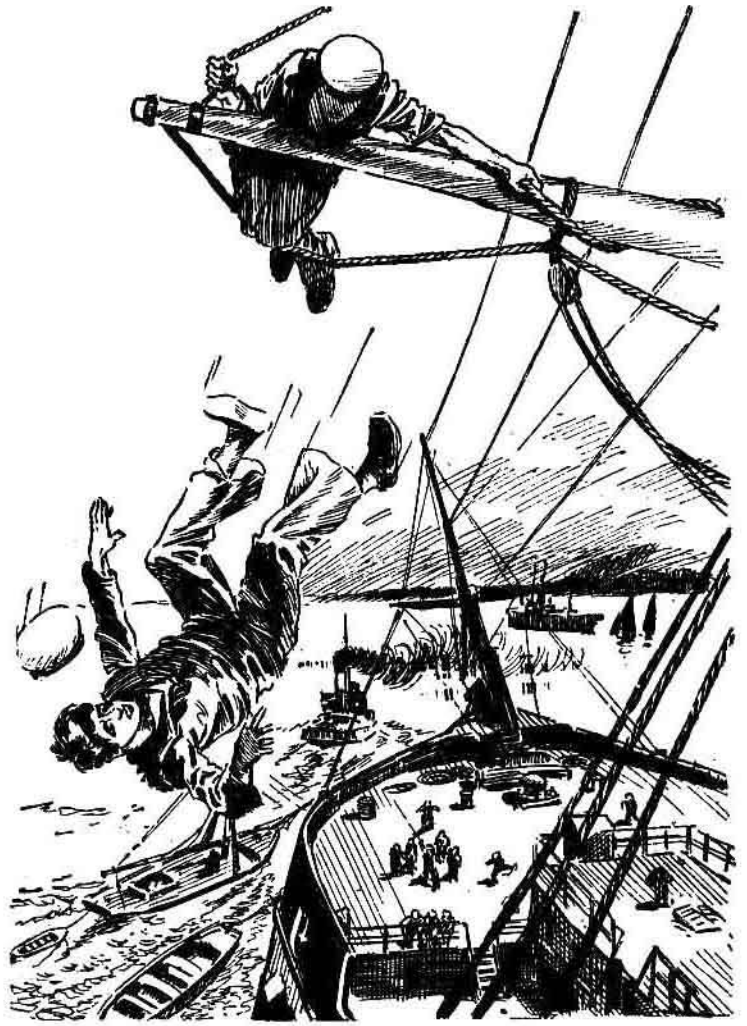
Tom sucked his hand where the skin had been cut by Burr's teeth.

"We've had a scrap, that's all, Dicky."

Dicky grinned.

"You don't say so, old son! Shouldn't have thought it," he said with deep sarcasm. Then he chuckled. "Seems to me you've given Burr a jolly good licking, too! Jove, isn't his face a treat? This is first-rate! But what's it all about?"

Briefly Tom explained. The others were crowding up now as the stragglers came in by twos and threes. It was obvious that everyone was glad to see that Burr had taken a good licking, and that fact did not escape the bully of the Ajax. He stood apart, sullen and savage, and wiped his crimson mouth.



There was a sudden scream of terror, and the next instant a dark figure was hurtling downwards. Stoniky Burr was crashing down to the very fate he had meant for Tom Gale!

A dozen questions were showered upon Tom, but he was in no mood to answer them. Together with Dicky West, he set off at a jog trot in an attempt to warm himself, for the air was cutting coldly through his soaking clothes. Tom did not mean to get laid up in the sanatorium with a bad chill on account of Stoniky Burr.

The others followed. About sixty youngsters had taken part in the run, and not one of those sixty stayed with the unpopular chief petty officer of the Blakes. He was left alone to attend to his battered features, his eyes dark and brooding.

"I hate him! I'll get my own back on Gale!" he muttered savagely to himself, as his eyes followed the retreating figures.

And then suddenly he swung round with a start as he heard footsteps on the grass behind him. A swift exclamation escaped Stoniky Burr.

A man had appeared from the bushes behind him, a tall, lean figure with pointed black beard and dark, sallow features. A high forehead showing beneath the black felt hat made the face appear peculiarly long and thin. But what caused Burr's exclamation of startled amazement was the strange appearance of the man, caused by a pair of spectacles, worn evidently as a protection to the eyes—spectacles dark green in colour, that glistened in the sunlight like cat's eyes.

As if instinctively, Burr started back. There was something queer and sinister in the man's appearance—this man, who had appeared as if from nowhere with noiseless, cat-like footsteps. Those queer green circles of glass stared down at Burr like blind eyes.

"Who was that boy—the boy you fought with?"

The voice was cold and harsh, with a slight accent that was un-English. For a moment Burr did not reply. Then he muttered:

"That? Oh, his name's Gale. I—I——"

"Gale they call him, do they?" White teeth gleamed as a sudden strange smile appeared on the man's face. "Gale! And you do not like this boy Gale?"

The tall figure stood there watching Burr keenly with his unseen eyes. Again the sunlight caught the glass of his spectacles, and they seemed suddenly like flames of green fire.

There was something repelling about that sinister figure, but at the man's words Burr forgot everything but the

hatred that was burning within him. Again he dabbed at his bleeding lips.

"*Not like* Gale?" echoed Burr, and his voice was like a snarl. "I—I hate him!"

Again the man smiled, a smile hard and cold as his voice. He glanced round. There was no one in sight. The last of the runners had disappeared among the distant trees.

"Then let me introduce myself," he purred softly. "My name is Kalche, and I do not like him, either. We should be friends, eh?"

There was something in that soft voice that caused Burr to step back a pace. The man in green spectacles bent forward, a sallow hand held out towards Burr. The long, sinewy neck was outstretched like a vulture's, and again the lips curled back in that smile that was colder than ice.

As if half-hypnotised, Burr held out his hand almost against his will. Those long fingers grasped it. Then the man who called himself Kalche nodded.

"We should be friends!" he repeated. "Good friends! Your name? Burr? Good! I have something I would say to you, Burr, my young friend!"

And Tom Gale, running on with Dicky West towards the Ajax, little dreamed of the amazing, far-reaching results that were to come from that queer paper-chase—little dreamed that even now the weaving of the web had begun—that web that was soon to ensnare him in its cruel, relentless clutch.

CHAPTER 3.
At the Yardarm Tip.

THERE was lively discussion on the mess-deck of the Ajax that afternoon when the youngsters gathered there for tea.

At the Hood tables, Tom, under pressure, was recounting his story of the run. Burr had returned to the ship rather late, but had escaped questions by the officer of the watch. He sat at his own table, scowling and friendless, but for a crony of his named Hemming—a lanky, ferret-faced fellow, who toadied up to Burr. Otherwise, even in the Blake division, Burr received no honour, chief petty officer though he was.

Dicky West was elaborating Tom's account of the fight, his red head bobbing from side to side in his excitement as he talked. There was much laughter at the Hood tables, and turning of heads to stare at Stoniky Burr.

An under-sized and over-daring boy named Pole at Tom's table shouted for attention, then cried in a voice loud enough for Burr and his companions to hear:

"Say, I reckon Stoniky didn't do so bad out of the business. He must have found a purse, or a quid note, or something. I saw him when he came aboard and his pockets were bulging with tuck. When he was changing from his running-togs, I saw him slip a couple of boxes of drags into his trousers, too!"

Burr looked over at these words with a deeper scowl than ever, and Pole's neighbour at the mess-table kicked the youngster on the shin.

"Shut up, you crow! You're lappin' out for a touch o' the stoniky!"

But Pole only laughed, and shouted:

"I'll watch it! Stoniky can have me out, if he likes. But I reckon we ought to 'ave an unofficial tosh out wi' Stoniky!"

This remark brought forth yells of approval from the boys of all tables. "Tosh out" is training-ship slang for turning out one's pockets and lockers, and Stoniky Burr rose in some alarm.

"You let me alone!" he roared, glaring round. There was a queer look in his eyes as he stammered: "What if I did find half a quid? There's them as can't see further'n their noses, and you mokes must have passed it yourselves on the way back to the jetty. Here you are, anyway. I'll tosh out right enough."

Burr dived his hand defiantly into his pocket and produced a few articles that brought exclamations of astonishment and envy from the staring boys.

"A watch! Oh crumbs, we've a jumping millionaire aboard!"

"Three slabs o' toffee!"

"And bars o' milk chocolate!"

Such a wealth of property had never before been enjoyed by a boy on the Ajax within the memory of any present on the mess-deck. The boys gaped with surprise, and many envied Burr his luck in having found a ten-shilling note—for no one doubted the bully's words, that he had found the money on his way back to the training-ship after the fight with Tom. How else could Stoniky have become the sudden possessor of that wealth of chocolates, toffee, and forbidden cigarettes—his own speciality—not to mention a real watch that was ticking quite healthily?

Before darkness closed in the training-ship boys were allowed the run of the upper deck and the rigging. The Ajax was jury-rigged as a barquentine—that is, she had three masts with yards on the foremost mast. The boys of the Ajax thought nothing of shinning up the rat-lines to the tops, and some of the more daring worked their way out on to the yards and stood up at the yardarm, with a hand grasping the "lift," as the rope there is called.

Tom and Dicky West were among the first to make a charge at the shrouds of the foremast. Laughing and shouting to each other, they swarmed up to the fore-top, thirty feet above the deck below, and nearly seventy from the surface of the water. There they paused, panting and joking, watching the stream of youngsters following them up the rigging.

"I'll race you out to the yardarm, Tom!" cried Dicky West, before the other boys had mounted to the futtock-rigging under the platform, or "top," on which the pair were standing. "You take the starboard, and I'll take the port!"

"Right-ho! I'll give the word. Ready?"

Both got their feet on the footrope under the sling of the yard, their stomachs pressing on the great round spar itself, and, arms extended, ready to work their way along to the outermost tip.

"Ay, ay, I'm ready!" replied Dick.

Tom gave the word, and the footropes swayed and jerked as the two daring youngsters wriggled along the yard, a dizzy height above the water. Each was so intent on the race that neither noticed that the first boy to reach the foretop after them was Stoniky Burr.

For a moment the bully of the Ajax glanced down furtively. There was a queer gleam in his eyes as the heavily built, broad-shouldered figure at once began to work his way out along the yard, out to starboard, following Tom Gale.

"Come on, fellows!" roared Stoniky suddenly; "as many on the yard as we can get! Every other chap to starboard! follow me, Hemming!"

Tom was still too intent to notice what was happening. And when he reached the yardarm tip and turned to see how Dicky West was getting on, he was rather taken aback to see the sneering, unpleasant face of Burr not far behind. The others, with much laughter and shouting, were still working their way out along the footropes. However, it was no new game, this crowding out on the yard, so Tom thought little of it. He rose to his full height, hand on the lift, to find that Dick was just completing his passage along the third quarter of the yard, and had not yet reached the part known as the yardarm.

"Licked you, Dicky!" he shouted.

Boys were crowding along the port side of the yard, in the wake of Dick, and by the time Tom's chum had risen to an upright position, like Tom, the spar was thick with boys from the sling outwards, clinging like flies at what would seem to a landsman a terrifying height.

Tom looked round, and his eyes met Burr's. And there was something in those eyes that Tom did not like.

Burr had worked his way close to Tom, and though the young leader of the Hoods was not afraid of Stoniky, he felt that he would be more comfortable lying across the yard than standing with his toes on the spar and his hand on the lift. So he lightly lowered himself on to his stomach and groped about with his heels for the footrope.

There was an ugly grin on Burr's face now. He edged nearer.

"Closer, boys!" he yelled. "Git another two on to the yard! See if we can get more on our side than them on the port!"

The boys on the port side took up the challenge, and there was much good-natured shouting and chaff as they shuffled still closer towards the yardarm tip. Tom felt Burr crushing close against him, and the press behind the bully forced the young chief petty officer of the Hoods right out on the yardarm tip, where there was no grip on the foot-rope, and where the yard itself had thinned down to about six inches in diameter.

"What's the game, Burr?" said Tom angrily. "Shove back—you'll have me off!"

Tom Gale uttered a sudden cry and staggered back as the stem of a huge, red-rusty steamer came crashing through into the deck of the Ajax!

Tom was clinging to the yard with both hands, his feet sliding inwards on the footrope. Burr, perfectly safe himself, chuckled.

"Got the wind up?" he jeered. "You're no better'n a 'sos,' Gale! Frightened because you're the outermost on the yardarm! Yah!"

As he spoke, Burr gave a furtive hack at Tom's ankle with his boot. Tom's lips were tight. It was impossible for him to retaliate. All his efforts were needed for clinging on.

Training-ship boys are well used to being reliant on a slender spar at dizzy heights above the water. But a sudden instinct warned Tom that Burr meant mischief.

He drew a sharp breath. Could it be possible? Was Burr actually trying to make him fall? Tom glanced down at the curdling, muddy water far below him; and then his eyes met Burr's again. He read there something that made even the plucky youngster that Tom was go suddenly cold.

Again Burr hacked furtively at Tom's shin, and the youngster on the yardarm tip winced with pain.

There was only one thing to be done, terrible though the risk was. Swift as light, Tom let go his hold with one hand and gripped Burr's shoulder like a vice.

"Hang you, Burr!" gritted out the young officer of the Hoods. "If you make me fall off the yardarm, you'll come, too!"

Burr laughed harshly, though a sudden look of fear had leapt into his eyes. Savagely he tried to fling off Tom's hand. Interlocked, the two swayed together in a desperate trial of strength.

And then a sudden scream of terror cut the keen upper air like a knife. There was a wild scraping of fingernails on the polished paintwork of the yard, worn smooth with use. The next instant a dark figure was hurtling downwards, hands clutching wildly in the empty air.

But it was not Tom Gale. The bully of the Ajax was crashing down to the very fate he had meant for his enemy!

CHAPTER 4.
Disaster!

TOM hung from the footrope, which he had caught, like a spider from its thread, horrified, as he saw Burr disappear below. The youngster twisted his head downwards and followed the lightning-like descent of the heavily built bully.

The hurtling form struck the edge of the life-net. Then, with another shriek that froze the blood in the veins of the watchers, Burr was flung off the edge of the net. By a hairbreadth he escaped smashing on the high rail of the bulwarks of the ship, to fall into the water with a terrible splash.

Tom Gale, by a gigantic effort that nearly sent him after Burr, hauled himself to safety. He lay on the yard, scarcely breathing, his face as white as paper, waiting for Burr's head to reappear on the surface.

Already the officer of the watch was bawling to the boys on boat duty in the jollyboat that had been plying between the ship and the causeway. The shouting orders had just died away when Burr appeared, a tiny spot on the dark water, it seemed to Tom from his great height. Then a gasp of horror came up from those who crowded the bulwarks. Burr was unconscious, and the ebb-tide was carrying him swiftly away from the Ajax. It looked as though he must drown inevitably before help could reach him.

Tom saw Burr sink again. And then a desperate scheme flashed into Tom's brain.

Swiftly his eyes measured the intervening distance. Never before had the height from the yardarm tip to the water seemed so great to Tom Gale. But already his mind was made up, and, without waiting another instant, he drew himself up with lithe agility till he was standing on the yard.

Dicky West, as though reading Tom's daring purpose, gave a wild shout from the port side of the yardarm. Tom stood there like a statue, white and motionless, and all eyes were turned in his direction. A gasp of wondering amazement came from the startled lips of those watching. The youngster was standing on the six-inches' thick yardarm tip without holding the lift!

Vaguely Tom heard the shouting die away as a terrible hush seized those on board the Ajax. He stood there, perfectly balanced, his eyes on the water. And slowly his hands went up above his head.

From somewhere on the deck far below an inarticulate cry rang out from someone, and was choked back. Dicky

West seemed frozen to the other end of the yard, his face as white as chalk. The red-headed youngster saw Tom shoot suddenly forward, his arms poised—then curve downwards in the most perfect swallow dive that any aboard the Ajax had ever witnessed.

The curdling water seemed to rush up towards the plucky young leader of the Hoods. Tom just had time to wonder how he would meet the uninviting depths, when the crash came. The water sang about his ears, his head seemed to have burst open. His senses reeled—— And then Tom found himself striking out mechanically for the surface, heard the wild cheer that went up as he took a life-giving breath of pure, sweet air.

He was conscious that his head was aching horribly. Then, bending his head to his own particular, powerful side-stroke, Tom struck out for where he knew Stoniky Burr would again reappear for the last time.

Tom saw him, but he was four yards ahead. The young leader of the Hoods changed to a rapid over-arm stroke, but he swam right over the spot where Burr had been. However, Tom grasped at a last chance. He dived, and went full tilt into a soft form below the water. He gripped hard and kicked out with his legs towards the surface.

It seemed to Tom an age before he felt the wind cold on his face. But after a long, gasping breath the lad got a firmer hold of Burr's collar, and drew the bully's head above the surface. Then he trod water, supporting Burr the while. His strength was almost exhausted. Could he hang on till help came?

Again his senses reeled; a mist came before his eyes—and then out of the mist the jollyboat came leaping towards them.

Tom drew a deep breath. Just in time!

. . . . . .

"But how on earth did Stoniky come to fall off the yard?" asked Dicky West. "Hang it all, it's not as though he's a newjee!"

It was late that night. Tom and Dick were lying in their hammocks on the orlop deck. Tom, like Burr, had soon pulled round after his terrible ordeal, though his head was still aching a little.

