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FORM-MASTER 'SACKED'!

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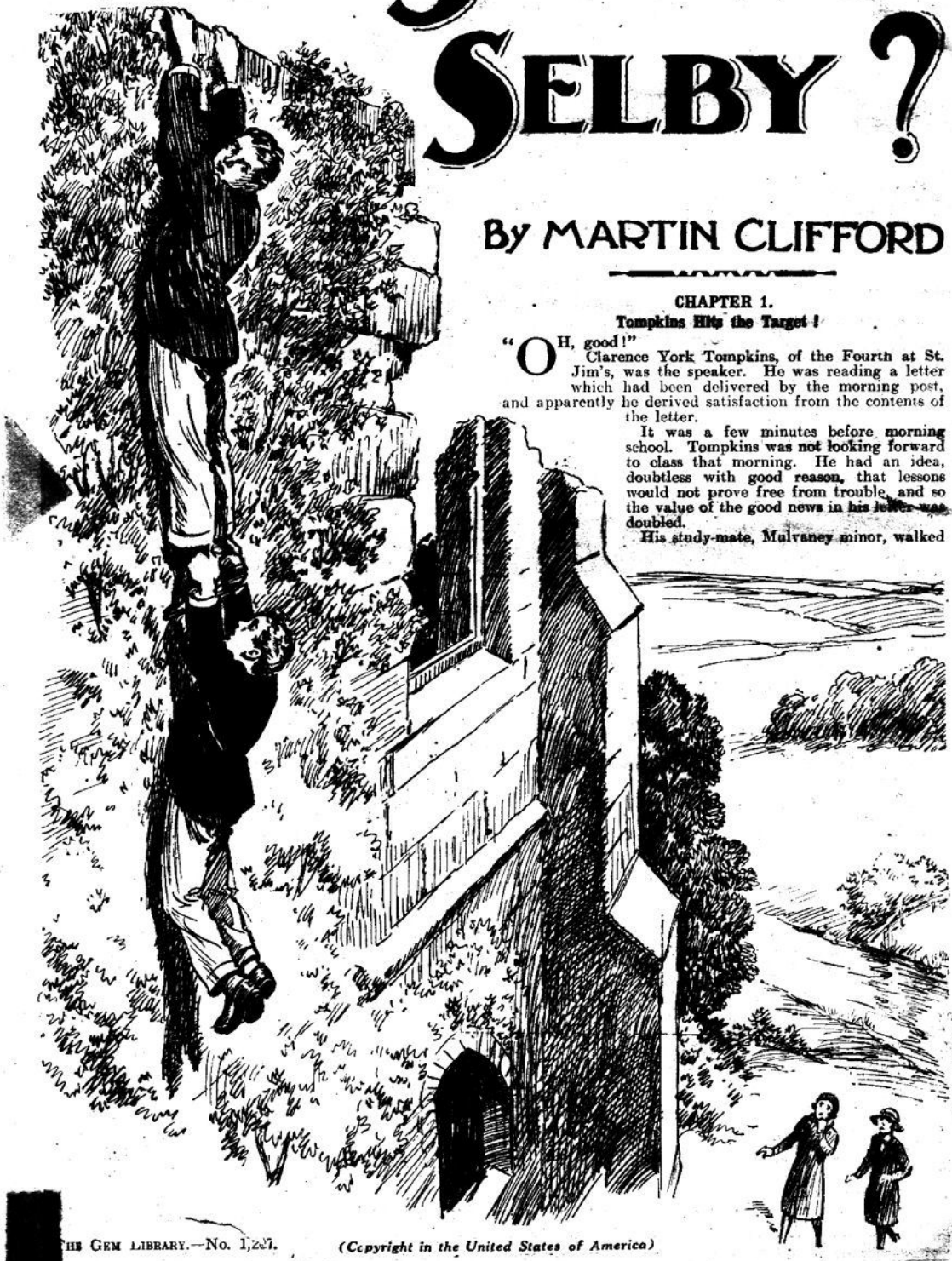
WHO PUT A SACK ON MR. SELBY? WAS IT RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW?—

WHO 'SACKED' SELBY?

By MARTIN CLIFFORD



CHAPTER 1.
Tompkins Hits the Target!

"OH, good!"

Clarence York Tompkins, of the Fourth at St. Jim's, was the speaker. He was reading a letter which had been delivered by the morning post, and apparently he derived satisfaction from the contents of the letter.

It was a few minutes before morning school. Tompkins was not looking forward to class that morning. He had an idea, doubtless with good reason, that lessons would not prove free from trouble, and so the value of the good news in his letter was doubled.

His study-mate, Mulvaney minor, walked

in, whistling cheerily. Judging by his looks, the Irish junior had also received good news.

"Heard about Lathom?" he chirruped joyfully.

Tompkins looked up from the letter.

"What about him?"

"Ill!" said Mulvaney, beaming. "Seedy! Groggy!"

"What?"

"Sure! Touch of bronchitis, or pneumonia, or cholera, or something. The doctor darlint says he'll have to stay in bed for a few days."

"Oh, good!"

For the second time that morning Tompkins had received good news.

Owing to the fact that he had, the previous evening, purchased a thrilling novel entitled "The Sign of Blood; or, the Mongol's Magic!" Clarence Tompkins had neglected to do his preparation. The time for prep had occurred just as Tompkins had reached the eighth chapter, where Ping Pong, the villainous Chinaman, entrapped the hero in a den of poisonous spiders. In the circumstances, prep was impossible. Tompkins had been compelled to read on and on until he reached the end of the book.

But he felt, with some reason, that it would be useless to explain this to Mr. Lathom. The master of the Fourth was one of those narrow-minded persons who considered preparation far more important than dens of spiders, poisonous or otherwise. Tompkins was convinced that Mr. Lathom might object. Such things had happened before in Tompkins' experience.

So, although he was not hard-hearted, and felt sorry for Mr. Lathom, Tompkins was glad to hear that he was not going to take the Fourth that morning. The job would probably devolve upon a prefect, and a prefect was a much easier proposition to handle than a master.

"Oh, good!" he said.

"I expect Kildare will take the Form, intoirely," grinned Mulvaney. "You're lucky, Tommy! Lathom would have landed you for not doing your prep."

"You bet!" said Tompkins, with satisfaction.

Mulvaney's eye dwelt on the letter in Tompkins' hand. The Irish junior looked hopeful.

"Got a remittance, darlint?" he asked. "Money is mighty tight in this study."

"Nunno! There's no money in the letter, but——"

Mulvaney's interest dropped. He turned to the door.

"But it's good news, all the same," said Tompkins. "You'll be glad to hear what's in this letter, Micky!"

"Oh!" Mulvaney turned back. "What is ut? Hamper on the way?"

"Nunno, but——"

"If you mane that a registered letther is coming for yez——"

"Nunno, but——"

"Or perhaps it's a parcel, intoirely?"

"No!" yelled Tompkins. "Nothing of the kind! My Cousin Joan——"

"Eh?"

"She's come over from Canada and is paying a visit to my house," explained Tompkins. "She's a good sort! She's rather grown-uppish—she's about twenty-two—but she's a ripping sport."

Mulvaney snorted. As a substitute for remittances, hampers, registered letters, and parcels, Mulvaney did not think much of Cousin Joan. In fact, he said as much.

"Bless your Cousin Joan!"

"And my sister Mary——"

"Yes, and your sister Mary," nodded Mulvaney, extending his list to include this new addition.

"But my cousin and my sister are coming on a picnic to Wayland Abbey this afternoon," Tompkins went on. "And they've invited me to go over there and meet them."

"Oh!" said Mulvaney, interested again. "If you mane that you can take a pal with yez——"

"Nunno! I'm going alone, of course——"

"Then bless your Cousin Joan, and bother your sister Mary, and blow the picnic, and dash Wayland Abbey!" snorted Mulvaney, anxious to be strictly impartial in his maledictions. He swung out of the study in disgust.

Tompkins, however, re-read the letter with satisfaction. It was some years since he had last seen his Cousin Joan; but he had a very affectionate remembrance of her, and was quite bucked at the idea of meeting her again. Possibly the picnic also helped to cheer him up. Funds were low in the study, and an afternoon picnic would come as a relief.

Form master found bound . . . and "sacked"! If his assailant's found *he's* bound to be sacked!

Fortunately it was a half-holiday that afternoon. Wayland Abbey was not more than thirty minutes' walk from the school. It was a classic spot for a picnic—a nice stretch of green turf with a background of mouldering ruins.

Tompkins put the letter in his pocket, and was about to leave the study, when he was brought up by a yell from outside.

"You fellows!"

It was Cardew's voice. Tompkins looked out of his study window, and saw Cardew, with his chums Levison and Clive, on the path below. The three Fourth Form juniors were filling in the time until morning school.

"What's up?" asked Tompkins.

"Heave down that footer out of my study, Tommy!" called up Cardew. "We're going to have a punt about until class."

"You want a football out of your study?"

Cardew sighed. It was a little failing of Tompkins' that he took about ten minutes to grasp a thing.

"Yes!" bawled Cardew. "Look alive, old bean! We've only a few minutes!"

"Whereabouts in your study is it?"

"In the corner!" roared Cardew. "Use your little eyes, Tommy."

"In the corner of your study?"

"Yes!" yelled Cardew.

Clive grinned.

"I might as well cut into the House myself and get it," he said. "It'll be quicker."

"It's all right—he's gone to fetch it!" growled Cardew.

"What is all this shouting on the path here?" demanded a snappish voice.

It was Mr. Selby, the short-tempered master of the Third. He came up to the three chums, bristling with irritability.

"Can't you boys go into the quadrangle if you wish to bawl about in this disgraceful way?" he snapped.

"We weren't bawlin', sir," replied Cardew respectfully. "We haven't started yet. We're goin' to begin in a minute."

"What—what—what?"

"Foot-bawlin', sir," explained Cardew innocently. "We're waitin' for the ball now."

Lurking grins appeared on the faces of Levison and Clive. Mr. Selby snorted like a horse with snuffles.

"You are impertinent, Cardew."

"Oh, sir!"

"You are an ill-mannered boy!"

Cardew opened his lips, and would doubtless have made a retort which would have earned him a further reprimand, if Fate had not ordained otherwise. Before he could utter so much as a syllable, the face of Clarence York Tompkins appeared at the window above, and the voice of Tompkins shouted cheerfully.

"Here you are!"

A football sailed out of the window. If Tompkins had practised for months, he could not have brought off a better shot. The ball landed diametrically in the centre of Mr. Selby's mortar-board.

Squonk!

"Oooooooh!"

The football, bouncing on Mr. Selby's head, knocked his mortar-board over his eyes and obliterated his view. It was a perfect "header," such as any good centre-forward would have been pleased to make. Levison trapped the ball as it fell to the ground.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Cardew audibly.

Clarence York Tompkins stood frozen to the window with horror.

Mr. Selby took off the remains of an elegant mortar-board and stared at it balefully. Then he gazed about him in wonder.

"Wha-at was that?" he gurgled.

His gimlet eye lighted on the football, and then on Cardew's grinning face, and finally on the quivering form of Clarence York Tompkins at the window above him. Mr. Selby drew a deep breath. The drama was revealed to him, and the plot laid bare.

"Boy, your name is Tompkins, I think?" he ground out.

"Oh! Yessir!" groaned Tompkins.

"Did you—did you have the temerity to discharge a football at my head?"

"Oh crikey!"

"Answer me!" thundered Selby.

"It—it was an accident, sir," Tompkins stuttered. "I didn't know you were there—really, sir."

Mr. Selby fixed him with a baleful glare for about five minutes, and then transferred his fiery eye to Cardew.

"Cardew! You laughed, I think?"

"Yes, sir!"

"The situation struck you as funny, perhaps?" said Mr. Selby, savagely ironic.

"Yes, sir! I'm sorry; but——"

"Very good! Oh, very good!"

That was all! Not another word! Mr. Selby turned on his heel and strode away. Levison and Clive, who had expected to see Cardew hauled off to the Head, or reported to Railton, stared after him.

"What's up with Selby?" asked Clive, in wonder. "Is he getting good-tempered, or what? Surely he's not going to let it go at that?"

Cardew shook his sage head.

"This is sinister, my dear men!" he said. "If Selby had gone up into the air like a rocket, I could have understood it. But just walkin' away like that—there's more in it than meets the eye. He's got some deep scheme for making it hot for me."

"Gone to report you, perhaps."

Cardew shook his head again.

"He'd have collared me and taken me with him. No; the dear man's got another game on. I saw the look in his giddy eye. I'm for it!"

"If it had been Levison, it would have been different," grinned Clive. "He could have taken it out of Levison's minor. He's in the Third."

"Oh, well, bother him, anyway!" yawned Cardew. "Let's go and punt that footer about, if we're going to. It'll be classes in a moment."

And the three chums, dismissing Mr. Selby from their minds, went along to the football ground.

CHAPTER 2.
Not a Happy Morning!

"SELBY!"

"Oh, scissors!"

There was a gasp of dismay.

The Fourth Form had assembled in the Form-room, waiting for the prefect who was to take the Form in the absence of Mr. Lathom. The Form, as a whole, were sorry that Mr. Lathom was laid up with bronchitis, or pneumonia, or cholera, or something; but they were looking forward to an easy time, after a spell of hard work.

But when the door opened it was no prefect who entered the room. It was the snappish Third Form master, Mr. Selby, and a general gasp of dismay went up. The Form were not likely to have an easy time while Selby was in charge. Indeed, their easy time would commence when Lathom returned.

Most despondent of all were Cardew and Tompkins. Cardew perceived now why Mr. Selby was nursing his vengeance. The master had known that he was to take the Fourth that morning, and so he was assured of being in a position to correct Cardew if he was found to be in error. And it was any odds that Cardew would be found to be in error before that morning had elapsed.

Mr. Selby, probably, was not unjust; but he did not err on the side of mercy. In the ordinary way, Cardew might have managed to scrape through with his construe. He had done his preparation—after a fashion—and might have managed to satisfy Mr. Lathom. But with a master specially on the look-out for the slightest flaw, it was not likely to pass muster.

Selby knew that, and so did Cardew. There was not the faintest possible shadow of a chance that Cardew would not be asked to construe. Selby was pretty sure to pick on him right away. So Cardew looked, and felt, uncomfortable.

Mr. Selby put his books on the desk and fixed his pince-nez on his somewhat beaky nose. Then he glanced over the Form. The Fourth, that morning, might have been so many statues. They sat still, on their very best behaviour.

"The master of this Form has, unfortunately, been taken ill, and Dr. Holmes has requested me to deputise for him. I trust that I shall find no cause for dissatisfaction in your behaviour this morning."

Mellish, who was sitting between Herries and Tompkins, furtively edged a box of drawing-pins into his pocket. It had been Percy Mellish's intention to place those drawing-pins, point upwards, on the seats of the fellows nearest him, and so cause a little harmless and amusing relaxation. But under Mr. Selby's lowering frown Mellish thought better of this intention.

Mr. Selby rested a smouldering eye on Jack Blake.

"Blake, what portion of Virgil is set for to-day?"

"Liber seven," gasped Blake. "Page 186, sir. The part where Æneas sees the pig."

Mr. Selby breathed hard.

"If by the word pig, Blake," he said, in grinding tones, "you are referring to the prophetic white sow of Tiberinus, god of the river——"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" Blake gasped.

"Then you will write it out twenty times after school to impress upon your mind that the country of Latium was not, as you seem to think, a farmyard." Mr. Selby was grandly and gloomily sarcastic. "Open your books!"

The juniors duly opened their books. Tompkins stared dumbly and incredulously at the words of P. Virgilius Maro. Doubtless that ancient gentleman had meant something when he wrote, "Ecce autem subitum, atque oculis mirabile monstrum," etc., but the meaning of those words was hidden from Tompkins as in a glass darkly.

In his state of perspiring apprehension he couldn't have construed "hic, hæc, hoc, hunc, hanc," etc. He blinked hopelessly at the wretched words. At the back of his mind he had a dim suspicion that "ecce" meant "behold!" and possibly "oculis" had something to do with the eyes; but, this apart, he was hopelessly at a loss. Fervently he prayed that he might not be called upon to construe.

"Cardew will commence," snapped Mr. Selby.

Cardew smiled contemptuously. Mr. Selby was crude. Had he been a wise gentleman he would have disguised his desire for revenge by picking upon Cardew casually, half-way through the lesson. And, as a matter of fact, it was silly, in any case, to make Cardew begin, for the juniors usually prepared the first part of the lesson better than the latter part.

This proved to be the case now.

"'Ecce autem subitum atque oculis mirabile monstrum,'" drawled Cardew, with a sarcastic inflexion.

"Construe!" rasped Selby.

"Behold, a sign marvellous to view!"

Mr. Selby pursed his lips.

"Yes; but I think we'll include 'subitum' into the sentence, if you don't mind," he said.

Cardew's sarcastic smile grew more pronounced. Selby evidently wasn't going to let anything pass.

"Behold, a sign sudden and marvellous to view," he amended. "'Candida per silvam cum fetu concolor albo procubuit viridique in litore conspicitursus.' Shining in the wood, a sow of—of the same colour—of the same colour white——"

"That is incorrect, Cardew."

"I know it is, sir," nodded Cardew, bestowing a wink on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who sat next him.

"And why is it incorrect?"

"Because white isn't a colour, sir," Cardew replied coolly. "We learnt that in the Third Form. White isn't a colour. Virgil was talking out of his hat, sir!"

"Boy!"

"Of course, I suppose we ought to make allowances, sir," said Cardew cheerfully, while the class gasped. "I mean, he lived hundreds of years ago, and probably didn't know anything better."

"B-boy!" stuttered Mr. Selby.

"Still, it's wrong," added Cardew, with a shake of his head. "I am glad you noticed it, sir."

"When you have finished your comments upon the outstanding poet of the finest civilisation the world has known, Cardew," ground out the scandalised Form master, "perhaps you will have the kindness to step out here and hear my views on the subject."

"Oh, I know you're going to cane me!" said Cardew recklessly. "You'd have found an excuse if I hadn't given you one."

There was a gasp from the Form. Mr. Selby turned purple.

"Silence, boy! Another word, and I will take you to your headmaster. Bend over that chair."

The junior bent over nonchalantly. Mr. Selby administered four hefty swishes scientifically. He stopped at the fourth, doubtless considering that he need not give Cardew his full punishment in one instalment, so to speak. There would be other occasions shortly.

Cardew's eyes were burning savagely as he went back to his seat. He sat down, and wriggled involuntarily. Mr. Selby pursed his lips.

"You need not sit down for a moment, Cardew. You have not finished yet. Kindly take that phrase as a whole and construe it again, giving each adjective its proper noun."

"Yes, sir," said Cardew, gritting his teeth. "Shining in the blessed green wood was a dashed silly sow of the same rotten colour of her beastly white litter stretched out on the fatheaded green bank before her idiotic eyes."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the class.

Mr. Selby danced with rage.

"Silence!" he roared. "Silence! If I hear another sound I will detain the whole Form! Cardew, step out here!"

An unnatural and deathly stillness descended on the Form, and Cardew strolled languidly to the front again. Mr. Selby clutched his best friend—the cane.

"You—you dare to interpolate those vulgar and meaningless adjectives into your rendering of the Æneid!" he glared. "I will crush this rebellious spirit in you, Cardew! You shall not defy me with impunity. Bend over that chair again!"

Cardew bent over.

Swish, swish, swish!

"Ooo!" came a murmur from the anguished junior.

Selby was putting some beef into the task.

Swish, swish, swish!

"Yoooop!"

The faces of the juniors were dark at this savage castigation. But not so dark as Cardew's. His face was that of a demon as he stood up again. Probably even Mr. Selby could see that he had had enough for the time being.

