



LEFT BEHIND.

A MAGNIFICENT NEW, LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL TALE OF TOM MERRY & CO.



THE OLD MAYOR'S BEST PACE!

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*A Magnificent, New, Long, and Complete Story of
Tom Merry & Co. at Jim's.*

LEFT BEHIND.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



CHAPTER 1.

Stranded!

"O H, you silly chumps!" howled

Tom Merry.

"You frabjous asses!" hooted

Monty Lowther.

"What on earth did you do it for?"

shouted Jack Blake.

"Weally, I am surprised——"

The last was from Arthur Augustus

D'Arcy.

No more was heard. The train sped on, and Harry Manners and Dick Roylance stood on the platform and watched it go.

They had missed it!

Their comrades were off to Greyfriars, and here were they—Manners, a member of the footer team selected, Roylance brought along as reserve man—stranded at Lexham Junction.

The polite remarks hurled at them by the four whose faces were quickly becoming mere pale specks in the distance had not reached them exactly as set down above. That was hardly possible, since all four shouted at once, and others behind them in the two compartments which the team occupied were also shouting.

But it was easy enough for Manners and Roylance to guess the purport of the remarks.

One thing was certain—none of those remarks was likely to be in the complimentary line.

"My hat! We've done it now, Roylance!" said Manners dolefully.

"We have, rather," replied the New Zealand junior, much more cheerily.

Roylance had a more even temper than Harry Manners.

"You can tell me it's my fault, if you like!" snapped Manners.

"I wasn't thinking of doing that, old chap."

"Well, it was! There's no getting away from that."

And it had been the fault of Manners.

With close on an hour to wait at Lexham, half the team had seized the chance of having a look at the town; and Manners had stayed too long looking at a camera in a shop-window.

"It doesn't matter," said Roylance.

"Doesn't matter? What are you talking about, fathead? Old Tommy won't be half mad, and the side will have to play a man short—or else borrow a man."

"I meant that it wasn't worth while arguing about whose fault it was," Roylance replied equably.

"No room for argument! It was mine entirely."

"All right! Have it that way if it suits you."

"You told me we should be late if we didn't hurry up."

"I'm not denying that. It doesn't matter now."

"But it does matter, chump!"

Manners was feeling very irritable.

If Monty Lowther or Levison had been the fellow left behind with him there would probably have been a quarrel.

But Roylance was not irritable, and he had no notion of quarrelling with Manners.

"It seems to me that what really matters is how soon we can get to Greyfriars," he said.

"How soon? How late, don't you mean? There's not a dog's chance of getting there in time for the game."

"I'll ask, anyway."

"It's no use, I tell you!"

But Roylance went off to inquire of a ticket-inspector.

The small hope he had cherished was dashed at once. He came back shaking his head and looking graver.

"It's off!" he said.

"Told you so!"

"There's no other train for a couple of hours, even if that goes, the inspector said."

"What's he mean?"

"Blessed if I know! But he seemed to mean something. I'd have asked him, only that he spoke in a very mysterious kind of way, not very friendly. Rather as if it was cheek for me to ask."

"It doesn't matter a heap, anyway. A train in two hours' time is no good to us," said Manners.

"I suppose not. The game would be over before we got there."

"We should be in time for tea after it, that's all. What an ass old Tommy was not to keep the train waiting a minute or two!"

"He probably didn't know we weren't on board until it had started."

"That was it, I fancy," said Manners.

"I sha'n't forget their faces in a hurry. Gussy's was as long as a giddy fiddle. But it's rough luck."

"Rougher for you than for me, old chap, as I was only reserve. But I'd have liked to see the game."

"What are we going to do, Roylance?"

"You don't see any use in going on to Greyfriars?"

"Rather not! They'll rag us bald-headed for missing the blessed train. I'm not in such a hurry for that as not to wait till the bounders get back."

"We might put in our time here. There's sure to be a cinema show, or perhaps there's a footer match on."

"I've had enough and a bit over of that mouldy town. I'm not going back to it."

"Well, there doesn't seem anything very interesting on here."

As Manners would not go on to Greyfriars, refused to return to St. Jim's at once, and had no use for the town of Lexham, the one thing left seemed to be to put in their time at the station.

But that was evidently not what Manners wanted.

"I should rather say not!" he answered.

"Stale buns—automatic machines that won't cough up anything for your pennies—and discontented-looking people! Not in my line, thanks!"

"There's a bookstall," remarked Roylance.

"And the company's bylaws on the walls, if you can't find anything really interesting on the bookstall," gibed Manners. "Not any for me!"

"I'm not sure that there isn't something interesting going on here," said Roylance suddenly. "Do you know, Manners, I begin to twig what the inspector merchant meant?"

Manners looked around him curiously.

He might not have noticed anything on his own account; but he saw now that the hint had been given him.

They were the only people on their particular platform, which was that farthest from the booking-office. But on the next and about the buildings on the farther one were groups of porters and other railway servants, all apparently discussing something with great earnestness.

A slow local train stood in a bay of the main platform, and in that train there had already been passengers seated when the fast train for Courtfield and Friardale had steamed out.

But the local train had not started, and now the driver, stoker, and guard all came from it and joined the biggest group on the main platform.

"Anything up?" said Manners.

"Yes, I think there must be," answered Roylance.

"I say, it can't be a smash on the line!" said Manners, white to the lips with alarm at the sudden thought that had seized him. "Our chaps—their train was the last through."

"Tisn't that, I'm sure," struck in Roylance. "They would be doing something if it was, not standing about gassing."

"Well, what in the world is it, then? Tell a fellow, can't you? You seem to know all about it."

"I don't really know any more than you do, old chap. But it looks to me like a strike."

"Of course! I was a fatheaded ass not to twig! That's what the inspector merchant meant by talking about if the train went. I rather fancy the train over here isn't going, do you know?"

"Look at the stationmaster," said Roylance. "He's worried pretty nearly out of his life, I should say. He's been pacing up and down as if he didn't care to speak to any of those chaps who are arguing over there, too. Waiting for them to say what they are going to do, I suppose."

"This is jolly interesting," said Manners. "Look! There's a passenger from that train coming to speak to the station-master."

"Important-looking old buffer, too. Looks as if he might be the Mayor of Lexham, with the corporation."
 "Without the corporation, you mean."
 "No, with, Manners!"
 "Well, where's the corporation?"
 "Inside the mayor's waistcoat, old top!"

"You're nearly as funny as Lowther."
 "That," said Roylance gravely, "is saying a lot."

"Think so? Well, go on thinking so if it pleases you. I say, the mayor and corporation doesn't seem to be getting much change out of the stationmaster!"

It was even as Manners said. The stationmaster could only shake his head and look worried. A storm had beaten up which he could not hope to quiet, it was evident.

The mayor—if he was the mayor—now approached one of the debating groups. He commenced to harangue the men; but one of them said something that made the rest roar with laughter, and the mayor—if he was the mayor—looked furious.

"Now the stationmaster's going to have a shot at them," said Manners.