Burr was also lying wakeful in his hammock in the Blake division. He was thinking of all that had passed between him and the man named Kalche that afternoon, and of Tom Gale. He felt no gratitude to Tom for having saved his life. When the Hood youngster had spoken to him after the accident—that accident that had so nearly ended in tragedy—he had simply snarled, and turned away.

Dicky West, his hammock slung next to Tom's, repeated his question in a low voice. For a moment Tom lay staring before him in the darkness. Then, the snores around them convincing him that the rest of the Hood division were sleeping, he answered in a low tone:

"Dicky, no one saw it, luckily for Burr; but he meant to have had me off that yard! Only he fell himself! I can't understand it, Dick. I know he hates me, but not enough to want to kill me, I feel convinced. I've been wondering about it; there's something fishy afoot. I don't see how there can be any connection between the two things, but how is it Burr has got all this boodle to chuck about?"

"Says he found half-a-quid," answered Dick, in the same low tone.

"Yes; he says so. That doesn't mean it's true—not from Stoniky!" Tom broke off, to add slowly: "I wish I knew what it all meant. Of course, as I say, I know he was down on me; but when it comes to downright attempted murder, Dick—and that's what it was, right enough—there's no other name for it! I can't doubt it, after seeing his face up on that yard when he was edging me out on to the tip! But why—why? Why should the navy-neck want to do for me?"

Dicky shook his head in the darkness, yawning sleepily.

"Ask me another, Tom! Why? Not just because you licked him. It beats me, and I'm too tired to think, so g'-night!"

Dicky dropped off to sleep first, then Tom, and, down in the Blake division, Burr fell asleep. But if they considered the events of that adventurous four-and-twenty hours at an end, they were sadly mistaken. Had they known it, a creeping, blanketing, thick London fog was crawling silently from the south-west to take the river and its numerous throbbing hearts of shipping in its dreaded grip.

Soon the sirens of the steamers were hooting their melancholy notes, muffled by the thick atmosphere. The last of the outward-bounders from up-river were coming down on the falling ebb tide. The roar of anchor cables was heard from here and there, as ships brought up to wait for the weather to clear.

The officer of the watch, stumping about near the gangway, while the ship's searchlight bit into the ever-thickening fog, shivered, and buttoned his coat more closely round him.

"There'll be a ship or two take the mud on the Ness to-night, maybe," he said to himself, as he listened to the sirens, shouts, and other sounds from the thick mists towards the west.

The double-flash of the Ness light was shining very dimly in the murk, and at last the fog got so thick that even that became invisible. The searchlight of the Ajax would pierce no more than fifty yards of fog.

Sensing the danger from downward-bound craft, the officer of the watch passed over to the starboard side of the training-ship. He stood there, peering into the white blanket of fog, and at last cocked his ear alertly as the booming notes of a big steamer came to his ears. He could hear the throb of the ship's engines. She was forging ahead a bit so that her great bulk could withstand the kick of the tide from the bend in the river just above the Ajax.

"The fools!" muttered the officer of the watch. "Why don't they come to anchor till it clears, and they can see a thing or two?"

Meanwhile, the sleeping youngsters on the orlop deck were in blissful ignorance of the change in the weather. Dicky West was sleeping the untroubled sleep of a clear conscience, Tom Gale was a trifle restless, probably dreaming of falls from yardarms on to broad iron bulwark rails, while Stoniky Burr was snoring in his own sweet way.

But suddenly the sound of the tide swirling against the side of the ship on that low deck changed its note. A big hump of water struck it with a splash. Then there was an alarmed shout above, that broke the muffled silence of the Ajax like a knife.

Started into abrupt wakefulness, Tom Gale heard an order shrieked through a megaphone, heard the clatter of sea-boots on iron decks. And then, above it all, there came a rending crash, and the Ajax quivered from stem to stern.

Tom was flung violently from his hammock. He scrambled to his feet, to find the arms of Dicky West round him, clutching frantically in the darkness. A cold draught of air whipped across the boys' faces. Then the electric lights suddenly blazed forth, bathing the orlop deck in the brilliant glare.

The next instant Tom uttered a startled cry, and staggered back. Scarcely a yard from where he stood, a jagged hole had appeared in the ship's plates, torn like paper by the stem of a huge, red-rusty steamer that was crashing through with its giant strength into the orlop deck of the Ajax!

(The interesting chapters of this splendid new serial, which will appear in next week's issue of "The Gem" Library, tell you more about the mysterious, sinister man with the green spectacles. This man, who plays such an amazing part in Tom Gale's life, has his knife in the lad. Why? That is a question that will be answered for you if you Order your "Gem" NOW!)

Cardew's great campaign against Tom Merry goes—

—astray with drastic results to his own chum, Levison!

THE VENGEANCE OF CARDEW

The rivalry between Tom Merry and Ralph Reckness Cardew is brought to a dramatic climax in this Powerful School Story of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's,

BY

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.
At Eastwood House!

"TROT in!" called out Tom Merry cheerily, as a tap came at the door of his room at Eastwood House.

Tom Merry was standing before the glass, arranging his tie to his satisfaction.

Tom was not, as a rule, very particular about his tie. But dinner at Eastwood House, on Christmas Day, was a rather special occasion.

"That you, Gussy?" asked Tom, without looking round, as the door opened.

"No."

Tom turned quickly.

It was Ralph Reckness Cardew, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, who had entered.

Cardew closed the door, and stood looking at Tom Merry, with a smile on his face. The dandy of the Fourth had already dressed for dinner, and he looked very handsome in his evening clothes.

The cheery expression faded from Tom Merry's face. Cardew of the Fourth was the last fellow he would have expected to drop into his room, and certainly the last fellow he would have wished to see there. The rivals of St. Jim's were both members of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's Christmas party at Eastwood House; and Cardew, at least, had not allowed the feud to sleep.

"Well?" said Tom curtly.

"Am I interruptin' you?" drawled Cardew.

"Well, yes."

"Sorry! I've been lookin' for a chance to speak to you," said Cardew. "With so many people buzzin' about all day it's rather difficult—so here I am."

"I can't see that you've got anything to say to me," said Tom coldly. "If you've come here to quarrel, Cardew, you've come for nothing. I don't intend to row in D'Arcy's house."

"Isn't it a little too late to think of that?" smiled Cardew. "We were enemies at St. Jim's, and we're enemies here."

"I never wanted to be," said Tom; "and on Christmas Day, at least, you might give the subject a rest, Cardew. Plenty of time for rowing when we get back to St. Jim's next term."

"You should have thought of that sooner. It's an unlucky thing that we're both D'Arcy's guests for Christmas. But there it is. One of us will have to go."

Tom smiled slightly.

"I've no objection to your going," he said. "The sooner the better, so far as I'm concerned."

"My view is exactly the same towards you. One of us has got to spin a yarn to keep up appearances, and get out to-morrow morning," said Cardew.

"I've already thought of that—but I can't go," said Tom. "Miss Priscilla is here, and she would want to know why. My friends are here, and I can't very well leave them. As a matter of fact, Cardew, though the position's awkward enough, I don't choose to go."

"Same with me—my uncle's here, and he would want to know—and I don't choose to go, either," said Cardew. "At St. Jim's, as junior captain, I can give you orders. But I suppose you won't take orders from me here?"

"Hardly," said Tom, laughing.

"Well, we've got to settle it, here and now," said Cardew. "That's why I've come to speak to you."

Tom Merry turned to the glass again, and proceeded with his tie. There was a contempt in his manner that brought a gleam to the eyes of Ralph Reckness Cardew.

"I've got a sportin' proposition to make," continued Cardew. "The situation's too awkward to last—and neither of us chooses to go, and leave the enemy in possession of the field. I'm willin' to toss up for it."

"What?" ejaculated Tom.

"Heads you go, tails I go," said Cardew. "Here's a half-crown. Are you agreeable?"

Tom shook his head.

"You refuse?"

"Yes."

"It's a fair offer," said Cardew.

"I dare say it is, in its way," said Tom. "But I can't leave Eastwood House now, and I'm not going to. There was no need for us to have any trouble here, if you'd chosen to keep the peace. I wanted to keep it, and I want to keep it now."

"You should have thought of that before you laid hands on me last evening," said Cardew.

Tom coloured a little.

"I lost my temper—and I'm sorry I did," he answered. "But you fairly drove me into it, Cardew. You've played rotten trickery on me ever since we've been here, and last evening you bagged my dance with cousin Ethel by a sneaking trick. You couldn't expect a fellow to put up with that kind of thing for ever."

Having finished his tie to his satisfaction, Tom Merry put on his dinner-jacket. Cardew stood with his back to the door, watching him, his eyes gleaming.

"I'm givin' you a chance," he said. "We can't fight in Lord Eastwood's house. It would be fairly bad form to turn up at Christmas dinner with a black eye apiece."

"Well, rather," agreed Tom.

"But I hardly suppose you imagine I'm the kind of fellow to take a blow quietly, lyin' down," said Cardew.

"Not at all. I'll meet you, with or without gloves, on the first day of term at St. Jim's."

"That's not good enough—if you stay here. If you go, well and good."

"I'm not going."

Cardew drew a deep breath.

"Then I'm afraid that good form will have to be thrown to

the giddy winds, and that I shall have to give you your blow back with interest, without waitin' till next term," he said.

He came towards Tom Merry as he spoke.

Tom backed away.

"Are you off your rocker, Cardew?" he exclaimed. "Haven't you the least sense of decency? We can't fight here."

"I'm not insistin' on it—if you choose to take back the smack in the face you gave me, without puttin' up your hands."

"Oh, don't be a fool."

"You want it all your own way, old bean," said Cardew. "I'm afraid there's nothin' doin'. You're takin' the smack, anyhow, and you can please yourself about fightin' afterwards."

CHAPTER 2.
By the Strong Hand!

TOM MERRY'S eyes blazed.

He leaped back as Cardew came at him. But as the Fourth-Former came on, Tom Merry closed with him and grasped him. Cardew was by no means a weakling; he was slim and elegant, but he was sturdy, and he was known at St. Jim's as a good fighting-man. But as soon as Tom's sinewy grasp closed on him, Cardew realised that he had taken on too large an order. Tom's grasp slid to his wrists, and he held Cardew's slim wrists in a grip of iron, and the dandy of the Fourth struggled in vain to release them.

For a full minute he wrenched and struggled, to the detriment of his immaculate shirt-cuffs—no longer spotless. They were decidedly crumpled by that silent, furious struggle. Tom Merry did not speak; and Cardew was silent, save for his hurried, furious breathing. But Tom's grasp did not relax.

Cardew broke the tense silence at last.

"Will you let go my hands?"

"No!"

"You rotter! You coward!"

"I think you're out of your senses," said Tom coldly and quietly. "You provoked me yesterday till I lost my temper. You did it intentionally. I shall not lose my temper again. You're not worth it. But I'm not going to fight you here. You must be mad to think of such a thing. In Lord Eastwood's house——"

"Let go my hands!"

"We're both D'Arcy's guests. We've got to face a crowd of people this evening—girls among them. What would they think of us?"

"Let go!"

"And you such a stickler for good form!" said Tom contemptuously. "You want to act like a hooligan! Well, I'm not playing up! As soon as we're out of D'Arcy's house I'll fight you as quickly as you like. Not here."

"Will you release me?" hissed Cardew.

"Not till you give me your word to let this drop till after we're both gone from Eastwood."

"I won't!"

"You will!"

Tom Merry spoke calmly, quietly, but resolutely. His grip on Cardew's slim wrists was like the grip of a steel vice. Cardew struggled again—silently, persistently, savagely. But he could not release his wrists. He was in the grasp of a fellow stronger than himself, and quite as determined.

He stood panting at last, white with rage and humiliation.

There was a tap at the door.

Some other member of the party was calling on Tom Merry. The strange scene was interrupted.

"Let go!" breathed Cardew.

"Will you promise?"

No reply.

Tom Merry compressed his grip on the slim wrists as the door opened. Manners and Lowther, his chums in the Shell at St. Jim's, came into the room.

"Ready, old bean!" said Monty Lowther. "Hallo! What——"

"Cardew here!" exclaimed Manners. "My hat! What's the game?"

The two Shell fellows stared blankly.

"Cardew's looking for trouble," explained Tom Merry. "I'm trying to persuade him to keep the peace."

"Looking for a row—in D'Arcy's house!" said Manners contemptuously. "Even you ought to know a bit better than that, Cardew."

Cardew writhed with rage.

"You're stronger than I am, Tom Merry," he said in a low, choking voice. "I have to admit that."

"I'm sorry to use my strength like this," said Tom. "But if you were cool, you'd understand that we cannot make a scene in another fellow's house; and if you're bent on it, I must stop you."

"I should jolly well think so!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

There were footsteps and voices in the corridor outside Tom Merry's room. Blake and Herries, Digby and D'Arcy were there, apparently about to go down. Levison's voice was heard:

"Seen Cardew, you fellows?"

"I think he went along to Tom Mewwy," came the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Monty Lowther softly backed to the door and planted his heel against it. Arthur Augustus was not wanted on the scene just then. There was a tap at the door.

"Cardew heah, Tom Mewwy?" called out Arthur Augustus cheerily.

"Yes," called back Tom.

"You fellows comin' down?"

"Yes."

"Wight-ho!"

Cardew breathed harder. The vice-like grip was still on his slim wrists, and at any moment the St. Jim's fellows might come in. He looked at Tom Merry's face and read inflexible determination there.

"Let go!" he breathed. "You've got the better of me this time. I—I promise not to touch you."

Tom Merry released him at once.

"I only want you to keep clear of me while we're both staying here," he said. "I shall keep clear of you, if you'll let me."

Cardew rubbed his wrists. There were dark marks on the white skins, and the bones ached. It had not been a gentle grip that Tom had laid on him; but a gentle grip would not have controlled him. Cardew had had what he asked for.

The door opened.

Arthur Augustus, in evening clothes, a thing of beauty and a joy for ever, stood in the doorway, and nodded and smiled to his guests.

"You fellows havin' a chat?" he asked.

"Just that," said Cardew, with a smile. He drove his hands deep into his pockets.

A minute before his face had been almost convulsed with rage. Now it was calm, smiling, cheery. It was a startling change, and it made the Terrible Three stare. In spite of his recent conduct, it was clear that Ralph Reckness Cardew desired to keep up appearances, and to prevent his host, Arthur Augustus, from discovering that he had come to Tom's room with hostile intentions.

"Just goin' down," added Cardew; and he gave the Terrible Three a cheery nod and strolled to the door.

"Well, my hat!" murmured Manners.

Arthur Augustus remained to exchange a few words with the Terrible Three. Cardew joined Levison and Clive in the corridor. Ernest Levison gave him a quick, searching look.

"Anything up?" he muttered.

Cardew raised his eyebrows.

"Up? What could be up?" he drawled.

"I was afraid you'd gone looking for trouble," said Levison curtly.

"What rot, old chap," said Sidney Clive. "I suppose Cardew isn't capable of kicking up a shindy while he's a guest here, is he?"

Cardew laughed.

"Why not?" he said. "Old Ernest knows me better than you do, Clivey."

"You don't mean to say you've been rowing with Tom Merry—here!" exclaimed Clive, quite aghast.

"Dear man, so far from rowing, I've given him my word not to touch him so long as we're D'Arcy's guests."

Sidney Clive looked relieved.

"That's good," he said. "Blessed if I see at all why you're so up against the chap, Cardew. You bagged the junior captaincy from him at St. Jim's, and it's for him to feel ratty, if for anybody, I should think."

"Don't you remember what the jolly old poet says," grinned Cardew:

"'Forgiveness to the injured does belong:
But they ne'er pardon who have done the wrong.'"

"Oh, rot!" said Clive.

"Well, let's get down," said Levison uneasily. There was a look in Cardew's eyes that Levison of the Fourth did not like.

"I've got to change my shirt," smiled Cardew. "I've got these cuffs a bit rumpled. Dear old Thomas has been showin' me some wrestlin' tricks, and he's got a rather heavy hand."

"Cardew!"

The dandy of the Fourth sauntered away to his room.

"Careful, sir!" said the poacher hurriedly, as he caught sight of Wally D'Arcy staring into the summer-house. Cardew looked round. "What the thump!" he exclaimed, with an angry look at the fag. Wally eyed him. "I'm looking for Pongo," he explained. "Have you seen anything of him?" (*See page 12.*)

Levison and Clive looked at one another very uneasily, but they did not speak. They waited, however, till Cardew joined them before they went downstairs. And they were glad to get him into the drawing-room, where the presence of cousin Ethel and Doris Levison and Manners' sisters and the other ladies of the party made "trouble" impossible.

Tom Merry came down soon afterwards, with Manners and Lowther. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy moved among his guests with a bright and beaming countenance, evidently utterly oblivious of any recent trouble between two of the party. Indeed, Arthur Augustus remarked to Jack Blake that it was "vewy decent" of both Tom Merry and Cardew to bury the hatchet so thoroughly, and forget their old differences during the Christmas holidays—a remark at which Blake smiled, without making any comment.

At the dinner-table, under the shaded lights, Tom Merry glanced once at Cardew.

Cardew's face was cheery and smiling, and he chatted to cousin Ethel, at his side, like a fellow who had not a care in the world.

Seemingly, he had forgotten the scene in Tom Merry's room.

Tom Merry was glad of it.

He knew that Cardew was not a fellow to forget or to forgive; but he knew, too, that Cardew was a fellow of his word. The promise he had given, he would keep.

That was good enough: and the Christmas festivities at Eastwood House would not be marred by any further trouble. Tom Merry was not the fellow to guess the deep, black, bitter rancour that lay under the smiling exterior of the dandy of the Fourth; and he would have been startled, had he been able to read the thoughts that were passing through Cardew's mind, even while he smiled and chatted so cheerily.