"Go to your place, Cardew!" he said coldly, and Cardew limped to his seat.

Mr. Selby's eye roamed over the Form and rested upon Clarence York Tompkins. Tompkins writhed and perspired gently.

"Tompkins! You will continue!" he said grimly.

Tompkins half rose.

"Oh, no, sir; not me, sir!" he whimpered feebly, thinking, not without reason, that there would be a painful time ahead if he started.

"What—what! Pick up your book and continue at the place Cardew left off. You hear me?"

Tompkins clutched his book and rose up. Deeply, from the very bottom of his soul, did he regret the time he had spent on "The Sign of Blood; or, the Mongol's Magic" the previous evening. The Æneid was not nearly so interesting as poisonous spiders, but it saved a deal of trouble in the Form-room.

The ill-starred youth blinked at his book.

"'Quam pius Æneas tibi enim, tibi, maxima Iuno,'" he stuttered dismally. "Oh crumbs! I—I mean——" And then, like a ray of light, the words "pius Æneas" and "maxima Iuno" hit him in the vision. He was on safe ground here, at any rate. The book was full of "pius Æneas" and "maxima Iuno." "'The good Æneas and the mighty Juno——'" he began.

Selby stopped him.

"What makes you put a conjunction in that sentence, Tompkins?" he asked, like a rusty saw going through knotted wood.

Tompkins had by this time forgotten there were such things as conjunctions. He would not have known a conjunction if it had bitten him at that moment.

"Oh dear!" he wailed. "The good Æneas—er—the mighty Juno—er—tibi—tibi——"

Selby gazed at him.

"Is it possible, Tompkins, that you cannot even construe a simple personal pronoun?"

Evidently it was. Tompkins couldn't have construed his cousin's letter just then. He simply perspired with terror and goggled wildly at Selby.

"Boy! You will write out twenty times that the word 'tibi' is the dative case of the second person singular. I should cane a Third Form boy who did not know that, Tompkins."

"Oh, sus-scissors!" groaned Tompkins.

"Continue. Mactat sacra ferens——"

"Mactat sacra ferens—mum-making sacred ferns——"

"Wha-a-at?"

In spite of the gravity of the situation, a titter ran round the Form. Tompkins gulped. And then he suddenly remembered that he had had the word "sacra" only the previous day. It was "sacrifice"—he remembered it now.

He tried again.

"Making a sacrifice of some ferns——"

"Ferns!" echoed Selby blankly. "Is this boy totally ignorant of the Latin tongue? Step out in front of the class, Tompkins!"

Tompkins shivered. He had not the hardihood of fellows like Cardew, Blake, or Levison. He walked out trembling. Mr. Selby's cane sprang automatically to his grasp.

He collared Tompkins with one hand, and with the other he wielded the cane.

"Perhaps this will help you"—swish!—"to pay a little more attention"—swish—"to Latin grammar"—swish!—"and in order to implant it on your mind"—swish—"you may stay in the Form-room during morning break"—swish!—"and conjugate the verb 'ferre,' to carry, including fero"—swish!—"ers"—swish!—"fert"—swish!—"ferimus, fertis, and ferunt"—swish, swish!

Squonk! The ball landed on Mr. Selby's head, knocking his mortar-board over his eyes!

"Oooogh! Whooop! Ow-wow-wow!" shrieked Tompkins, struggling wildly.

The Fourth Form juniors looked angry and disgusted—with the exception of Mellish, who had just placed one of his drawing-pins on Tompkins' empty seat. Two fellows so far had been called on to construe, and both of them had been caned in a severe and unwarrantable manner.

The fellows were not aware, of course, that Selby had a special grudge against Cardew and Tompkins because of the football incident. They were all feeling apprehensive. Other fellows had scamped prep the previous evening. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had spent the time he should have devoted to prep in getting ink-stains out of a pair of elegant trousers, and he was filled with the most dismal forebodings as to what would happen when he was called upon.

He needn't have worried. Selby was concerned mainly with Cardew and Tompkins. He was likely to be a trifle easier with the others—not very much, but a trifle.

Tompkins crawled back to his seat, moaning feverishly.

He dropped wearily on to the form; but the next moment he sprang upwards again with a fearful yell.

"Oooooooogh!"

There was a pile of books on his desk. His frantic dive sent them flying all over the room. The inkpot overbalanced and ran down the desk like a black waterfall, sprinkling ink on the form of Tompkins, who had now made a forced landing on the floor.

Tompkins sat on the floor, smothered with ink, and gurgling. Mr. Selby and the juniors stared blankly.

"Mmmmmmmmm!" mumbled the unfortunate junior, gouging ink out of his eyes.

"Tompkins! Boy!" roared Mr. Selby. "What is the meaning of this pantomime? Answer me!"

"Ow! Wow! Ooogh!" groaned Tompkins. "Some rotter put a drawing-pin on my seat. I sat on it. Ow! I'm all inky! Ow!"

"A drawing-pin!" hooted Selby. "Wretched boy! I do not believe a word you say. You are deliberately trying to waste the time of this Form!"

"Do you think I shot this ink all over my chivvy on purpose?" roared Tompkins, quite forgetting his terror in his excitement. "I sat on a drawing-pin——"

"Silence! Go to the bath-room and clean yourself. You will be detained this afternoon to make up for your wanton waste of time this morning!"

Tompkins could scarcely credit his ears.

"Dud-detained!" he stuttered. "Please, sir——"

"You may go to the bath-room, boy!"

"Thank you, sir!" gasped Tompkins. "But I'm sorry I can't stay in this afternoon. I've got a most important engagement, sir. My cousin——"

"Bless my soul! Did you hear me say you were detained, Tompkins?"

"Oh, yessir! But I've got to meet my cousin—a picnic from Canada, sir!" stuttered Tompkins, getting a little confused in his haste. "I shan't have another chance, sir. If I don't see her to-day——"

"Go!" roared Mr. Selby.

Tompkins went. There are some tones of voice with which there is no arguing. This was one of them.

Lessons proceeded in a breathless atmosphere. Percy Mellish, especially, was anxious not to catch Mr. Selby's eye. Had Mellish done the right thing he would have owned up about the drawing-pin. But such a course of action never even occurred to Percy Mellish.

Lines and lickings fell thick and fast that morning. Cardew, who was in his most reckless mood, reaped five hundred lines by asking Mr. Selby a single question. It appeared that Cardew was anxious to discover the correct Latin construction of an English sentence. Would it be better, he wanted to know, to write "The object hath descended upon his head," or, alternatively, "Upon his head hath the object descended"? Possibly Mr. Selby did not know the answer. At any rate, answer made he none, save to reward Cardew with the five hundred lines aforesaid.

All this was bad enough for the Fourth; but worse was to follow. They could have stood lines and lickings at a pinch; but Mr. Selby's final words, as Blake said, "fairly took the biscuit."

Mr. Selby spoke the fatal words as the Fourth were putting up their books.

"I believe I am not far wrong in saying that this Form is the most unruly Form at St. James'!" he said unpleasantly. "Comments upon the behaviour of this Form have reached my ears many times in the past; but I have, of course, been powerless to intervene. Now I shall make it my business to do so. I have heard that this Form is fond of indulging in what you call 'raggings,' free fights, and brutal horseplay in Rylcombe Wood and in the village, on half-holidays."

"Great pip!" murmured Blake dazedly.

"On one occasion I myself witnessed a vulgar splashing-match by the river, when the boys of this Form were deliberately attacking certain juniors from the New House. That kind of thing degrades the reputation of this school, and it must cease."

"Silly old ass!" murmured Blake, who was the ring-leader in the splashing match referred to. It was merely an ordinary house-rag, which was thoroughly enjoyed by the juniors of both camps. However, it was not much use pointing this out to Mr. Selby.

"This afternoon," went on the cheerful Selby, "I personally intend to walk through Rylcombe Wood to the village and back. I shall keep my eyes open for any signs of misbehaviour by the boys of this Form, and I warn such culprits as I may discover that I shall deal out punishment with no sparing hand."

"As per usual!" murmured Digby inaudibly.

"That is all I have to say!" concluded Mr. Selby. "To such of you as are contemplating a walk through the wood or to the village this afternoon I give a word of advice. Behave yourselves circumspectly. If you do not, the consequences may be very far from pleasant. That is all. The class may dismiss."

And in a state of simmering fury the class duly dismissed.

CHAPTER 3.
Tompkins Asks for It!

"THE rotter!"

"The outsider!"

"The old tyrant!"

The Fourth were in that happy state known as unanimous. To a man they uttered words of condemnation, and it is revealing no very dark secret to state that the object of their wrath was the misguided Selby.

The juniors had writhed under his final words in the Form-room. He actually proposed to use his little brief authority in the Fourth to hunt around Rylcombe Wood and the village to find out if they were indulging in rags. It was the absolute, utter limit. They felt like little boys who dared not speak for fear their nurse might hear.

Blake was boiling with indignation as the juniors went up the stairs.

"The beastly old tyrant!" he said sulphurously, sparring in the air. "Wouldn't I like just to knock that nasty sneer off his moth-eaten old face!"

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Selby weally is the limit, deah boys! I vewy stwongly disappwove of bein' chivvied about the place on a half-holiday, like a pwisonah let out of gaol!"

"You're lucky to be able to be chivvied!" moaned Tompkins feverishly. "I'm detained—all the blessed afternoon. And I specially wanted to meet my cousin before she goes back to Canada. She's coming to Wayland Abbey for a picnic."

"Wough luck, deah boy!"

"Dash it all! It's too thick!" exclaimed Blake. "Couldn't you have explained it to Selby?"

"Didn't I?" howled Tompkins. "Does he let a man explain anything?"

"Appeal to Railton," suggested Digby.

"That's no use," said Blake. "Railton's bound to stick up for Selby. The beaks always stick together. You'll have to grin and bear it, Tommy."

"Will I?" snapped Tompkins. "I shall cut detention."

"Ass! You'd be caught."

"Why should I? Selby's going down to the village. You heard him say so. I could get back by five."

"Give it a miss, old bean!" advised Blake kindly. "There would only be more trouble if you were caught—and you'd be bound to get copped."

"Rot! Think I'm going to let my cousin down when she's come here purposely to see me?" howled Tompkins.

"It would be hard cheese, and no mistake! But——"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy! As a fellow of tact and judgment, I advise you not to cut detention."

"Blow your tact and bless your judgment!" snorted Tompkins. "I'm cutting it!"

He stamped off moodily, and the juniors followed him with sympathetic eyes.

"Beastly hard luck on the poor little blighter!" said Herries. "'Tain't as if he was used to lickings like me. He's only a harmless little fathead, and Selby fairly savaged him. Two lickings, fifty lines, a Latin declension, and an afternoon's detention—all in one morning. Phew!"

"It's beastly mean and rotten!" snapped Blake. "Selby ought to be hung!"

"Hanged!" corrected Digby. "Here comes Cardew! Doesn't look happy, does he?"

Cardew mouched sullenly along the passage, having shaken off his chums, Levison and Clive. He favoured the juniors with a scowl.

"Feeling bad, old top?" asked Blake sympathetically.

"Not so bad as Selby will be feeling when I've done with him!" responded Cardew, between his teeth. "I'll make the old tyrant sit up! I'll get my own back for this morning!"

The juniors gave condoling murmurs.

"Just because that ass Tompkins bunged a football on his silly nut, and I laughed," explained Cardew. "I've bagged two lickings and five hundred lines!"

"You did rather ask for it, you know."

"I wasn't going to let Selby think I was afraid of him, even if I did know his little game. I tell you men that this is going to cost Selby a lot of worry. Wait till I get half a chance of paying him back, that's all!"

"Better cheese it, old man," advised Blake. "You'll only give him a further chance of lamming into you."

"I don't care. You saw how he went for me this morning!"

"Well, I bagged twenty lines for calling that giddy white sow a pig," said Blake. "And, after all, the brute was a pig—you can't get away from it."

"And I bagged a licking," supplemented Herries. "Pretty well every man bagged lines or a licking."

"Nobody went through it like Tompkins and I!" gritted Cardew. "Just because the old villain had his knife into us!"

"What are you going to do to Selby?" asked Dig.

"I don't know—yet!"

Cardew stamped away, scowling. Arthur Augustus shook a sage head.

"It weally is too bad!" he declared. "When Cardew gets one of these fits he is a weckless boundah! And it's all Selby's fault. Cardew's constwuc was all wight till Selby started waggin' him!"

"Bless him!" growled Blake. "Cardew will get up to something and land himself in trouble. It'll be no use explaining to the beak that it was all Selby's silly fault. I'm glad I'm not a Third Form man!"

The juniors went in to dinner. There was not one of them but hoped fervently that Mr. Lathom's bronchitis, pneumonia, or cholera would soon disappear.

After dinner the Fourth Form juniors dispersed, in far from pleasant frames of mind. Those fellows who had decided to visit the village, the wood, or the river, had to bear in mind the fact that they must repress their high spirits for once. The slightest jollity, if seen by Mr. Selby, would be counted as misbehaviour.

Most miserable of all was Clarence York Tompkins, as he wended his weary way to the Form-room. Possibly Cardew, who had mouched off somewhere by himself, was nearly as gloomy—but not quite. Tompkins was a picture of despair and desperation.

He had decided that, come what might, he would cut detention and meet his cousin. There is a point beyond which even the mildest junior cannot be driven, and that point had been reached. Tompkins, usually a mild, inoffensive fellow, was pitched up to deeds of deadly daring.

He took his seat drearily and stared at the clock. Mr. Selby came in, dressed for walking, in a frock coat and shining silk hat.

"You will remain in this room until five o'clock, Tompkins!" he snapped. "You need not waste your time. You may copy out a Georgic or two, and improve your scanty knowledge of the Latin language!"

With which consolatory sentiment, Mr. Selby passed out of the room and shut the door.

Tompkins glanced at the clock again. Allowing himself half an hour to get to Wayland Abbey, and half an hour to get back again, he had no time to waste. If he was going at all, he had to get on with it.

Allowing Mr. Selby five minutes' grace, Tompkins shut his Virgil, bowled it overarm into the fireplace, and walked quickly out of the room. He stuffed his cap into his pocket, and, looking about him cautiously, he edged down the steps into the quad, and fairly bolted around the corner of the House.

Unfortunately, Mr. Selby elected that particular moment to walk towards the House from the Close. At the corner there was a desperate collision.

Tompkins fell one way, Mr. Selby the other. They sat on the ground and blinked at each other. Then they made remarks, almost simultaneously:

"Oooogh!"

"Whoogh!"

CHAPTER 4.

The Battle of Selby's Hat!

THERE ensued a silence. Tompkins, with praiseworthy courtesy, waited for Mr. Selby to open the conversation. As soon as he had once more recovered his breath, Mr. Selby did so.

"Boy!" he said, and his voice sounded as though it was being produced by some sort of broken-down machinery. "Boy! Tompkins! Do I find you here?"

"Oh lor'!" groaned Tompkins.

"Boy!" roared Mr. Selby, struggling up. "Have you dared to absent yourself from the Form-room against my specific command? Answer me!"

"Oh dear!"

"Have you actually contemplated setting my orders at defiance in this matter? How dare you?" He reached out, and his fingers closed upon Tompkins' ear. "Come—come with me!"

"Whoop!" yelled Tompkins, as his ear was drawn swiftly towards the doorway. "Leggo! Ow! My ear!"

Tompkins accompanied the outraged master to the Form-room. A number of fellows watched the procession; some with approval, some with sympathy. Tompkins felt like King Charles the First, in the picture in Big Hall, where he was walking to his execution through a long line of soldiers and lookers-on.

Mr. Selby towed the offending junior into the room, leaped at the cupboard, took out his stoutest cane, and fairly made the instrument ring on Tompkins.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yaroooh!" shrieked Tompkins. "Oooop! Stoppit! Oh crikey! Whooop!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yoooooop!"

"And if you dare to presume to even think of leaving this room again until I give you leave," said Mr. Selby, panting heavily, "I will take you to your headmaster for a flogging. Be silent, wretched boy!"

"Ow-wow-wow!"

"You understand me? If you dare leave this room before five o'clock, you shall be reported to Dr. Holmes for a public flogging."

Mr. Selby threw the cane into the cupboard, and strode out of the room. He left behind him a mournful, painful, but exceedingly determined Tompkins. So far from having discouraged Tompkins in his determination to see his cousin, Mr. Selby had merely goaded him to a point of reckless indifference. Tompkins, in his normal state of mind, would not have dreamed of flouting authority in such a barefaced manner, but that morning he had been so heavily punished that he really didn't care what punishment was booked to come next.

He crossed to the window and looked out, wriggling uncomfortably. The high-hatted figure of Mr. Selby dawned on him. The master was striding across the Close in the direction of the main gates. It was a sunny afternoon in spring, and the sun gleamed cheerfully upon Mr. Selby's top-hat as he walked along. A cheeky fag was punting a football near by, and for a moment it looked as though the fag was going to elect Mr. Selby's top-hat to the position of goal. But, to Tompkins' disappointment, he thought better of it.

The junior watched Mr. Selby out of sight, and then gave him a few minutes' grace. After that he opened the door and scuttled away.

Roylance was sunning himself on the steps as Tompkins dashed by.

"Cutting it?" he asked, interested.

"Yes!" jerked out Tompkins.

"Phew!"

"Keep it mum!" urged Tompkins.

"You bet! Whither bound?"

"Wayland Abbey. Picnic."

"Look out for Selby, then," cautioned Roylance. "You'll have to go through Rylcombe Wood to get there. And merry old Selby's dodging about in the wood, looking for horseplay."

Tompkins started.

"Oh, my hat!" he said.

He had forgotten that little detail. Unless he went as far as Wayland and crossed the River Rhyl by the bridge he was bound to go through the footpath in Rylcombe Wood. And he had not nearly enough time to go the long way round. He must chance meeting Selby.

Keeping his wits well about him he trotted down the Rylcombe Road as far as the stile, and, crossing this, set off along the towing-path in the direction of the wood. And it was as he was sprinting along the towing-path by the river that he overhauled Selby.

Rounding a corner rather quickly, he perceived Selby's top-hat gleaming in front of him. Instantly he dived into the bushes and lay low.

Selby was not alone in that spot. A number of village youths were out for an afternoon row in an ancient boat, and they had pulled into the bank at that spot to bump, clump, and frog's-march one of their number, who had declined in the most offensive manner to do any rowing or steering.

It was while this misguided merchant was experiencing all the tortures of the Spanish Inquisition that Selby dawned on the group. Instantly tortured and torturers abandoned the pursuit in favour of a more pressing matter.

"Where did yer get that 'at, where did yer get that tile?" warbled the lanky youth with red hair, who was evidently chief brigand. "Oh, isn't it a nobby one, and quite the latest style!"

Tompkins peered through the bushes. The village rowdies were regarding Mr. Selby with breathless interest, and it was plain that his top-hat was the subject of their regard. Mr. Selby eyed them coldly as he drew level with them.

"'Ow much for the 'at, guv'nor?" inquired a youth of commercial taste.

"You shut up, 'Erb!" admonished another. "The old covey wouldn't sell that 'at. 'E carries 'ome the grub in that 'at, 'e does."

This theory was evidently well supported. Mr. Selby glared.

"Be off, you impertinent little ruffians!" he snapped.

"Oh crimes!"

The youth 'Erb felt that this conversation had gone on long enough. It was all very well to make fun of a top-hat, but, after all, the traditions of boyhood held that top-hats were constructed simply and solely as targets for snowballs, turfs, and other missiles. 'Erb now helped Mr. Selby's hat to fulfil its mission.

Digging a turf from the river-bank he took careful aim and let fly. The education of the village rowdies was deficient in many respects, but there was nothing left to teach them in the matter of aiming straight. 'Erb's aim would have struck envy into the heart of William Tell.