The portly gentleman was striding away. The official with the gold-braided cap walked up to the group.

No one laughed at him. The two juniors, now thoroughly interested, though they could not hear what was said, could see that the stationmaster had the respect of the men.

But they were not to be talked over by him, that was plain.

He walked slowly towards the local train. The driver, guard, and stoker, who had come from that, detached themselves from the group and stood looking after him. But they did not follow.

"He'll fetch the people out—you see," said Manners.

And Manners was right.

The stationmaster passed along the train, and halted a moment or two at each occupied compartment. Then the passengers began to tumble out.

There were not many of them—perhaps a score in all. Some of them left the station at once—Lexham people who had merely to postpone a short journey to one of the villages along the branch, no doubt.

But others waited, appearing anxious. They had luggage, and wanted to get home, no doubt.

Then, for the first time, something struck Manners.

"I say, old chap," he said, "if they can't get away from here, how are we going to?"

"That's a question that's been in my mind for the last five minutes or so," said Roylance quietly. "We seem to be stranded!"

CHAPTER 2.

The Mayor of Lexham.

"JOLLY awkward!" said Manners, with a very worried look.

"It is, a bit," agreed his companion.

"What are we going to do?"

"Well, first thing is to find out whether there really is any chance at all of getting away. A few hours' delay won't matter much, though it will be a bore. But I don't fancy railway strikes are generally over in a few hours."

"More likely a few days. My hat, this is a knock-out! Why, those fellows will be hung up at Greyfriars—that's a dead cert."

"Better off than we shall be, if they are," returned Roylance. "The Greyfriars people will put them up. I don't know who's going to do as much for us."

"We've simply got to get through—

either to Greyfriars or to St. Jim's!" said Manners.

"Better try for St. Jim's, I think. No use waiting. The stationmaster's got enough on his hands to be going on with. But he looks a decent sort, and I don't think he'll mind telling us how things stand. Let's cut over."

The two crossed the bridge, and made their way to the official's sanctum. No one took any notice of them. No one took any notice of the other stranded passengers. The troubles of the public were evidently a matter of indifference to the strikers.

"Come in!" called a deep, pleasant voice in response to the tap at the door which Manners gave.

But, though it was Manners who tapped at the door, it was Roylance who had to open the hall when they were once inside.

"Sorry to bother you, sir," he said. "We know you must have enough of that sort of thing without us, for we can see there's a strike on. But we thought you would not mind telling us—"

"I don't mind telling you anything I can, or helping you in any way possible," struck in the station-master. "I have a duty to the public, you know. Ask me anything you like, and I will do my best to answer you."

"We ought not to be here at all," said Roylance. "If we hadn't missed our train—"

"Like silly dummies!" put in Manners.

"We should have been well on the way to Courtfield now, for a match with Greyfriars."

"You will hardly get to Courtfield today, I'm afraid, young gentlemen."

"It wouldn't be much use if we could, now," said Manners. "The question is whether we can get anywhere."

"The remainder of your team will have to stay at Greyfriars to-night—perhaps longer," the station-master answered thoughtfully. "You cannot join them—unless you go by road, and that means a long distance. Your best plan will be to stay here till to-morrow, and await the chance of a resumption of the service. You might, of course, try to get back to your school to-night; but it's a long way, and there are several changes."

"You know where we come from, then?"

The official smiled.

"We have had teams from St. James' through here too many times for me to fail to recognise your colours," he said.

"Well, do you think there is a chance of our getting through if we try it?" asked Roylance.

"A chance, certainly. Everything depends upon whether the L.B. & S.C. men are also going out. But our own system is utterly disorganised, and you can only get on to the other company's system by a cross-country journey by some road vehicle. When you strike the L.B. & S.C.R. you may very likely find that no trains are running."

Manners and Roylance looked at one another in silence for a moment.

Then the New Zealand junior spoke.

"After all, even if that happens, we shan't really be any worse off," he said.

"Better, in a way, because we shall at least be nearer St. Jim's. And there's no particular pull in staying here."

"Except that I can find you a decent place to put up at for the night, and can make myself to some extent responsible to your Head for you," the station-master said quietly.

They might have resented that, if it had been put bumpkinsly. But it was not. There was real kindness in it. The stationmaster suspected that they might get into trouble for straying from the

rest of the team, and wanted to make matters as easy as possible for them.

But there was no need for that. Neither Dr. Holmes nor Mr. Railton was at all likely to blame them for missing the train at Lexham, and beyond that they were hardly open to blame—as long as they did all that they could to get either to Greyfriars or St. Jim's before bedtime.

"Thank you ever so much," said Roylance quietly. "But I really think trying to get back at once is our proper plan. Even if we don't succeed, we shan't take much harm, you know. We can put up somewhere for the night, and start again in the morning."

"Well, you certainly look fit to take care of yourselves, and perhaps the plan you suggest is best. You won't think me intrusive if I ask whether your funds run to it?"

Again the two looked at one another. This query struck home.

"I've a trifle over five bob," said Roylance frankly.

"Mine's less than that—about three," Manners said.

"You could get home on that if you had luck everywhere, perhaps. No, you would hardly do that, for any conveyance to the nearest place where you can strike the other line would certainly cost you more than eight shillings. May I make you a loan?"

"We're strangers to you, sir," said Manners doubtfully.

"I see many strangers, and I rather fancy my own judgment about them. I could trust either of you. But really it is not risking much, for I know your school, and you can tell me your names, so that recovery of the advance would in any case be easy enough."

They gave him their names, and he handed over a couple of pound notes. Then he shook hands with them, and told them where to make for and the nearest route; and they departed, after renewed thanks.

"That's a real good chap!" said Manners.

"One of the best—the very best!" replied Roylance heartily.

He's made me feel no end backed. It's an adventure, Roylance. I'm sorry about missing the match, but nothing else matters much, and I'm jolly glad that it was you with me. I'd as soon have you as Tommy or Monty, and that's saying a lot."

It was saying quite a lot for Harry Manners, who was little given to saying such things at all. Roylance said nothing, but he knew, and he was sure Manners knew, that no other fellow at St. Jim's would have suited him half as well as Manners for a comrade in this adventure.

Their way out of Lexham led through the main street in any case, even if they meant to take the road on foot. But they did not mean to do that unless they were obliged, and the High Street seemed the likeliest place for hiring some sort of vehicle to take them as far as Hovenden, the station they intended to make for.

"It ought to run to a taxi if we can get one," said Manners.

"This doesn't look like a place exactly overrun with taxis," replied Roylance.

"A spring cart will satisfy me, if there's nothing better to be had."

"But we ought to get there as soon as we can. The strike will be spreading, I should think."

Roylance thought it more than likely it would have already spread. He had very small hope of getting a train at Hovenden. Once there, they were quite a good distance on the road back. But it would scarcely be prudent to spend all they had in getting there.

"Here we are!" said Manners, stopping in front of a garage. "Are you going to do the talking, or shall I?"