CHAPTER 3.
Wally butts in!

"WALLY, you ass——"

"Wally, you dummy!"

Reggie Manners and Frank Levison spoke simultaneously, with emphasis.

"Oh, dry up!" grunted D'Arcy minor.

It was Boxing Day, and the dusk was falling thickly. The snow was falling more thickly than the dusk.

The three Third-Formers of St. Jim's were tramping through a "ride" in Eastwood Park, thick with snow, swept by the wind. The snow had started suddenly, and it was coming down almost in masses, and the wind dashed it in the faces of the three fags.

"Look here, I'm fed-up!" exclaimed Manners minor.

"Same here!" said Frank Levison.

Snort from Wally of the Third.

"We've got to find Pongo!" he said.

"Blow Pongo!"

"Who's afraid of a little snow?" demanded Wally.

"Fathead! Call this a little."

"I'm hungry, too."

"Oh, rats!" said Wally crossly.

Levison minor and Reggie Manners were the guests of Walter Adolphus D'Arcy for Christmas. But manners were not polished in the Third Form at St. Jim's. Host and guests generally forgot that they were not in the old Form-room, when they addressed one another. And in the Third Form room at St. Jim's, language was very plain.

"Pongo's got off his chain," said Wally. "He's gone wandering. I'm bound to find him. You asses said you would come."

"We've been searching for the brute for two hours," said Reggie sulkily, "I can tell you I'm fed up with Pongo, Wally."

"Rats!"

"I'm jolly well going in!" roared Reggie.

"Sooner the better," said D'Arcy minor. "You can't stand a little snow and wind. You're rather soft."

"Oh, go and eat coke."

Reggie Manners tramped off in the direction of Eastwood House. Frank Levison looked as if he would like to follow. But he hesitated.

"You backing out?" demanded Wally crossly.

"Nunno! But what's the good of looking for Pongo in this snow-storm?" argued Frank. "We'll never find him."

"Well, you wouldn't," agreed Wally. "You haven't much sense. I'm going to find him somehow."

"You're an ass, Wally."

"You're another."

"Look here——"

"Bow-wow!"

"I'll jolly well leave you to it, then."

"Do! Make the job easier if you don't help."

"Br-r-r-r-r-r!" said Levison minor. And he started off in the tracks left behind him by Reggie Manners.

Wally of the Third was left alone, looking and feeling cross. He was very much concerned about Pongo, his favourite mongrel. Nobody but Wally of the Third was able to discern any lovable qualities in Pongo—but Wally's fixed belief was that there never had been such a dog as Pongo. Pongo had gone wandering, and Wally was determined to find him, somehow. How, was rather a problem.

"Pongo! Pongo! Pong! Pong!"

If Pongo was within hearing he did not listen to the voice of the charmer. At all events, no answering bark or whine came.

Wally tramped on doggedly.

He knew that he would be late for tea, and that after tea there were going to be great festivities, participated in with keen enjoyment by the younger members of the Christmas party, and with cheerful tolerance by the elders. But tea and festivities failed to appeal to Wally when Pongo was in trouble. Possibly the elusive Pongo was miles away—possibly he had returned to his kennel while his master was hunting for him; but, possibly he was being buried in the snow in the wide bleak park, and frozen—and that possibility kept D'Arcy minor keenly on the search.

In the thickening dust, the St. Jim's fag pursued his quest, determined to keep it up till dark at least. It had come into his mind that perhaps Pongo had taken refuge from the falling snow in the summer-house in the park—an open structure, used only in the summer, open to the winds, but sheltered from falling snow. Wally of the Third tramped up the "ride" to the summer-house.

He came up rather wearily through the thick snow, in the dusk. As he had almost reached the open doorway he was startled by the sound of a voice within.

"You've kept me waitin'."

Wally jumped.

It was the voice of Ralph Reckness Cardew. He wondered what on earth Cardew could be doing there.

A hoarse, husky voice answered:

"Sorry, sir! The snow came on, and——"

"Never mind."

There was the scratch of a match; Cardew was lighting a cigarette. Wally stepped in.

In the light of the match, he saw Cardew's handsome face, and caught a glimpse of the man Cardew was talking with. He knew the man by sight—a disreputable character, well-known to be a poacher and a pilferer, who was generally to be seen at the Spotted Dog in Easthorpe, loafing about the bar or the billiards-room.

Cardew blew out a cloud of smoke.

"Well, look here, Lomax——"

"Careful, sir," said the poacher hurriedly. He had caught sight of the St. Jim's fag.

Cardew stared round.

"What the thump——" he exclaimed, with an angry look at the fag.

Wally eyed him.

"I'm looking for Pongo," he explained. "Have you seen anything of him?"

"No! Bother your rotten mongrel!"

"You seem to be palling with a mongrel yourself, Cardew," said the fag sarcastically. "Do you know that that man is Mike Lomax, who's been in gaol more times than he can count?"

The poacher gave Wally a savage look, and a thick cudgel, that he carried under his arm, slipped down into his hand. The fag looked at him fearlessly.

Cardew gave the man a warning look, and Lomax muttered something under his breath, and turned away. The match had gone out, and the dusk was deep in the summer-house.

"Your dog isn't here, kid," said Cardew, controlling his annoyance, and speaking civilly. "I've seen nothing of him, and I've been in here ten minutes or more, sheltering from the snow—as this man seems to have done."

"Lomax has no right on my father's land," said Wally. "If a keeper found him here, he would be shifted off fast enough. He's a bad hat, and the less you have to say to him the better."

Cardew gritted his teeth. But he answered cheerily:

"My dear kid, thanks for the tip—it's kind of you fellows in the Third to look after your elders like this."

"Oh, rats!" grunted Wally.

"But I suppose I can wish a merry Christmas, even to a bad hat," went on Cardew, with a laugh.

"You can do anything you jolly well like, so far as I'm concerned," snapped Wally, and he went out again into the snow, to look further for Pongo.

Wally was quite well aware, from the words he had heard accidentally, that Cardew's meeting with the poacher was not by chance.

What Cardew's business could be with such a character was a mystery, but Wally did not think about it. It was no concern of his. Moreover, he was deeply concerned about Pongo just then.

But a few minutes later Wally stopped with a surprised exclamation. Mike Lomax, poacher and pilferer, was a dog-stealer among his other activities. Pongo was missing—and Lomax was on the spot! That Pongo was worth stealing Wally had not the slightest doubt, though Reggie and Frank would have chortled at the idea.

"He's got him!" gasped Wally.

And he turned round and tramped back towards the summer-house. If Mike Lomax had got Pongo, Wally meant to have him back, even at the cost of a battle royal with a six-foot ruffian.

All was dark in the little summer-house now, and Wally wondered whether the poacher was gone. But the husky voice came to his ears.

"I ain't see'd him. How shall I know him, sir?"

"You can see him to-morrow morning." It was Cardew's voice. "He's taking an old lady to see the ruins of the abbey. Just hang round and watch for him there."

"And then——"

"Nothing in the presence of Miss Fawcett, you fool! You'll watch, and get a look at him, so that you will know him again."

"Leave it to me, sir."

D'Arcy minor stood quite still. The words, muttered in low tones, came quite clearly to him, and they amazed him so much that he stood and blinked at the dark summer-house like a fellow in a dream.

"Good enough! I'm going now!"

There was a sound of footsteps. Cardew left the little summer-house by the door on the opposite side. Then Wally heard the heavy steps of the poacher coming out. In the doorway, not six feet from Wally, Mike Lomax stopped to light his pipe and to turn up the collar of his rough coat and to mutter a curse on the snow and the wind. Then he came tramping along, and almost ran into Wally of the Third on the dark path.

"Who's that?" muttered the ruffian.

"Little me," said Wally, recovering himself. "I want to know whether you've got my dog, Lomax?"

"You young fool!"

"Look here——"

The poacher gave him a savage shove, and Wally went sprawling in the snow. Lomax laughed gruffly and tramped on, disappearing into the darkness.

"Ow! My only Aunt Jane! Ow!"

Wally scrambled to his feet. He was greatly inclined to rush after the poacher and take summary vengeance, but he realised that this was a proposition of considerable difficulty. Moreover, he was fairly certain by this time that Lomax had not been there on account of Pongo. There was something between the ruffian and Cardew—something that was odd and underhand—but evidently Pongo was not concerned in the matter. D'Arcy minor shook his fist after Lomax, instead of pursuing him, and then started off on a further search for his valuable mongrel.

Tom Merry jumped to his feet with a laugh and shook the snow from his clothes. "My dearest Tommy!" ejaculated Miss Priscilla. "It's all right, dear," said Tom hastily. "But," continued Miss Priscilla tenderly, "you will catch cold, darling! Run in and change your clothes at once!" (*See page* 14.)

CHAPTER 4.
Tom Merry's Substitute!

"BAI Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his celebrated monocle into his noble eye and gazed at his young brother with horror.

Wally had returned at last.

He was in a parlous state.

"Gweat Scott!" said Arthur Augustus faintly. "Is that weally you, Wally? Or is it some howwid twamp?"

"Oh, come off!" said D'Arcy minor. "I've been looking for Pongo. Has he come in?"

"Weally, Wally, I take no intewest whatevah in the movements of that howwid mongwel of yours. Pway huwwy up and change your clothes befoah anyone sees you!"

"Bow-wow!"

"You young wapscallion——"

"Pongo's come in, Wally!" shouted Reggie Manners from the distance. "He's in his kennel now."

"Oh, good!" said Wally.

"Come on, old kid—we're doing charades!" shouted Frank.

"Right-ho!"

Wally of the Third tramped away to change his clothes. He was wet to the skin, and smothered with snow and mud. He had searched for Pongo not wisely, but too well.

But he was very bright and cheery when he joined the festive party. Pongo being all right, everything was all right, from D'Arcy minor's point of view.

But during the festivities of that merry evening Wally did not forget the curious incident of the summer-house in the wood.

He found himself thinking of it a great deal, and more than once he glanced curiously at Cardew, who was cheerful and smiling and debonair as usual.

Cardew's secret meeting with Lomax meant mischief of some kind. He had told the poacher where he could see and watch Tom Merry, so that he would know Tom again on another occasion. That it was Tom who was spoken of Wally knew, for he was aware that Tom Merry was to take Miss Priscilla to see the abbey ruins in the morning.

Wally wondered. He could not help wondering.

He knew all about the St. Jim's feud, and he had seen more than one sign during the Christmas holidays that Cardew had not forgotten his enmity.

Some trick was to be played on Tom Merry by means of the poacher—that much was clear to Wally. For that purpose Lomax was to get to know Tom by sight.

That anything worse than a trick was intended did not cross the fag's mind for a moment. Some jape, such as snowballing the Shell fellow from behind a hedge, or something of the kind—that was what Wally considered probable. He was not likely to suspect anything more serious than that.

He wondered whether he ought to speak to Tom on the subject. What he had heard, he had heard by accident—and

a jape was only a jape, though certainly Eastwood House was not a proper place for japes.

Wally of the Third had not made up his mind on the subject when he went to bed that night, and the next morning Wally was busy. The lake was frozen, and most of the younger members of the Christmas party were going on the ice. Wally and Reggie and Frank were among them, and for the time Wally forgot about Cardew and his schemes. It was not, after all, an important matter—so far as the fag could see, at least—and there was plenty of time to speak to Tom Merry if he decided to do so.

Wally & Co. were among the first on the ice, disporting themselves gleefully, after the manner of the Third Form. Blake & Co. came on, and Manners and Lowther, and Sidney Clive, and cousin Ethel, and Doris, and Manners' sisters. Ralph Reckness Cardew joined them, skating with remarkable skill and grace. Levison of the Fourth had lingered to speak to Tom Merry, who was waiting in the hall for Miss Priscilla to come down for the walk to the abbey.

"I haven't had a chance of speaking to you quietly, Tom," said Levison in a low voice. "I—I hope that there wasn't any trouble when Cardew came to your room Christmas Day?"

Tom Merry looked rather uncomfortable.

"Well, there was a bit of an argument," he said. "But it's all right. Cardew's agreed to a truce while we're here with Gussy."

Levison looked very relieved.

"I'm glad of that," he said. "It would be pretty rotten if there was anything like a scene in D'Arcy's house. I really can't quite understand Cardew lately. I should have thought him the last fellow in the world to make a scene at any time. But I'm afraid he's been rather near it."

"It's all right now," said Tom. "He's given his word to keep clear till we've both left Eastwood House."

"That's good!" said Levison. "If Cardew keeps clear, I know you will, and it's all right!"

"Right as rain!" said Tom, with a smile.

Miss Priscilla Fawcett came down, wrapped in furs, her kind old face looking very frail and delicate under her bonnet.

"My dearest Tommy, have I kept you waiting?"

"Not at all!" said Tom cheerily. "Luckily, the snow's stopped, and it's a lovely morning for a walk."

Levison walked down the drive with Tom and Miss Fawcett. He had his skates under his arm. And then occurred an incident which, trifling as it was, was destined to have strange results. Miss Priscilla dropped her muff, and Tom Merry's foot slipped in the snow as he stooped to pick it up, and he went with a plunge into the drift of snow piled beside the drive.

He jumped up with a laugh and shook the snow from his clothes.

"My dearest Tommy!" ejaculated Miss Priscilla.

"All right, dear!" said Tom hastily.

Miss Priscilla never could quite understand that Tom Merry was no longer the fascinating little baby of years ago. Tom was deeply grateful for her kind affection; but at fifteen he felt a certain discomfort at being coddled, especially before other fellows. But that little incident, trifling to Tom, was of deep import to his kind old friend.

"My darling, you will catch cold," said Miss Priscilla tenderly. "Run in and change your clothes at once."

"I'm not wet——"

"And warm yourself thoroughly before the fire——"

"But——"

"Change down to the skin," said Miss Priscilla. "And, oh, my dearest child, be careful that your things are well aired, and be very careful to put flannel next to your skin, and——"

"I—I——"

"Quick, my dearest boy!"

Levison contrived not to smile. Tom Merry's face was crimson.

"But we're going to the abbey——" gasped Tom.

"That is nothing! We can go another time. Run into the house at once, Tommy—at once!"

"But——" stuttered the hapless Shell fellow.

He broke off. Miss Priscilla was looking deeply distressed, and Tom would not have distressed the kind old lady for worlds.

"All right!" he gasped. "But——"

"Leave it to me, Tom," said Levison. "It will be a pleasure to me to walk to the abbey with Miss Fawcett."

"Thanks, old man! Right-ho!"

"Darling Tommy——"

Levison passed his skates to Tom, and Tom Merry hurried back to the house. Levison of the Fourth, with great politeness, walked on with Miss Priscilla. Tom went into the house, left Levison's skates in Levison's room, and then went to his own room. He did not trouble about changing his clothes; Miss Priscilla's tender fears for her darling's health were quite unfounded. He had some letters to write—that duty having been rather neglected during the holidays, a not unusual circumstance—and he filled in the next hour with pen and ink.

Meanwhile, Levison of the Fourth walked to the abbey ruins with Miss Priscilla. He showed the old lady round the ruins with indefatigable politeness. A rough-looking man was loafing about the ruins, smoking a pipe, with his hands in the pockets of a frowsy woollen jacket. Levison glanced at him carelessly; but the rough-looking fellow gazed at Levison in a very fixed way. Had Levison taken any heed of him he might have guessed that the man was observing him carefully, fixing his features upon his memory.

After a few minutes the man lounged away, with a grin on his stubbly face.

CHAPTER 5.
Struck Down!

"CARDEW, old man!"

It was the following day, and Ralph Reckness Cardew was lounging in an easy-chair before a log fire in his room at Eastwood House. A spiral of smoke curled up from a cigarette between his slim fingers.

"Hallo! Trot in, Levison!"

Levison came in, and Cardew pointed to a chair. Levison sat down and looked at his chum.

Cardew blew out a cloud of smoke.

"Have a cigarette?" he asked.

"No."

Cardew laughed.

"We're not on duty now," he remarked. "I've sneaked up here for a quiet smoke. Gussy's an ideal host; he lets a fellow do as he likes. Have you come to fetch me for anythin'?"

"I'm a bit worried!" said Levison.

"Reel it off," said Cardew encouragingly. "Confide it to your old pal. Droppin' money on steeplechases?"

"Don't be an ass!" said Levison gruffly. "Look here, Cardew, I'm jolly uneasy about you!"

"About me?" Ralph Reckness Cardew raised his eyebrows. "Dear man, I'm all right—enjoyin' myself at the present moment, in fact. A good smoke, and particularly agreeable company——"

"I thought when we came here for Christmas you were going to leave St. Jim's troubles behind," said Levison. "But——"

"I've a good memory," said Cardew.

"You seem to me to have set out to provoke Tom Merry in every possible way," said Levison.

"That's so."

"You seem to have depended on his unwillingness to make a scene to keep on worrying him," went on Levison.

"Right!"

"Oh, you admit it?"

"Quite!"

"Isn't that rather rotten, Cardew?"

"I dare say," assented Cardew coolly. "It's my way! I detest the fellow, and I never forget a grudge. Under a jolly old screen of politeness and good manners, I set out to make him writhe. Havin' been endowed by Nature with about ten times as much brains as the excellent Thomas, the task was an easy one."

"It's a risky business," said Levison. "He might lose his temper some time, and then——"

"He lost it on Christmas Eve when I bagged his dance with cousin Ethel," smiled Cardew.

"Was there a row, then?"

"Somethin' like it! He smacked my face."