The turf sailed through the air and impinged itself upon the very centre of Mr. Selby's top-hat. The hat flew; Mr. Selby jumped.

"Why, what—what——" he stuttered. And then he turned about with a face of fury.

Unluckily for the grinning 'Erb, Mr. Selby was armed with a thick Rattan walking cane. Two strides carried him up to 'Erb. There was a brief struggle, and when the dust cleared away it was seen that 'Erb was face downwards over Mr. Selby's knee, and that the walking-stick was poised threateningly in the air above a certain part of 'Erb.

"You ill-mannered ruffian!" thundered Mr. Selby. "How dare you discharge your abominable missiles at me? Take that and that!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

'Erb's cry of agony ascended to the stars. 'Erb writhed under the lashing walking-stick, and appealed to his comrades for assistance.

"Whoooop! Leggo! Ow! 'Elp a bloke, can't yer? Yarrooooh!"

The lanky youth approached Mr. Selby in a manner more timid than intimidating.

"'Ere, look 'ere, guv'nor——"

"You wish to share in your companion's castigation?" inquired Selby, pausing in the act of dusting 'Erb's garments with his stick.

The lanky youth did not understand what Mr. Selby meant; but he gathered that it was something unpleasant. He backed away.

Mr. Selby administered two more sharp corrections to the writhing 'Erb, and then picked up his top-hat.

"Be off!" he snapped. "And try to learn a few manners!"

He trod magnificently upon his way. But 'Erb was not done with yet. 'Erb desired revenge. 'Erb did not permit even his father to treat him in the way that Selby had treated him. 'Erb's pride was wounded.

He bent down and picked up a huge boulder from the side of the river. His comrades were alarmed.

"'Ere, stop it!" cried the lanky youth. "You'll kill 'im if you 'it 'im with that!"

"I ain't a-going to 'it 'im!" snarled 'Erb.

Such was not the intention of the master-strategist, as his chums saw the next moment. 'Erb flung the big stone with all his might. But not at Selby.

He flung it into the river at the spot by which Mr. Selby was passing.

A fountain of green water shot up from the river and drenched Mr. Selby like a sudden cloudburst.

"Gug-gug! Ooooooooogh!" gasped the Third Form master, as the river Rhyl left its course and poured itself over him. "What, what—— Ooooggggggh!"

"Bunk!" gasped 'Erb. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" echoed his comrades. And Tompkins, behind the bushes, giggled happily.

The village youths crowded quickly into their ancient boat. But Mr. Selby, after his first shock of surprise and horror, also acted quickly. Clutching his walking-stick, he fairly leaped along the towing-path, dripping fury from every pore.

And then 'Erb made a sickening discovery. When they had pulled into the bank, they had tied the painter in a double-knot about a tree-stump, and try how they might, they couldn't get it undone. They were anchored to the bank.

Selby pranced up, waving his stick. It was the work of a moment to reach out and grab 'Erb by the scruff of the neck. A moment more, and 'Erb was prostrate on the bank. Yet another moment, and 'Erb was going through it.

Whack, whack, whack, whack, whack!

"You—you unnatural little savage!" panted Selby, whacking away as if for a bet. "I'll teach you once and for all to moderate your primæval instincts and pay respect to your elders."

"Oooop! Whooop! Yooop! Gloooop!" moaned the wretched 'Erb, wriggling like a lizard. His companions watched him dumbly.

Mr. Selby—after a while—finished thrashing 'Erb, having completely broken that fine spirit for a time. 'Erb knew when he had had enough. He crawled to the boat, fell in it, and subsided under a seat with a moan. As far as future trouble was concerned, 'Erb was out.

The Third Form master brushed himself as dry as possible with a handkerchief, fielded his top-hat once more, and resumed his walk. He resumed it in a state of indescribable fury.

Woe betide any Fourth Form boy who caught Selby's eye that afternoon.

Tompkins watched the ragged youths push their craft away from the bank, bearing 'Erb, and then came out from his hiding-place, and once more set off along the towpath in Selby's wake.

He was more than ever watchful now. His imagination refused to picture what would happen to him if he ran into Selby after this. It would be something too dreadful to contemplate. His knees knocked at the bare thought of it.

Trotting along silently, his eyes wide for the first gleam of Selby's hat, Tompkins reached the end of the towing-path, and gained the shelter of the wood. If he could only manage to circumvent Selby now, and get in front of him, he could race away to Wayland Abbey as quickly as he liked.

Dodging through the wood, Tompkins contrived this. He swept away from the footpath in a wide circle which brought him nearly to the bank of the river again. Then he bore away back to the footpath, hoping to have got well ahead of the Third Form master.

But just as he reached the footpath, he glimpsed the well-known top-hat approaching him not ten yards away.

He gasped, and crouched behind a large clump of blackthorn, praying feverishly that Selby would not spot him.

It was the most trying period in Tompkins' life. He heard the steady clop! clop! clop! of Selby's footsteps, and knew that, in a few seconds, Selby would pass within three feet of him. Would he be——

His thoughts were diverted by a furious yell.

"Whooooooogh!"

There came sounds of a struggle and a muffled exclamation of surprise and rage.

Tompkins peered through the blackthorn fearfully.

At the sight that met his eyes, he nearly dropped down in a fit.

CHAPTER 5.
The "Sacking" of Selby!

MR. SELBY frowned.

He had been frowning all the time, of course; but this was something extra-special in the way of frowns. The normal expression of Mr. Selby's face was a frown, so when he did frown, his eyebrows nearly met his chin.

"Impertinent scoundrel!" he murmured, tramping steadily through the wood. "Upon my word, I should like to meet that youth's father. I should certainly tell him what I thought of his method of educating his offspring. Bah!"

In saying this, Mr. Selby made a mistake. He would not have liked his meeting with 'Erb's father. 'Erb's parent was a bargee, and in moments of excitement, he had a most unfortunate habit of "bashing" people. He was even then doing twenty-one days for assault, and it is probable that, if he had met Mr. Selby, he would speedily have qualified for a further three weeks.

But Mr. Selby didn't know this, and as he tramped along, he mentally ran over the points he should raise in pointing out 'Erb's defects to his nautical parent.

He had just reached the stage of commenting upon 'Erb's freedom of expression when his thoughts were suddenly arrested by a sack dropping over his head and blotting the sunlight from his eyes.

Now, the normal procedure of a gentleman when a sack drops over his head is to struggle, and this Mr. Selby did. He let out a furious cry, and began to rid himself of the sack.

But the person who had dropped the sack over his head evidently did not desire him to get rid of it, for the sack was drawn tight about his middle, pinioning his arms to his side.

"Mummmmmm!" came a muffled gurgle from Mr. Selby inside the sack.

Really, this was not Mr. Selby's lucky afternoon.

He thought he heard a soft chuckle from his dastardly assailant; but he gave the matter no thought, for just then the person who had dropped the sack on him began to bind a rope around the sack.

So stightly did the rope cut into his wrists that Selby gave a muffled cry. This did not deter the villain who had him in his power. The rope was bound and rebound about his middle and his shoulders, and finally tied in a workmanlike manner at his back.

He stood there, trussed like a chicken, with a sack over his head. His legs, however, were still free.

But not for long. His assailant pushed him up against a tree, and secured him to it.

Came the sound of steadily retreating footsteps, and Mr. Selby was alone with the birds and his own thoughts.

These were, as it may be imagined, of no very pleasant character. He was forced to the conclusion that this was a planned thing. Somebody was waiting for him, hiding behind a bush. Somebody had brought that sack, fully intending to use it on him. Mr. Selby panted with fury and dismay.

Who was it? At first his thoughts turned upon the boy 'Erb. Could it have been 'Erb?

It was not impossible. The sack had been plunged over his head so swiftly that a mere boy could easily have handled him. As far as regards physical possibility, 'Erb could have managed it.

But practically it was by no means certain. He had to assume that 'Erb and his companions pulled their boat into the bank by the wood, cut through the trees ahead of him, and ambushed him with this sack.

It would mean a bit of quick work, but it certainly was not impossible.

But Mr. Selby all this while had a feeling that this assault sprang from deeper waters than that, and almost automatically the name of Cardew sprang to his mind.

This was the kind of thing that Cardew might easily have planned. His reckless nature was a byword in the school. Mr. Selby read the message in his sullen eyes that morning; knew that Cardew was nursing his animosity. If it was to be assumed that this assault was the work of any junior at St. Jim's, it was almost certain to be Cardew.

At this point his reflections were interrupted by the sound of footsteps. Somebody was coming. He heard the unseen person approach him and stop before him.

He wriggled, expecting to be released. But he was not released

For very good reasons.

It was Clarence York Tompkins who was standing before him, and if Clarence York Tompkins released Mr. Selby, Clarence York Tompkins would be flogged. Not much of an inducement to do rescue work.

From behind the blackthorn bush Tompkins had seen it all. He goggled at the wriggling form of Selby—goggled with dismay and perplexity.

What on earth was he to do?

Common justice demanded that he must release Mr. Selby.

Common sense demanded that he must not release Mr. Selby.

It was an awful position.

Tompkins tried to think, staring hard at the wriggling form, clothed in sackcloth and rope. He stretched forward to extricate the master, but he paused. How could he be expected to release Mr. Selby when he knew the moment Selby saw him it meant a flogging?

Besides—and Tompkins paled—what sort of mood would Selby be in when set free? Really, it would be a lot preferable to release a man-eating lion. With a hungry, raging, man-eating lion one might stand a chance of getting off lightly, but with Selby there was not the remotest possibility.

He would be out for blood, and Tompkins had no desire to supply him with a victim.

Mr. Selby wriggled frantically, evidently wondering why he was not released. Tompkins stared at him with a frown on his pale face. What to do—what to do? He simply had not the courage to do the right thing.

And then all at once his difficulty was solved. From farther along the footpath floated a laughing voice.

"Cheese it, Monty!"

It was the voice of Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell. With him were Lowther, Manners, and Handcock, the chums of Study No. 10.

Tompkins jumped for joy and glided like a ghost through the trees.

He disappeared in the direction of Wayland at a great rate, leaving the Shell juniors to extricate the unfortunate Selby.

The books went flying all over the room, the ink-pot overbalanced, and Tompkins landed on the floor!

They came along merrily. Lowther was in one of his poetic moods, and was keeping his chums laughing. Spring often affected Lowther in this manner.

"Oh, father, I hear the sound of guns! Oh, say, what may it be? It's me! I've been and dropped the buns we're saving up for tea!" chanted Lowther. "Oh, to be in England, now that April is there! Whoever wakes in England seems some morning unaware——"

"That a guy is roped beyond belief at the foot of a gosh-darned brushwood sheaf!" finished Cyrus K. Handcock, staring ahead. "Are there any road agents or flour-bag gangs in this part of the world, kids?"

"Road agents?"

"Well, I guess that guy has met somethin' mighty violent," drawled Handcock in his most composed fashion. "I sure did reckon that that kind o' thing wasn't encouraged outside o' God's Own Country."

"What on earth are you talking about?" asked Tom, in perplexity.

"That roped-up guy there!" replied Handcock, pointing ahead.

Three pairs of eyes followed, and three fellows jumped as if a depth-charge had suddenly exploded beneath them.

"What—what—what——"

"Great pip!"

"Oh, holy smoke!"

The juniors hastened forward.

"Who is it?" gasped Tom, drawing a knife from his pocket.

"It's alive, at any rate," commented Handcock casually.

Tom stepped forward and severed the rope which bound the sack about the strange figure. Lowthers and Manners gaped blankly in the background, while the captain of the Shell and Cyrus K. Handcock unwound the rope and pulled up the sacking from the struggling man.

As soon as the sacking was pulled from his head a yell went up.

"Selby!"

"Selby! Oh, my only hat!"

Mr. Selby blinked dizzily at the juniors. The juniors blinked dizzily at Mr. Selby.

"What—what has happened, sir?" stuttered Tom.

"I have been assaulted—violently and brutally assaulted," answered Mr. Selby, in a vinegary tone. "Some—some person has presumed to envelop me in this—this sack and tie me up with rope. Have you any knowledge of this, Merry?"

"Oh crikey! I mean, nunno!" gasped Tom. "We've only just arrived!"

"You did not see any person here as you came up?"

"Nobody at all, sir!"

"Only you, sir," put in Lowther anxiously.

"What—what?" Mr. Selby staggered forward, and then sank down and looked at his ankles.

They were tied with a handkerchief.

"Ha!" he said, struggling with the knot in the handkerchief. "This handkerchief may be an important clue."

"Was it—was it a footpad who attacked you, sir?" ventured Tom.

"No, it was not!" Selby snorted, wrestling with the handkerchief. "My own impression is that it was a junior."

"Not a St. Jim's junior, sir?"

"Undoubtedly!"

"Gug-great pip!"

The Shell fellows were staggered. They gazed at Selby blankly.

That unfortunate man had now untied the handkerchief, and was examining it closely. He uttered a yell of triumph as he saw the initials R. R. C. worked in red in one corner.

"I think I was not mistaken in supposing this handkerchief would provide a clue," he snapped. "Merry! Do you know any junior at St. James' whose initials are R. R. C.?"

"R. R. C.?" yelled Tom.

Mr. Selby displayed the handkerchief.

Tom darted a look of apprehension at Manners, which was returned by his chums. Their discomfiture was plain. Evidently they did know of somebody bearing those initials.

"Answer me, Merry!"

Tom turned.

"Excuse me, sir! This is a serious matter. I'd rather not implicate myself in it."

"Then perhaps you will kindly inform me what are Cardew's Christian names?"

"I'm sorry, sir—no!" returned Tom, breathing hard and biting his lip. "I can give you no information, sir."

"Will give me none," amended Mr. Selby. "You could do so, if you desired. It matters little, of course. An examination of the school registers will soon settle the point."

Tom blinked at him dismally.

"Do you desire us to assist you back to the school, sir?" he asked.

"Nonsense!"

"You can walk all right, sir?"

"Eh? Yes, of course! You may get along!"

Mr. Selby picked up the sack and rope for evidence. For the third time that afternoon, he fielded his top-hat and, having placed it on his head, he nodded curtly to the juniors, and strode back towards the school.

The Shell fellows watched him go with dismal eyes.

"It's all up with Cardew now," said Manners.

"The silly ass!" growled Tom. "He's asked for it often enough; and he looks like getting it now. What on earth made him do such a fatheaded trick as this?"

"Gussy was saying that Selby lammed into him rather in class this morning. Seems to have had a special down on him!"

"I guess Selby knew darn well it was Cardew all the time," opined the American junior. "Yessir! That handkerchief only told him what he knew already."

"That means that he was half expecting it?"

"I guess that's the way I reckon it out. The old gink knew he'd been putting the screw on Cardew, and he was kinder calculating on Cardew stagin' a come-back. Cardew's a dumb-bell! He's only given the old whippet a hold on him. Selby will get him kicked out. It's what he wants."

"Shouldn't be surprised. He's a venomous old beast. Worse than Ratty in that respect."

"Fancy Cardew being such an ass as to use his handkerchief to tie the old tyrant's legs," remarked Lowther.

"It wants some fancying!" grunted Manners.

"Yes! After all," put in Tom, "we may be taking too much for granted. It's just possible that Cardew really didn't do it."

"I guess he did it O.K.," said Handcock, with a shake of his head.

"Well, we'll wait and hear what he has to say. He may have a complete alibi."

"Well, if Cardew didn't do this, I reckon I'll be greatly surprised. Yessir!"

"Anyhow," grinned Tom, "he looked prime in that sack, didn't he, you men?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If I had known it was Selby, dashed if I wouldn't have let him stay there!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And if there's anything on earth we can do to get Cardew out of this scrape, and give Selby one in the eye, we're the men to do it!"

"Hear, hear!"

On that point the chums were in complete agreement. Unfortunately, however, it seemed there was nothing they could do, except tell each other what they would like to see happen to Mr. Selby.

And they did that all the afternoon.

CHAPTER 6.
Cardew—Hero!

"HERE he is at last. Clarence!"

Mary York Tompkins called out cheerfully to her brother, as she perceived him hurrying towards the Abbey ruins.

"Hallo, sis! So there you are, Joan!"

"Yes," agreed Joan pleasantly, "here I am!"

Clarence Tompkins had done it.

He had come to Wayland Abbey in the teeth of the most stern and terrible opposition; he had come there knowing full well that it was touch and go whether he would be discovered; knowing that, in any case, he was bound to get a licking for not doing the Georgics.

But he felt it was worth it.

Miss Joan Laidlaw was an extremely pleasant sort of cousin. It was a pity she was so old—twenty-two was getting towards the sere-and-yellow stage—"silver threads among the gold" and so forth—but even at the advanced age of twenty-two she had not yet lost her good looks, and Tompkins, who was ready to go through fire and water for her, felt that a flogging was a small price to pay for her company.

The two girls had built a fire and were boiling water for tea. The cloth was laid on the even green grass, and an inviting array of sandwiches and cakes were set out on the cloth aforesaid. It was a very comfortable prospect, and Tompkins beamed accordingly.

He dodged a kiss from Mary, and sat down. Sisters are rather too fond of kissing, and cousins are not quite fond enough. What Tompkins wanted was an even balance between the two.

"Ripping to see you again, Joan," he said cordially.

"Ripping to see you, old chap," said Joan. "Is that tiresome kettle boiling yet?"

"Just," announced Mary, doing miracles with a teapot. "You're late, Clarence."

"Eh? Oh, yes! Lucky to get here at all," said Tompkins.

"Why? Isn't it a holiday at the school?"

"It's a halfer! But an old tyrant of a master detained me this afternoon."

"Then how is it you're able to come at all?"

"Oh, I managed it!" replied Tompkins ambiguously. He turned to Joan. "How's uncle?"

"He's all right!" smiled Joan. "But I guess if he gets any fatter, he'll have to put his collar on with scaffold poles."

"How are you keeping?"

"Oh, Canada suits me. I don't look so ill, do I?"

Tompkins ran a calculating eye over her and agreed.

"You're not married yet," he observed thoughtfully. "Aren't you going to be?"

Miss Joan shrugged her elegant shoulders.

"Who knows?" she replied. "Stranger things than that have happened, though not many. I guess I've been too busy to think about it. Besides, didn't we agree years ago that I was to wait for you?"

Mary giggled. Tompkins eyed her haughtily.

"Yes, that's right," he said, still eyeing his sister severely. "But you'll have to wait until I leave school. They don't allow you to marry at school."

"That's real tough!" agreed Joan sympathetically. "I wonder the fellows don't do something about it."

"Well, as a matter of fact, they're not a spooney crowd at St. Jim's," explained Tompkins, helping himself to a sandwich. "Besides, girls are rather a nuisance in a way—I mean, some girls, of course," he added hastily. "They're always getting in the way and mucking things up, you know."

"Yes, it must be a trial for you."

"Ghastly!" nodded Tompkins, warming to his cousin. Joan always seemed to understand these things. Different from Mary, who was only a giggling school-kid. "There's a crowd of girls from Spalding Hall near here. Awfully decent sorts, you know, but no common sense. We played 'em at cricket once—we were batting left-handed, which was jam to Reilly, because he is left-handed and made top score, though I was given out l.b.w., when my leg wasn't within a yard of the crease——"

"What on earth has all that to do with girls being in the way and having no common sense?" demanded Mary.

"Do shut up, there's a good kid," implored Tompkins. "You see, I was bowling and I got one of the girls l.b.w.—it was as plain as anything, you know—and the girl wouldn't go because she didn't understand that her leg was right in front of the wicket. She said it wasn't anywhere near the wicket, which was rot, because——"

"What's that?" asked Cousin Joan suddenly, as a perfectly appalling row broke out among the ivy on the ruins of the abbey. It was a squawking noise, and it was obviously made by one of the jackdaws.