"You do it if you like, old chap. But make as good a bargain as you can. We may find that we've little cash to spare before we get back."

"Hallo, there's the mayor and corporation! Seems to be coming here, too. I'd better get in ahead of him."

And Manners bolted into the garage. The pompous, portly individual whom Roylance had designated the mayor and corporation—and, in point of fact, he was the Mayor of Lexham, though not the corporation as well—was evidently in a hurry.

His hat was pushed to the back of his head, and there were beads of sweat on his brow, which was an extensive one, stretching fairly to the back of his neck, for the only hairs upon his cranium were at the sides. He had a red face, and his eyes were small and fierce.

He pushed past Roylance with quite unnecessary rudeness, and bounced into the garage.

Next moment angry words proceeded from within.

"Rubbish! Do you tell me, Adkins, that you propose to allow this—ha, hum!—whipper-snapper to have the only car available when I—I want it?"

"Sounds a bit like old Grundy," murmured Roylance.

And, indeed, the mayor's assumption that he was the centre of the universe was rather like the great George Alfred.

"Better be civil!" rapped out Manners. "I don't allow fat strangers to call me names!"

Roylance went inside. It occurred to him that Manners might need his moral support.

The proprietor of the garage looked uncomfortable. In his eyes the mayor was evidently a person of extreme importance.

"What? Do you dare to call me a fat stranger?" thundered the mayor.

"You mustn't talk like that, you know, sir!" said Adkins nervously. "That ain't any stranger. That's Mr. Bultitude. He's been Mayor of Lexham for seven years, and he's the most highly respected gentleman in the town."

"That doesn't say much for the town!" returned Manners. "Anyway, I can't stand being called names."

"You had better get your car out, Adkins," said Mr. Bultitude.

He was plainly used to ordering other people about.

"Well, sir, this young gentleman—"

"And who is this young gentleman, I should like to know?" roared the mayor.

"My name is Henry Manners, and I am from St. James' School," said Manners politely. Then he spoiled the effect of his politeness by adding snappishly: "Now you know!"

But there was something in his speech which seemed to have a mollifying influence upon the mayor.

"Ha, hum!" said his worship, stroking the lowest of his three chins. "And do you wish to get back to your school?"

Roylance had to answer that. The politeness of Manners seemed quite exhausted.

"That's the notion," said the New Zealand junior easily. "The station-master thinks that we might get on to the rail again at Hovenden."

"Ha, hum! That chances to be the direction in which I am going. This is the only car to be had in Lexham at the present moment—eh, you know that, Adkins?"

"It's certainly the only one I know of, Mr. Bultitude," replied the garage proprietor. "Petrol's still very short, you see."

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"And the distance to Hovenden is too great for any horsed vehicle," continued the mayor.

"The horses these days," said Adkins, "don't get enough petrol to go that far, so to speak."

The mayor frowned upon the joke. Then he turned to the two boys.

"As a very special favour," he said impressively, "I will let you journey to Hovenden with me."

Manners glared at him.

"I don't know that we care—" he began.

But Roylance checked him by a dig in the ribs with his elbow.

Roylance could see that the mayor had the pull with Mr. Adkins.

The garage proprietor wanted to be fair, perhaps. But Manners had not actually hired the car when Mr. Bultitude entered, and he had no real claim on it if Adkins preferred to let the mayor have it.

"But—ha! hum!—there must necessarily be some arrangement as to expenses. What would you charge to drive me to Hovenden, Adkins?"

"Two pounds, sir," said Mr. Adkins promptly.

"No, no! Really, Adkins, really! That is the figure you would charge to these two—ha! hum!—youths, or any other stranger. I ask for the charge you would make to me—me?"

"Well, sir, of course, you're a good customer, and I'll say thirty shillings."

"That's better! Ha, hum! Now, my boys, you will save five shillings each by the plan I propose."

"I fancy your arithmetic's wrong, sir!" growled Manners.

"What! My arithmetic wrong? Why, in my day at St. Jim's I was always the first in my Form at arithmetic!"

"There ain't the equal of Mr. Bultitude in Lexham in a matter of figures," said Adkins.

"If we were to share the expenses equally, and the charge is to be thirty shillings, we shall save ten shillings each, and you will save twenty, sir," suggested Roylance.

Ha, hum! Yes, certainly, if that were the arrangement. But, in justice to myself, I could not think of any such division. I have secured the car for you at ten shillings less than you could have got it for yourselves, and my idea—ha! hum!—is that you should pay fifteen shillings each."

Mr. Adkins scratched his head. Even by that arrangement the two schoolboys were getting off more easily, while the mayor was getting off altogether. It occurred to Mr. Adkins that someone must be losing, and it also occurred to him, after a minute or two of deep meditation, that the loser's name was Adkins.

But the arrangement did not displease him as much as it did Manners.

Manners was dead against acceptance. Perhaps Roylance was the only fellow at St. Jim's, except Tom Merry or Talbot, who could have talked him over. Certainly Lowther or Blake or Figgins could not have done it.

"The old buffer's a St. Jim's chap, it seems."

"Before the Flood!" growled Manners.

"Still, he is an Old Boy, and that makes a bit of difference."

"He's an old skinkfin!"

"He's that, too—granted. But we're getting off cheap—"

"And he's getting off for nix!"

"That's so. Still—"

"Oh, have your own way, Roylance! After all, I let you into this."

But that was not the only reason why Manners was willing to let his com-

panion have his own way. It was not even the chief reason.

The fact of the matter was that Roylance's unruffled good humour—which Manners well knew did not come from any lack of spirit—made him feel just a little bit ashamed of his own unfortunate temper, and that he could not forget what Roylance had suffered in the past through that temper.

CHAPTER 3.

An Unexpected Meeting.

A SURPRISE was in store for the two St. Jim's juniors, as for his Worship the Mayor of Lexham.

It was a girl who drove out the car, and it was plainly the notion of Mr. Adkins that this girl was to drive it to Hovenden!

"Can't be helped," they heard him tell the mayor. "I must stay here myself, and I haven't a man available. They're all either in the Army still, or laid up with the flu. And my daughter Patty can drive as well as any man in Lexham."

"I do not dispute that, Adkins. I make no doubt that the—ha, hum!—young person is a most capable driver. But, my good man, think of my—ha, hum!—dignity!"

"What's the matter with that, sir?" asked Adkins.

"To be driven by a young woman—"

"Nothing new in that, Mr. Bultitude. Lots of big people—members of the Cabinet, Harley Street doctors—"

"But I am—ha, hum!—the Mayor of Lexham, and—"

"Oh, really, sir, you must see reason! It's Patty or nothing."

The mayor got into the car with an expression upon his face that seemed to imply his considering Miss Patty Adkins rather worse than nothing.

Manners and Roylance did not agree with him at all. The young lady was quite pretty, dressed in quiet, workmanlike manner, and evidently well up to the job she was taking on.

It was Manners who managed to secure the seat by her side, leaving Roylance to get into the tonneau with the mayor.