"Oh!" ejaculated Levison.

"Then, as your charmin' sister appeared in the offing, I couldn't take action," said Cardew, still smiling, but with a deadly gleam in his eyes. "I nursed my injury till a more favourable moment. That's why I looked into his room on Christmas Day—to give him back what he had given me. But, alas! the excellent Thomas is sadly lackin' in brains, but he shines in the muscular line. I was held."

"I guessed something of the kind," said Levison. "I saw the state of your cuffs and your wrists. You must have been mad to act in such a way, Cardew!"

"Think so? Well, nothin' came of it," drawled Cardew. "I was held; and I promised not to touch him again while we were at Eastwood House. I didn't promise that he shouldn't be touched. Only that I wouldn't touch him. There's a distinction there, though it did not dawn on the powerful intellect of Thomas."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothin'!" yawned Cardew. "I never mean anythin'. Shall we go down and play billiards?"

Levison shook his head. He was deeply troubled.

Levison showed Miss Priscilla round the ruins with indefatigable politeness. A rough-looking man was loafin about the ruins smoking a pipe, with his hands in the pockets of a frowsy woollen jacket. Levison glanced at him carelessly, but the rough-looking man gazed at Levison in a very fixed way. *(See page 14.)*

"What's the worry?" asked Cardew lightly. "I've been smacked and I've been held like a helpless baby and I've been made to toe the line and make a promise. Dear old Thomas triumphs all along the line, and I'm left to swallow my own smoke and grin and bear it. You know my patient, lamb-like nature—how meek I am in endurin' injuries and humiliation."

He threw the stump of the cigarette into the fire. Levison noticed that his hand was shaking.

"What are you thinking of, Cardew?" asked Levison very quietly.

"Nothin'!"

"I know you better than the other fellows do. I knew something must have happened—I knew you were brooding over it. You've let Tom Merry alone the last day or two. Cardew, I know quite well that you've got something in your mind—some silly scheme! What is it?"

"Guess!" said Cardew, smiling.

"I can't guess—I want to know."

"So that you can stop me?" grinned Cardew.

"So that I can save you from making a fool of yourself," said Ernest Levison sternly. "So that I can save you from doing something that you'll be sorry for later, when you're cool."

"Dear man!" said Cardew.

"You won't tell me?"

"No."

"You admit that you've got some scheme in your mind?"

"I don't admit anythin'."

Levison sat in silence for a few minutes. Ralph Reckness Cardew stared at the fire. The forced smile had faded from his face; he looked hard, and bitter, and revengeful. Only too well Levison knew how bitterly Cardew must be resenting his humiliation—how it must have roused everything that was evil in his wayward nature. And Levison's uneasiness intensified. He was oppressed by a fear that the Christmas holidays would not terminate without some outbreak on Cardew's part, though what form it would take he could not imagine.

"You're a cheery sort of companion," said Cardew, breaking the silence at last. "Are you understudyin' the jolly old Quakers?"

"I'm worried," said Levison. "Cardew, if you can't keep your enmity to Tom Merry in check, wouldn't it be best to leave? Your uncle, Lord Lilburn, is leaving to-day."

"Not till I've finished with Tom Merry."

"But how——"

"Better not ask questions," yawned Cardew. He glanced at the clock. "I'm goin' down to play a hundred up with Clive. Comin'?"

"I'm going down to Easthorpe," said Levison. "Like to come with me?"

"Not in this snow, thanks. You know what a slacker I am."

"You'll keep clear of Tom Merry while I'm gone?"

Cardew laughed.

"My dear chap, haven't I promised not to touch Tom Merry? Isn't my word my bond?"

"Well, yes, I'm sure you'd keep your word," said Levison. "But—but I wish——"

"What's the good of wishin'?"

Levison made an impatient gesture, and left Cardew's room. The dandy of the Fourth shrugged his shoulders. At St. Jim's, Levison of the Fourth had seemed to have a great influence over Cardew, but that influence was quite gone now. Ralph Reckness Cardew was going on his own way, spurred on by the bitterness of his humiliation, which blinded him to all else.

Ernest Levison, muffled up in a thick coat against the falling snow, tramped away by the footpath through the park, a short cut to the village of Easthorpe. He had a purchase to make in the village, and he would have been

glad of Cardew's company in the walk to Easthorpe, if only to keep him away from Tom Merry.

But it never occurred to him that there was any danger in that walk in the winter dusk by the woodland footpath.

Once or twice he heard footfalls behind him, faint on the snow, but he did not look round. He was near the spot where the footpath joined the road when the footfalls behind him hurried, and then Levison noted them and glanced round.

A man in a rough coat and cap was close behind him. In the dusk and the falling snow recognition was not easy; but Levison's eyes were keen, and he knew that this was the man he had seen loafing about the ruins on the morning he had walked there with Miss Priscilla. Something in the man's manner warned him of hostility, and he jumped back.

Mike Lomax peered at him sharply.

"You're my bird, I reckon," he said.

Levison backed away.

"What do you mean? Stand back!"

Lomax chuckled hoarsely and made a spring at him. In a moment Levison was struggling in the grasp of the ruffian.

"Help!" shouted Levison.

His voice rang through the park, echoing among the frozen, leafless trees.

But the place was too lonely; there was no help. Mike Lomax had chosen his time well.

His powerful grasp was on the junior; Levison, sturdy as he was, was like an infant in his hands.

But he struggled desperately. He could only suppose that this ruffian, a stranger to him, was a footpad, and designed to rob him.

He freed his right arm and drove his clenched fist full in the ruffian's stubbly face. The blood spurted from Mike Lomax's mouth.

The ruffian panted out a curse.

Levison went to the ground with a crash. His face was driven into the snow, and a savage grip on the back of his neck held it there.

The stick Lomax carried under his arm had dropped to the ground. He picked it up and gripped it savagely.

Lash, lash, lash!

The blows descended like rain on the struggling junior.

Levison struggled, and writhed, and panted. Twice he kicked at the ruffian, and Lomax's howls showed that he was hurt. But the junior's desperate resistance only provoked his savage temper. The blows of the stick descended with more and more savage force.

Lash, lash, lash!

It seemed to Levison that he must be in the grip of a madman. The man, a stranger to him, was not seeking to rob him—he was beating him savagely, brutally. To the last Levison struggled and resisted, but he was powerless in the ruffian's grip. The blows descended harder and faster as the junior writhed with his face in the snow. His struggles ceased suddenly.

Lomax rose, panting.

The junior lay quite still. The ruffian realised that he was insensible.

He looked round quickly, stealthily, and then hurriedly plunged into the wood and disappeared.

On the lonely footpath Levison of St. Jim's lay unconscious, with the snow falling thicker and thicker upon his motionless form.

CHAPTER 6.
Not Tom Merry!

"LOOKING for Tom Merry?"

Ralph Reckness Cardew asked that question in a casual sort of way. Manners and Lowther were standing by a window in the hall, looking out at the falling snow in the thickening December dusk.

"Not yet," said Lowther.

"I dare say this snow's delayed him," remarked Manners. "He may have stayed at Dawes' cottage for shelter."

"I wonder!" said Cardew musingly.

Manners and Lowther glanced at him rather curiously. They did not see why Cardew should be interested in Tom Merry's movements that afternoon.

Cardew strolled away to the billiards-room, where some of the St. Jim's party were amusing themselves by knocking the balls about. Blake was performing a series of cannons, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood watching him, cue in hand. Herries and Digby looked on, and Cardew joined them.

"Good shot!" he remarked, as Jack Blake brought off another cannon.

Then he strolled restlessly away. In a deep window-seat he came on Sidney Clive and Doris Levison, reading a "Holiday Annual" together. Cardew exchanged a few words with them and wandered away.

He seemed strangely restless and ill at ease.

Wally of the Third and Manners minor and Frank Levison came downstairs muffled in coats and scarves.

"Goin' out?" asked Cardew.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said Wally cheerily. "We ain't afraid of a little snow in the Third, are we, you fellows?"

"No fear!" said Levison minor.

"Besides, we're taking out Pongo," remarked Reggie Manners with a slightly sarcastic inflection in his voice. "What does the weather matter when we've got Pongo?"

"Look here, young Manners!" began Wally warmly. "If you don't want to come for a run with Pongo——"

"Could a chap like anything better?" demanded Reggie, still sarcastic, and Levison minor chuckled.

"Some chaps might like to have their heads punched!" said Wally darkly.

"Some chaps might be able to punch them!" retorted Reggie. "Not you."

"I'll jolly well——"

"Begad!" It was Lord Conway's voice. "Are you always as polished as this, Walter, in dealing with visitors?"

"Oh, my only Aunt Jane!" ejaculated Wally, and he turned quickly at his eldest brother's voice.

"Oh, it's only Wally's gas!" said Reggie cheerfully. "We just let him run on, don't we, Frank?"

"We do," chuckled Frank.

"Oh, rats!" said Wally. "For goodness sake, get a move on, and don't stand cackling like a lot of old hens. Like to come for a run with Pongo, Conway?"

"At the present moment I beg to be excused," said the viscount, with a smile. "Even the delightful company of Pongo will not tempt me out in this weather."

"You mustn't get soft, you know," warned Wally, and he grinned and walked off with his comrades, leaving the heir of Eastwood staring.

Cardew smiled, and strolled away. He looked into the drawing-room and found Manners' sisters there, trying over things on the piano, with Miss Priscilla and Aunts Adelina and Matilda listening and knitting. Cardew backed out, and moved along to the library. Cousin Ethel was there helping Lord Eastwood with his correspondence, and Cardew did not enter. He went to his own room at last and smoked a cigarette.

But he was too restless to remain there. He came down to the drawing-room again. Miss Priscilla gave him a kind smile.

"Has dear Tommy come in?" she asked.

Cardew started a little. The kind old face seemed to give him a twinge of pain or remorse.

"I—I think not," he stammered.

"Is Tom out?" asked Doris Levison, looking round from the piano. "Perhaps he has met Ernest. Ernest has gone to the village, I think—they may have got shelter from the snow."

"I hope dear Tommy has taken shelter," said Miss Priscilla. "He is so delicate." Doris smiled. "The dear boy has gone to Mrs. Dawes' cottage," said Miss Priscilla. "He has taken the woollen comforter I knitted for her husband, who has rheumatism, or bronchitis, or lumbago, or something—I quite forget which, but I know it is something very unpleasant. It was so kind of Tommy to go; but he is always such a good little boy."

Cardew drifted out again.

Manners and Lowther were sitting by the big fire in the hall, playing chess, now. Cardew glanced at them without speaking. A few minutes later, muffled in a thick coat, Cardew was tramping through the snow and wind, into Eastwood Park. Dusky as it was under the leafless, frozen trees, Cardew tramped on without a pause, and he reached the deserted summer-house in the wood.

From the interior of the little building, open on two sides to the wind, he caught a red glow, which he knew came from the bowl of a pipe. A scent of strong tobacco came to him. He stepped inside, and there was a husky exclamation.

"That you, sir?"

"Yes. Anythin' happened?"

Cardew drawled out the question in his usual lazy tones. But his eyes were keen and anxious as he peered at Mike Lomax in the gloom.

The ruffian chuckled hoarsely.

"Yes, sir! I've carried out your orders."

Cardew drew a quick hard breath.

"Tom Merry——"

"I follered him on the footpath," said Lomax. "He put up a fight—look at my mouth! But I paid 'im!"

"On the footpath?" repeated Cardew, puzzled, "I understood that he was gone to the Dawes' cottage. That's in another direction."

"I was watching on the drive, and saw him start," answered Lomax. "I follered him—I don't know where he was going, but he went by the footpath in the park, and I collared him there."

"What—what did you do?" breathed Cardew.

"What you told me, sir—gave him the hiding of his life," answered Lomax. "I reckoned I've earned that five pun, sir."

Cardew's face was pale now.

"You—you did not go too far?"

Lomax did not answer. Cardew made a step towards the ruffian, and caught him by his sleeve.

"You fool! I told you to thrash him! If you've hurt him—really hurt him—I'll have you handed in prison for it."

"He hit me in the face," muttered the ruffian sullenly. "He kicked and struggled. I gave it to him harder for that."

"Where did you leave him?"

"On the footpath."

"He was unable to get home?"

"I dunno."

"You fool—you brute!" hissed Cardew. "Do you dare to tell me that he was not able to get home?"

"I reckon he's home by this time, or ought to be," muttered Lomax. "He's all right! I reckon he'll bear the marks for a good time to come. That's all. I want my money, sir."

There was a threatening growl in the ruffian's voice.

Cardew stood silent.

"You hear me, sir. I've earned my money, and I shall have to get out of this neighbourhood for a bit—the feller might have knowed my face."

With a gesture of scorn, Cardew flung a five-pound note at the ruffian.

"Get out of my sight," he muttered.

Lomax gave him a savage look, crammed the note into his pocket and slouched away.

Cardew stood motionless after he had gone. For a long time he stood there, forgetful of his surroundings, his heart beating painfully.

What had he done?

The fierce, black, bitter resentment that had spurred him on till that moment seemed to have died away in his breast. His brain seemed to clear — in those moments he saw his conduct as it really was—and it sickened him. He had fallen to this—a depth to which he would never have dreamed of falling! It seemed to him now, as he stood there in the silence and solitude, like some evil dream.

He shook himself at last, as if shaking off troubling thoughts, and left the little building. With his head bent to the wind he tramped back to Eastwood House.

It was done now!

It was done, and could not be undone. He had been insulted, and had had to endure the insult. In revenge his enemy had been beaten by his order. After all, he began to reflect cynically, there was nothing in that to make a bother about. Nothing! Only if the ruffian had gone too far—if he had struck too hard——

Cardew hurried his steps.

He was glad to see the lights of Eastwood House gleaming through the winter dusk and the falling snowflakes. Had Tom Merry come in? Surely he had come in! He could not have been hurt—seriously hurt—surely Lomax could not have been such a fool—such a brute—— Ralph Reckness Cardew's heart was throbbing when he entered the house.

"Hallo! You've been out in the snow?"

Cardew started violently.

It was Tom Merry's voice.

He stared blankly at the Shell fellow. Tom Merry looked ruddy and cheery, and there was no sign of damage about him. With what Mike Lomax had told him fresh in his mind, Cardew stared at Tom like a fellow in a dream, utterly confounded.

His strange expression did not escape Tom Merry's notice, and Cardew saw the wonder in his face, and tried to pull himself together.

"Yes—no——" he stammered. "You've been out? Caught in the snow?"

"Yes, rather," said Tom. "It's pretty thick, isn't it? I stayed at the Dawes' cottage for a bit to see if it would blow over, but it didn't, so I chanced it."

"You got home all right?"

"Eh! Looks like it—here I am," said Tom.

Cardew's brain was in a whirl. Had Lomax lied to him—lied to obtain his bribe unearned? Was that the explanation? It was possible, but Cardew did not believe so. What fearful mistake had the ruffian made?

It seemed to Cardew, for some moments, that the walls were whirling round him. He saw Tom Merry's ruddy face as in a mist. And he saw the wonder growing there.

"Did you meet anybody coming back?"

Cardew knew, vaguely, how incautious such a question was, in the circumstances. But for his life he could not have helped it. He wanted to know—he felt that he must know.

"Meet anybody?" repeated Tom. "No—the lane's pretty lonely. Are any of the fellows out?"

"Oh, yes! Levison's gone to the village," stammered Cardew. "I—I thought you might have met him."

"No, I haven't been near the village."

Cardew moved away. As soon as possible he sought his room, anxious for solitude, to think the thing over. Tom Merry had escaped the designed attack—that was clear now; he had escaped the danger without even knowing that it had threatened. Yet Lomax had carried out his orders—Cardew felt sure of it. What had happened? Had the brutal ruffian, in the winter dusk, made a mistake—attacked some other person in mistake for Tom Merry? Yet how was that possible, when he had watched Tom at the abbey ruins, a few days before, in order to know him again without possibility of mistake?

What had happened?

Cardew hoped—he almost prayed—that Lomax had cheated him—that the ruffian had claimed his wages for a service unperformed. But if it was not that—what had happened?

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CHAPTER 7.
By Whose Hand?

"PONGO!"

Pongo did not obey his master's voice.

The little mongrel was scuttling through the snow on the footpath, and the three fags of St. Jim's scuttled after him. The dusk was thickening into darkness, and Wally & Co. felt that it was time to return from their ramble in the snow. But Pongo seemed to have other intentions.

"Pongo!" shouted Wally.

"Stop, you horrid mongrel," yelled Reggie Manners.

"Stop, you beast," shouted Frank Levison.

Pongo scuttled on. Something seemed to have attracted his attention, and he declined to stop.

"Oh, let him rip!" said Reggie crossly. "Let's get back. They'll be having tea."

"Bosh!" said Wally.

A loud, prolonged whine came from Pongo. The dog had stopped of his own accord, and stood over something that was stretched in the snow. Loud and sharp and eerie, in the darkening woods, sounded the whine of the dog.

"He's found something," said D'Arcy minor.

"Rot!" said Reggie.

"You're a silly ass, Reggie!"

"You're a silly chump, Wally!"

"Look here——"

"Oh, cheese it, you two," said Levison minor. "Let's go and see what he's found, and nail him before he can scoot."

The three fags ran on. Pongo, whining over the still form in the snow, showed no desire to "scoot." He whined and whined again as the fags ran up.

"My only Aunt Jane! It's somebody!" exclaimed Wally.

"Phew!" Reggie Manners whistled.

Frank Levison ran quickly forward. He raised the head of the fallen figure in his arms, and a faint moan was heard.