Tompkins looked up at the ruins.

"Jackdaws!" he said. "Nest up there, I expect."

This was true. The facts were these: In a nest among the ivy on the ruins were three young jackdaws whose only notable possessions were three enormous appetites. Mrs. Jackdaw had that moment entered the nest with some food for tea, in the shape of a peculiarly tough worm. One of the little jackdaws had swallowed more than half this worm the instant it appeared; but, being tough, he could not break it, and Mrs. Jackdaw refused to let the other half vanish into his cavernous beak. So the family were arguing the matter.

"Jackdaws!" cried Joan, and her eyes lighted up. "I haven't seen one for ages and ages."

"I expect the babies are making that row," said Tompkins.

"I wish they'd fly out. I'd love to see one."

Tompkins looked at the ruins, and he looked at his cousin. Then he said recklessly:

"I'll get one for you, if you like."

"My dear chap, you couldn't climb up there. You'd kill yourself."

"Not at all," answered Tompkins. "The ruins are as safe as houses really, though they don't look it. We've climbed them many times."

This was not strictly correct. St. Jim's juniors certainly had often climbed the western ramparts (for the abbey was battlemented), but these were tolerably safe and easy. But nobody had climbed the face of the south tower, where the jackdaws were nesting.

But Tompkins felt that he could do it. He could have climbed the Eiffel Tower for Joan.

"It doesn't look safe to me," demurred his sister Mary. "That brickwork at the top is all crumbling away."

"Oh, of course you'd think so!" put in Tompkins, with exasperation. "It's quite easy to climb."

Tompkins rose to his feet and started towards the tower. It really didn't look difficult—from the ground.

"Mind," called out Joan, "you are not to hurt the little thing, and you must take it back afterwards."

The junior nodded briefly, and disappeared into the ruins. By climbing the worn-away interior stairs, he could get a start as far as the gap which had once been the second-floor window.

He appeared high up at this crumbling gap in due course. Joan and Mary looked rather small as they peered up at him.

"Are you sure it's quite safe?" called up Joan.

"Certain."

It was not a difficult climb, but it was unsafe. The brickwork was mouldering away into dust, and showers of it spattered the leaves of the ivy as Tompkins climbed higher and higher. The jackdaws were still arguing about the worm, and proclaimed their whereabouts to all and sundry.

Tompkins climbed slowly towards the nest.

He never reached it.

Ten feet below the nest was a ledge of stone, which was cracked and decayed by the years. Tompkins stood upon this coping, and grasping the firm ivy branches, began to work his way slowly to the left.

With a sickening terror at his heart he felt the stonework giving beneath his feet. He tried to climb, but before his frenzied eyes could seek out a foothold, the coping caved in.

His fingers grasped the bricks, and found a small crevice. The stonework shot away to the feet of the girls below, and Tompkins was left hanging at a dizzy height by the first joints of his fingers.

A horrified cry floated up from the girls.

Tompkins screwed round and gazed about him in terror. The coping had given way a yard or so on each side of him, and the slightest foothold was out of his reach. The ivy on the wall was far too slender to support his whole weight. It was all right to hold, but no good to bear him. There wasn't a handgrasp or foothold near him.

He blinked wildly around and shut his eyes. His face was deadly pale and his lips were white. One little crevice was saving him from death—and how long could his numbed fingers grasp it? Already he was feeling sick and giddy.

Out of the air, as it seemed to Tompkins, he heard a voice.

"Tompkins, hold on! Keep there for five minutes!"

It was Cardew's voice.

Ralph Reckness Cardew had been wandering moodily through the wood and along the lane when he heard the cries for help raised by the two girls. He had sprinted instantly, and at once took in the situation. High up on

the tower the form of Tompkins of the Fourth was hanging listlessly.

"Stay here!" he cried to the girls. "I can get on top of the tower from the ramparts, if I can crawl up that flying buttress. It's easier to lower myself down than to climb up."

He dashed at full speed to the side of the ruins nearest the river, and scrambled recklessly up the broken stonework to the battlements. So far, this had not been difficult; but negotiating that flying buttress was a task to make the stoutest heart quail.

The buttress was a kind of thin arch of stone, flying out from the side of the tower to a pinnacle on the roof of the gatehouse. It was broken and cracked, like all the ruins, and did not appear stout enough to support the weight of a bird. But Cardew, as cautiously as speed would permit, worked his way upwards and upwards, followed by the terrified gaze of the two girls.

At length, he managed it, and stood upon the top of the tower. Crawling to a spot immediately above Tompkins, he looked down upon the junior's ashen face.

"Can you hear me, Tommy?"

"Yes," whispered Tompkins faintly.

"Wake up, man! I'm going to lower myself to that ledge above you. Catch hold of my ankles as I drop."

"Yes."

He wormed his way over the side of the tower and clung for dear life to the brick-edge. Then, ever so slowly, he descended, until he knelt upon the carved ledge. He glanced down at Tompkins, three feet below him.

"Ready, Tommy?"

"Yes."

Slithering over the ledge, his ankles dropped by Tompkins' hands.

"Wait till I give the word!" he called out.

He took a firm grip of the stone ledge and braced himself for the terrible ordeal.

Tompkins' dazed eyes looked upwards. Carefully he removed one hand from the crevice. His fingers were numbed with the strain, but he closed them around Cardew's ankle. Then he removed the other hand, and the whole of his weight fell upon Cardew's wrists.

A gasp escaped Cardew's agonised lips, but he kept firm. Then the ordeal began.

Slowly, an inch at a time, Cardew clawed his way along the stone ledging. There was only four feet to cover, but it seemed like four miles to Cardew, as hand followed hand an inch at a time along the ledge.

At last, Tompkins' feet touched the broken coping. He removed one hand from Cardew's ankle and clutched the ivy branches. The other hand followed; and then he worked his way along until he reached safety. He sank down upon the sill of a window-gap, feeling more dead than alive.

Cardew, left hanging, looked down.

"Can you make your way down from there all right?"

"Yes; it—it's safe enough now," faltered Tompkins.

Cardew tried to pull himself up, but the muscles of his arms refused to act after the strain put upon them. He found that he could manage to lower himself by the ivy, however, and in five minutes was by the side of Tompkins—done to the wide.

After a brief rest he sat up abruptly.

"Time we were gettin' down," he said. "I'll go first."

"Eh?" Tompkins started. "Oh! But, I say, I can't come yet. I've got to get a jackdaw."

"Wha-at?"

"That jackdaw's nest——"

"You frabjous, foozling, frizzling fathead!" said Cardew in measured tones. "Leave the jackdaws alone and get a move on!"

Tompkins gazed mournfully at the nest twelve feet above him, and then began to climb after Cardew along the side of the tower. In ten minutes they reached the window-gap, crawled in, and descended the broken stairs.

Cousin Joan and sister Mary were waiting for them.

"Oh, Clarence, you fathead!" gasped Joan in husky tones. "I thought you were done for. I knew that stonework wasn't safe." She turned to Cardew with bright eyes. "Please let me thank you. I have never seen a pluckier action."

"It was nothin'!" growled Cardew, raising his cap.

"Clarence," snapped Mary, with sisterly concern, "you might have the common decency to introduce your friend who risked his life for you!"

"Oh, all right! Give a fellow a chance! This is Cardew of our Form. Cardew, my Cousin Joan and sister Mary."

Cardew looked extremely uncomfortable and edged away. Mary started forward.

"Oh, you mustn't run away, Mr. Cardew. We want to thank you."

"Sorry!" murmured Cardew. "I've really got to go. It was nothin'. St. Jim's fellows naturally stick together. If it had been me up there Tompkins would have come up after me."

Tompkins looked at Cardew, looked at the tower, and looked at the flying buttress.

"Oh! Ah! Yes, of course!" he said.

The two girls pressed Cardew to remain, but he declared it was impossible. In the end, he fairly bolted away. And then Tompkins endured a long lecture from his sister, with interpolated remarks from his cousin. The lecture, which was somewhat garbled and unpunctuated, dealt chiefly with the utter idiocy of people who climbed falling ruins after jackdaws' nests, and Tompkins soon tired of it.

Finally, Cousin Joan looked at her wrist-watch.

"Half-past four!" she announced. "Time we were going!"

Tompkins gave a convulsive start.

"Half-past four!" he yelled. "Oh, my only aunt! I've got to be in the Form-room before five! Crumbs! I must rush!"

With a brief farewell to his cousin, and a still briefer one to his sister, he dashed hastily away in the direction of the river.

Now that the excitement was over he dreaded what might lay ahead of him. Possibly, some terrible vengeance waited him in the Fourth Form room.

But, if it had been a gorgeous spread instead of a terrible vengeance, he couldn't have run more swiftly to meet it.

The clock was striking five as he edged in through the gate and scudded along the shady side of the Close. Not daring to go into the House, he climbed through the Form-room window, and tumbled into his seat.

Then he waited calmly for what was to happen.

CHAPTER 7.

Selby on the Warpath!

TOMPKINS never knew by what little chance he was saved that afternoon. He never found out exactly how much he owed to a certain small piece of paper.

The paper in question was the week's Form list, and it hung upon the notice-board in the passage. Mr. Selby strode in, bristling with fury, and—was it possible?—a little

Would You Believe It?

triumph. In his hand he clutched the handkerchief; under his arm was the sacking and the rope.

He strode in with the intention of proceeding at once to the Form-room and finding Cardew's Christian names in the Form register. Had he done so, the first object which would have smitten his eye would have been Tompkins' vacant seat. Tompkins would have been discovered. Or, more correctly, he would not have been discovered.

But as Mr. Selby was navigating in the direction of the Form-room, his eyes caught the list upon the board, and from the array of names thereon one leaped out at him.

"Cardew, Ralph Reckness."

He snorted triumphantly. He had expected it. He changed his course, and proceeded to the Head's study, tapping on the door.

Dr. Holmes was taking a well-earned rest from his labours as Selby went in. The doctor, having spent an arduous morning with the Sixth in mastering Horace and Xenophon, was turning his mind to somewhat lighter literature. He was reading Thucydides, and he looked up with surprise as Mr. Selby made his appearance.

"Dr. Holmes," rasped the Third Form master, "I have to put before you a matter of the utmost gravity, a matter which needs the very strictest investigation."

"Good gracious!" The Head put down Thucydides and removed his spectacles. "My dear Selby, what——"

"I have been the victim of an assault, sir—a wicked, wanton, and violent assault!" boomed Mr. Selby. "As I was taking a walk through Rylcombe Wood this afternoon, some person, concealed behind the bushes, came behind me and enveloped me in a sack."

"A—a what!" stuttered the Head.

"A sack, sir—this sack!" said Selby, placing exhibit No. 1 upon the Head's desk. "My head and shoulders were enveloped in this sack, and I was roped up securely with this rope," placing the second exhibit alongside the first.

The Head fairly blinked at him.

"Is it—is it possible?"

"I tell you the facts, sir. After I had been fastened in the sack in the manner I have described, my assailant lowered me to the ground and tied my ankles together. He did not use a rope for this purpose, sir; he used a handkerchief. I have it here. Having secured me thoroughly, he left me."

"Bless my soul!"

"I was eventually extricated from this position by some juniors from the Shell who passed by—the boy Merry was one of them. They released me from my unpleasant predicament, and I have hastened back here to put the facts before you, and demand the severest punishment for my aggressor."

The Head choked.

"Punishment! Mr. Selby, you cannot think that this—this wanton—this ruffianly assault was the work of a St. James' boy, surely!"

"I have every reason to believe, sir, that my assailant was a junior in the Fourth Form."

"Impossible!"

"Not nearly so impossible as it seems, sir. In the ordinary way, of course, a junior could not use me in this fashion; but the sack was drawn so swiftly over my head that I was rendered helpless almost immediately. I repeat, sir, that it was certainly possible for a junior, having me at such a disadvantage, to bind me and leave me in that situation. I hope to prove to you, sir, that it is more than possible—it is a fact, sir."

"Did you not catch one glimpse of the villain, Mr. Selby?"

"Not one glimpse, sir. He came from behind me."

The Head pondered, dumb with dismay and astonishment. Probably the Head knew more of Mr. Selby's little weaknesses than that gentleman supposed, and he treated his information accordingly. In accrediting Mr. Selby's evidence, it was always necessary to allow for a small amount of personal prejudice. The Head knew this very well.

"This is a very serious matter, Mr. Selby," he said at length. "You had better let me hear what you have to say."

"I was coming to that, sir. This morning, as you know, I was appointed to take the Fourth Form in place of Lathom, and, unfortunately, I had occasion to be very severe with a member of that Form. I allude to the boy Cardew."

"Cardew!" exclaimed the Head, and his lips tightened suggestively. This was not the first time that Cardew had been in trouble.

"The boy is both reckless and impertinent!" explained Selby. "He gives trouble for the delight of it. I need say no more than that the least of his offences this morning was interpolating vulgar and meaningless adjectives into his construe—deliberately including them for the purpose of annoying me."

"Yes, yes!" interrupted the Head. "I am aware of Cardew's deficiencies. Pray continue!"

"Owing to the fact that he was, as I have said, excessively impertinent, I was obliged to punish him several times. This aroused in him a spirit of reckless rebellion, and I may say at once that I feared he would commit some imprudent action to satisfy his wicked craving for revenge."

The Head pursed his lips.

"This is all rather indefinite," he remarked. "The establishing of a motive isn't the establishing of guilt. The boy may be all you say, but——"

"That is not all, sir. Kindly glance at this handkerchief, which was used to bind my ankles."

The doctor took the linen handkerchief and scanned it carefully. Then he stiffened, and Mr. Selby smiled sarcastically.

"This is—is certainly rather a different matter," he said. "Unless it is something of a coincidence, this is Cardew's handkerchief."

"I hardly think it can be a coincidence, sir."

"It is certainly not feasible; but still, we will hear what Cardew has to say. He may have a complete alibi."

Mr. Selby sniffed. He did not think it probable.

"In any case, you may rest assured, Mr. Selby, that the fullest possible justice will be meted out for this wanton attack. I—I hardly like to think it is the work of a St. James' junior; but if Cardew has no explanation, I shall be compelled to act on that assumption."

"I will give instructions for Cardew to be sent to you when he comes in," said Mr. Selby.

"Please do so."

Mr. Selby walked away, coldly triumphant. He met Blake as the captain of the Fourth came in with the chums of Study No 6. Selby beckoned to him.

"Has Cardew come in yet, Blake?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Kindly ascertain. Send him to my study immediately he comes in."

The four chums were concerned, and stared after Selby's retreating figure.

Facts from Far and Near.

"He's been up to something," observed Blake, with a whistle. "There's a row on, my infants! Selby's on the warpath!"

"What the dickens has the ass been doing, I wonder?" speculated Herries.

"Goodness knows!"

"It is wathah wotten!" put in Arthur Augustus. "Selby is lookin' for twouble, you know. If Cardew has given him any excuse, theah will be the most feahful wow!"

"Better see if we can find Cardew," said Dig.

And the four chums separated to begin their search.

Mr. Selby, meanwhile, had reached his study. He entered it as the clock chimed five, and this recalled Tompkins to his mind. He went to the Form-room and opened the door.

Clarence Tompkins was seated there, very red of face. If it had not been impossible, one would have said he had been running hard.

"You may go, Tompkins!" said Selby gloomily. "And I trust this will be a lesson to you."

He went away. Tompkins gasped. What was wrong with Selby? He had not even asked for the Georgic.

Tompkins did not point out this omission, however. He scuttled out of the Form-room, rejoicing to get off so lightly.

As he proceeded to his study, Cardew strolled in. Tompkins went up to him.

"Look here, Cardew!" he said huskily. "I haven't thanked you for rescuing me. It was a risky job. You risked your life for me, you know."

"Don't be an ass! We got away with it, and that's all that matters."

"No, it isn't. If ever I can do anything for you——"

"Oh, rot! Forget it!"

"I'm not likely to forget it. I regard it as a debt, and if I ever get a chance to pay it I'll grab it with both hands."

Blake came up before Cardew could reply.

"Cardew, the beak is after you! Old Selby! You've got to go to him at once!"

"Bless him!" growled Cardew. "What is it—a row?"

"Just a bit of one, I think!" grinned Blake. "He looked like a thunderstorm! What sins have you been committing?"

"It would take too long to tell you." Cardew looked thoughtful. "What odds will you give me that this doesn't mean the sack?"

"The sack!" echoed Blake. "Why—what—what have you been up to?"

"'Tis a grave matter," said Cardew, shaking his head. "I've asked for it, and I'm going to get it!"

"But what——" yelled Blake.

"I looked at Selby!"

"Eh?"

"Horrifies you—what? I met the dear man in the quad after dinner, and I actually had the brazen and disgustin' impertinence to look at him. Well, well! I may get off with a floggin', but I'm afraid it means the bullet."

"You silly ass!" hooted Blake.

Cardew strolled away to the Third Form master's study. He left Blake looking after him, with quite an extraordinary expression on his face.

CHAPTER 8.

On the Carpet!

"COME in!" snapped Selby.

Cardew entered, and Selby's eyes glittered at him.

"Cardew! You have returned?"

"No, sir!"

"What—what?"

"Not yet, sir!"

Mr. Selby ground his teeth.

"Still impertinent I see, Cardew. No doubt you think it doesn't matter, in view of what is bound to happen to you."

Cardew showed polite surprise.

"I don't quite follow you, sir."

"Perhaps not! But I require you to follow me now—to the headmaster's study," rejoined Mr. Selby, with ghoulish humour. "Doubtless your headmaster will enlighten you!"

Cardew looked sarcastically at Mr. Selby.

"Oh, I don't mind goin' to the Head, sir! I was afraid you were goin' to deal with the matter."

"I think, however," said Mr. Selby, also sarcastic, "that you will derive but little benefit from the situation. Follow me!"

Cardew opened the door politely, and followed the avenging master along the passage.

Several Fourth Form fellows, having heard rumours of trouble, were hanging about curiously. These stared at Cardew, and were somewhat reassured when Cardew winked at them humorously.

"He looks cool enough!" murmured Blake. "Can't be anything so very bad."

The master entered Dr. Holmes' study like a bird of prey with its victim. Dr. Holmes looked up and settled himself firmly in his chair.

"Here is the boy, sir."

"Cardew," said the Head, in a deep voice, "can you think why you have been brought to me?"

"No, sir; but I plead 'Not guilty!' whatever it is."

"We shall see, Cardew. This afternoon Mr. Selby was the victim of a very grave and shocking assault. Some person was lying in wait for him in Rylcombe Wood, and as he passed, this dastardly ruffian enveloped him in a sack and

tied his arms to his side with rope. He was then tied to a tree, and his ankles were secured with a handkerchief."

"Indeed, sir?"

"You don't seem very surprised at the news, Cardew," put in Mr. Selby, still sarcastic.

"No, sir," replied Cardew equably.

"Why not, Cardew?" asked the Head. "Have you any knowledge of this?"

"No, sir; but I should not be surprised at anythin' that happened to Mr. Selby."

Mr. Selby breathed hard, while the Head stared blankly.

"Cardew! You will do your case no good by impertinence, my boy. I must recommend you to be frank and respectful."

"Very good, sir. But you spoke of my case. Am I implicated in this?"

"Most certainly you are! Mr. Selby suspects, with some reason, I may say, that you were his assailant."

"I see, sir," said Cardew, and he smiled. Mr. Selby was reaching boiling point.

"Listen to me, Cardew!" said the Head, quite sharply. "I believe that you were rather troublesome in the Form-room this morning?"

"I was troublesome before that, sir," answered Cardew, setting his teeth.

"What do you mean by that, boy?"

"I was troublesome when Tompkins, of my Form, dropped a football from a window on to Mr. Selby's head. I happened to laugh, sir."