"Old hunk!"

The girl had not turned her head, and the whisper was too light to carry to ears behind; but Manners caught it.

He grinned.

"I hate him!" said the girl, still in a low, clear whisper. "If he was alone I'm not at all sure that I wouldn't overturn the car. Perhaps I will going back!"

Manners could not reply to that. He was rather afraid that any whisper of his might reach the ears of Mr. Bultitude. But he grinned again, and there was no discouragement in his grin.

"Everything ready?" asked Adkins.

"Another rug, Mr. Bultitude? Yes, sir. You had better have another, too, sir; it will be cold in front there."

This was to Manners.

"Thank you," said that junior.

"When I was a boy, boys were not—ha, hum!—pampered," said the mayor pompously.

But no one—not even Mr. Adkins—took any notice of the mayor's remark.

In another moment the car was gliding swiftly through the long, dull High Street of Lexham.

Manners settled himself in his place, and prepared to enjoy his trip. Roylance settled himself in his place, and prepared to endure his. The mayor, well wrapped up, looked so sour and disagreeable that it seemed likely enough Roylance's endurance might be put to a considerable test.

Just for a moment Manners felt a

pang of compunction. But it was too late now to change places. Besides, it was Roylance who had insisted upon their acceptance of the mayor's very one-sided arrangement; and Roylance was such a good-tempered fellow that he could probably travel with Mr. Bultitude without quarrelling with him. Manners felt that difficult task quite beyond him.

The car sped out of the town into open country. Already the sun was getting low. They would hardly reach Hovenden before dusk.

Miss Adkins drove well, and without any apparent effort. She could talk to Manners as she drove, though he found it difficult to answer her without raising his voice so that it must come to the mayor's ears. But he said a word or two from time to time, and nodded and grinned in friendly wise; and the girl told him quite a lot about Mr. Bultitude.

"Dad and the rest of the old fogies make a lot of him because he's got heaps of money," she said. "But he's as mean as they make them, and you've only to ask any of the younger people what we think of him! We won't have skinflints putting up for Parliament. If he does, I'm not at all sure I shan't stand against him! Women are standing now, you know, and I believe I'd lick him!"

"Sure you would," said Manners.

"But it's because of my boy I hate him so much," the girl said, after a few minutes of silence, during which she had looked straight ahead of her, with a light in her face that Manners could not help noticing. "Jim was in his office. He cut up rusty when Jim volunteered, and refused at first to make him a penny allowance. Jim didn't want it for himself; it was for his old mother. Skinflint had to shell out, after all; public opinion was against him, and he made out that he had always meant to. But we know better."

"Jim's all right," asked Manners.

"Yes. Wounded twice; but he's never been home at all. Four years—I want much more than a kid when he went. And now he'll be home very soon—any day almost. Skinflint wants him back; he's put in an application for his discharge. But I don't think he'll stay long with skinflint."

They had their plans, this pretty, resolute little woman and her Jim; Manners could see that. He wondered what Jim was like. He even thought that Jim was rather a lucky dog, though, as a rule, Harry Manners did not care greatly for girls. It was to escape Mr. Bultitude that he had bagged the seat beside Miss Patty.

Meanwhile, behind them, the Mayor of Lexham was condescending to talk to Roylance.

"And how does it come about that you two are gallivanting about the country at this distance from your school?" he demanded severely.

Roylance explained briefly.

"Ha, hum!" said Mr. Bultitude. "In my days at St. Jim's we did not go rushing about in motor-cars."

"There weren't any, were there, sir?" returned Roylance.

"Oh, missing trains. I—ha, hum!—may say that I have never in all my life missed a train."

"Were there any trains when you were at St. Jim's?" asked Roylance innocently.

"Do you mean to be—ha, hum!—impertinent, boy?"

"Oh, no," Roylance said. "But St. Jim's is quite an old-school. It was there ever so long before the railways."

"It is not a question of the antiquity of St. Jim's, but of—ha, hum!—the age of Benjamin Barker Bultitude," the mayor replied pompously.

"That being you, sir?"

"Of course! Ha, hum! You are not

a boy of very bright intelligence, I fear."

"Perhaps not. I can't guess your age, anyway."

And Roylance looked at the mayor critically, as though hesitating somewhere between the eighties and the hundred and fifties in his guess.

The mayor was annoyed, and showed it. But he had his own way of showing it.

He stood up, and laid a fat forefinger, encased in fur, upon the slim shoulder of Miss Adkins.

The girl gave a shrug of dislike, and twisted the wheel ever so slightly, with the result that Mr. Bultitude had to grab at Roylance to save himself from tumbling out.

"You are going much too fast!" he snapped.

"Under twenty," replied the girl.

"I've fancied so for some time," said the girl, with a mischievous smile. "He's doing it, too."

"Stop!" bawled the mayor.

"It doesn't seem to have much effect," remarked Manners.

"It has no effect whatever," said Miss Patty Adkins calmly.

"Will you stop, you wicked minx?" howled Mr. Bultitude.

Next moment the car slowed down to a crawl, and Miss Adkins turned an icy look upon the red-faced man behind.

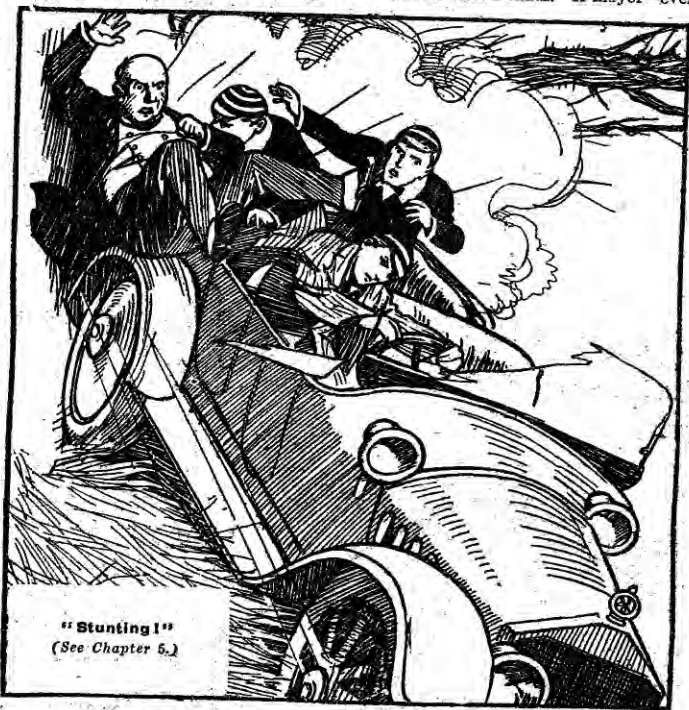
"Were you addressing me, Mr. Bultitude?" she asked, with freezing hauteur.

"Of course I was! How dare you speak—"

"Then please address me civilly in future!"

"Ha! Hum, hum! Ha! Really, this is beyond belief! I—"

"That's what I think. A mayor—even



"We must get to Hovenden to-day. I have to bring you back."