"Strike a match, Wally," said Frank. "Let's see who it is."

Wally fumbled for a match-box. The first match was instantly blown out by the wind; the second Wally sheltered in the cupped palm of his hand, holding it over the white face that was turned from the snow. A loud, terrible cry broke from Frank Levison.

"Ernie!"

"What?" gasped Wally.

"It's my brother."

"Great Scott!"

"Ernie!" panted Frank. "He's hurt—he's hurt! Ernie!"

Levison moaned faintly. His face was white as chalk, his eyes closed. His hands were frozen.

Frank dragged him to his feet. Wally grasped him, and the two fags held Levison between them.

"What—what's the matter with him?" exclaimed Reggie Manners.

"I don't know—he's hurt," sobbed Frank. "Ernie, old man. Can't you speak, Ernie?"

"Something's happened to him," said Wally sagely. "Look here, he's half frozen. We've got to get him up to the house, quick."

"We can carry him somehow," said Reggie. "He ain't a heavy-weight. Take hold, you fellows."

"Can't you speak, Ernie?"

But Ernest Levison could not speak. He was partly conscious, but his lips were frozen and numb. Only a faint moan came from him.

Frank choked back his rising terror. That there was something seriously wrong with his brother was clear, and it was no time for grief and fear; it was a time for rapid action. The three fags lifted Ernest Levison in their arms, and tramped away with him up the snowy path.

It was a good distance to the house—and it seemed like miles to the fags, in the wind and snow, with the weight of Ernest Levison on their arms.

But they tramped on with dogged determination.

Wally led the way by a short cut across the grounds, when the park was left behind, and they came out on the drive near the great portals of Eastwood House.

"Cut ahead and tell them, Reggie," panted D'Arcy minor.

Manners minor shot ahead at a breathless run, and clamoured at the door. Wally and Frank followed, panting, labouring under the weight of their burden.

The great door was wide open when they arrived, with light streaming out into the winter dark.

Reggie had spread the news. A crowd of startled faces greeted the fags as they arrived with their burden.

"It's Levison——"

"What's the trouble?"

"He's ill——"

Lord Conway received Levison from the arms of the fags, and carried him in. Lord Eastwood came hurrying from the library, with a startled face.

"What is it, Conway?"

"Something has happened to Levison, father! Will you telephone for the doctor at once, while I take him to his room?"

"But what——"

"He has been brutally attacked, I think—and has lain in the snow since."

"Good heavens!"

The viscount carried Levison up the stairs. The junior's weight was nothing to him. Frank Levison followed—he did not mean to leave his brother. He did not even think of Doris in those terrible moments.

Lord Eastwood was busy on the telephone. A few minutes more, and a car was grinding away on the snowy drive to fetch the doctor. The Christmas party gathered, discussing the strange affair in hushed tones. Cardew, shut up in his room, was the only one of the St. Jim's party who did not know what had happened.

Lord Conway carried Levison into his room, switching on the electric light. Frank followed him. Clive had come up, his face pale and startled. With deft, quick hands Lord Conway removed Levison's clothes and put him into bed; and in a few minutes more there were hot-water bottles at his feet, and the blankets were piled on him. The viscount sat by the bed to await the arrival of the medical man. Frank sat down, quietly, his face colourless, to wait, too. Clive sat on the edge of the bed, his face the picture of misery.

Downstairs, Tom Merry & Co. were discussing the occurrence, when a soft hand was laid on Tom's arm. He turned to see Doris Levison.

"What has happened?" whispered the girl.

Tom hesitated.

"My brother——"

"Something's happened to him," said Tom reluctantly. "He—he seems to have been knocked down—somehow—I—I think it's not serious, Miss Doris."

"Where is he?"

"In his room."

The girl ran lightly up the stairs.

The Terrible Three looked up at one another with dismal faces. They knew what a shock this would be to Doris. The three Levisons—the two brothers and the sister—were bound to one another by a strong tie of affection.

"Poor Doris!" muttered Manners.

"But who—who could have done it?" breathed Lowther.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Some footpad, I suppose—I can't make it out! Poor old Levison!"

"Bai Jove! This is fearful, you fellows," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy dismally. "Pooah old Levison! What howwid wuffian can have pitched into him."

"It beats me," said Blake. "Hallo! Here's the doctor! Thank goodness for that."

The medical gentleman had arrived. He was taken up to Levison's room at once.

The whole party waited anxiously for news. It came at last.

The doctor's explanation was heard with amazement. Levison had been cruelly beaten—his back and arms showed weals and bruises caused by a rain of brutal blows. Someone unknown had beaten him savagely; but an examination of his clothes showed that he had not been robbed; the attack seemed to have been inspired by sheer unmeaning brutality. He had suffered as much from exposure as from the brutal beating; but he was in no danger. He would be ill—that was certain—but all he needed was careful nursing. That last item of information was a great relief to the St. Jim's party.

But who had done it—and why? That was a mystery—a mystery that puzzled and baffled all at Eastwood House.

CHAPTER 8.
Cardew's Punishment!

"YOU'RE lookin' glum!"

Ralph Reckness Cardew strolled into Sidney Clive's room. He was tired of his own company; tired of speculating on the problem that troubled him. With an effort, Cardew had dismissed the matter from his mind: and he had strolled along to speak to Clive, feeling the need of company.

He expected to find Clive dressing for dinner at that hour. He found him sitting by a low fire in his room, with a dark and gloomy face.

"Haven't you heard?" muttered Clive.

"Anythin' happened?"

"Yes."

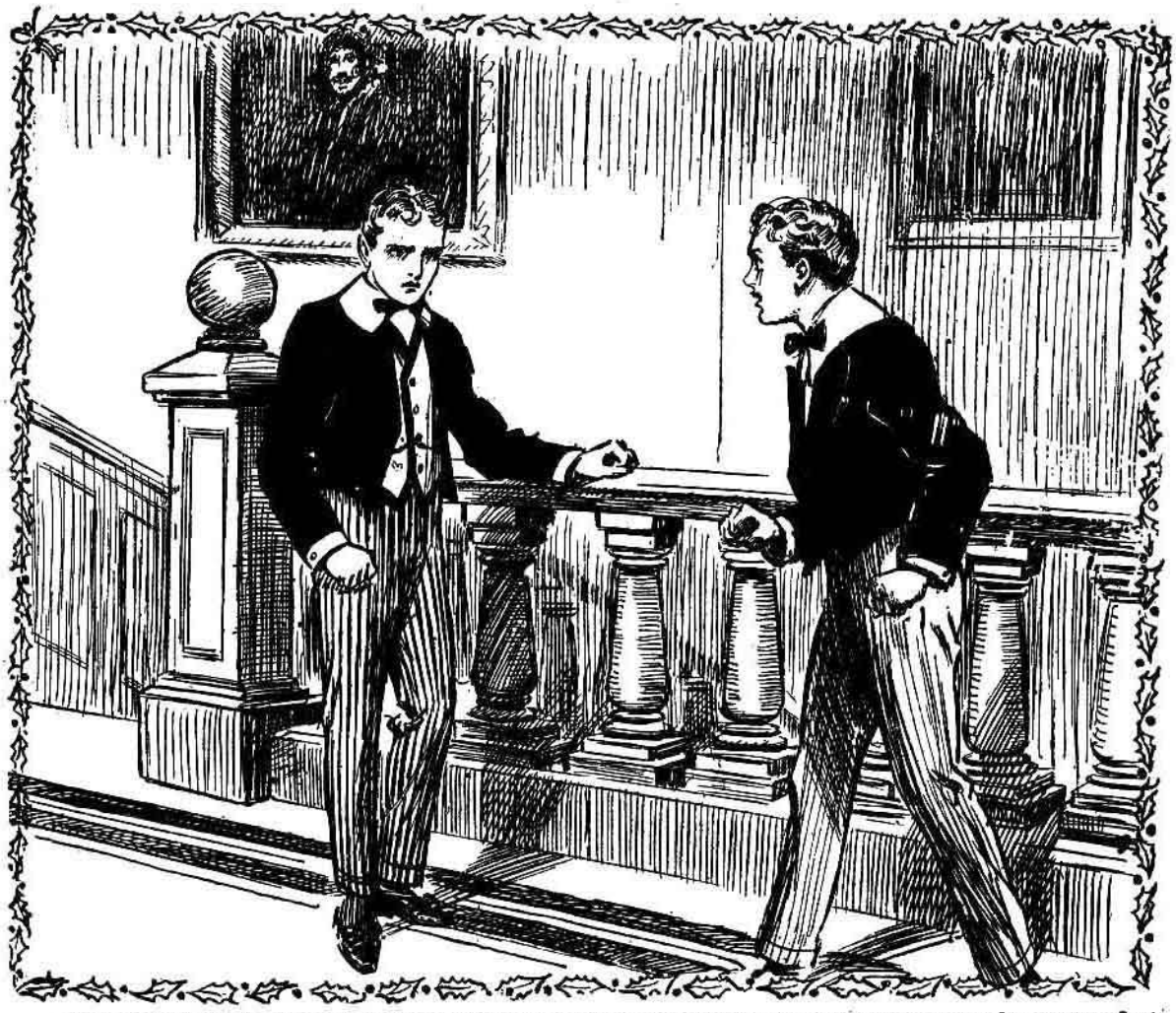
"Well, I haven't heard it," said Cardew. "I've been in my room, workin' out problems." His manner was light, but there was a shade of anxiety on his handsome face, as he looked at Clive. The thought was in his mind at once that some news had been heard of Mike Lomax's blunder—if after all Lomax had blundered. Cardew realised that it was necessary for him to be very careful.

Whether he repented of the wickedness into which his fierce resentment had hurried him, he hardly knew himself. But he knew that it was ruin to him if the truth ever came out. Even his nearest and dearest chums, Clive and Levison, must never suspect.

"Levison come in?" he drawled.

Clive nodded without speaking.

"Well, what's the jolly old happenin' that you're lookin' like



Ralph Reckness Cardew stared dully at the red, almost flaming, face of the indignant Wally D'Arcy. "You cur, you cur!" The fag's words came almost in a hiss between his teeth. "You've got to get out! Do you hear? You've got to get out of this house, you cur!" *(See page 20.)*

an owl about?" asked Cardew cheerily. "Has Gussy lost his latest top hat in a snow-drift?"

"Don't!" muttered Clive.

"Somethin' serious?

"Yes."

"Well, give it a name," said Cardew impatiently. "What's happened?"

"Levison——"

Cardew's face changed.

"Nothin's happened to old Ernest?"

"Yes."

"He told me he was going down to the village," said Cardew. "What's happened to him! Run over by a car——"

"No, no! He—he was found on the footpath——"

"The footpath!"

"Yes."

"In the park."

"Yes."

"Found?" repeated Cardew, in a voice so unlike his own, that it sounded strange and jarring to his ears: "Found? Did you say found? Was he hurt?"

"Yes."

"On the footpath in the park! Hurt?"

It seemed to Ralph Reckness Cardew that an icy hand was clutching at his heart. What had he done—what had he done?

He made a spring towards Clive, and caught him by the arm, so savagely that Clive gasped with pain. He shrank a little from the strange, terrible expression on Cardew's convulsed face.

"What had been done to him?" panted Cardew. "Quick—tell me—you fool, tell me!"

"He's been beaten——"

"Beaten!"

"Some ruffian seems to have set on him," groaned Clive. "He wasn't robbed—his watch and money are in his pockets. He was beaten with a cudgel—horribly—and left lying in the snow. He was insensible—when they found him—— I—I think he hasn't come to, yet."

Cardew stared at him. His grasp dropped from Clive's arm. His face was white, his eyes almost wild.

"Levison!" said Cardew, in a broken voice. "Levison! Old Ernie! My own pal—as good a pal as a fellow ever had! Oh, Heaven, I suppose this is what I deserve!"

"What do you mean?" muttered Clive. There was something in Cardew's look that almost scared him. "What——"

Cardew did not answer. He hurried out of the room, and went along to Levison's door. He tapped very softly, opened the door a few inches, and looked in.

He caught a glimpse of Ernest Levison in the bed, his unconscious face on the white pillow—of Frank, sunk deep in a chair, motionless, soundless. Doris, sitting by the head of the bed, glanced round swiftly, and put her finger to her lips.

Cardew made her a sign—an imperative sign; the girl rose silently, and crossed to the door.

"How is he?" breathed Cardew.

"He has not spoken yet."

"He is hurt?"

"Yes."

"But"—Cardew choked over the words—"Is there any danger?"

"The doctor thinks not."

Cardew felt his heart throb. A terrible fear had been upon him. He breathed more freely.

"I had to know!" he whispered, and he withdrew as silently as he had come. Doris returned to her chair by the bedside.

Cardew lingered in the broad corridor. He leaned on the oaken banister. He felt strangely tired and ill. There was a step below—Tom Merry was coming up.

Cardew's eyes gleamed at him.

The vengeance he had planned to fall upon Tom Merry had fallen upon his own chum—his best chum! It was a just punishment, so far as Cardew was concerned, for his wickedness. He felt that it was so, yet the sight of Tom Merry, well and fit, while his chum was stretched on a bed of sickness, roused deep bitterness in his breast. Wally of the Third was following Tom up the stairs, but Cardew hardly noticed the fag. He stepped towards Tom, as the Shell fellow reached the landing.

Tom's face softened as he saw the white misery in Cardew's handsome face. Evidently the disaster to Levison had hit the dandy of the Fourth hard.

"You've heard, of course?" said Tom.

"Yes—I've seen him. I—I suppose they don't know who did it," said Cardew.

"No. But the police will find him. I fancy, when Levison is well enough to give a description of him," said Tom. "The villain who did this won't escape unpunished, I am sure of that!"

Cardew winced.

Tom Merry paused a minute outside Levison's room, in the hope, perhaps, of hearing his voice. But all was silent, and Tom went on to his own room.

Cardew leaned on the banisters, sick and miserable. His wickedness had come home to him, and, like Cain of old, he felt that his punishment was more than he could bear. A wild impulse was upon him to descend to proclaim his guilt to all the assembled house-party—to take as his just reward the horror and scorn and indignation in every face; then to go forth alone, despised, for ever shamed.

The voice of Wally of the Third came to him, low but distinct. He had hardly noticed the fag, but he realised that Wally was speaking to him—strange words for him to hear.

"You cur! You cur! You cur!"

Cardew turned a dull look on the fag. What was the boy assailing him for now—assailing a guest in his father's house? He hardly cared. He only stared dully at the red, almost flaming face of the indignant fag.

"You cur! You cur!" Wally's words came almost in a hiss between his teeth. "You've got to get out! Do you hear? You've got to get out of this house, you cur!"

Then Cardew understood.

Wally knew!

CHAPTER 9.
Get Out!

WALLY of the Third came closer to Cardew. He was trembling with passion, his hands were clenched. It seemed that it was only with difficulty that the fag restrained himself from dashing his clenched fists full into the face of the white, stricken junior standing before him.

"You cur!" Wally seemed unable to think of any other epithet. "Oh, you cur! You meant it for Tom Merry—and Levison got it! Your own pal! Oh, you cur!"

Cardew tried to pull himself together. How did Wally know? What did it all mean? He seemed dazed.

A minute or two before, the impulse had been on him to confess, to proclaim his guilt, to rush recklessly on his punishment. That impulse was gone now. At the thought of what would follow he shuddered in every fibre of his body. The look on Doris' face—when she knew—on Frank's! Death would be preferable to that! And Wally knew—he knew!

Not a word of denial came to Cardew's lips. He was not by nature given to lying. He was too reckless for that. And to save his life he could not have lied now. He looked at the indignant fag, with haggard eyes.

"You're to go!" said Wally. "Do you understand? Do you want me to speak to my father—to Gussy? Will you go without a scene, or wait till you're kicked out, like the cur you are?"

Cardew made a gesture towards Levison's room.

"I can't go while he's like that!" he whispered.

"You're going, and at once! You sha'n't sleep another night in this house!" said Wally between his teeth. "You cur!"

Cardew recovered himself a little.

"Come into my room," he said.

"No need! I've told you——"

"Come in, kid."

Cardew went to his room, and after a moment's hesitation Wally followed him. Cardew closed the door and faced the fag in the bright electric light.

"What do you know about this?" he asked. He seemed almost himself again now. His face was white, but calm; his voice cool and steady. Little outward indication was there of the misery and remorse that gnawed within.

"I saw you in the summer-house that day with that brute Lomax," muttered Wally. "I heard something. You told him to watch Tom Merry, the day he went to the abbey with Miss Fawcett, so that he would know him again. Lomax has done this."

"You've told Tom Merry?"

"No."

Cardew breathed more freely.

"I'd have warned him," said Wally. "I thought some rotten trick was going to be played—snowballing him, or something—some sort of a jape. I never thought of anything like this! I never knew there was a cowardly villain in this house!"

Cardew shrank a little.

"Only afterwards," continued Wally, "I found that Tom hadn't gone to the abbey ruins at all. Something happened to stop him."

"He did not go?"

"No; Levison went——"

"Levison!"

"Yes," said Wally savagely, "Levison went instead, for some reason. And your scoundrel, who was watching, must have taken him for Tom Merry, as he was with Miss Fawcett at the time and place you told him. When I found that that had happened I thought I'd hold my tongue. I didn't want to meddle, and I thought Tom was all right. I never dreamed it was anything but a jape of some sort. But when we found Levison I knew the kind of jape you'd planned with that brute. I knew then."

"So—so that was how!" Cardew spoke almost unconsciously. "And I—I never knew!"