"Keep to the point, Cardew!" The Head's temper was gradually rising. "Did Mr. Selby punish you rather heavily in class this morning?"

"He did, sir. Both Tompkins and myself had very heavy punishment."

The turf, thrown by 'Erb, sailed through the air, caught Mr. Selby's topper, and sent it flying!

"Oh!" said the Head.

He glanced at the furious Form master. The coincidence was rather curious.

"I have explained, sir," gasped Selby, "that Cardew was lazy and impertinent! Tompkins was also——"

"Precisely!" The Head coughed. "But this is rather beside the point. The fact is that Cardew was punished heavily, and, presumably, felt aggrieved and vengeful. Now, Cardew, listen to me! Where have you spent the afternoon?"

"I walked through Rylcombe Wood to Wayland Abbey and back, sir."

"Alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah!"

The atmosphere was tense now. The Head looked regretful and Mr. Selby exultant.

"So, Cardew, you were in Rylcombe Wood alone this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir."

"Had you no companion with you at all? Did you meet no other junior in the wood? Can you produce no witness who saw you?"

Cardew thought.

"I met one fellow at Wayland Abbey, sir."

"Who was that?"

"I would rather not say, sir."

The Head seemed puzzled.

"Surely there can be no objection to stating which boy you saw at Wayland Abbey, Cardew?"

"I really cannot tell you, sir."

Cardew, of course, knew perfectly well that Clarence York Tompkins was out of bounds that afternoon, and he did not feel inclined to give him away to the beak.

"Well, I do not understand your reticence, but it is of little importance. The fact is that during the whole time you were in Rylcombe Wood you saw nobody. The boy at Wayland Abbey matters nothing. It is the wood that is the important point."

"Yes, sir. But other fellows have been in the wood to-day. Why not suspect them all—why only me?"

The Head took up the handkerchief.

"Because this handkerchief, Cardew, was used to bind Mr. Selby's ankles, and this handkerchief bears your initials."

"Oh!"

"In the face of that," put in Mr. Selby, with a sneer, "I think you will need to deny nothing further."

"May I inspect the handkerchief, sir?"

The Head passed it across. Cardew looked at it coolly, examining the initials. Then he gave it back reluctantly.

"Yes, it is mine!" he admitted. "I must have dropped it."

"Dropped it? Where?"

"I don't know, sir! Since it was used to bind Mr. Selby's ankles, I presume I may have dropped it in the wood. I didn't know I had lost it." And Cardew felt in his pockets in a puzzled fashion.

The cool and collected way in which the junior was taking the grave charge was a source of much surprise to the headmaster and Mr. Selby. The Head felt himself sorely perplexed.

He had argued like this: If the junior was innocent he would have started back in amazement and horror at the charge. If he was guilty, he would have attempted to act the part of an innocent youth; but he would have been frightened and shifty of manner.

Cardew was neither. He was regarding the whole proceeding with an air of detachment, as though it did not concern him very greatly. And the good doctor was very puzzled.

"Now, my boy," he said, at length, "I will ask you the direct question. Did you perpetrate this disgraceful act?"

"I have already pleaded 'Not guilty,' sir."

"Answer me—'Yes,' or 'No.'"

"A plea of 'Not guilty' implies a negative, doesn't it, sir?"

"Cardew doesn't appear keen upon giving a plain answer, I notice," put in Mr. Selby.

Cardew eyed him scornfully, but was silent.

The Head paused.

"In the face of this evidence, Cardew, what am I to decide?" he asked.

"That I am guilty, sir. I understand that."

"You have nothing further to add to what has been said?"

Cardew reflected.

"Yes, sir," he replied, with a slight smile. "I should like permission to ask Mr. Selby one or two questions."

"Providing they are not impertinent questions, Cardew, I see no objection. Every accused person has the right to his defence."

"Thank you, sir!" Cardew turned to the contemptuous master. "In the first place, sir, I should like to ask you why should I ambush myself in Rylcombe Wood? How did I know that you would be passing that way?"

The Head looked at Mr. Selby with interest. This was a point he had overlooked. Mr. Selby bit his lip furiously, and rapped out:

"You were perfectly well aware of the fact, Cardew, since I announced my intention in class this morning."

"I don't think I could have been listening, sir. Why did you announce that you would walk through Rylcombe Wood?"

"Never mind why," rejoined Selby, gritting his teeth. "I did so!"

"You went that way, sir, because you hoped to find Fourth Form boys misbehaving themselves, as you called it."

"I didn't hope to find anything of the sort; but I more than half-expected to find that such was the case."

"I understand you stated that was your object in Form this mornin', sir?"

"Dr. Holmes," rasped Mr. Selby, "these questions are being put rather offensively, and I decline to answer them!"

"In any case," put in the Head severely, "they do not appear to be relevant to the matter in hand. You may cease, Cardew."

"But they are relevant, sir," answered Cardew coolly. "I wanted you to understand the position. In class this morning Mr. Selby announced to the entire Form that he would walk through Rylcombe Wood for the special purpose of seeing that the fellows were behaving themselves. He spoke to us like a nurse speaks to a naughty kid. And the whole Form were boilin' with anger about it, sir. It

was much too thick. Now Mr. Selby will admit that he told his intention to the whole Form, and every one of them were indignant. There is no reason why one or more of forty fellows should not have desired to get their own back, and have tied Mr. Selby in a sack in this fashion. My motive is the motive for the whole giddy Form, sir, and the case against me stands or falls by that handkerchief, which I think I dropped near the scene of the assault."

The Head drew a deep breath and looked at Mr. Selby, who was biting his nails with fury.

"What Cardew says is perfectly correct, my dear Selby," he said. "Cardew is an unusually shrewd and intelligent junior, and he has shown the weak points of this accusation."

"Nevertheless, sir," grated Mr. Selby, "I am convinced that this junior, and no other, was my aggressor this afternoon."

"You did not see the person, Mr. Selby, and you cannot be absolutely certain."

The doctor pondered, holding his chin in his hands. Cardew had certainly reduced the evidence against him to a more handkerchief, which might conceivably have been picked up by the attacker. It was an awkward situation. On the one hand, justice must be done, and on the other, the evidence seemed rather weak to justify expulsion.

"I am willing to give you every chance, Cardew, before I am finally convinced of your guilt," said the Head, at length. "You will be taken to the punishment-room now, on the provisional assumption that you are guilty. Mr. Selby, you will call the Fourth Form together and find out from every junior what he did this afternoon. Any junior who is unable to bring witnesses to substantiate his story you will bring to my study. If I can find no fresh evidence I may decide that Cardew is the culprit. I cannot say."

"Very well, sir!" snorted Mr. Selby, with obvious reluctance. "Come, Cardew!"

He placed his hand on that cheerful youth's shoulder and led him out of the study, leaving the Head looking very thoughtful.

Down the passage to Nobody's Study went the solemn procession of two. Mr. Selby was looking as though he would like to bite Cardew, and Cardew winked slyly at the wall as he marched along. The door of the punishment-room was thrown open.

"You may step inside, boy," said Selby, in a grinding voice.

Cardew duly stepped inside.

Slam!

The door was locked, and Selby strode away.

He left Cardew in very delighted mood. The Fourth Form junior walked to the window, singing softly an air from the "Mikado."

"To sit in solemn silence,
In a dull, dark dock;
In a pestilential prison,
With a life-long lock;
Awaiting the sensation
Of a short, sharp shock;
From a cheap and chippy chopper
On a big, black block."

"Poor old Selby!" murmured the young rascal to himself. "I rather think that this is where he is taken down a peg. I may be wrong, but I rather think so."

And the enigmatic junior whistled cheerily.

CHAPTER 9.
What Tompkins Knew!

"TOMPKINS!"

Clarence York Tompkins looked up with a start as Tom Merry and Cyrus K. Handcock came into the study.

It was an hour later. The Fourth had been hauled into the Form-room and questioned, and every junior had proved a complete alibi—none more so than Tompkins, who had not even been asked where he spent the afternoon. Selby, fortunately, had taken that for granted.

Tompkins was looking white and haggard.

Cardew, the junior to whom he owed his life. Cardew was in the punishment-room, awaiting—who knew what?

Tompkins thought, and thought furiously. Could he say anything for Cardew? Not without revealing that he had been out of bounds and getting the Head's flogging for it.

It was a terrible position.

Poor Tompkins had stated that he would pay his debt at the first opportunity. Was there an opportunity here? A flogging stood like a lion in the path.

But there was also another reason—a reason from which Tompkins shrank.

He looked up with a start as the two Shell juniors came in.

"What do you want?" he asked dully.

"I guess you're looking pretty pie-eyed," said Handcock. "What's the sobstuff, kid? Thinking about Selby and Cardew?"

Tompkins started.

"What do you want?" he gasped.

Tom Merry was looking very stern. He took a letter from his pocket.

"Have you lost this letter, Tompkins?" he asked, holding it out.

Tompkins looked at it. It was the letter he had received that morning.

"Yes, thanks!" he said. "Where did you find it?"

"Behind a bush in Rylcombe Wood," said Tom Merry, looking at him steadily. "A bush opposite the spot where Selby was downed."

Tompkins jumped, and then groaned.

"You were there this afternoon, Tompkins!" snapped Tom. "You cut detention."

Tompkins looked up dismally. His white face softened Tom somewhat.

"What's the trouble, old bean?" he asked. "Surely you didn't down Selby, did you?"

"I?" exclaimed Tompkins, starting.

"Well, you had a pretty good excuse—Selby treated you as badly as Cardew this morning, so they say. Look here," said Tom, "you were there when Selby was attacked, weren't you?"

Tompkins was silent.

"Weren't you?" repeated Tom harshly. "Speak up!"

Still Tompkins made no reply.

The two Shell juniors looked at each other.

"I guess there's more in this than meets the eye," opined the American junior. "Why don't you speak, you gosh-darned bonehead?"

"I've got nothing to say," answered Tompkins sullenly.

"You saw Selby attacked! You know who it was!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Look here, Tompkins," exclaimed Tom, in exasperation, "this is not a matter that can be hushed up. Cardew looks like getting the bullet for this. And there is a general opinion that he is innocent."

"Well?" muttered Tompkins.

"I guess I ain't so sure," put in Handcock. "There's something almighty strange about the whole affair. It's odd—darned odd! There's something about this business that's very curious, and I can't get the hang of it."

"Well," said Tom, "every fellow thinks that Cardew wouldn't be fool enough to use his own handkerchief with his own initials on it to tie up the old beast. And they're right. Cardew's much too fly to do a silly ass thing like that. The Head knows it as well as we do. He knows what Cardew is like, and he can't swallow it. Look here, Tommy! Did you recognise the fellow who went for Selby?"

Tompkins looked at him, and then looked all round the study helplessly.

"No," he said.

"That's lie number one," said Tom cheerfully. "You know jolly well who it was, and you'd tell the beak so, if you weren't afraid of getting a flogging."

"Look here——" Tompkins paused.

"It's no use denying it," Tom said coldly. "You could chip in, if you liked; but you funk the flogging. But I warn you, Tompkins, that before Cardew is sacked, I shall tell the Head what I found under that bush."

"You might try minding your own business!" snapped Tompkins.

"You cheeky rotter!" said Tom, breathing hard. "I'd punch your nose, if you were up to my weight! Blessed if I don't half believe you're the guilty party, after all!"

"You silly ass!"

"Well, what were you doing behind that bush, anyway?"

"I'd cut detention, and I saw Selby coming towards me. I was hiding until he'd gone by."

Tom pursed his lips, and Handcock chipped in.

"Look here, son," he said, kindly enough, "it's up to you, you know. If you know anything at all about this business, it's up to you to tell the beak."

"You don't understand," said Tompkins feebly. "Besides, I was thinking it over. Cardew saved my life to-day——"

"He did what?"

Tompkins explained about the abbey incident. The two fellows stared at him breathlessly.

"Keep it dark for a short while," said Tompkins, "until I decide what to do."

"What to do!" roared Tom. "After Cardew has risked

his life—absolutely risked his life to save you! You're funking a flogging to save him."

"I'm not!" yelled Tompkins. "You don't understand, I tell you!"

"What don't we understand?"

"I—I—I can't explain it now! Later, perhaps——"

"Oh, shut up, you rotter! It's the flogging you're afraid of."

"It isn't!" whimpered Tompkins. "It's nothing of the kind. You don't understand!"

"For goodness' sake don't start blubbing, you silly owl!"

"I'm not blubbing!" cried Tompkins, with a choke. "I'm—I'm going to the Head. Perhaps I will——"

"You'd better, I think, if you want to save your miserable skin!" said Tom contemptuously. "Come on, Handcock! The little sweep makes me feel sick! Cardew's actually saved his life this very afternoon, and he's afraid of a measly flogging to stop his expulsion."

Handcock followed Tom, but looked back at the doorway.

"Take my advice, kid," he said meaningly, "and go to the Head before the Head comes to you."

Then he went out.

Tompkins stared after them, his face white and drawn.

"The rotters!" he choked feebly. "Just as if I'd mind a blessed flogging. Oh dear! What shall I do?"

Something, evidently, was puzzling him. He tried desperately to think. Which would be his best course of action?

He rose after a while and tottered to the door. Outside he encountered Blake & Co., with Tom Merry and other juniors. He staggered past them without heeding them. Tom stepped after him.

"Where are you going, Tompkins?" he asked.

Tompkins looked at him with a white face.

"To the Head."

"Good lad! Perhaps the Head will let you off the flogging for owning up?"

Tompkins nodded, and walked feebly to the Head's study. He raised his hand to tap, and then paused. Again he raised it, and again he paused. Then he turned back.

But some strength of purpose came to him, and he gritted his teeth desperately. Returning, he banged on the door in a way which made the Head jump.

"Come in!" ejaculated Dr. Holmes.

Mr. Selby was in the study. He was evidently explaining that no other Fourth-Form junior had been unable to account for his movements that afternoon. He glowered irritably at Tompkins.

"What is it, boy?" asked the Head testily.

"It's—it's about Cardew, sir!" gasped Tompkins.

The two masters jumped.

"Do you know anything of the matter, Tompkins?"

"Yes, sir! I—I—Cardew didn't do it, sir! It's all a mistake, sir."

Mr. Selby snorted.

"How can you know anything about it, Tompkins?"

"I—I—I——"

"Yes?" murmured the Head kindly, as Tompkins paused with fear.

"I was on the spot at the time, sir."

"On the spot at the time!" roared Mr. Selby. "Do not talk nonsense, Tompkins! You were detained in the Form-room all the afternoon—and, besides, there was nobody present but myself and my assailant."

"I—I was hiding behind a bush, sir. I had cut detention. I went over to Wayland Abbey to meet my cousin."

It was out now. Tompkins looked feebly at the astonished Head and the infuriated Selby.

"You broke detention—after my explicit caution, Tompkins?" grated Mr. Selby. "I warned you that you would be flogged if you succeeded in defying me, and you have the impertinence to come here and say you have done so."

"I've got to save Cardew, sir. I—I know it means a flogging, but I'm ready to face it."

"I am glad of that, for you will certainly be required to face a flogging. Dr. Holmes, I discovered the boy Tompkins attempting to break detention, and I took him back to the Form-room and warned him that if he tried it again I should report him to you for a flogging. According to this confession, he has done so; and I leave him to you to be dealt with."

The Head looked long and curiously at the trembling form of Tompkins. Then he spoke.

"If this is the case, I have no alternative but to sentence you to a public flogging, Tompkins!"

"I—I'm ready, sir."

The Head coughed.

"But, shelving that for a moment, let me hear what you have to say about this assault on Mr. Selby. You were hiding behind a bush. Why?"

"I saw Mr. Selby coming along the path, sir, and I was afraid he might see me."

"I see. And while you were hiding behind this bush you saw Mr. Selby attacked."

"Yes, sir."

"By whom?"

The Head paused; Selby drew a deep breath, and Tompkins groaned.

"By whom?" repeated the Head.

"I don't know, sir."

"What? Did you not see the person?"

"Yes, sir; but I didn't know him. I didn't see his face very clearly. He was a ragged village youth, I think, sir. His clothes were very ragged, sir."

Mr. Selby fairly jumped. He had almost forgotten the possibility of 'Erb being his attacker. Indeed, by the success of his deduction, he had been certain it was Cardew.

"Impossible!" he ground out. "The boy is not telling the truth."

The Head motioned him to be silent, and fixed a stern eye on Tompkins.

"This is a very extraordinary story, Tompkins," he said searchingly. "You must substantiate the story. Did you recognise the person as anyone known to you?"

"I have said, sir, that I didn't see his face clearly," replied Tompkins sullenly. "I just saw sufficient of him to recognise that he was a village fellow, sir. All rags and tatters, sir."

"But what possible motive could he have had for such a trick? Mr. Selby, can you think what the motive of such a person could have been?"

Mr. Selby bit his lip. For one moment a temptation seized him to forget 'Erb; but he couldn't do it.

"Yes," he said reluctantly, "I certainly had some trouble with a number of impertinent little ruffians in the wood this afternoon. One of them drenched me with water, and I administered castigation with my stick."

"Then such a person as Tompkins describes might conceivably have had the opportunity and the desire to attack you?"

"I suppose so, sir!" grunted Selby.

The Head frowned thoughtfully. Selby spoke again.

"But the handkerchief, sir—you are forgetting the handkerchief."

"Please, sir——"

"What is it, Tompkins?"

"I believe the handkerchief was picked up in that very spot, sir. I seem to remember noticing a white handkerchief under the bushes."

"I did not notice it," said Mr. Selby coldly.

"Nevertheless," added the Head, "this is all distinctly possible. The conviction of Cardew rests solely on this handkerchief. Cardew states that he thinks he may have dropped it in the wood, and Tompkins says he believes your assailant picked it up. That is quite consistent."

"But I submit, sir——"

"One moment, Mr. Selby. I was about to remark that Cardew is, in many respects, a very shrewd and unusual boy. From my knowledge of his character I find it difficult to believe that he would be so foolhardy—so fatuously indiscreet—as to leave a marked handkerchief as a clue to his identity. I am bound to remark that I cannot conceive Cardew overlooking such a vital clue. It is entirely opposed to his careful, shrewd methods, as evidenced in the past, and I am, therefore, inclined to give more weight to Tompkins' story than I should if the handkerchief had never been discovered at all."

(*Continued on the next page.*)

"I am bound to differ from you in that respect, sir, but I must allow your judgment, notwithstanding."

The Head pondered again, and looked at Tompkins.

"It is a very strange affair—very strange indeed!" he remarked, passing a finger across his chin in a puzzled fashion. "Tompkins, why did you not go to Mr. Selby's assistance when you saw him attacked—or, at least, have released him afterwards?"

"I—I didn't want a flogging, sir. Mr. Selby would have taken me back and had me flogged, sir. I—I think I should have let him go if I hadn't heard Tom Merry coming, sir."

"Where did you go after you left the scene of the assault, Tompkins?"

"To Wayland Abbey, sir, to meet my cousin."

"Wayland Abbey!" exclaimed the Head. "Did you see Cardew at Wayland Abbey, Tompkins?"

"Yes, sir," answered Tompkins, reddening.

"So you were the boy Cardew mentioned? I understand now, of course, why he refused to divulge your name. He knew you had deliberately broken detention?"

"Yes, sir. He—he saved my life at the abbey, sir."

"What?" ejaculated the Head.

Tompkins related the circumstances. The Head was amazed.

"Cardew is a remarkably courageous junior," he said at length. "This account is all very consistent—very consistent indeed. I am compelled to place credence in Tompkins' story, Mr. Selby. I think I can declare Cardew free from complicity in the matter.

"It would seem so, sir," agreed Selby savagely.