"Why did you swerve in that alarming manner?" demanded the great man.

"I felt something on my shoulder, and didn't like it!"

"You might have thrown me out!"

"And you might have made me throw all three of you out!"

Manners chuckled. Mr. Bultitude would hardly get much change out of Miss Patty Adkins, he thought.

The mayor sat down, with rather a bump; and for a short time he was silent.

They had been on the road over an hour, and were well over half-way to Hovenden, when the mayor again sought to attract Miss Patty's attention.

He dared not touch her shoulder this time, for he must stand up to do that, and he feared being shot out of the car. So he bawled at her.

She took no notice whatever.

"I fancy," said Manners, after six or seven bawls, "that our dear old pet behind is trying to make you hear."

a mayor of a tenth-rate little show like Lexham—ought to try to set an example, I consider."

"What are you grinning at, you boys, confound you?" hooted Mr. Bultitude.

"Shush!" said Miss Adkins reprovingly. "Men of your age and position shouldn't use strong language."

"I wish to get down! Do you hear me?"

The car stopped at once. They had just reached the end of a short village street.

"You will be good enough to wait here," said the mayor pompously. And he descended from the tonneau.

"Think so?" murmured Miss Adkins.

"Hum, ha! I have a call to make. It is not likely to detain me more than twenty minutes—half an hour at the outside."

"Here, I say!" gasped Manners, as the mayor stalked away in stately fashion. "What about us? We didn't bargain for this! Why, you may make us too late for a train at Hovenden!"

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Mr. Benjamin Barker Bultitude stalked on, paying no heed.

"We'll go on if you like," said the girl.

"Dad will be mad, but I don't care. This isn't fair to you kids, especially as you're standing the shot."

"Let's get on!" said Manners wrathfully.

"Oh, I don't know!" replied Roylance.

"After all, catching any train at Hovenden is a good deal of an off-chance at best. And that old boulder used to be at St. Jim's. Glad it wasn't in my time! Still, it does make a difference."

"We've only his word for it!" retorted Manners. "You're too easy-going, old top!"

"Alloy, there!"

It was a very familiar voice that struck upon their ears, and they turned to see Ralph Reckness Cardew, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, dismounting from a bicycle that had seen better days in the remote past.

"Bit of luck, this!" said Cardew.

"What on earth are you doing here, you chump?" snapped Manners.

The sight of Cardew so far from the school was a surprising one. Both juniors jumped to a conclusion that was quite correct—that he was there without leave.

"That's rather a long story," Cardew replied coolly. "I'll tell you presently. First thing to do is to get rid of this pigger. The merchant who owns it fancies I've only hired it. My impression is that I've bought it outright an' paid about twice its value; but I suppose the dashed law would be on his side. The law, as friend Bunble remarked, is a bass!"

"You might leave it at that shop," said the girl, pointing to a small place a few yards back. "They know me there."

"An' what name shall I say?" asked Cardew, looking at her with frank admiration.

"Patty Adkins. No hurry; we're waiting for someone."

"I don't know about that," growled Manners.

"Oh, I think we must wait, as your serious friend has so high an opinion of dear old Benny Bultitude!" answered Miss Adkins.

"And I don't know about the high opinion of Benny," said Roylance, smiling cheerily at being called Manners' serious friend. "But I think it's up to us to wait a reasonable time, anyway."

Cardew had wheeled away his old crock. Miss Adkins looked after him.

"What's he after?" she asked, with misdisguised curiosity.

"Don't know. Never can tell with Cardew. What's Benny Bully after in a little one-horse show like this?" returned Manners.

"Oh, he's most likely gone to see one of the people he's got under his thumb, you know," replied the girl. "Mortgages, and all that sort of thing—he has hundreds of them!"

CHAPTER 4.

MISS ADKINS DESERTS.

CARDREW came back smiling, having disposed of the ancient bike.

"The chap it belongs to seemed attached to it," he remarked. "I couldn't get so, though, dashed if I could! It was hoppin' off to repair punctures every two or three yards, an' when it wasn't punctures it was somethin' else. Changin' seats, Manners? Right-ho! I'll take this."

And before Manners, who had only got down for a moment, with no intention of giving up his seat by the fair driver, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 569.

could protest, Cardew had hopped into his place.

Manners made a mouth. But he knew that it was of no use to argue with Cardew, and he saw that the girl had no objection to the change.

"Well, I suppose we've got to put up with you, Cardew," he said, with a sardonic touch not usual to him; "but you might enlighten us as to how you come to be here, at least."

"Just got to, dear boy. Don't be impatient! I wanted to see a pal in this part of the world to-day. Levison an' Clive were both strongly of opinion that askin' for special leave would be pretty useless, on the whole. So I didn't ask; I came without."

"My hat! And now you're hung up, and if you don't get back to-night—"

"My dear old top, aren't you an' the virtuous Roylance very much in the same box?"

"Not a bit of it! We're not away without leave, and we're doing all we know how to get back to-night. Trains aren't running in Kent, so we hired this car to see whether we could get on to the other line at Hovenden."

"You can get on to the line all right, an' you'll find plenty of room there," answered Cardew drily. "You won't be crowded off by trains, anyway. They aren't runnin' there, either."

"You're sure?" asked Roylance.

"Absolutely! That was why I took to the road on Noah's velocipede. I didn't expect to reach St. Jim's on it before bed-time; but, in view of the wrath to come, I thought I'd better show willin', anyway."

Manners and Roylance looked hard at one another.

There was not a great deal to worry about in their own situation. But Cardew was in very different case.

It looked very like the sack for Ralph Reckness Cardew. And somehow both Manners and Roylance felt that they would be willing to take a good deal of trouble to save that whimsical, reckless junior the sack.

"Don't you fellows worry," said Cardew, smiling. "I don't want the order of the boot. I've settled down quite nicely at St. Jim's, an' it pains me to think of how Clive an' Levison may go to pot completely if they lost my brilliant example in doin' the things which should be done. But if I get it, I shall have to say 'Kismet,' like the merry old Turk, an' trot off home to inquire how granddad is off for veal, y'know."

"Are you quite sure about the trains not running on the South Coast line?" asked Manners.

"Dead sure! My pal made inquiries. I shouldn't have started back so early, but for news of the strike reachin' him. By the way, if we're to get through to St. Jim's by road in decent time, we ought to be movin' on, I fancy."

"You've forgotten our travellin' companion," said Roylance. "He's the Mayor of Lexham, no less!"

"Yas! Quite a useful idea, forgettin' him—what? That is, unless he's a heap better sort than he looks, y'know."

"He's worse!" said Miss Adkins, with conviction.

"Then I'd forget him without a qualm of remorse in the middle of the Sahara," Cardew said.

"We hadn't thought of getting through to St. Jim's in this," said Roylance.

"For one thing, we can't afford it—"

"That's all serene. I can, dear boy," said Cardew.