"If you'd happened to know, you'd have warned your brute to be more careful, and Tom would have got this instead of Levison!" said Wally fiercely. "That's it, isn't it? Oh, you cur! That hound was watching the place for Tom, and if he'd known Tom by sight he'd have set on him. Tom was out at the same time as Levison. But he believed that Levison was Tom Merry! You couldn't even make a cowardly plot like this without bungling! I'm glad you bungled, too! I'm sorry for Levison—but better him than Tom Merry! You cur!"

"Are you going to tell them?"

"Yes, if you don't clear! You're not fit to stay in this house—or any decent house! If my father knew, he'd have the servants fling you out! If the Head knew, you'd never be allowed to go back to St. Jim's next term! You cur!"

"That's enough," said Cardew.

"You're going?"

"I'm going."

"The sooner the better," said Wally. "When Levison's able to speak he will give a description of the brute, and Lomax will be caught. He will give you away, most likely."

"He won't," said Cardew coolly. "It's worth his while to keep his mouth shut—even if they get him."

Wally clenched his hands.

"I've a good mind to go straight to the pater and tell him all that I know!" he said.

"There might be some difficulty in proving it," drawled Cardew. "A great deal of difficulty, I think."

Wally's face flamed at him.

"Let me pass! I'm going to my father!"

"No need for that," smiled Cardew—a ghastly smile. "I don't want a scandal—proved or unproved. I'm going. Will you give me time to pack my trunk, dear boy, after this exhibition of hospitality?"

Wally stepped to the door. His face was hard and set.

"If you're not gone in half an hour I shall go to my father and tell him the whole story!" he said.

And, with a look of scorn and loathing that brought a rush of crimson into Cardew's white face, the fag left the room.

Cardew stood for some minutes, silent, without movement. This was the end of it.

His dastardly plot had recoiled on his own head. His scheme of vengeance had laid his own chum on a bed of sickness. His wickedness, instead of being buried deep in the deepest secrecy, was known. He was ordered out of the house by a Third Form fag! And he had to go! He had to

go—without a word to Levison, without a word to the faithful friend who had been struck down by his bravo's blunder!

This was the end and outcome of his long and bitter feud with Tom Merry—a feud begun in sheer idleness, perverse waywardness—which had led him from bad to worse, till it had landed him in crime! For this was crime!

This was the end—the end that he deserved. The brute whom he had employed had exceeded his instructions—as Cardew might have expected, from the nature of the man. And it was upon Levison that the man's savage brutality had been wreaked. This was what he deserved—and now he was going, creeping away like a thief in the night, leaving surmise, perhaps suspicion, behind him.

And there was no help!

A quarter of an hour later Ralph Reckness Cardew slipped quietly from the house. A note left on his dressing-table, addressed to D'Arcy, made his excuses—explained that he was called suddenly to his grandfather's home. That was Cardew's only farewell. He went without a word—and it was not till some hours later that Tom Merry & Co. knew that he had gone.

CHAPTER 10.
Forget and Forgive!

FOR three days the doctor's orders kept Levison of the Fourth to his bed; and for two or three days further he had to keep his room. Then he was able to rejoin the house-party, looking a little pale, but very like his old self. There was keen sympathy from everyone; but Levison was not a fellow to ask for sympathy or to care for it; he seemed to wish chiefly that the whole episode should be forgotten as speedily as possible.

But it was not so easy for such a matter to be dismissed. The brute who had attacked him had to be found and punished, and Levison had two interviews with the police on the subject. But he was able to give no description whatever of the man.

That was a disappointment to the police, and a surprise to Levison's comrades. The winter dusk, the suddenness of the dastardly attack, explained it, perhaps; yet it was strange that so keen and observant a fellow as Levison should have seen and noted nothing of his assailant. Whatever he knew or had seen, the fact remained that he gave no description of Mike Lomax; he simply stated that he had nothing whatever to say on that point. Neither did he advance any theory as to why the attack had been made.

Of all the St. Jim's party, only Wally knew why Levison was silent. From Levison's silence Wally realised that Levison knew or suspected. He was silent because to speak might have involved his own chum in disgrace and shame. And as Levison was silent Wally kept his own counsel—he did not even speak to Levison on the subject. He shrank from the terrible scandal that would have followed the exposure of the facts; and if Levison, the injured party, chose to hold his tongue, it was not for anyone else to speak. Cardew was gone, and it was best for the matter to die away into oblivion.

Levison was told that Cardew was gone, and made no comment. Only Wally of the Third knew that he guessed why the dandy of the Fourth had left.

Cardew certainly was not missed by the Christmas party at Eastwood House. Tom Merry & Co. wondered a little at his abrupt departure, but it came as a relief to them.

It was on the second day after Levison came down that he set out on a ramble by himself in the park, avoiding the company even of Doris and Frank. His ramble brought him to the little summer-house in the wood—lonely, banked round with drifting snow.

He glanced round him before he entered.

"You've come, old bean?"

Ralph Reckness Cardew stood there. His manner was light and airy, as of old; but there were lines in his handsome face, the imprint of troubled thought. Cardew's days had not been happy since the disaster to his chum.

"Yes—I had your letter," said Levison. He held out his hand frankly.

"Better let me tell you somethin' before you shake hands with me," smiled Cardew.

"You need tell me nothing," said Levison quietly.

Cardew started.

"You know?"

"Yes."

"Then D'Arcy minor has told, after all?"

"Wally?" repeated Levison. "He has told nothing. Does he know anything? How could he know?"

"He knew so much that he ordered me out of the house," said Cardew coolly. "That's why I went. I wasn't keen on leaving you without a word."

"Well, he has said nothing, if he knows," said Levison.

Cardew looked relieved.

"Then how do you know anything?" he asked.

"I've thought it out. I knew you were planning something, as I told you—something foolish, something wrong," said Levison. "I warned you, as you remember. When this happened—I knew. Not at the moment, of course—but thinking it over afterwards. I knew the man; I'd seen him at the abbey ruins, where I went instead of Tom Merry——"

"That's what did the mischief."

"There was no motive for the attack on me; the man was evidently put up to it. Nobody had a motive for that. But somebody had a motive for putting up an attack on Tom Merry. Cardew, I should never have dreamed that you were capable of it!"

"Neither should I—until I did it!" said Cardew. "But I never meant it to happen as it did. A thrashing—that was all I meant. And I never dreamed that the brute would make a mistake in his victim. But I'm not makin' excuses. It was the limit—the outside edge—I know that now. I knew it all the time, of course, but wouldn't see it till too late. They haven't got the man?"

"I gave no description of him."

"For my sake?"

"Yes."

Cardew was silent for a minute or two.

"I asked you to meet me here, to confess," he said. "That's not needed, as you know already. I'm prepared to face the music."

"There's no music to face," said Levison, with a faint smile.

"You mean you're takin' it quietly?"

"What else can I do? I don't want you disgraced—I don't want you punished. You know that. If it had happened to Tom Merry, and I'd guessed the truth, I should have been bound to speak out. It happened to me, and it's my own business—so I shall say nothing."

Another long silence. Cardew's face was quivering.

"I'd better go, then," he said. "I understand that it's all over—you've done with me. You can tell Clive, or he'll be puzzled when we go back to St. Jim's. Good-bye!"

He turned to the doorway.

"I shall tell Clive nothing," said Levison; "and it will make no difference when we get back to St. Jim's. You must have been mad to act as you did, Cardew. I've had a rotten time; but I'm glad I went through it instead of Tom Merry. It can be kept secret now. We've got to forget it."

"You mean that, Levison?"

"Of course I do."

Levison held out his hand again. This time Cardew took it.

. . . . . .

Ernest Levison said nothing of that meeting when he returned to Eastwood House. Cardew's name was hardly mentioned again among the St. Jim's party so long as the Christmas holidays lasted. As the vacation drew to its close and the new term neared Tom Merry thought of his rival, and wondered what would be the outcome of the feud when he met Cardew again at St. Jim's. Only Levison knew that there was a change in Ralph Reckness Cardew—and that his long contest with Tom Merry would take a new and surprising turn when the juniors met once more at the old school.

THE END.

THE TRIERS!

(Conclusion.)

Brief Introduction.

Jack Morton, the popular centre-forward of Boltwich, has succeeded in clearing himself of the charge of theft brought against him by his cousin, George Clifton. In addition, he has established his right to a share of his late grandfather's great fortune.

Jack's Homecoming!

IT was an hour later that Jack Morton entered the old cottage where he and his mother had spent so many happy years of their lives, and as he entered and saw the dear white head bent over her sewing in the old way, in the same old chair, he sprang forward with a glad cry.

"Mother!"

"My boy—my boy!"

They kissed one another, and in another minute the lad was telling the old lady everything of what had happened.

With many a startled and agonised gasp of surprise she listened to it. She could scarcely believe that she and Jack were coming into their own at last. But, like the good-hearted soul that she was, when at last Jack had got to the end of his telling, she begged him to have mercy on George Clifton.

Jack nodded.

"Yes, mother," he said, "that is why I did nothing at the time; though I think that it would have been easy enough for me to persuade the inspector to have arrested the fellow then and there. But it was difficult. Whatever George Clifton has done to me, I cannot forget that he is my own flesh and blood. And, quite apart from that, there is the further consideration that I would have had, probably, to have dragged old Graves into it—and I am very grateful to him!"

"Yes, indeed," agreed the old lady, "his daughter has been an angel to me, my boy, since all this trouble started. I hope that nothing happens to him!"

"Nothing shall happen to anyone if I can help it!" said Jack.

Then he started, for suddenly there had come to his ears again the now well-known chant:

"We want Jack Morton!"

He went to the window of the cottage, and, looking out, saw that the crowd had surrounded the little gate.

He went out.

"What is it, boys?" he asked.

"Have you forgotten there is a League match this afternoon, Jack?" they cried.

He started, and a broad grin came to his face.

"By Jove, I had!" he said. "But I'll come along now, and we will see what we can do with them. Just half a minute!"

He rushed back to his mother, explained the situation, promised her he would not be gone long, and then hurried back to the "boys."

The Last Game!

BY this time the town of Boltwich was getting somewhat used to the excitement and alarms in connection with Jack Morton, their youthful centre-forward; but this afternoon there was a record scene on the famous ground as Jack ran on to the field with the team.

The story had spread about Boltwich that he had been set free from the charge which George Clifton had brought against him; but, even more, in the strange way that good news has of getting about a town, the news had spread, too, that there was queer work on foot, and that before very long folks would hear that Jack Morton had become a power in their midst, and was indeed going to become the head of Clifton's.

The cheers, then, were genuine and hearty, for the good people of Boltwich had endured the hardships put upon them by George Clifton for long enough, and they were delighted to think that a youngster who had proved himself such a good sport, always ready to play the game, and always ready to take the hard knocks of life with a smile, was going to take the place of a man who had invariably proved himself a bully and cheat.

The game commenced.

Boltwich were playing a very fast and clever team from the North of England, who never yet had suffered defeat on the Boltwich pitch, and who had come down again to teach the home lads a lesson or two.

But it was they who learned the lesson this afternoon.

From the kick-off—which the visitors took—Jack jumped right in, and, without a moment's hesitation, was down the field like a flash.

It was a bit of a fluke, of course, but it was that sort of fluke which, either in football, or in the bigger game of life, is often called genius, and it probably is, for the real genius is the man or the boy who knows how to take a chance while other people are thinking about it.

Anyhow, Jack got right down the field, and before the game had been in progress a full minute he had sent in a stinging shot, which had defeated the visiting goalie, and had notched the first point for the home side.

A remarkable scene followed. It was, of course, most regrettable; but the visitors, who knew about the trials and tribulations through which the youngster had passed, took it like good fellows.

The crowd broke on to the pitch then and there, and the game had to be held up for a few minutes while they raised Jack Morton shoulder high once again, and carried him round the ground.

"Good old Jack!" they yelled.

Then, as they passed the stands with him, Jack glanced round, and saw the place where his pals the Triers were all sitting, and, raising himself as best he could, he waved a cheery greeting to them.

"All the best, Jack!" cried the Triers, and he knew that in them he had friends for life.

Well, of one thing, at any rate, they could be sure, that now Jack Morton had come into his own, none of them need ever worry about the future.

At last the game was able to proceed, and there was no holding Jack or his team.

They were simply irresistible, and before the final whistle blew Jack had scored four times, and the visitors could certainly not go north again proudly declaring that they had never been defeated on the Boltwich ground.

* * * * *

Jack awakened next morning with that very pleasant feeling of wondering what had happened recently in his life to make him feel so very pleased with himself.

Then suddenly he remembered, and, looking up, realised that he must, after all the exhausting business of the last few days, have overslept himself, for there was his mother standing in the room at his side, handing him a cup of tea and a letter.

"A letter for you, dear boy," she said.

The lad took it in surprise, and then gave a gasp.

"It's from George Clifton!" he said. "You had better hear what he has got to say, mother!"

He opened the letter, and a moment later he was reading it to his mother.

"My dear Morton," Clifton had written.—"I shall be out of England by the time you read this, and I dare say that you will be glad to hear it. I have been thinking things over, and, on the whole, it seems to me that the best thing that I can do for everyone concerned, is to make a dash for it. I have a little money of my own, and I intend to go to a new country and start a new life.

"I don't say that I regret that I have done the things that I have, but I can say with perfect candour that I am very weary of all the worry and anxiety of not going straight, and so I am going to throw off all the old life, take a new name, and strike out for myself. At the same time as I write this, I am writing to my lawyers, making over all my share in our grandfather's business and estate to you, and you will not hear of me again.

"I have nothing more to say; but, perhaps, having done you many a bad turn, I may be allowed to wish you the best of good luck, and perhaps you, in return, will permit me to escape, and to live in peace. If you do, I can assure you that you will never hear of me again.

"Your cousin,

"GEORGE CLIFTON."

There were tears in the old lady's eyes as she looked down at Jack.

"Poor man!" she said.

Jack gave a grunt.

"I don't want his share," he said; "and if he does this, I shall keep his share for him. But at the same time I am jolly glad that he is out of the way; he was a bad egg, and there is no getting round that, mother!"

But George Clifton had gone, and a few days later Jack Morton had taken his place at the head of the big firm, and was safely in the saddle.

People expressed concern as to whether the lad would be able to cope with all the new responsibilities that had come his way; but those who had watched him play centre-forward so often were quite certain that he had in him all the makings of a great leader of men, even in their work, and there it is that a leader's qualities are most tried, and in a few weeks all Boltwich knew that the lad was more than equal to his job.

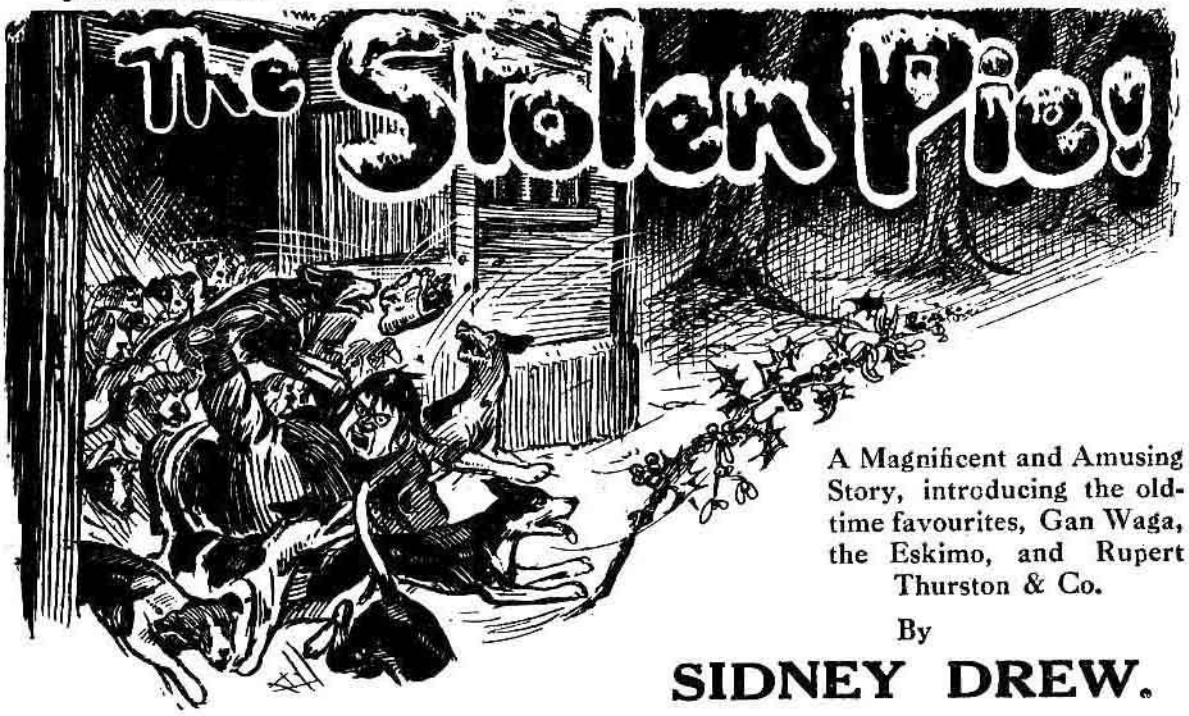
But he had retired from first-class football.

He started with Laurie Robson, his best pal, a club called the Triers, and before many seasons were out that club had become famous all over the land for fair play, good sportsmanship, and hard, honest playing.

THE END.

This splendid seasonable yarn has been—

—written specially for the GEM!



A Magnificent and Amusing Story, introducing the old-time favourites, Gan Waga, the Eskimo, and Rupert Thurston & Co.