"Then you will be pleased to release him from the punishment-room and bring him here. I will inform him that the facts are known, and I will commend his bravery at the same time."

Mr. Selby choked.

"But the real assailant, sir," he cried. "What can be done? Will you place the matter in the hands of the police?"

The Head displayed his hands in a helpless gesture.

"How can I?" he asked. "I am afraid that nothing more can be done in the matter. Tompkins says explicitly that he cannot recognise the person."

"But—but—but," babbled Mr. Selby, foaming with rage, "I know the dastard, sir. An impertinent youth named, I believe, Herbert."

"A little vague, I think," murmured the Head.

"His companions called him 'Herb,' sir," hooted Selby. "It is he! I know it! I can impeach him, sir! My word is good enough, I presume?"

"I'm afraid not, sir," coughed the Head. "If this youth denies it—as he is sure to do—who is to prove it? Tompkins says he cannot!"

Selby choked. After all this, nothing could be done. Everybody would go scot-free, and he alone would be the sufferer. The thought nearly drove him mad.

"You may go, Tompkins," said the Head. "I will speak later about your punishment."

"Yes, sir," said Tompkins. And he went.

The Head leaned back in his chair and coughed again.

"Mr. Selby," he said severely, "I am not aware of the reason for Tompkins' detention, and I am not aware of the reasons which have driven this usually inoffensive boy to such an amazing state of defiance. But I am bound to comment upon the singular coincidence mentioned by Cardew. These two boys apparently gave you cause for offence, and these two boys appear to have been the principal sufferers in class this morning. That is strange, to say the least."

"Sir! Dr. Holmes——"

"Stay! What I wish to point out is this: If you had used a little moderation and consideration in dealing with boys of a higher Form than those to which you have been accustomed, all this trouble and annoyance might have been averted. Your remarks about the conduct of the juniors when out of school bounds would be calculated to give offence and indignation to many worthy and law-abiding boys. It is unfortunate, Mr. Selby, that you chose to go to these lengths."

Mr. Selby was red, and burning with rage. This was the last straw. He tried to speak, but no words came.

"In the circumstances," pursued the Head, "I am disposed to take a lenient view of the folly of the boy Tompkins, particularly as he has come here of his own accord to give information. I'm afraid his act of breaking detention cannot be wholly overlooked, but I shall give him a nominal punishment. You will please inform him that he is detained within school bounds for a week."

At these dreadful words Mr. Selby nearly broke down. He opened the door and fairly tottered from the study.

CHAPTER 10.
Mysterious!

"HERE he is!"

"What's the news?"

Quite a little crowd of the Fourth and Shell were waiting for Tompkins at the head of the stairs. The Fourth Form junior's face burned as he saw them there, and he averted his eyes.

"What's the news, Tommy?" bawled Blake. "Did you go to the Head?"

"Yes."

"Well, give it a name. What happened?"

"Cardew's let off. The Head has let him off."

"Oh, good!"

"Well done, old bean!" exclaimed Tom, clapping him on the shoulder. "Are you landed for a flogging?"

"I don't know. The Head's going to speak to me later."

"That means you'll be let off!" opined Lowther.

"Hope so!" grunted Tompkins. He pushed his way through the juniors.

"Here! Hi! Come back, you silly ass!" roared Blake. "We want to hear all about it. You've not told us yet who biffed old Selby."

"Oh, rats!" retorted Tompkins, sprinting down the passage at full speed.

"Well, my giddy aunt! What is all this mystery?" gasped Lowther.

"Here comes Cardew!" cried Digby.

Cardew came tramping up the stairs. The juniors expected to see him merry and bright; but, knowing him, they would not have been surprised to find him calm and cool as usual.

He was neither.

His face was pale with rage, and his eyes glittered as he looked at the fellows. They drew back in wonder.

"So here you are, old top!" said Tom.

"Here I am!" agreed Cardew harshly. "Where's that fool Tompkins?"

"Wha-at?"

"I'll smash him!" hooted Cardew furiously. "I'll—I'll slaughter him! Where is he?"

This was the climax of amazement. Why Cardew, who owed to Tompkins his present liberty, should want to smash the fellow who had risked a flogging to save him they simply could not imagine.

"Weally, Cardew," admonished Gussy, in a shocked voice, "I am surprised at you, deah boy. Don't you wealise that Tompkins has been and asked for a thwashin' to get you cleah?"

"The interfering ass! Why couldn't he mind his own business?"

"Did you want to be sacked?" hooted Blake.

"I shouldn't have been sacked—trust me for that. I was all right."

"Well, I reckon it was jolly decent of Tompkins," said Herries bluntly.

"Who was it bagged Selby?" asked Tom.

Cardew smiled sarcastically.

"Better ask Tompkins, hadn't you—he knows!"

"The ass won't say! There's a giddy mystery about it, and I'm blessed if I understand it at all." And Tom shook his head, very puzzled indeed.

"According to Tompkins," returned Cardew, "it was a ragged village fellow—one who Selby thrashed for cheeking him this afternoon."

"What?"

"Great pip!"

The juniors were astonished—not at the fact that it was a village youth who ragged Selby; but at Tompkins' unaccountable secrecy. If it was a village fellow, why all the mystery? What need to hush it up?

"So that's who it was!" said Blake at last. "A fellow from the village. Well, I dare say Selby asked for it."

"Bai Jove! It's lucky for you Tompkins was theah, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, to Cardew. "Othahwise the evidence would be all against you."

"You think so, do you?" sneered Cardew.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, where's your blessed evidence, then?"

"The handkahchief, deah boy——"

"You think I should have been silly ass enough to bind Selby's legs with my own giddy handkerchief?" asked Cardew.

"Ye gods! No fear!" murmured Blake. "I give you credit for a bit more savvy, old bean."

"Thank you!"

Handcock was still grinning curiously. He was apparently amused by something in the conversation. He turned to Cardew.

"I guess you don't believe Tompkins' yarn, do you?" he asked.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"My opinion, one way or the other, doesn't count," he answered coolly. "Tompkins was a giddy eye-witness, and I suppose he knows."

"Not the only eye-witness," grunted Handcock.

Cardew's eyes gleamed at him.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded.

"Oh shucks!"

"Are you insinuating that I bagged Selby?"

"My opinion, one way or the other, doesn't count," grinned Handcock. "Tompkins was the eye-witness, you know."

Cardew gave him a grim look, and then strode down the passage, turning a deaf ear to various questions shot at him. Handcock and Tom Merry sauntered away.

"So that's your theory?" inquired Tom. "You think Cardew really did do it?"

"Yes, that's what I think, I guess!"

"But—but Tompkins said——"

"Lies, I guess!" yawned Handcock.

Tom stared at him blankly. Handcock smiled.

"You mean that Tompkins was such a—such a cad that he told the Head a lot of lies?" demanded Tom Merry, in a tone of disbelief.

"No! I mean that Tompkins was such a gosh-darned hero that he lied to the Head and begged for a flogging, just to save that guy's pesky hide. Come and start prep, old bean. We'll roll along and have a word with Tompkins afterwards."

CHAPTER 11.

Tompkins Pays His Debt!

TOMPKINS, resting a white face upon his hands, looked up as the door opened and Cardew entered his study.

Cardew's face was hard, and his eyes glimmered dangerously at Tompkins.

"So here you are!" he said metallically.

"Here I am!" groaned Tompkins.

"I'm let off, you see!" Cardew sneered. "Released without a stain on my character, because a good little boy went to the Head and told him a string of lies!"

"What's the good of talking about it?" muttered Tompkins. "You're out, anyway, and that's what matters."

"Oh it is, is it? You'll find that something else matters, you fool! I've a good mind to give you a dashed good hiding for poking your nose into this business. Why couldn't you have left me alone, and not told the Head those rotten lies on my account? Where was the sense of it?"

"You saved my life," said Tompkins brokenly. "I had to—to do something. I couldn't let you be sacked. So—so I lied to the Head. I've never done such a thing before, but—but—but——" his voice tailed off miserably.

"Were you really behind that bush?" demanded Cardew.

"Yes!"

"So you saw me put Selby in the sack?"

Tompkins nodded.

"And yet you tell the Head some dashed silly yarn about a village rowdy," said Cardew. "What did you do it for?"

"To get you clear, of course."

"Get me clear!" echoed Cardew, with a savage laugh. "You utter ass! I should have got myself clear if you hadn't butted in. You've absolutely spoilt the finest plan for scoring off Selby I've ever made. Absolutely spoilt it!"

"What do you mean? You'd have been sacked! That handkerchief——"

"Oh, leave off about the handkerchief! Can't you understand, you priceless chump, that I put that handkerchief there on purpose?"

Tompkins started.

"Why, what—— Where's the sense of it?"

"Look here!" said Cardew more calmly. "I'll explain. What I was out for was to make sure that Selby knew jolly well that I had attacked him, without giving him the power to get me fired for it. I was conductin' my own defence with the Head, and already I could see that the Head knew there wasn't enough evidence to convict me."

"But—but——"

"Shut up! If the Head decided that the handkerchief was evidence enough to convict me, I was goin' to point out to him that everybody in the school would testify that I should never be such a chump as to use my own hanky. The Head himself knew that—I could see it. A fag in the Second would have more savvy than to use his own handkerchief, and leave a clue like that. That's the reason why I used the thing. It was to be the proof of my innocence."

"You're a clever beast, Cardew!" said Tompkins, as he saw the idea. "But do you think it would have worked?"

"Of course it would, ass! They wouldn't dared have sacked me on that evidence. But Selby would know all the time that I was guilty, only he wouldn't be able to prove it—see? That's what I wanted. And now you've mucked it up. Selby thinks now that it was this village rotter; he doesn't know I was the one who bagged him. And it makes me feel sore, after all my trouble."

"I—I didn't know! I wanted to do something for you, after you saving my life. And—and all those lies weren't necessary, after all."

"You've put your foot in it, as usual!" Cardew said coldly. "That's what comes of bein' a fool."

"I wish I'd never gone to the Head!" groaned Tompkins miserably. "Only Tom Merry and Handcock ragged me, because they knew I was there. They accused me of funking a licking, and I—I couldn't explain to them that I knew it was you all the time. And—and you saved my life, so I went. It was beastly to tell lies. I pretty near funked it, after all; but—but I did it."

Cardew looked at him scornfully, but his face softened somewhat.

"I shouldn't worry about telling lies," he said dryly. "I've been telling them all the evening to the Head."

"You may be used to it; but——"

"Don't be an ass! I hate it, too! But to get even with Selby I would have been willing to lie for the rest of the term. Your conscience wants a nicer judgment of comparative values, old bean!"

"Well, there it is!" muttered Tompkins. "It's done now, and can't be helped!"

"Yes. Everybody will believe that it was this village kid who ragged Selby, and I shall be called a victim of circumstances, an' all the rest of it. Still, Selby got the raggin', and I suppose that's all that matters. By the way, though," said Cardew solemnly, "I'm afraid you've put your foot in it, old ass! What about when the Head puts the police on this village johnny?"

"He can't!" replied Tompkins, with a faint smile. "I specially mentioned that I couldn't recognise the merchant, and there's nothing for it but to drop the whole matter. The Head told Selby so while I was there."

Cardew looked almost admiring.

"Genius, old bean!" he declared. "By Jove! You must have some brains somewhere, after all! Selby will be hopping mad about this—not quite so mad as he would have been if my scheme had come off—but mad, all the same. Tommy, old bean," said Cardew, and his voice grew very kindly, "you're a good little ass! I'm glad I saved your silly life! But, all the same, it wasn't worth spoiling your record by lying like that, just to save a hard case like myself. Next time—if there ever is a next time—think twice before you butt in."

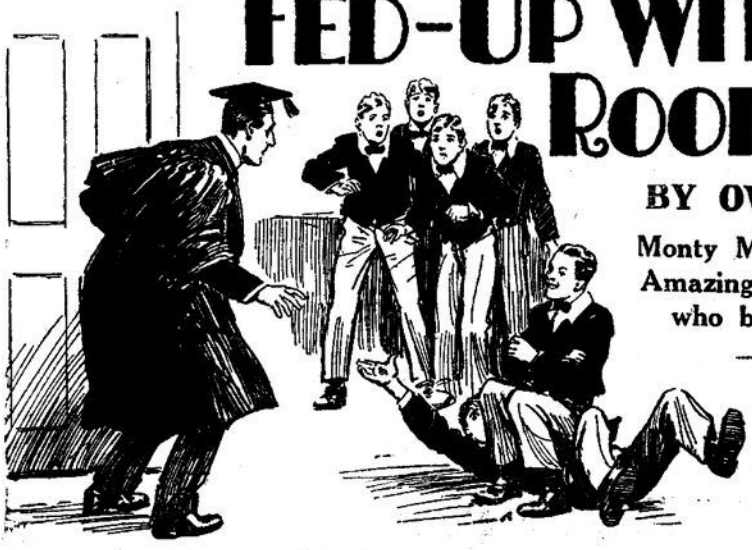
And, with a kindly nod, Cardew swung out of the study, much more genial than he left Tompkins.

The Fourth Form junior started prep in a miserable

(*Continued on page 27.*)

ANOTHER PRICELESS COMPLETE ROOKWOOD YARN!

FED-UP WITH ROOKWOOD!



BY OWEN CONQUEST.

Monty Manders Makes History! Amazing behaviour of new boy who begged for expulsion!

CHAPTER 1.

A Fight in the Form-room!

"NO rags!" said Jimmy Silver warningly.

Arthur Edward Lovell snorted.

Third school was due at Rookwood, and the Fourth were coming in after break. Third lesson was English History, which the Moderns shared with the Classicals, so both divisions of the Rookwood Fourth were gathering at the door of the Form-room.

Hence Jimmy Silver's warning, and the expressive snort of his chum Lovell. For among the Modern juniors was the new fellow, Monty Manders, and the sight of Monty Manders was to Arthur Edward Lovell like unto a red rag to a bull.

Mr. Dalton, master of the Fourth, had not yet arrived. But the Form-room door was open, and Classicals and Moderns went in together. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome gathered round Lovell, and headed him off as he made a movement towards Monty Manders. The Classical chums did not want a row in the Form-room.

"Look here——" began Lovell.

"Oh, cheese it!" said Jimmy Silver. "You're not going to row with young Manders. Dicky Dalton may hop in any minute, too!"

"Yes, shut up, old man!" said Raby. "Blessed if I ever saw such a fellow for kicking up a shindy!"

"That Modern tick keeps out of my way!" said Lovell. "I've been looking for him to lick him, but he dodges me!"

"Well, you dodge him, too," suggested Newcome. "If you dodge one another there won't be a row."

Another snort from Arthur Edward Lovell. The new term at Rookwood was only a few days old, but in those few days Monty Manders seemed to have succeeded in getting Lovell's goat very considerably.

"Will you come round behind the gym after class, young Manders?" bawled Lovell.

"No fear!" answered the Modern junior. "I'll lick you now, if you like. Dalton won't be here for a minute. That'll be plenty of time."

"Look here, cheese it, young Manders," said Tommy Dodd. "You can't scrap in the Form-room. Are you off your rocker? Hold that ass Lovell, you men!"

Arthur Edward required holding. Five or six fellows held him back, and he glared at Monty Manders. That cheerful youth had Green's "Shorter History of the English People" under his arm. He slipped it down into his hand, the volume swept through the air, and crashed on the chest of Arthur Edward Lovell. It was Green's "Shorter History of the English People," but it felt like Green's "Longer History of the English People," as it crashed on Arthur Edward. He sat down quite suddenly.

"Ow!" gasped Lovell. "Oh, oh, ow!"

"Why, you—you—you cheeky ass!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "You—you——"

There was no holding Lovell now. He bounded up and hurled himself at the Modern junior.

The next second, they were fighting.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Stop them!"

There was a buzz of excitement in the Form-room. Startled glances turned on the open door, at which Mr. Richard Dalton might appear at any moment. Jimmy Silver and Raby made an attempt to drag the combatants apart. Jimmy caught Lovell's left with his eye; Raby caught Manders' right with his nose. They yelled and backed off.

"You potty duffers!" gasped Newcome. "Stop it!"

But the combatants did not heed. Panting and scuffling and trampling, they scrapped vigorously in the midst of a buzzing and excited crowd.

Lovell's nose streamed red; one of Manders' eyes was half-closed. Lovell was more than a match for the Modern junior, but Manders was putting up a terrific fight.

Why he had asked for it like this was a mystery to all the Fourth. For days he had fairly dodged an encounter with the wrathful Lovell. Fellows had even begun to suspect him of funk. But it was evident now that funk was not the cause. Apparently young Manders had the desire for the scrap to take place in the one spot where, really, a scrap could not possibly take place. It looked as if he was deliberately hunting trouble with his Form master.

Tramp, tramp tramp!

Bump! Manders was down on the Form-room floor. But he was down only for a moment. He leaped up and came on again. There was a yell from Tubby Muffin at the door.

"Cave! Here comes Dalton!"

The footsteps of the Fourth Form master could be heard. They had a hurried sound. Probably, Mr. Dalton had heard the din from afar.

"Stop it!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

Lovell, excited as he was, realised that it was time to stop. He dropped his hands. Manders, who was not excited at all, did not stop. He clasped Lovell round the neck and whirled him over. There was a terrific crash as the two juniors went down together.

At the same moment, Mr. Dalton arrived in the doorway. He halted, quite suddenly, as the two panting juniors crashed fairly at his feet.

CHAPTER 2.

Manders Begs For It!

RICHARD DALTON stared.

"What——" he gasped.

Dead silence fell on the crowd of juniors. It was broken only by the voice of Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Oooooooooogh!"

Lovell was undermost. Monty Manders sat upon Lovell's waistcoat. He did not rise to his feet. He sat there—hard—and looked up at the astounded face of his Form master. He seemed unconscious of the fact that he was sitting on Lovell. He could scarcely have been unconscious of it, however, for he sat tight, unmoved by Lovell's frantic wriggling. Lovell squirmed and wriggled and spluttered.

"What—what does this mean?" gasped Mr. Dalton.

"Gerroff!" gurgled Lovell.

"Manders, get up at once!" thundered Mr. Dalton.

"I'm quite comfortable here, sir."

"What, what?"

"Quite comfortable, sir."

A pin might have been heard to drop in the Form-room. The Fourth-Formers, Classical and Modern, stared blankly at the new junior. Where a fellow found the nerve to answer his Form master in that strain was quite unknown to the Fourth. Even Morny, the most reckless fellow in the Form, would never have dreamed of it.

Mr. Dalton, for a moment or two, seemed too astounded to speak or to act. He stood and gazed, dumbfounded.

Then he woke to action, suddenly. He stooped, grasped Monty Manders by the collar, and swung him to his feet. Manders went spinning as the Form master released him. He brought up against the desks, gasping.

"Get up, Lovell!"

Arthur Edward picked himself up, gurgling for breath. He pressed both hands to his waistcoat. Lovell was winded.

"Now," said Mr. Dalton sternly, "I require an explanation of this. You have been fighting in the Form-room."

"Grooogh!" was Lovell's only answer. "Oooooogh!"

"Yes, sir!" said Monty Manders. "Or rather, sir, I've been fighting. Lovell can't fight!"

"You—grooogh—you cheeky cad—oooogh!"

"Silence, Lovell! Did you begin this disgraceful disturbance, Manders?"

"I did the whole thing, sir! I buzzed a book at Lovell, just to screw up his courage to the sticking-point, as jolly old Shakespeare puts it. Then I mopped him up."

"I'm dreaming this!" murmured Jimmy Silver dazedly.

The whole Fourth stared at Manders, in wonder. Never had a Rookwood man been heard to ask for it like this since Rookwood School had had a local habitation and a name.

"M-Manders!" stuttered Mr. Dalton. "Is this intended for deliberate impertinence?"

"Just as you like, sir!"