"Then we'd only hired it to Hovenden. Miss Adkins has to take Benny back—"

"Don't you worry about Benny! It won't hurt him to stay the night at

Hovenden, if it comes to that," struck in the girl.

"But it would be ever so late for you to be driving back through the dark," objected Manners.

"I don't know that you need be worried about me, either. I sha'n't get the sack, you know. I've thought of a plan. If any of you can drive, you may drop me at Hovenden—I've friends there I can go to—and go on with the car. It can easily be fetched back to-morrow, if there are any trains. I dare say dad will stick you for a pretty long price, but if that—"

"That is of no consequence at all," said Cardew quickly. "I'll make a deposit of a fiver now, if you like. An' I can drive. I'm competent to earn a livin' as a chauffeur—it's about the only thing I could earn it at."

"I don't want any deposit—I might lose it. But I don't want you to be expelled," the girl said.

Roylance and Manners wondered whether she would have done as much for either of them. Cardew had a way with him, there was no question about that. But they were wrong in doubting her. Miss Patty Adkins approved of both of them, and she was not the sort to shy at a little trouble for anyone of whom she approved.

Moreover, she disapproved very strongly of Mr. Benjamin Barker Bultitude, and the notion of leaving him in a state of fury at Hovenden filled her with unholty joy.

"That's nice of you," Cardew said gently. "I sha'n't forget that. But about Benjamin? I don't know Benjamin—I only had a glimpse of him as he stalked majestically across the street. But I bar him no end. Do you think we might keep it a secret from Benjamin till we get to Hovenden that he's not comin' back to-night?"

"If we want to avoid trouble with him, I should think it would be quite the best thing to do," the girl replied.

"You agree, Manners?"

"Oh, I agree. I bar the old hunk every bit as much as you and Miss Adkins do. I don't know about Roylance here, though."

"I agree, too. It's much more important that Cardew should get to St. Jim's than that Mr. Bultitude should get back to Lexham," answered Roylance quietly.

"Thanks, old gun!" said Cardew. "Hallo! Here's his Imperial Majesty!"

Mr. Bultitude reappeared.

"If you want to make it all right with him, tell him that Lord Reckness is your grandfather," suggested Manners. "I'll eat my hat if he isn't the sort of old snob who'd do any mortal thing for the grandson of a peer of the realm."

"Bein' funny, Manners? Don't—or I may tell the old bird that I'm the boot-boy at St. Jim's!"

Miss Patty was still giggling at that when the mayor stopped short, within a few yards of the car, and stood, with legs astraddle, glaring at Cardew.

Cardew met his angry glare with the coolest indifference.

"Who is this?" thundered the great man.

"Now's your time for trotting out granddad!" whispered the girl.

But Cardew left the other two to answer.

"A friend of ours," said Manners.

"Another St. Jim's fellow who has got hung up through the railway strike."

"Ha! Hum, hum! Ha. And who gave your friend permission to instal himself in my car?"

"Hanged if I don't like that!" roared Manners, losing his temper completely.

He had expected a protest; but this particular form of protest struck him as really too thick for anything. "Your

car, is it? Who's paying for it, I'd like to know?"

"Don't let me have any of your impertinence, my lad!" fumed the mayor.

"And don't let me have any of your silly swank, my man!" shouted Manners.

The rate Mr. Bultitude glared at the four young faces. Miss Adkins was trying to look demure; but the attempt was hardly a success. A smile played about her lips, and her eyes were dancing. Manners and Roynance grinned. But it was the look of supercilious indifference on the countenance of Ralph Reckness Cardew which was most exasperating to the great man.

"Get down!" he shouted.

"Speakin' to me?" drawled Cardew.

"Ha, hum! Of course I am speaking to you!"

"Might I point out that we haven't been introduced, by gad!" said Cardew blandly. "I only allow people I know quite well to issue orders to me."

"Confound your impertinence!"

"Ha! Hum, hum! Ha!" replied Cardew, with a ludicrous caricature of Mr. Bultitude's pompous manner. "Confound your impertinence, sir! I don't know you, an' I don't wish to know you. May I ask you to, drive on, Miss Adkins?"

"Come down from there, or I'll pull you down!" roared the mayor, as the girl's hand touched the clutch.

"If you don't get in, we'll certainly go on without you!" snapped Manners.

"We're paying for this car. You've foisted yourself upon us, and we don't kick against taking you as far as Hovenden, as that was in the bargain. But we shall take anyone else we please, and if you're not civil we drop you!"

"Hear, hear!" said Roynance heartily.

"Good! I couldn't have put it better myself!" Cardew said.

Mr. Bultitude got into the car, muttering something.

"Naughty, naughty!" said Cardew reprovingly. "Before a lady, too, Benjamin! Oh, really!"

That shut up Mr. Bultitude quite effectively for a few minutes. He sat breathing hard and gasping at times.

Manners and Roynance were more than half afraid that he might have an apoplectic fit.

But the wrongs to his dignity were not at an end. Something worse was about to happen.

They had covered another five miles or so, and had reached a big village, when someone in khaki hailed their fair driver from the seat of a high dogcart.

"Patty!"

A flood of crimson swept over the girl's face, and her lips trembled. Her hands fell from the steering-wheel, and if Cardew had not promptly clutched it an accident might have resulted.

"That was Jim's voice!" she faltered.

"And here, I fancy, is Jim," said Cardew blandly, dealing with clutch and brake, as he spoke, like an expert. "I haven't the pleasure of knowin' Mr.—er—James; but I envy him, by gad!"

The man in khaki had pulled up his horse suddenly, jumped to the ground, flung the reins to a boy standing near, and pursued the car with the utmost speed of which his long legs were capable.

He was alongside in a few seconds, and the girl fairly flung herself into his arms.

"Oh, Jim!"

"My dear, my dear!"

He hugged her to his breast, her feet clean off the ground, and kissed her again and again.

And neither he nor she seemed at all ashamed of themselves. They hardly seemed conscious that any eyes were upon them. They were meeting at last after four years' separation, and they had no thought of anything but their joy.

And to Manners and Roynance and

Cardew it all seemed natural and proper enough. They turned their heads away, indeed; but that was not because they were shocked. It was only because it seemed more decent not to look.

But Mr. Benjamin Barker Bultitude was deeply shocked.

"Miss Adkins! Really!" he cried.

"Westham! Ha, hum! You—"

"Oh, mind your own business!" snapped Manners.

"Sir?" said the tall man in khaki stiffly, putting the girl down.

"I am surprised at you! This is really a—hum, ha!—most improper—"

"Nothing of the sort, Mr. Bultitude! Patty's promised to marry me directly I get my discharge, and if she doesn't mind being kissed in public—"

"And I don't, Jim!"

"It's scarcely your affair, I consider."

"Do you realise to whom—ha, hum!—you are talking, Westham?"

Cadet Notes.