By

SIDNEY DREW.

CHAPTER 1.
Some Uninvited Guests!

DARRANCOMBE HALL had come to Rupert Thurston through the death of his hard-riding, hard-drinking uncle, Dale Thurston, one of the last of the old-fashioned squires who loved a good horse and a good hound, and detested motor-cars and all new-fangled inventions like he hated poison. In his lifetime he had practically ignored the very existence of his nephew, but as he had died a bachelor and forgotten to make a will the hall and estate belonged to Rupert after the Government had helped itself to a substantial slice for death duties and other charges.

As Thurston had never visited Darrancombe since his boyhood, and had almost forgotten what the old gentleman was like, he was not prostrated with grief when the news of Dale Thurston's death reached him. He was in New York at the time, and, as the solicitor's letter had been following him about for weeks from place to place, the squire had been laid to rest in the family vault long before the new owner of Darrancombe Hall was aware that he had passed out of this life. Having been born with a silver spoon in his mouth, as the saying is, this unexpected addition to his fortune did not excite Rupert Thurston very much, and three months passed before he found time to drive down to Darrancombe, accompanied by his friend, Prince Ching Lung.

"From what I remember of it, Ching," he said, "it's a fine old place, and my uncle looked after it well. The lawyer told me it was in excellent repair. He never grudged money for the hall, his pack of hounds, and his wine-cellar. He hunted his pack for over forty years, and they'll expect me to keep it on. That would mean spending the winter down here, and I'm much too fond of a roving life to do that."

"With the Lord of the Deep in dry dock for a good many weeks you have time on your hands," said Ching Lung. "Hello, what's this?"

It looked like a police-trap. They were running into a quaint sleepy-looking village of thatched cottages when several men sprang out of the hedge and held a rope across the road. Thurston stopped his big car, and one of the men came forward and touched his cap.

"Begging your pardon, sir," he said, "but we be stoppin' all cars till we do find the right 'un. Be you Squire Thurston, if you please?"

"I'm Thurston of Darrancombe Hall, if that's what you want," said Rupert.

The man raised his hand and someone sounded a bugle. Cottage doors opened and cheering people rushed out of the cottages into the village street.

Others rushed out of the Darrancombe Arms, mostly red-coated gentlemen with faces of a similar hue, who mounted horses led by grooms, and then, with the huntsmen in front and the whipper-in behind, the Darrancombe hounds, thirty couples strong, came trotting across the village green.

Amid cheers for the squire, ropes were fastened to the car, and, surrounded by hounds and horsemen and his shouting tenants, the new squire and Ching Lung were dragged in triumph up the village street, past the inn and the old church, through the gateway of the hall, across the splendidly-timbered park, to the very door of the splendid house where the servants were assembled.

Then Rupert made some kind of a speech, which was cheered to the echo. Presently he found himself in the spacious entrance hall being introduced by his uncle's solicitor to the gentlemen in scarlet coats, riding-breeches, and glossy boots.

"I didn't expect this, Mr. Gigland," said Rupert, when he had time to take breath.

"I had to do it, sir," explained the solicitor. "They expected it, you know. Though I didn't know what time you'd arrive I made arrangements. A banquet to-night to the members of the hunt, and unlimited cold beef and refreshments to everybody outside. Refreshments also in moderation at the Darrancombe Arms to all comers, of course. The whole thing won't cost a great deal, and I wanted you to make a good impression."

"Oh, I don't mind what it costs," said Rupert. "Let them enjoy themselves, Mr. Gigland, and don't trouble about the expense."

There was a heavy raid on old Squire Thurston's wine-cellar that night, but at last Rupert's guests rode away in the moonlight, and Thurston and the prince, who had donned scarlet for the banquet like the rest of them, were left to smoke a last cigar in peace.

"You'll settle down and become a country squire yet, old chap," said Ching Lung. "This is a grand old place that has come to you."

"True enough, Ching, but there will have to be some alterations if I stay here," said Rupert. "Candles in massive silver candlesticks are pretty things to look at, Ching, but I prefer electric light. There isn't even a telephone in the place, and I believe with thirty-five bedrooms there are only two bath-rooms. We must alter all that. I can ride to hounds as well as most people, but I know nothing about hunting a pack, and that's what they seem to expect me to do. It's not in my line, and I don't intend to try it. I expect I shall end by letting the place if I can find a tenant."

While Rupert and the prince were chatting a motor-car drove into the village in the clear moonlight. Darrancombe was fast asleep and as quiet as a graveyard. There were four gentlemen in the car,

and they were all out of work. The car stopped before the inn.

"Bedad, get down and bang at the dure, Ben," said the driver, "and ax where we are."

"Not likely, souse me, and have a jug of water poured over me, my lad," said the person spoken to. "Hold easy a minute while I look at the sign-board."

It was rather a faded sign-board. There was a dim picture of some animal that might have been a fox or a poodle, but the lettering was more distinct.

"It's the Darrancombe Arms right enough, Barry," said the man who had gone to investigate. "There's some big gates slap ahead, souse me, so that ought to be the hall."

Five minutes later a heavy knocking at the massive front door of Darrancombe Hall startled Ching Lung and the new squire. All the servants had gone to bed. Thurston took up one of the massive silver candlesticks and Ching Lung unbarred the door and opened it.

"Sorry to trouble you so late, by honey, but could you oblige us with the loan of a spanner?" asked a familiar voice.

"And some suppers, Chingy," added another familiar voice. "We awful hungriness, old bean."

"Out o' work, souse me, and starving," said the man who had looked at the sign-board of the inn. "We ain't tasted a bite o' food for umpteen years."

"Oh, for the smill of a hambone or a boite from the wing of a bloather! Av ye don't take us in and grub us, we'll have to pawn the mothor," said the gentleman with the Irish accent, dropping into poetry: "Bedad, and av ye dhroive us out, you'll foind your mothor up the spout."

It was Ching Lung's motor-car, and large to go up a pawnbroker's spout, but as he did not wish to lose the car, and the house was Rupert Thurston's, he stood aside. The visitors, Mr. Thomas Prout, Mr. Benjamin Maddock, bos'un of the Lord of the Deep, Mr. Barry O'Rooney, also on the books of that craft, and Mr. Gan Waga, were certainly out of regular employment while the yacht was in dry-dock, but they had been provided with comfortable quarters in Porthampton and their wages were being paid regularly.

"And how did you find us out, you blackguards?" asked the Squire of Darrancombe.

"It was this letter, sir," said Prout. "It said on it that if it couldn't be delivered to you aboard the yacht it was to be forwarded on to you at this place, by honey. And thinking it might be important——"

"You bagged my car out of the garage and treated yourselves to a joy-ride," said Ching Lung. "Things were getting a bit too slow for you ashore at Porthampton, I suppose. I've a good mind to throw you out again and make you walk back. What's that terribly urgent letter about, Rupert?"

"A bill from my bootmaker," said Rupert Thurston. "If you blackguards want anything to eat, go and find the larder, for I'm not going to waken the servants for your benefit. And you can sleep on the floor, which is the proper place for you. Why couldn't you stay away till you were asked?"

"Kick 'em out neck and crop, and be done with it," said Ching Lung. "Fire the whole bunch of them, and let's go to bed."

In spite of this chilly welcome, and Ching Lung's suggestion to pitch them out on their faces into the cold park, the three mariners grinned, and clutching a candlestick, Gan Waga waddled out of the room, and, tilting his snub nose upwards, he sniffed the air.

"Bedad, bhoys, the Iskimo is on the scent," said Barry O'Rooney. "He'll smill the larder a moile off, and that's the only bit of use the fat rogue is in the wide worrld. Come quick and muzzle the rascal afore he ates the lot. Afther the spalpeen, or he'll ate the place bare, bones and all."

Clutching more silver candlesticks, the three hungry sea-dogs set sail in the wake of the Eskimo, whose unerring nose led him to the kitchen, and from the kitchen to the larder. In the kitchen the fire was still burning. Prout raked it together while the bo'sun lighted the lamps. It was a wonderful larder, and Rupert Thurston's guests at the banquet had not succeeded in emptying it. There was a whole salmon, a huge game pie that had not been cut, and a sirloin of beef as intact as when it came out of the oven. There were jellies and tarts, and trifles and blancmanges, and fruit salads, and cheese and celery, and nuts galore. There were also bottles of wine and bottles of ale and spirits still sealed and corked, which the butler had been too tired to restore to the cellar and put under lock and key.

"By honey, Mr. Rupert and the prince didn't exactly give us the glad eye, as they call it," said Prout, as he proceeded to carve the salmon, "but whether they meant it or didn't mean it, I'm glad I came! I suppose you couldn't manage a slice of this stuff, could you, Ben?"

"I could manage two better, souse me," replied the bo'sun. "So make it two, Tommy. One slice looks so lonely on a chap's plate!"

"And, bedad, Gan," remarked Barry O'Rooney, "you ate properly wid a knife and fork! None o' that disgusting finger business, and then wiping your hands on your hair. Give him some fish quick, Tom, for he's got his greedy little oies on that lovely game-poie, and he'll be snatching at and bolting! Phwat a loife! Phwat a spread! For marcy's sake, Ben, don't let the monsther do at! He's putting vanilla custard and vinegar on his salmon!"

"Yo' not knows what's goodness!" grinned Gan Waga, as he reached for the Worcester sauce. "M'yum! Custards and salmons, they just lovelifuls!"

After carving the salmon, Prout sharpened the knife and began to operate on the sirloin of beef. Gan Waga could not keep his beady little eyes from the game-pie. It was large and oblong and beautifully brown and shiny. The Eskimo loved game-pie.

"Looks, Tommy—looks!" he said, in a hoarse whisper. "What that big blackness thing behinds yo', hunk?"

Prout, taken off his guard, turned his head, and Maddock and O'Rooney rose from their chairs to look. Gan Waga's arm went round that noble pie, and before they realised it the Eskimo and the pie were half-way up the staircase.

"The pie!" roared Barry O'Rooney. "The murthering thafe of an Iskimo has pinched at! Have at the rogue!"

At the top of the staircase Gan Waga lost his bearings; but only for a moment. Clutching his prize, he waddled along a gloomy passage till he saw the bright, wintry moon shining through the fanlight above the front door. The angry pursuers were not far away. Putting down the pie, Gan Waga turned the key and pulled back the bolts.

As Prout & Co., taken off their guard, turned their heads, Gan Waga's arms went round the noble pie, which he promptly collared.

"Souse me, we've got him!" growled Maddock. "He's gone out, and he can't run for toffee. We'll give him pinching pie, the fat waster!"

Over snow or ice or in the water the Eskimo could travel at great speed, but on land he was slow and clumsy. A capture seemed certain. But they had reckoned without the car, which still stood where they had left it.

"Ho, ho, hoo, hoo!" laughed the Eskimo. "The merry olds pie nots good fo' yo', dearies, 'cos it give yo' nightmares! Good-bye-e!"

Barry O'Rooney made a frantic plunge down the steps and a dive at the rear of the car. He missed by inches, and fell sprawling. Smoothly and swiftly the car ran over the grass, and came to a standstill in the open, where it was impossible to stalk it in the bright moonlight. Gan Waga raised the pie aloft and bowed to them.

"By honey," said Prout, grinding his teeth, "I hope it'll choke him! I didn't mean to eat any beef, but to save up for that!"

"So did I, souse me!" groaned the bo'sun. "I never see such a lovely pie in all my life! I only wish it was chock full of rat poison!"

Keeping a wary eye astern, so that he could make sail in case of pursuit, Gan Waga opened his knife, cut a wedge-shaped piece out of the pie, and munched joyfully. It was the very monarch of game-pies—a delicious mingling of pheasants, partridges, hare, and woodcock. Gan Waga patted himself and blinked upwards at the moon, heedless of scowling eyes and shaking fists and the horrid things Prout, Maddock, and O'Rooney were saying about him.

CHAPTER 2.
The Hunted Eskimo!

RUPERT THURSTON and Prince Ching Lung went to their bedrooms without troubling any further about the late-comers, for they knew that they were quite capable of looking after themselves. The beef and the other things were so good that the mariners did very well in spite of the regrettable absence of the game-pie. Though gone, it was not forgotten, and Barry recalled it as they sat in front of the kitchen fire, smoking their pipes.

"A dirthy thrick!" he said. "Didn't Oi warn ye he was watching that poie, and that he'd be afther snatching ut and bolting wid ut, the fat brigand?"

"And to catch us the silly way he did, souse me—that's what makes me so wild!" said the bo'sun. "Older than Adam that same trick is!"

"It's those rotten old tricks that come off," grunted Prout. "If he wolfs half that pie, by honey, he'll sleep for a week! If we could only get him napping, we could run him out about ten miles, chuck him off the car, and leave him to foot it back. There's nothing he hates worse than a long walk."

"Faith, that's a foine oidea, Tommy!" said Barry O'Rooney, rubbing his hands. "Let me get hould of him aslape, and, bedad, we'll give him all the walking he wants, the dishonest blatherskite! Ut sames murther to lave a noice foire loike this, but justice must be done, so Oi'll explore a few, bhoys."

Gan Waga had eaten all the game-pie he wanted to eat—for the time being. He could easily have driven the car a safe distance from the house, and slept in it quite comfortably; but he was not sleepy. Gan Waga felt thirsty, and he also felt lonely. He was not pining for the company of Prout, Maddock, and O'Rooney, although he was very friendly with the three mariners when it did not happen to be the other way about. Gan wanted Ching Lung, for with Ching Lung he knew he would be perfectly safe, ever if he had purloined the whole larder.

A man, brandishing a stick as if to strike, stepped out of the shadows and confronted Gan Waga.

Under the white, silent moon the deserted park looked very ghostly. It was cold, too, but the Eskimo did not object to cold, but liked it. There was plenty of pie left, and Gan Waga did not intend to waste it. He got out of the car, carrying the remainder of the pie on a cushion, and waddled towards the house. Barry O'Rooney, who was watching from the door, gave a silent chuckle.

"Come along, young feller-me-lad!" he muttered. "Bedad, you don't know who's waiting for you! Oi'll tache you to pinch poies, you ugly haythen!"

Then Barry O'Rooney saw something else. A man stepped out the shadow of a tree and confronted the Eskimo. Cushion and pie slipped from the startled Eskimo's limp hands. The man had a big cudgel, and advanced brandishing it as if to strike. Self-protection being the first law of nature, Gan Waga made a clutch at the nearest available weapon, which happened to be the remains of the pie. He hurled it with both hands, and fled for the car. The man with the cudgel uttered a smothered kind of howl. From the doorway Barry O'Rooney saw him prance about on one leg, and then sit down. He got up, pranced about on the other leg, and then sat down again, this time on the cushion. Finally, he managed to erect himself on both legs, and then, shaking his cudgel, he set out across the grass after the terrified Eskimo, who was running his hardest.

"One of the gamekeepers," grinned Barry O'Rooney. "Bedad, Gan, ut's good for you, my bhoy, he did that slithering and skating, or he'd have had you! Och, he'll have you by the neck yet, av you don't put more pepper into ut! Long-legs wins, and the Iskimo is bate. Sprint, Gan, you fat tortoise, or ut's a woipe wid his shillelagh ye'll be getting! Murther and gridirons! Phwat's the mather wid the man? Are his boots soled wid oice?"

"Ooh! Wa-ooh!" shrieked Gan.

A prod in the back from the pursuer's cudgel elicited the shriek from the Eskimo. Another stride, and his hand would have been on Gan Waga's collar, and Barry was about to rush out to prevent the pie-stealer from being roughly treated, when the man seemed to skid as if he had trodden on something very slippery. For the third time in succession he sat down with a good deal of violence. He was a person of determination, for he was up again at once; but his slip had saved the Eskimo, for Gan Waga was in the car. The self-starter worked without a hitch, and once his hands were on the steering-wheel the Eskimo's courage and confidence came back to him.

"Good-bye-e!" he cried, though his voice was thin and breathless.

Still the man did not give up. Since his first smothered howl when the pie had hit him he had not uttered a sound. He continued to run after the car.

"Bedad, Oi'd bether fetch the others and stop this!" thought Barry. "There must be more keepers where Gan's going, or the chap knows he's running into a corner, or he wouldn't be following up. Sure, a hoiding wouldn't do that fat thafe of an Iskimo a bit of harrm, but the prince wouldn't loike it. Oi'll wager that av he does catch Gan he'll be in such a stew of a timper he'll use that ould blackthorn of his purty free!"

Barry hurried in, grinning all over his face, to impart the glad news. Darrancombe Hall was an ancient, rambling place, and in his haste Barry O'Rooney found the wrong staircase, and a very dark one. There were lots of stairs, but he put his foot in the wrong place. An anguished howl and a succession of bumps broke the placid stillness of the night. When Barry O'Rooney came to

a full stop the gloom around him sparkled with stars which, like the particular stair he had tried to put his foot on, were not really there at all.

Barry got up, moaning, only to bang his head against a shelf, dislodging a couple of jars or bottles, that clattered down and broke. Evidently, by the smell, one was a bottle of pickles. Mingled with the aroma of vinegar was another scent quite familiar to him, but he did not stay to think what it was.

"Bedad, Oi'll have a lump on my head the soize of a punching-ball!" he groaned. "And Oi belave that rotten vinegar and stuff has splashed all over me. Phwat a hole! No gas, no electric loight—only rotten ould paraffin lamps and candles. Ut's a marcy Oi didn't break a limb!"