"What?" roared Mr. Dalton.

"Just as you like, sir!" answered the cheery Manders. "Take your own view of the matter, sir, and don't mind me!"

"Manders, you are insolent!"

"Go hon!"

"What? What did you say, Manders?"

"I said 'Go hon!' sir. Getting deaf?"

"Manders! Are you out of your senses?"

"No, sir. Are you?"

"Upon my word! Manders, is it possible that you suppose that the fact that you are the nephew of a Rookwood Housemaster gives you such license?" Mr. Dalton set his lips. "If that is the case, Manders, you will discover your mistake. I shall not deal with you personally—the matter is too serious for that——"

"Go it!" said Manders.

"I shall send you to Dr. Chisholm to be flogged, Manders. You will take a note from me to the headmaster at once!"

In the midst of a dead silence Mr. Dalton stepped to his desk, indited a note, placed it in an envelope, and held it out to Manders.

"Take that to the Head immediately, Manders!"

Manders took the note from the Form master's hand. With quiet deliberation, he tore it across, and across again, and scattered the fragments on the floor of the Form-room.

Jimmy Silver & Co. gazed on in horrified silence. Mr. Dalton looked at the rebel of the Fourth, his face growing first crimson, and then pale. He compressed his lips, stepped towards Manders, and dropped a hand on his shoulder.

"Manders!" The Fourth Form master's voice was almost choking.

"You—you refuse to obey me——"

"Yes, sir!"

"You—you have torn up my note——"

"That's it," assented Manders.

"You will not be flogged now, Manders. I shall take you to the Head, to be expelled from the school! You leave Rookwood to-day! Come!"

"Anything to oblige, sir!" answered Manders.

And with Mr. Dalton's grasp on his shoulder, Monty Manders walked out of the Form-room. The juniors looked at one another, with awed faces.

"Bunked!" said Jimmy Silver. "Well, if ever a fellow asked for it——"

"Blessed if it doesn't look as if he wants to be bunked!" said Mornington, in wonder.

"Well, I—I'm sorry!" said Lovell slowly. "I think the fellow must be off his rocker! He jolly well deserves to be sacked for cheeking Dalton like that!"

"He begged for it!" said Raby.

It was ten minutes before Mr. Dalton returned to the Form-room. He came alone, and his face was set and grim. The Rookwood Fourth was a very quiet and circumspect Form during third school that morning. But it is much to be feared that they did not derive much benefit from their Form master's valuable instructions. The "Shorter History of the English People" produced anything but its usual soporific effect.

Manders took the note from the Form master's hand and deliberately tore it up, scattering the pieces on the floor!

CHAPTER 3.

The Vials of Wrath!

TOMMY DODD & CO., and other Modern men, fairly raced across to Manders' House when the Fourth were out. They wanted to know what had happened to Manders; still more, they were keen to learn how Mr. Roger Manders, chief Beak of the Modern Side, was taking it.

Many fellows knew, too, that Mr. Manders had persuaded Monty's father to take him away from Highcroft and send him to Rookwood, where he would be under the avuncular eye. This outcome was likely to dismay him.

But the eager inquirers did not find Young Manders on the Modern Side. They looked for him eagerly, but he was not there. And Old Manders, when they saw him, had not turned a hair. Old Manders was seen coming away from the Lab, looking his usual sour but perfectly composed self. As a matter of fact, Mr. Manders had been busy with a science class of the Fifth, and had not heard the news that had thrilled the Fourth Form from end to end, and was spreading among the other fellows. This did not occur to Tommy Dodd; and having failed to find the nephew Tommy decided to ask the uncle.

"Excuse me, sir! Is he gone?" asked Tommy Dodd.

Mr. Manders was not a gentleman whose looks encouraged

questions on any subject; except, of course, "stinks" in the Lab. But even Mr. Manders, Tommy Dodd thought, could hardly resent a fellow being concerned about his nephew.

"What?" snapped Mr. Manders. "What do you mean, Dodd? To whom are you alluding? Is who gone?"

"Young Manders, sir—I mean your nephew, sir——"

"I fail to understand you, Dodd. I was not aware that my nephew was going anywhere!" said Mr. Manders testily.

"Isn't he sacked, sir?" gasped Tommy.

"What!" roared Mr. Manders.

"I—I——" Tommy Dodd jumped back, quite alarmed by Mr. Manders' look. He realised now that Manders didn't know. "I—I—I thought he was sacked, sir—I mean bunked—that is, expelled—— Yaroooooh!"

Smack!

Smacking a fellow's head was barred at Rookwood. Heads were never smacked at that ancient scholastic foundation. Mr. Manders quite forgot that—at the moment. He smacked—and he smacked hard!

"How dare you, Dodd!" he thundered.

"Whoo-hoo-hooop!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "Oh crikey! Ow! Oh lor'!"

Mr. Manders was striding at him, with upraised hand, evidently for another smack, and Tommy Dodd fairly fled.

"Dodd!" roared Mr. Manders.

Tommy Dodd vanished into space. Mr. Manders stared round at the other Modern fellows, with frowning brow and glinting eyes.

"What does that boy mean, Cook? Has anything happened in third school this morning affecting my nephew?"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Cook. "He's sacked—— Yaroooooop!"

Smack!

"How dare you!" bawled Mr. Manders.

Tommy Cook did not stay to explain how he dared. He disappeared round the nearest corner. Mr. Manders was getting dangerous at close quarters. The other fellows backed away in alarm.

They had wondered how Manders would take it. He seemed to be taking it badly.

"Doyle! Stop! Where are you going, Doyle? Do not dare to walk away when I am speaking to you! Come here, Doyle!"

"Oh, howly smoke!" mumbled Tommy Doyle, in dismay. He approached his Housemaster in a very gingerly manner. "Yes, sir!"

"What has occurred in third school—if anything?" rapped Mr. Manders.

"Young Manders, sir!" stammered Doyle. "He cheeked Dalton, sir, and—and Dalton took him to the Head, sir, to be sacked—— Whoooop!"

Smack!

"Ow, me napper! Ow! Wow!" yelled Tommy Doyle.

"Will you tell me the truth, Doyle?" shrieked Mr. Manders.

"Faith, I've tould it——" gasped Tommy Doyle. "Oh! Kape off!"

And Tommy Doyle fled after the other two Tommies, heedless of the exasperated voice that called him back. The three Tommies, of the Modern Fourth, were resolved to give their Housemaster as wide a berth as possible.

The Modern master strode away in the direction of the Head's House—the Classical House at Rookwood. He wanted to know. Jimmy Silver & Co., adorning the steps of their House with their youthful persons, watched him as he came with curious eyes.

"Manders looks ratty!" murmured Lovell.

"No wonder!" said Jimmy. "It's rather a jolt for Manders. I've heard Young Manders say that his uncle made him leave Highcroft and come here. It's ended in a mucker for the kid! Perhaps Manders is thinking now that he'd better have left him where he was."

The Classical chums capped Mr. Manders very respectfully as he came up. They did not like Manders; nobody liked Manders, even in his own house. But they could feel for a master placed in Manders' present painful position. Mr. Manders was about to pass them, taking no notice whatever of their respectful salute; but he changed his mind and stopped.

"Silver," he snapped, "has anything occurred in third school this morning?"

Jimmy stared. From Manders' "ratty" look, he supposed that the Modern master knew.

"Yes, sir," he answered. "Manders got into a scrap——"

"What? What? Nonsense! My nephew would do nothing of the kind in the Form-room! He may have been forced into such an action by Classical boys, perhaps! With whom was he fighting, if this is true?"

"Me, sir!" said Lovell.

"Then I have not the slightest doubt that you were to blame, Lovell. You are a disorderly boy!"

"Oh, am I?" said Lovell warmly. "Well, I haven't been sacked, anyhow!"

"Do you dare to say that anything of the kind has happened to my nephew?" hooted Mr. Manders.

"I know he's sacked—— Here, keep off!" yelled Lovell.

Smack!

The yell that Lovell gave rang across the old quadrangle of Rookwood. He jumped away, missed his footing on the steps, and rolled.

"Oh crumbs! Ow!" roared Lovell, as he bumped. "Oh, my hat!"

Mr. Manders gave him a glare, glared at Jimmy and Raby and Newcome, and strode into the House. Lovell scrambled to his feet, crimson with rage.

"The old tick!" he spluttered. "Does he think he can smack Classical heads? Why, the cheeky Modern worm, I'll jolly well——"

Jimmy and Raby and Newcome grasped their enraged chum and dragged him back as he was rushing into the House after Mr. Manders. What Lovell was going to do was not clear; but it was obviously better for Lovell not to do it.

"Keep smiling!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"I tell you I'll jolly well——" roared Lovell.

"You'll jolly well come for a walk in the quad!" chuckled Raby. And Arthur Edward, under the forcible persuasion of his chums, went.

Mr. Manders stalked into the House and rapped at the door of Mr. Dalton's study. Without waiting for an answer to his rap, he threw open the door and stalked in.

There was no love lost between the sour Modern master and the young, athletic master of the Fourth. But Mr. Dalton's manner was very conciliatory now, as he saw who his visitor was; he felt for Mr. Manders. There was nothing conciliatory in Mr. Manders' look, however. His eyes glinted at Richard Dalton.

"What is this I hear?" he hooted. "A number of boys in your Form, sir, are saying that my nephew is to be expelled from Rookwood, sir!"

"I regret to say that such is the case," answered Mr. Dalton. "I am more sorry than I can say, but——"

"Nonsense!" hooted Mr. Manders. "I decline to believe anything of the sort. Dr. Chisholm would not be guilty of such injustice—such folly, sir."

"Really, Mr. Manders——"

"I gather that my nephew was forced into some quarrel by a Classical boy—a disorderly young ruffian, sir—but I have no doubt, sir, that you have taken the opportunity to lay the whole blame upon my nephew, sir. But you will not succeed in this, sir!" bawled Mr. Manders.

"If you will let me explain, sir——"

"Where is my nephew now, sir?"

"He is confined in the punishment-room at the present moment. The Head desires to see you before sending him away. But there is no hope——"

"Nonsense!" roared Mr. Manders.

With that Mr. Manders flung out of the study. He could not smack Mr. Dalton's head—though undoubtedly he would have liked very much to do so.

"Upon my word!" gasped Richard Dalton.

Mr. Manders swept down the corridor like a thunderstorm. He arrived at the Head's door like a tornado. It was to be hoped, for Mr. Manders' own sake, that he would not smack the majestic head of Dr. Chisholm.

CHAPTER 4.
The Limit!

JIMMY SILVER stared.

"Young Manders!" he ejaculated.

Most of the fellows of the Classical side knew that Monty Manders had been locked in the punishment-room. Tubby Muffin had heard Bulkeley of the Sixth mention it to Knowles, the Modern prefect, and Tubby soon spread the news. As Young Manders was locked in, and as a fellow could not be in two places at once, the Fistical Four were naturally astonished to see him walking cheerfully in the quadrangle, with his hands in his pockets, and a cheery grin on his face.

He nodded to them, his grin expanding.

"How the thump——" exclaimed Raby. "Ain't you in punny?"

"Do I look as if I were in punny?" asked Manders. "My dear man, don't you know that stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage? There's a window to punny—and ivy on the wall underneath. I was out of punny five minutes after Dicky Dalton locked me in. Me for the open spaces."

"You unutterable young ass!" said Jimmy Silver. "Get back as quick as you can. Your uncle's gone to the Head, and there's a sporting chance that he may be able to beg you off. He's jolly certain to try hard."

"Don't I know it?" agreed Manders.

"Well, then, you fathead, if they find that you've bolted out of punny it will knock the last chance on the head."

"Just what I was thinking," said Manders.

"For goodness' sake, have a little sense!" exclaimed Raby. "Dicky Dalton's a good sort—one of the best—he might accept an apology, and you might crawl off with a flogging, instead of the sack. But if they find you've broken out of punny it will be the last straw."

"That's why!" said Manders.

"You silly chump!" exclaimed Lovell. "Do you want to be sacked?"

"What a brain!" said Monty Manders cheerfully. "That shows what a Classical education will do for a fellow not naturally bright! You've guessed it!"

"You—you—you want to be sacked?" stuttered Jimmy Silver, while the Co. stared at Manders dumbfounded.

"Think I'd have made a fellow scrap in the Form-room, and cheeked a nice man like Dalton, if I hadn't wanted it?" asked Manders. "Of course I want it! As the sportsman says in the play, it's the only way! I want to get back to Highcroft. Nunky hooked me out of Highcroft because he thinks he knows best. I want to get back there because I think I know best! Nunky thinks it's good for me to be under his eye. Now, I ask you—if Manders was your uncle, would you like to be under his eye?"

"No jolly fear!" said Lovell.

"Besides, there's the cricket," said Manders. "I'm in the second team at Highcroft. The fellows want me. I want them to have me. Highcroft is my school. I should be unwilling to be found dead at Rookwood. See?"

"You silly ass, we play cricket at Rookwood, if that's what you want to——"

"Yes, but at Highcroft we play it, with the accent on the 'play.' But that isn't all. My friends are there. I never wanted to change my school. My pater didn't really want it, only he always gives in to his brother Roger—nunky jaws and jaws till you have to give in or perish. I've been thinking it over ever since term started—I've asked nunky twice to let me off! The first time he jawed me; the second time he gave me six! I haven't asked him since."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, my hat!" said Lovell. "I thought you must be off your rocker, or——"

"Common complaint among lunatics, suspecting other people of being potty," said Manders affably. "But don't rag now; I don't want to leave any disabled wrecks at Rookwood when I go."

"Why, you cheeky tick!" gasped Lovell. "I was going to let you off that licking as you're bunked, but——"

"Cheese it, old bean; you've served your turn," said Manders. "You were the only fellow in the Fourth idiot enough to be hooked into a scrap in the Form-room. You came in jolly useful—which ought to be a comfort to you, as you can't possibly be considered ornamental. Here, keep off!"

"Chuck it!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, shoving Lovell back as he was jumping at Manders. "Here comes Dalton!"

Mr. Dalton had come out of the House. From the expression on his face and the way he glanced about him, it was easy to see that Manders had been missed from the punishment-room. The Fourth Form master's eye fell on Monty Manders and he came up with rapid strides.

"Manders!" he exclaimed. "You—you are here!"

"On this very spot, sir!" answered Manders.

"The Head sent to the punishment-room for you—your uncle is with Dr. Chisholm now—and you were found——"

"Couldn't have been, sir!" said Manders. "I wasn't there, you see."

"You were found to be missing!" thundered Mr. Dalton.

"When they got there the cupboard was bare, what?" said Manders. "And so the poor beak had none! What a life!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. grinned. They knew now the object of that extraordinary new boy in talking to his Form master in this style. Mr. Dalton did not know, however, and he frowned at the Classical chums. Then he fixed his eyes grimly on Manders.

"Manders! Your uncle has interceded with the Head. Dr. Chisholm has asked me whether I can overlook your conduct, if you make a public apology, to be followed by a severe flogging. For your uncle's sake—certainly not for your own—I have consented. Mr. Manders has an impression that I desire to be harsh with you—an impression that I wish to remove. You will now come with me to the Head; and you will be allowed one more chance——"

Mr. Dalton probably expected the new junior to look relieved, if not delighted. But if Mr. Dalton expected that, he was disappointed. There was only dismay in Monty Manders' face.

Manders dodged round the juniors, pushing Lovell violently into the arms of Mr. Dalton!

"You have had the insolence," went on Mr. Dalton, "to escape from the punishment-room. Had I been aware of that when I consented to give you another chance in my Form, I should not have consented. But I will not go back on my word. You have another chance, Manders. But I warn you to be careful. Another word of impertinence——"

"Rats!"

"Wha-a-a-t!" stuttered Mr. Dalton.

"Bow-wow!" said Manders.

That tore it, so to speak. Mr. Dalton made a stride at the Modern junior, and grasped at his collar. Monty Manders jumped back and dodged. The Form master, with a crimson face, followed him up. Manders dodged round the Fistical Four, and, giving Arthur Edward Lovell a violent shove in the small of the back, sent him staggering into the Form master's arms.

"Oooooch!" gasped Lovell.

"Manders!" shrieked Mr. Dalton.

Manders backed away, eyeing him warily. Mr. Dalton made another stride at him, and Manders dodged round

the massive trunk of one of the old Rookwood beeches. Twice round that ancient tree Mr. Dalton followed the elusive Manders, and there was a roar of laughter from the fellows in the quad. Classicals and Moderns were gathering in swarms to look on at that amazing exhibition.

"Go it, Manders!" yelled Mornington.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Dalton paused, with a face like a newly boiled beetroot. Never had the master of the Fourth been placed in so ridiculous a position before. And he was keenly conscious of the ridicule.

"Manders!" he panted.

"Keep it up, sir!" chortled Monty Manders. "Here we go round the mulberry-bush! I'll keep up this game as long as you do, sir."

Mr. Dalton made another rush, and again the elusive junior spun round the beech. The Form master paused again.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, what larks!" gasped Morny. "Go it, Manders!"

"Silence!" roared Mr. Dalton. "Carthew! Hansom! Seize that boy!"

Two big seniors rushed on Monty Manders. Carthew of the Sixth and Hansom of the Fifth collared him promptly.

"Here, chuck it!" gasped Manders. "I'll jolly well hack your shins!"

"Yarooooh!" roared Carthew. And he let go of Manders quite suddenly, and hopped on one leg, clasping the other with both hands in anguish.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here he is, sir!" gasped Hansom of the Fifth. "Chuck it, you young ass! Do you know that the Head's looking from his study window, and Manders, too? Chuck it, you potty, little ass! Oh! Ow! Whoooop!"

Hansom hopped and roared. But Mr. Dalton's grasp was on Manders now, and his knuckles fairly ground into the back of the Modern junior's neck.

"Now come with me, you young rascal!" said Mr. Dalton. "You will be expelled! And you have yourself to thank! Come!"

In a grip of iron Monty Manders was led away towards the House. Half Rookwood followed him, in a swarming, buzzing crowd. As Mr. Dalton marched him in Manders glanced round, and closed one eye at Jimmy Silver. Then he disappeared into the House, leaving the crowd in a roar of laughter.

CHAPTER 5.
Foiled!

DR. CHISHOLM fixed his eyes on Monty Manders as he was led into the Head's study. The Head's brow was grim. From his study window he had watched that amazing scene in the quadrangle. Mr. Manders had begged for another chance for his hopeful nephew; but there was no chance for the rebel.

Monty Manders set his collar straight as Mr. Dalton released him. He faced the Head, but with the corner of his eye on Mr. Manders.

"Manders," said Dr. Chisholm, in a deep voice, "at your uncle's request, I asked Mr. Dalton to be kind enough to accept an apology from you, with the intention of administering a flogging, instead of expelling you from this school. That is past. What I have seen with my own eyes convinces me that you cannot in any circumstances remain at Rookwood."

"Yes, sir," said Manners meekly.

"Such reckless insubordination, such unparalleled rebelliousness, cannot be overlooked or condoned. You will go!"

"Yes, sir," murmured Manders.

"One word, sir!" gasped Mr. Manders.

Dr. Chisholm held up his hand.

"I can listen to nothing, Mr. Manders. I cannot listen to a single word in favour of this reckless, rebellious, disobedient boy."

"Dr. Chisholm, one word!" spluttered Mr. Manders. "I make no excuse for this young rascal!"

"I imagine not, sir!" boomed the Head. "I imagine not!"

"But, sir, I have now penetrated his motive. This boy, sir, came to Rookwood unwillingly. He does not desire to remain here. This boy, sir, has, as I am now aware, deliberately acted so as to be sent away from the school. Regardless of my wishes, regardless of every consideration, he has deliberately calculated on this, sir."

"Is it possible?" ejaculated the Head.