Are you a member of a Cadet Corps? If not, why not? Cadet Corps are open to boys between the ages of fourteen and nineteen. They are, as a rule, inexpensive; in some cases the uniform is provided free, and in some cases it is partly paid for by small instalments. Usually there is a small weekly subscription of a few pence. Members are expected to attend one or two nights in the week, Saturday afternoons, and occasionally for some kind of special parade on Sunday.

A certain part of the time, of course, is spent in instruction in drill of a military nature. It is only natural in a large body of lads. Where you have numbers you must have discipline, or there will be no organisation. We need not dwell here on the advantage of any kind of discipline for boys as well as men. Drill makes for physical fitness, and develops a healthy spirit of competition. But military drill is not the only work of a Cadet Corps. A well-organised Corps of sufficient numbers can organise instruction in other matters—lectures, etc., and field games. In the summer there is usually a camp. Where the Corps can obtain suitable accommodation there is sometimes a real boys' club in connection with the Corps. The larger the Corps the more pleasant it is to belong to, and all boys should hurry up and join, and try to get their friends to join, too. Any boy who would like to know which is the nearest Corps should write, stating age, etc., to the C.A.V.R., Judges' Quadrangle, Law Courts, Strand, W.C.2.

"Oh, I know you all right," replied Sergeant Westham grimly.

"I am your employer, my man!"

"You were my employer, you mean. That may have given you a right to call me your man, though I don't think so. But you must have had my letter telling you that I am not coming back to your employ."

"That is all very well. Hum, ha! There is a matter of an allowance—"

"Don't worry! You'll get that back, with any conscientious interest you have on your face to charge."

"Really!" gasped the mayor. "Never in all my life—"

"Oh, this is beyond my patience! Miss Adkins, I insist upon your driving on at once!"

"I don't think I shall drive on at all, Mr. Bultitude," replied the girl coolly.

Westham had slipped his arm round her waist, heedless of the crowd that had gathered.

"What do you mean? I—hum, ha!—insist—"

"Coming back with me, Patty!" asked Westham eagerly.

"Rather, Jim! You don't suppose that I'm going to let you go back all that way alone, do you? Why, you might break your neck before you got to Loxham!"

"I don't think!" said Jim, gazing down at her fondly. "But what about the car, kid?"

"Never mind the car, sergeant! Kiss her agin!" cried a village urchin, in high glee.

"The car will be all right. He can drive." The girl nodded at Cardew.

"We've arranged all that."

"Here, wait! I am—hum, ha!—no party to any such arrangement!" protested the mayor furiously. "I positively decline—"

"Oh, you've nothing to do with it; you're only having a ride at other folks' expense!" replied the girl airily.

She held out a small hand to each of the three juniors in turn, and they all said something—the best they knew what to say, though Manners and Roynance both felt afterwards that their little speeches lagged far behind what the ever-ready Cardew said.

Then Sergeant Westham extended a big hand to each of them in turn, quite as if they were old friends.

"I protest! I won't have this!" fumed Mr. Bultitude.

"Oh, dry up, Benny!" said Cardew.

The tall, bronzed man with the three wound stripes on his arm, and on his breast the insignificant-looking bronze medal with the simple words "For Valour," led the girl away, and helped her into the high dogcart.

"Hurrah!" yelled the village crowd, and the three St. Jim's juniors joined in the cheering.

"So long!" cried Westham, whipping up his horse. And Miss Patty turned, with flushed face and bright eyes, to wave her hand to them.

Then they were gone. Miss Patty Adkins had deserted, and no one but Mr. Benjamin Barker Bultitude, Mayor of Loxham, blamed her!

CHAPTER 5.

Cardew—Chaufeur.

"I—I— Never in all my life—"

"You made some remark of that sort before, sir," said Cardew.

"This annoyin' habit of repetition comes from public spoutin', I take it. But don't inflict it on us. We don't take any dashed stock in mayors an' beadies an' parish pumps an' things, I assure you!"

"Mayors—beadies—parish pumps!" gasped Mr. Bultitude. "Never in all my life—"

"He's at it again!" groaned Cardew.

"My good man, you mustn't—you really mustn't! My constitution's delicate, an' my doctors say that I must avoid gas, especially the brand that mayors an' aldermen an' beadies an' things go in for. Shall I drive on?"

"Certainly not! I—hum, ha!—value my neck!"

"Queer notion, that!" said Cardew, turning to look at him. "Now, I wonder whether anyone else values it, by gad? Married man, Benjamin?"

"I say, Cardew!" protested Roynance.

"Think I'm goin' too far, old bean? I don't quite see it."

"Mr. Bultitude is an old St. Jim's boy."

That fact had impressed Roynance more than it had Manners. It did not impress Cardew at all.

"Rough on St. Jim's!" he said.

"Still, I should think he's the only one of his kind the school's turned out, an' I hope an' trust he was turned out before he wanted to go. Are you getting out, Benjy?"

"How dare you address me in that impertinent manner! Most certainly I am not getting out!"

"Hold tight, then! I'm startin', an' Jehu, the son of Nimshi, who drove furiously, simply isn't in it with this child!"

"I command— I will not have—"

"Oh, dry up!" snapped Manners. The car shot forward.

"Turrah!" yelled the rural crowd.

"Stop!" howled Mr. Bultitude.

But Cardew paid no heed.

Again apoplexy seemed a contingency by no means too remote to be worth considering. Mr. Bultitude gasped and wheeled in an alarming fashion, and his face was purple.

"I suppose Cardew's driven his grandfather's cars?" said Roylance quietly to Manners.

"Yes. Lord Reckness spoils the bouncer!" replied Manners.

Mr. Bultitude gave a curious gurgle, and his face changed. It became less purple, and it looked much more human.

Roylance had touched the chord of snobbery, and the Mayor of Lexham responded to the touch at once.

He leaned forward, and laid a fat hand on the knee of the New Zealand junior.

"Is your—hum, ha!—comrade a grandson of Lord Reckness?" he asked, almost breathlessly.

"Yes," answered Roylance, wriggling his knee.

"Why did you not tell me so at once? Really, it was—ha, hum!—most remiss on your part! My dear young—hum, ha!—Reckness!"

Cardew heard, but he paid no heed.

"Lord Reckness is a nobleman for whom I entertain the—hum, ha!—highest respect," went on the mayor eagerly. "I—hum, ha!—am delighted to have this opportunity of making friends with his grandson!"

"You haven't got the opportunity!" said Manners sourly.

"What do you mean? Your tone—ha, hum—"

"I mean that you can't suck up to Cardew now. There wouldn't have been much chance before; he's got lots of faults, but he hates snobs. As it is, you've settled yourself once for all with him!"

"Rubbish! A—ha, hum!—misunderstanding that can easily be put right by a few words!"

"Well, you try to put it right!" snapped Manners.

Roylance grinned. He had quite given up the mayor now, for all his claim to being an old St. Jim's boy. He certainly had not learned there the lesson that fellows taught one another in these days. There were not half a dozen fellows in the school to whom it made a scrap of difference that Ralph Cardew was the grandson of Lord Reckness; and no one despised more than Cardew the fellows to whom it did make a difference. "Young Reckness! Sir! Oh, dear! Please stop!"