This time Barry O'Rooney was wise enough to strike a match. The smell of pickles and the other smell, which was far stronger, accompanied him, for he had managed to smash a large bottle of anchovy sauce or essence of anchovy over his boots. He discovered the stairs to the kitchen, and went down. There were three chairs drawn up before the fire, but they were empty. Prout and Maddock had gone in search of something softer to spend the night on than kitchen chairs with wooden seats and backs. After that glorious supper they wanted easy chairs at least, with plenty of cushions, if they could not find couches or Chesterfields. And at the moment Barry was searching for them they were cuddling down to slumber in Rupert Thurston's drawing-room.

"Bad luck to thim for a brace of ugly desarters!" growled Barry. "Av Gan puts up a foight wid that keeper-chap there'll be a purty tale to tell. And av he wanted to tell the tale, he won't understhand the fellow's counthry accent, and ut's as sure as the nose on my face the man won't understhand Gan Waga's lingo. Drat the Iskimo! Pouf! Phwat's this awful smell Oi'm carrying about wid me? Phew! Ut's loike sthale fish. Phwat a loife, bad luck to ut!"

Barry did not intend to fall down any more flights of stairs, so he made no further search for Prout and Maddock. In spite of Gan Waga's evil deeds, he did not wish him to be ill-treated by an angry gamekeeper. The smell of fish seemed to grow more pronounced in the fresh air. There was no sign of the keeper, the car, or of Gan Waga. The Eskimo was a good driver, and, so long as he had room and petrol, and nothing went wrong with the works, he was not likely to be caught. Barry growled a few more growls, and set off in the direction that the car and its pursuer had taken.

And as Barry O'Rooney walked over the dewy grass of Darrancombe Park beneath the silvery moon, he left a sweet scent of essence of anchovy behind him.

Meanwhile, that low-down pie-snatcher Gan Waga crawled along and took a good look at the man whose unexpected appearance with the big stick had startled him so much, and to whom he had given the pie. He was a lean, bony man quite six feet tall, and he had a lot of black whiskers. When an Eskimo manages to grow whiskers at all it is always a very thin crop, and that perhaps is why Gan Waga disliked them. In addition to the black whiskers, the man also wore cord breeches, leather gaiters, thick-soled boots studded with hobnails, a grey coat with bulky pockets, a brown billycock hat, and the thick stick. He had a long, steady stride, and he kept it up.

"I run yo' offs yo' legses, my hairy old beans!" grinned the Eskimo, who was quite himself again. "Yo' have big, hard cornses on yo' par feet ifs yo' mean to follow me about all night!" He grinned, and then raised his voice. "How yo' wases, Charlie? Charlie can't catch me!"

Then Gan Waga looked ahead. He saw a lake and a long stretch of undulating park-land dotted with clumps of trees. It looked good going, though it was rather like a switchback; and, as he liked to see the gamekeeper run, he travelled slowly. The grim pursuer never varied his stride, but kept on at the same steady, swinging pace. The car bumped off the grass on to a gravelled road that seemed to make a circuit of the lake. Gan Waga kept to the road, and smiled back at the gamekeeper, who came crunching after him.

"Yo' be awfulness tired, old dears!" said the Eskimo sweetly. "Why yo' chasing me about, hunk? Yo' ought to be home in bedses, Charlie!"

"Wait till Oi do get 'old of you, me lad!" said the gamekeeper, speaking for the first time. "You'll be in bed for three solid months arter Oi done wi' you!"

"Come on the grass some morer, Charlie," said the kindly Eskimo, "and it not hurts yo' par feets so muchness!"

An ordinary man would have abandoned such a hopeless chase; but the gamekeeper was not an ordinary man. Gan Waga was going in the proper direction to suit him. Two of the underkeepers lived in a cottage at the head of the lake, and it was almost time for them to come on duty and patrol the park. He had his whistle in his pocket, and he fancied that the fat, foreign-looking poacher in the motor-car would throw up his hands and surrender at the sight of a gun, and he cursed himself for having left his own gun behind.

Gan Waga put on speed and drew away, which gave him time to stop and light a cigar; but the gamekeeper did not halt. The Eskimo began to get tired of it, and thought he might as well go home. Doubtless Prout, Maddock, and O'Rooney would be asleep by this time. He was still thirsty after so much pie, but there was lots of water in the lake. Gan made another spurt, got down and drank out of his cupped hands, and waited in the car until the dogged gamekeeper came within earshot.

"I goings now, Charlie!" he said. "Yo' a most champion runners, so yo' can chase yo'selfs all night! Shave yo' whiskers off next times, and then yo' not have so much weight to carry! I awful sadness to leave yo', Charlie, but I want some morer suppers! Chi-ike! Charlie can't catch me!"

The Eskimo waved a farewell. Another backward glance showed him the position of the house. The gamekeeper uttered a yell of rage, and hurled his cudgel after the Eskimo, who took the road round the lake. Further pursuit was utterly hopeless. Dashing into the shrubbery he found a hidden wire, and pulled it. As he rushed past the cottage at the head of the lake the Eskimo heard a terrific bang, so close to him that he fancied a tyre had burst. It was not a tyre, however, but a spring gun the keeper had fired to warn his two comrades that evil-doers were about.

Fancying that he had been shot at, Gan Waga stooped low over the steering-wheel. The keeper was running to cut him off, but he had no possible chance of doing so. The car circled the lake at almost racing speed, and plunged into a dark tunnel of trees. When he emerged Gan Waga guessed rightly that the curving road would enter the main drive further on and bring him to the very steps of Darrancombe Hall.

And then, to his horror, the engine gasped and grunted and gave out. The tank was dry! There were some petrol-tins in the car, but they were dry also. In the shadows behind he saw—or imagined he saw—the dim figure of a running man. It was hardly possible that it could be his remorseless pursuer, unless he had found some amazing short cut; but the Eskimo was getting nervy.

He sprang out of the useless car and took to his legs. If he had been near the lake all would have been well, for he was like a seal in the water; but the lake was far away, and Gan Waga was sorrowfully aware that he was a poor runner. He was not much of a fighter, either, and he was also sorrowfully aware that the big, bony man with the whiskers would not be in a gentle mood. He gave another frantic glance over his shoulder, and there, without a doubt, was the remorseless pursuing shadow.

"Oh, mi! Oh dears, dears, dears!" groaned the Eskimo. "I wishes I never steal that rotten old pie! Ooh! Murders!"

Suddenly he saw a long, low building with an iron gate. It was impossible to reach the house before being overtaken, for it was too far away. If he could not run he might hide, and so evade the terrible man with the black whiskers who refused to be shaken off.

The iron gate ought to have been locked. The reason it was not locked was due to the fact that, for the first time in living memory, refreshments were being given away free at the Darrancombe Arms. In his hurry to get there before the last barrel ran dry the person in charge of the gate had neglected his duty. Gazing back, his little beady eyes round and scared, Gan Waga turned the handle and pushed.

Then Gan Waga uttered a weird howl of terror and anguish. Dim shapes rose out of the gloom and surrounded him. There was an uproar of horrifying sounds, and the darkness seemed filled with glaring eyes and gleaming teeth. The dark shapes leapt at him and hurled him from his feet by sheer weight, and galloped over him as he lay on his back gasping and moaning.

Gan Waga had opened the gate of one of the Darrancombe Kennels. There were fourteen couples of hounds in that particular kennel. They were pleased to see the Eskimo, and they had expressed their pleasure by jumping at him and knocking him down; but they were much more pleased to see the open gate. Out they streamed joyously, headed by old Shafter, the pick of the pack.

Two minutes later they had found the ruins of the pie and the cushion that was well smeared with it, and three minutes later they had torn the cushion to shreds.

Ching Lung started out of his slumbers. In his dreams he had been hunting, and the hounds were hot on the

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scent. He was dreaming still, he thought; but suddenly he sprang out of bed and rushed to the window. Sounds that fill a fox-hunter's heart with joy filled the midnight air—the music of a pack in full cry.

The prince flung up the window and leaned out, and at the same moment the window next his was opened, and Rupert Thurston's head and shoulders appeared.

"What in the name of wonder has happened?" cried Rupert Thurston.

"I don't know, old man, unless your park is haunted by a ghost-pack," answered Ching Lung. "Your hounds have got out, and, by the look of it, they've found a red-hot scent. Tumble into some clothes as fast as you can, and see what's the matter."

CHAPTER 3.
Treed!

IT was a very hot scent indeed—the result of the essence of anchovy on Barry O'Rooney's boots and the game-pie on the boots of the gamekeeper. Barry did not find the car, and he was beginning to think that Gan Waga had escaped from the park by another gate, when something happened. He heard a violent bang, and then the car came into view on the other side of the lake, plunged into an avenue of trees, and was lost to sight.

"Murther and onions!" thought Barry. "Surely the spalpeen daren't fire at Gan to hit! There he goes, anyway, the troublesome rogue, and bedad, av he's a grain of sinse left he'll scuttle into the house and loie low! A noice game this is, whin Oi ought to be aslape in my bed! Bad luck to the oily Iskimo!"

Barry had wandered a good way from the house. Feeling sure that Gan Waga was safe, he was about to return when he was suddenly seized from behind by the tall, bony man with the whiskers, neatly tripped, and deposited face downwards with his nose pressed hard into the dewy grass of Darrancombe Park. The bony man, who was very out of breath, took a seat on Barry's spine, and puffed and panted.

"G-g-g-ga!" remarked Barry O'Rooney furiously. "Ag-ag-g-g-ga!"

It was not a very brilliant speech, but it was all he could say at the moment, for the point of his chin was on a thistle, and his mouth was filled with grass. He made several furious and frantic heaves to try to dislodge his assailant, but the thin gamekeeper was fairly weighty. He had his whistle in his hand, but he was too short of breath to blow it, and when he attempted to do so the only sound was a thin and feeble squeak.

Barry dug his toes into the ground, worked the top of his head into the grass, and tried to imitate a wild and unbroken broncho of the prairies by buck-jumping. It was a great and gallant effort. It ridded him of the gamekeeper, who was shot off so violently that he nearly swallowed the whistle. He aimed a blow at the supposed poacher as Barry O'Rooney was scrambling to his feet, and, before sitting down again, Barry retaliated. The gamekeeper found breath enough to say "Ouch!" And then, rubbing their heads, they sat and glared at each other.

"For a ha'porth of nuts, my noble lad," said Barry, "Oi'd set about you; and then, bedad, there'd soon be a funeral in your family! 'Oi'm a man of pace, but you thry to biff me again and nasty things will happen! There's only wan man aloive who has a chance to wallop me whin it comes to a foight, and that's Jack Dempsey—and Jack's too woise to thry ut on! You take me for a poacher, don't you, you unshaven ould rogue? Well, Oi'm not. Oi'm a guest at the hall, and Mr. Rupert Thurston's friend. Av you don't belave ut, bhoy, get up on your hind legs and Oi'll hammer some understanding into you!"

"W-wait till Oi gimme breath!" said the keeper, who was as game as any pheasant or partridge in the park, "and Oi'll kill 'ee stone cold, so Oi will!"

"Och, that's the way to talk, bhoy!" said Barry. "Be quick about ut, for, bedad, Oi'm losing me beauty-slape! Ut's long enough since Oi fought and killed a man wid whiskers, and ut'll be a change afther the clane-shaven wans. Av there's any little message you'd like to lave to your woife or mother, you'd betther tell me now, William, and Oi promise to deliver ut. As Oi towld you, Oi'm a man of pace, but Oi'm a proud O'Rooney of Ballybunion Castle, and the only O'Rooney who ever refused a challenge to foight was stone deaf, and didn't hear ut. Whin he did larn the truth and phwat he'd missed, ut preyed on the poor lad's moind so much that he doied of a broken hearrt. So up wid you, Willy, and shake hands, and then we'll settle ut loike gintlemen!"

The gamekeeper was quite willing. Barry looked at him sorrowfully in the moonlight.

"Sure, ut sames a pithy to spoil a good-looking fellow loike you, wid such a glorious set of whiskers," he said; "but if you will have ut, bhoy, put 'em up!"

"Howld aisy wan minute, darlint!" said Barry. "In the absence of a referee and seconds, how do we go? Phwat about the rules, William?"

"There be no rules, for Oi be goin' to polish 'ee off quick!" replied the gamekeeper. "And Oi'll tell 'ee for whoy. There be two sleepy louts in yon cottage who wouldn't wakken 'oop and come to help Oi when Oi touched off that gun, and when Oi be finished with ee, Oi be goin' to wakken they oop and rattle their thick heads together till Oi rattles 'em off. So just tak' that for a starter!"

Then the gamekeeper swung his fists and butted in at Barry O'Rooney with his head down, like a human battering-ram. A neat upward prod from Barry's right fist knocked his chin upwards again. Before he could recover, Barry O'Rooney gave him a pile-driver in the ribs that left the gamekeeper as limp and windless as a punctured tyre. Though a powerful man, and no doubt an awkward customer in a wrestling-match or in a rough-and-tumble, the gamekeeper was no boxer. As he swayed, with goggling eyes, Barry O'Rooney unclenched his fist, pressed the flat of his hand against the gamekeeper's face, and pushed. And down went the man with the whiskers!

"Phwat a foight!" said Barry sadly. "Willie, you've deceived me. You don't tell the truth, Willie. You—— Help! Phwat the—— Murther and onions! Phwat's this?"

There was only a rush of padded feet, for the hounds had finished the last portion of the run without a sound, on a scent of essence of anchovy that was hot enough to scorch the grass. They surged over Barry O'Rooney in a four-legged tide, and tumbled him on top of the gamekeeper. Barry O'Rooney staggered and shinned up a tree. The gamekeeper made a quick recovery and did the same, for to obtain the flavour of the game-pie the hounds were trying to chew his boots off.

And when Rupert Thurston and Ching Lung came along, armed with whips, there they found them.

Barry O'Rooney had not been bitten, but his trousers were in a hopeless state.

"And this is phwat Oi get for being koind!" he growled. "Bad luck to that haythen, pole-snatching Iskimo. There'll be red murther done this noight av Oi can lay hands on him. And thim throusers as good as new! There's only wan good Iskimo, and that's a dead wan! And bedad, he doies to-noight!"

But you have to catch your Eskimo before you can kill him, and Barry O'Rooney's hideous threats did not disturb Gan Waga. Well over his fright, and fast asleep in the loft above the kennels, with the moonlight shining through a dusty little window on his plump and placid face, Gan Waga dreamed of game-pie spread with raspberry jam, and smiled blissfully in his sleep.

(*Another topping yarn of the amusing Gan Waga next week. Note the title: "GAN WAGA'S HUNTING." By famous Sidney Drew.*)

Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes Awarded for Interesting Paragraphs.

(If You Do Not Win a Prize This Week—You May Next!)

All Efforts in this Competition should be Addressed to: The GEM LIBRARY, "My Readers' Own Corner," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER!

"POOH!"

A nigger from North America had been for a short holiday in Canada, and on his return he told his mistress of his adventures. "And while I was dere, Miss Lucy, I went into de white man's church, and de white man, he took me all up de corridor an'——" "When you are speaking of a church, Sam, you should say 'aisle,' and not 'corridor.'" "He done took me all up de aisle, right up to de front, and he gone and set me on de front bench, Miss Lucy, in de middle of two white ladies. W'at you t'ink ob dat, Miss Lucy? Me, poor nigger man, in de middle ob de two white ladies on de front bench!" "That was all right, Sam, but you must not say 'bench.' You must say 'pew.'" "Pew, Miss Lucy, pew? Dat was w'at de two white ladies said!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to I. D. Alnett, The Palace, Hampton Court.

LITTLE BY LITTLE!

"Very sad, very sad, sir!" said the doctor. "I greatly regret to tell you your wife's mind is completely gone." "Well, I'm not surprised, doctor," returned the husband. "She's been giving me a piece of it every day for the last fifteen years!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Edmund Lachapelle, 45a, St. Familes Street, Montreal, Canada.

NOT GUILTY!

A certain lady, upon engaging a new cook, was careful to impress upon her that no followers were allowed, and that the last cook was discharged through breaking that rule. Shortly afterwards, suspecting that everything was not all right in the culinary department, she paid a surprise visit to the kitchen, where, during a tour of inspection, she discovered a stalwart soldier standing bolt upright in a cupboard. "Bridget!" she cried. "What is this doing here?" "Faix, ma'am, he must have been left there by your last cook!" roplied Bridget innocently.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Goslett, Treaty Cottage, Albert Road, Woodstock, South Africa.

WHY NOT?

A young man entered a cafe for dinner one day, and soon the band began to play all the liveliest tunes. After a while he got up from his table and walked up to the conductor of the band and said: "Do you play by request?" "Oh, yes, sir, we play anything by request," answered the conductor. "Well," remarked the young man, with a smile, "do you mind playing dominoes while I finish my dinner?"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. T. Hughes, 100, High Street, Connah's Quay, nr. Chester.

A NATURAL MISTAKE!

As no one else could be found, Skimpole was asked to play in a practice hockey match. He agreed, but as his time is chiefly taken up with the works of Professor Balmycrumpet, his knowledge of the game is decidedly limited, and he was repeatedly offending by raising his stick above his shoulder. "Sticks!" was repeatedly shouted at him, and thinking the players were alluding to his thin legs, he approached Kildare, who was refereeing the match. "I wish to protest against this vulgar abuse," he said. "I know my legs are not robust, but if those fellows don't stop calling them sticks, I shall certainly refuse to finish the match." "It's all right," said Kildare, smiling, "they're alluding to hockey sticks, not walking sticks!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to P. Haslam, 152, Molyneux Road, Kensington, Liverpool.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

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