He stared at Monty Manders. The dismay in the new junior's face at the turn affairs were taking, showed that it was only too possible.

"If this boy is sent away, sir," grated Mr. Manders, "it will not be a punishment to him. It will be the gratification, sir, of his own wishes. For that reason, sir, I beg you to let him remain, and administer a flogging—a severe flogging—an extremely severe flogging!"

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton, staring at Manders. "If that is the case, sir——"

"That is the case, sir. He is making use of you, sir, and of his headmaster, to carry out his own plans!" gasped Mr. Manders. "Such a scheme, such a—a—a plot, should not be allowed to succeed, sir."

Dr. Chisholm drew a deep breath.

"If matters are as you think, Mr. Manders, the boy's scheme should certainly not be allowed to succeed. Certainly, I have no intention of gratifying his wishes as a reward for his insolent conduct. You agree with me, Mr. Dalton?"

"Most assuredly, sir!" said the master of the Fourth. "And now that I am aware of his object, I shall know how to deal with him in Form."

"Oh crumbs!" moaned Monty Manders.

"The severest possible flogging, sir!" said Mr. Manders, with an eye like a basilisk on his hapless nephew. "No punishment could be too severe."

"Enough!" said the Head. "The boy shall remain at Rookwood! Mr. Dalton, kindly hand me my birch! Thank you! I have no doubt that adequate punishment will prevent this boy from attempting to carry out such a scheme again. I shall endeavour to make the punishment adequate. Manders, bend over that chair!"

"Oh crikey!" groaned Manders.

"Bend over, sir!" thundered the Head.

And for several minutes after that there was a sound of steady swishing in the Head's study, accompanied by frantic yells from Monty Manders.

Manders' little scheme had come near to success—very near—but not quite. Monty Manders had very nearly got what he wanted. Now he was getting what he had asked for. And the terrific yells that rang from the Head's study demonstrated that he was not enjoying it.

THE END.

(Don't forget, chums, you will meet Jimmy Silver & Co. exclusively in the GEM every week!)

FURTHER CHAPTERS OF OUR THRILLING ADVENTURE SERIAL.

THE ISLAND CASTAWAYS!

(Opening Chapters retold on page 26.)

SAVED BY A BUCKET!

Shipwrecked passengers make amazing landing.

A Breeches Buoy!

"JILL, your mother wants you to go to help dress her." It was dad speaking.

Jill screamed at that, and I suppose it was funny that anyone should trouble a lot about dressing when you're in a room with chairs and things floating round; but she slipped off the table and made for the door of the cabins, and I slipped off, too.

"I think it would be a bright idea for me to go on deck and have a look round," Barry said. "It seems to me that it's becoming lighter, and we're not being pounded so much."

The portholes on what I reckoned must be the land side were covered by water, for we'd taken a distinct list, and all one could see from the others were showers of spray. On deck one would get an outlook, even though it might be a rotten one.

"I'll come with you," said dad. "Dudley, you must look after your mother and sister."

"Right-ho!" said Dud, smoothing his hair. "But I do wish we had gone down nice and quickly and quietly when the storm started, it would have saved a lot of inconvenience, and I do hate these long-drawn-out affairs, with a lot of trouble for nothing!"

"Don't be an idiot!" said dad a little snappily. "We're not done yet!"

But as I waded towards the door I was a bit puzzled. I'd never thought Dud a particularly plucky chap; but there it was, he reckoned that it was all up with us, but took it quite gamely; but I knew it was the idea of a chance of escape that kept me up, and I think dad was the same.

And then we saw a tree!

I let off a yelp of sheer delight. It was true the tree was surrounded by tumbling surf, but it was not more than a hundred yards from the Maglo, and then, through the flying spray, we saw more trees on a coral strand, clear of the sea, slender palm-trees, but beyond them a jungle of green, and with a bluish-looking hill rising behind the green, and a stretch of sand, over which the surf was breaking.

"It's a weird position, Barry," said dad, in a rather strange voice. "We're on a ship apparently deserted by all but the dead"—and he nodded towards the bodies of two lascars washed into the scuppers close by—"and our one hope is to get on to a desert island before the ship breaks up or rolls into deep water."

"How do you know the island is uninhabited?" I asked him.

"Because if it was inhabited the natives would have been down by the sea like vultures following their prey, watching the treasure trove being driven their way. But, inhabitants or not, our only chance is to get on land. Even if there is a boat left, I doubt if we could make the landing in that surf."

I suppose when you've turned forty you can't take a situation like ours so jolly cheerfully; but the sight of the island had bucked me up, and I suddenly had a brainwave.

"I've got a bright idea, dad!" I cried. "What about the emergency coaling gear? I could swim ashore with a light line, haul the wire cable in, fix it to a tree, and one of the deep steel buckets would make a sort of breeches buoy."

Dad looked at me, and then he looked at the tumbling sea and the heavy surf, and said it would be impossible to swim in such a sea. But I argued that I was a bit of a swell at swimming, and that, as it was our only hope, I might just as well be drowned trying to help the lot of us, with a sporting chance of pulling it off, as stick on the ship and perhaps be drowned less quickly.

I could see that dad didn't like the idea; but, with a creak and a groan, the old Maglo went down a bit more in the bows, nearly flinging us off our feet, and I suppose that decided him, and he agreed. So I took off jacket and trousers, and, in vest and short pants, tied the light line he had found, round my waist.

"So-long!" I said, and slipped into the comparatively sheltered water on the shore side of the ship, and then I heard a whine and a splash, and I saw the skipper's black dog swimming after me. He was a rum-looking dog, said to be a cross between a setter and a retriever, with a long, fluffy tail, and a fringe on his legs like a cowboy's chaps.

Saunders had been rather a brute to him, but he and I got quite chummy, and I suppose the poor beast, dazed by the storm and the shooting on board, had thought he would chance his luck with me.

I thought he had probably made the mistake of a lifetime, for the sea was pounding me, and I saw I'd never get through the surf on the sand, so I made for the reef, taking

the risk of being dashed to pieces against it. I saw the dog being tumbled over and over in a big wave, and thought poor old Nigger had had his last swim; then a wave picked me up, a shower of surf descended on my head. I saw the bending stem of a small palm, and clutched wildly at it, missed it, and went under and was swirled round, and came up panting for breath, to find myself within a few strokes of water as blue as the poster artists make the sea and as calm as the school swimming-bath.

I had just enough strength left to make those few strokes, and was then in the shelter of the reef where it rose above the rough sea, dividing it from a calm lagoon. For a few seconds I lay on my back, getting my breath. It was clear that the big wave had lifted me clean over the reef into safety.

Climbing a coral reef wasn't exactly a pleasant job in undervest and pants, but I managed it with comparatively few gashes, and got on the reef high and dry, but for occasional showers of spray, and found myself close to a stout palm-tree, to which I could attach the wire cable once I hauled it in.

The Maglo looked strangely close, for it seemed that I'd swum for miles, and I could see dad waving his hand, and, but for the howl of the wind, we could easily have shouted to each other. Then I spotted Jill, and I gave her a wave, and began to haul in the line.

Then something brushed against the back of my legs and gave me a nasty jar, for there was no knowing what was on this island off the steamer routes in the Pacific, and there was rather a rotten sense of loneliness standing there, with my people on a sinking ship, parted from me by an uncrossable sea. Then I saw it was the dog.

"Nigger, you ass, you gave me a scare!" I said, as I patted him.

And he began to jazz round me, wagging his tail as I hauled at the line dad was paying out; then I felt more weight, saw the clamp at the end of the thick wire cable come over the side. Once that was clamped to the palm-tree it would be a precious short time before we were all on the island.

But it took some pulling, and then, just as I was beginning to put my weight into the job and the cable was halfway across, there came a snap. I went reeling backwards and crashed against the palm-tree, and I saw the Maglo swept by a heavy sea.

The rope had evidently been weakened in some spot by rubbing against the coral, and it had parted. The connection I had made that swim to establish had been cut before it could be of any use. My people were on the doomed ship and the dog and myself on the island!

—1—

Well Bowled!

IT was a perfectly ghastly feeling to stand there with the line in my hand, realising that my swim and the wonderful bit of luck which had brought me through had all been in vain. I suppose one does cling to life, especially at sixteen; but I know as I stood there, feeling so terribly helpless and lost, I wished I'd stopped on the ship to drown with the others, and I was just wondering whether it wouldn't be better to plunge in again and try to swim back when I saw that dad was hauling in the cable and that Dudley stood between him and Jill and, with his hands to his mouth, was yelling something to me.

I could not catch a word, but I saw the ship was lower in the bows. Then Dud stepped backwards, came with a run, and his left arm whirled over his head.

I got the idea.

My brother Dudley might not be bright in the selling of motor-cars, but he was a jolly fine left-hand bowler, and had been taking his cricket things out to New Zealand. At school he had established a record for throwing the cricket ball which had not been approached within yards in my time. It was easy to see his idea. If he could throw a cricket ball to me on the reef, communication would quickly be established again; but the chances seemed to be a hundred to one against it succeeding, and there was no time to waste.

There was nothing for me to do but wait. The heads of all three had disappeared from the bulwarks, and it was clear that they must be fixing string to the ball. And when I thought of the yards and yards of line which would have to run out, the risk of it fouling, and, at best, the dragging effect of it, I felt the throw to be impossible, even though it would be helped by the strong wind blowing from the sea.

Then dad and Jill appeared at the side again, and Dud was walking back across the fairly steeply inclined deck. He had taken off his dressing-gown and the coat of his pyjamas, and looked a weird figure as he took a bowler's run.

I kept my eye on the ball, and saw it coming through the air, a brand new ball, gleaming red against the greyness all round. For a second, as I ran forward up to my knees in water, keeping a precarious foothold on the reef, I thought it was going to reach me, but it dropped in the swirling water, about four yards out of my reach. And then I thought of the dog beside me. Saunders had told me that he had been trained to retrieve, and there was a bare chance that he might save lives now.

"Fetch it, Nigger!" I shouted, and pointed to the ball bouncing about in the swirling surf.

The dog looked at me with his tail down and a pleading look in his brown eyes. But a dog might live in a sea that would drown a man, and again I ordered him to go.

And in he went before I could think to tie the line I held in my hand to his collar, and I could have kicked myself for not thinking of it in time.

The dog was carried away from the ball, but he was game, turned, made a snap for it, and then I was up to my waist, grabbed his collar, and staggered back up the reef out of the water, holding the collar with one hand and the string in the other, in case he dropped the ball.

I know I patted the beggar frantically, and then started cautiously hauling in. Yards and yards of thin string had been fastened to the ball by means of a sort of cage of string, and then came a light line, and then a fairly thickish rope, and I saw that dad had taken every precaution this time. Haul as quickly as I would, it seemed to take an interminable time, and it was pretty awful to feel that any minute might see the end.

Then I grasped the heavy clamp of the wire hawser, and heaved a sigh of relief. Attached to it was a rope for hauling in the bucket. The clamp was no good, as I had no spanner; but there was plenty of wire, so I took three hitches round the palm-tree, and tied the twisted clamp with a length of line.

Looking at the Maglo, I saw that they had attached a large and deep steel bucket to the pulley with a patent hook, and that dad and my brother were getting my mother into it, and Jill was handing some things in. And then I saw dad signalling to me to haul in.

That was easy, for the slope of the wire was towards me, and soon the bucket was almost up to the reef, with spray breaking over it. Then I grabbed it.

"My boy!" said my mother. "Oh, my boy!"

My mother was a dignified-looking woman. I don't mean she was haughty, but she had a sort of natural dignity. A serious illness a few years after I was born had turned her hair quite white.

"All change!" I said, thinking I'd better act the silly ass and try to cheer her up a bit. And Nigger danced round her, seeming to think that things had taken a better turn.

It seemed she had insisted on bringing my blue flannel suit with her, and told me I could put it on whilst dad was hauling the bucket back. Dad had sent a sporting rifle and a packet of cartridges with the tobacco in his oilskin pouch, and Jill a sackful of provisions.

Just to satisfy the mater's idea of respectability I pulled on the wet blue trousers as they were hauling in the bucket, and I eagerly asked her questions. It seemed that they had thought I was a goner when the wave had lifted me over the reef, and it was then that Dud had the idea of throwing the cricket ball with a strong line attached to it, hoping that it might wedge somewhere and act as a life-line for him to work along.

"Some hopes!" I said, and saw that Jill was getting into the bucket.

"I think it was very clever of Dudley to think of it," said mother. "And when we saw you on the reef, Jill said that with string instead of a line on the ball, and someone on shore to haul in, the idea ought to work all right. But, Barry dear, I'd just as soon be drowned as eaten by cannibals."

"So would I," I said. "But we know drowning was unpleasantly near, whilst we haven't sighted a solitary cannibal."

And then I was hauling in Jill.

She'd got a bale of blankets, which she tossed out to me, and then jumped lightly from the bucket.

"Well done, Barry!" she said. And there was more colour in her cheeks now, and something of the old brightness in her eyes, though she still had the half-drowned kitten look, through the drenching of spray she had received in the bucket.

"It was Dud's bowling that did it, not to mention the dog," I said. "Welcome to the ancestral seat, and there's no charge for coconuts!"

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

Young BARRY MAYNE is on his way to New Zealand aboard the Maglo, with his father and mother. DUDLEY, Barry's elder brother, and JILL, his younger sister, are also with them. During a terrific storm in the Pacific, the crew mutiny and desert the boat, after killing all the officers. Barry and his family are left locked in the saloon. With an earsplitting crash the Maglo runs aground and the saloon is flooded.

(Now continue the story, as told by Barry.)

Jill laughed, but mother sat staring out to the wreck, her chin propped on her hands, whilst Nigger fussed round Jill.

Then dad gave the signal to haul in, and Jill, evidently feeling that she had not been exactly tactful, went to cheer up mother, who just sat staring out to sea.

I was a bit staggered when I saw my brother. He had changed into a grey flannel suit, and donned a macintosh, he had fancy socks, and a pair of beautifully polished brown shoes.

"Well bowled, sir!" I said, with a grin, and he grinned back. He had brought a large stone jar of water, and some more blankets.

"I wish dad would hurry!" whispered Jill to me anxiously. I could see him loading stuff into the bucket, and then, without getting in, he gave the signal to haul in.

"Don't pull that rope!" cried my mother. "Make him get in!"

But I was already hauling. It was no time for argument. I took it dad knew what he was about, and that by not obeying his instructions I should be letting him down.

Dudley reassured her, and then he and Jill came to help unload. The bucket was filled with provisions, another sporting rifle and ammunition, and I chuckled as I took out the huge plated cruet which had always stood on the dining-table.

"Good old guv'nor!" said Dud. "If I've got to eat sharks and birds of paradise, I'd sooner have 'em with a little vinegar and pepper! That's a useful axe, too. Let her rip!"

I signalled to dad that all was clear, and he started to haul the bucket back. I think we all had a horrible feeling that he was tempting Providence, and I was jolly thankful to see him place two or three things in the bucket, and then get in and signal for me to haul in. I pulled like mad, and as the bucket came hurtling through the surf, and Dud and I grabbed it, mother gave a little cry and that tense expression left her face.

"We're a real modern Swiss Family Robinson!" said Jill, brushing back her wet hair and looking round her. "What shall we call the island, dad?"

Dad scrambled out of the bucket and tied a loose line to the handle, a line he had been paying out as the bucket came over, providing a means of hauling it back to the ship if we were lucky enough to have the chance.

"Oh, I don't know, my dear," he said quite cheerfully. "Barry had the idea for using the coaling gear, and Dudley bowled splendidly. I think I should suggest the Isle of Invention."

"I can improve on that, dad!" I said, with a laugh, "If necessity is the mother of invention, why not call it Necessity Island?"

Jill clapped her hands.

"I should let it go at that!" said Dudley a little grimly, as we all stood staring at the unknown land at the end of the coral reef.

(Barry and his family are certainly on solid earth, but what strange adventures are ahead of them on Necessity Island? Boys, this great adventure yarn is chock full of exciting situations. Order next week's GEM now!)

WHO 'SACKED' SELBY?

(Continued from page 19.)

frame of mind. He was interrupted when Tom Merry and Handcock came in.

Tom had a rather red face.

"Listen, kid!" he said hesitantly. "I—I want to beg your pardon for ragging you about Cardew just now."

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

"Why, according to Handcock, it looks as though Cardew is guilty, and you know it. That's so, isn't it?"

Tompkins was silent.

"It won't go any further than ourselves," said Tom. "You can rely on us to keep mum."

"Well, yes, that's so!" groaned Tompkins. "I told the Head lies—you know that now——"

"Don't think I blame you, old chap!" Tom said quickly. "It was a ripping action, considering the circumstances!"

"The only thing is," put in Handcock, "Cardew wasn't worth it."

"He was—he is! He saved my life!"

"He's a cool and plucky bounder!" admitted Tom. "And, really, Selby deserved all he got."

"You understand why I didn't want to go to the Head?" Tompkins said feebly. "It wasn't the flogging. I knew Cardew had done it."

"I understand, old bean! I hate lies, and I hate liars; but I take off my hat to you, Tommy! You're as plucky as they make 'em!"

"That's rot, really! I was in a blue funk when I got to the Head's study."

"All the more honour to you for going in, old bean."

"Y-you see," stammered Tompkins, "I had to pay my debt, you know. I—I thought at first of telling the Head that I did it; but I figured it out that, if I said it was done by a fellow I couldn't recognise, they'd be bound to let it drop, and there would be no harm done."

"Well, I guess nothing more will happen about it," argued Handcock. "Everyone will think that this village guy downed Selby—except we three and Cardew. Well, that's all to the roses, and won't do the village mutt any harm. And, say, I allow that Selby will be mad. Just a few!"

"We must keep it mum!" agreed Tom. "Poor old Tommy is a giddy hero, really; but it mustn't be known. You'll be one of those flowers which are born to blush unseen, old man!"

"That's what I want!"

"Anyway, you've paid your debt—though only four fellows know it."

And when the story of Cardew's life-saving act at the abbey wall became known, everyone agreed that Clarence York Tompkins owed a debt to the plucky junior.

But only four fellows knew how the debt was paid.

THE END.

(Well, chums, that was a jolly good yarn, wasn't it? Next week, Martin Clifford will make you yell with laughter! Read "Down on Grundy's Farm!" in the next issue! It's a scream from beginning to end.)

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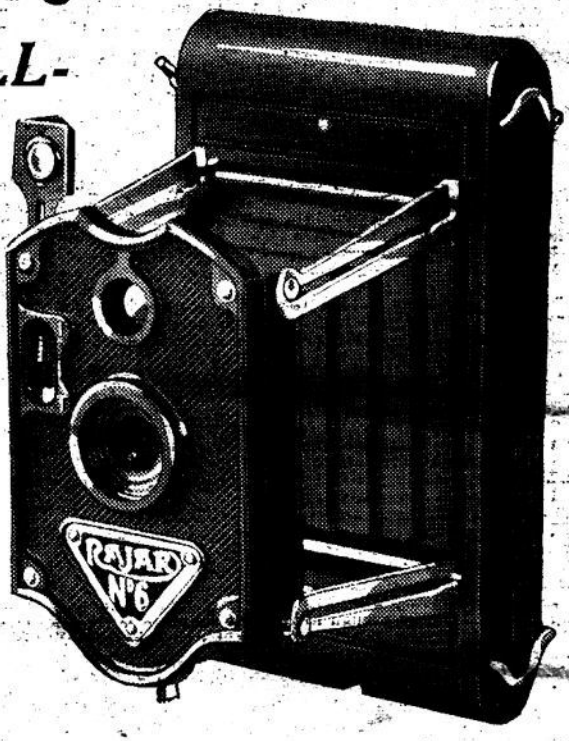

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