Cardew heard, and sent the car bounding forward on its top speed.

Down the long, straight stretch of level road it flashed at something like sixty miles an hour, and the wind of their going fairly took away the breath of the two juniors behind. But Mr. Bultitude had some shelter, and he continued to call in almost agonised accents upon "young Reckness," doubtless feeling that it would be something little short of a catastrophe if there were any delay in his giving proof of what an ardent snob he was.

At last Cardew glanced round.

"Shut up!" he hissed. "If you don't I'll capsize the whole dashed bag of tricks; by gad!"

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Next moment he had to pull in the clutch and slow down, for the road took rather a sudden turn.

His eyes gleamed as he saw high banks on either side of the new stretch.

A wild notion leaped into his mind—a notion such as would never have occurred to any other fellow at St. Jim's. He did not really intend to "capsize the whole bag of tricks"; but he intended to go near enough to doing it to give Mr. Bultitude the fright of his life.

"Young Reckness!" howled the mayor again.

Cardew set his teeth, and into his eyes came a madder gleam than ever.

The car swerved towards the high bank on one side.

"Oh, look out, you silly ass!" hooted Manners.

He jumped to his feet, and Roylance followed suit. Mr. Bultitude, his eyes goggling almost out of his head, staggered up as the wheels on one side mounted the bank, making the floor of the car an inclined plane.

If they had not jumped up all might have been well. For next moment the car was running on the level again. But before it regained the level both juniors had shot out, and the Mayor of Lexham had shot out on top of them.

Cardew pulled the car up dead within a few yards, jumped from his seat, and came running back.

"By gad, I've overdone it this time!" he muttered as he ran.

"You silly idiot!" snapped Roylance, from the bottom of the heap.

"My dear young Reckness, I trust you are not hurt?" inquired the mayor, scrambling up.

"No? Well, no; it wasn't very likely I should be," answered Cardew. "Are you?"

"Nothing—hum, ha!—worth mentioning," replied the mayor.

"We thought you could drive, Cardew!" said Manners, with withering contempt.

"Sorry, old chap. If you'd only sat still you'd have been all right. Any damage?"

"I'm bruised all over, I think, hang you!"

"Oh, well, as long as pothin's broken, cheerio! Hurt, Roylance?"

"Not as much as I might have been," said the New Zealand junior, his good temper returning. "But that's not your fault, chump!"

"You'd better let me drive!" growled Manners. "I don't profess to be an expert, but I can do as well as that, anyway."

"I can do better, old top, as long as I'm not called young Reckness!" replied Cardew, with a meaning glance to their passenger. "If I'm called that by anybody—man, woman, child, or butter-tub—I'm always liable to a spill!"

"You utter idiot! Do you mean to say that you did that on purpose?" yelled Manners.

"Oh, no, old gun! I neither assert nor deny that. You can't ask a chap to convict himself, y'know. But somethin's bound to happen if I'm called fancy names again. So, if necessary, just muzzle it!"

And Cardew walked back to the car and mounted to his seat without another glance at the mayor.

For once in his life Mr. Benjamin Barker Bultitude was too much taken aback to say even "Hum, ha!"

He stunk to the car and got in, his red face very sheerish. But there was a nasty gleam in his little eyes.

It occurred to Roylance that perhaps it was just as well Mr. Bultitude had heard nothing of Cardew's story.

Foiled in his plans of making up to the grandson of Lord Reckness, he might be

quite capable of making trouble for that irresponsible youth.

And now, in his reckless way, Cardew gave away the secret.

"Hurry up, dear boys!" he said. "You're all right, in any case; but it's the sack for this child if he doesn't make St. Jim's to-night!"

The little eyes of Mr. Bultitude gleamed more luridly than ever at that.

"What does your young friend mean?" he inquired of Roylance, when they were once more gliding on their way.

His fat hand again gripped Roylance's knee. The Fourth-Former pushed it off. "That's our affair—not yours!" he said curtly.

"Oh, indeed! Hum, ha! A secret! Our young friend may find that people who have secrets to conceal—"

"It's all right!" snapped Manners. "You don't know it, so you can't tell it. And if you did know it, Cardew would only have to let you kiss his hand to square you. He's the grandson of a lord, you know, old bean!"

For fully five minutes after that Mr. Bultitude sat and glared at Manners in speechless wrath, and Manners and Roylance sat and grinned.

They were getting very near Hoven-den when, as they slipped past the head of a by-road, someone hailed them from a stationary car.

"Hi, stop! Mr. Bultitude, sir!"

"Will you be good enough to stop—ha, hum!—Mr. Cardew!" shouted the mayor.

At that Cardew pulled up. He had done enough motoring to have the motorist's feeling for another in a mess.

"Is that you, Simons?" asked the mayor, scrambling out.

"Yes, it's me, sir, and in trouble," replied the man addressed.

There was no one else in the car, and one at least of the three juniors noticed something queer about it.

What Cardew—more familiar with cars than the other two—noticed was that the front identification plate had gone.

It might have been carried away in a collision, of course; but, though the car appeared to be stranded, there were no signs of a collision about it.

Simons wore the usual dress of a chauffeur, and seemed to be a professional driver. Mr. Bultitude knew him, but that fact failed to remove the suspicions which had leaped into the mind of Cardew on the instant.

He could not have explained why it was, perhaps; but he felt quite sure from the very first moment that Simons was in some way a wrong 'un.

CHAPTER 6.

The Mayor is Deserted.

"W" HAT'S wrong, Simons?" asked the mayor pompously.

He spoke as if he knew the man well; and Simons evi-

dently knew Mr. Benjamin Barker Bultitude well, for his manner was exactly the fawning manner which the Bultitude type expect from those they look upon as inferiors.

"A good deal, sir," he said; "and I never was so glad to see anyone in all my life as I am to see you, for I know you're not the gentleman to refuse a helping hand to a man that's always looked up to you."

"Ha, hum! Hum, ha! Anything I can do—ha, hum!—in reason, Simons—in reason."

"Oh, this won't give you a lot of trouble, sir. If it would I should be ashamed to ask it. I've a—a trunk here that I'm bound to get to Hoven-den as soon as anyways possible, and here I am broken down on the road!"

"A very simple—ha, hum!—problem to solve, Simons. Shift the trunk to this car, and get in yourself—that is, if you can leave your car here in safety."

The three juniors were all interested in this conversation, Cardew most of all. At this point Cardew put in a word or two.

"Had a collision—what?" he asked off-handedly.

Simons glared at him rudely.

"Is it any affair of yours?" he retorted.

"Hush, Simons! This is—hum, ha!—the grandson of Lord Reckness."

But, though it was evident that Mr. Bultitude felt that a man in the position of Simons ought to be properly subservient to a sprig of nobility, it was also evident that he no longer felt that he could love and cherish "young Reckness" for his grandfather's sake. In fact, his tone was decidedly nasty.

The stranded chauffeur said no more, but lugged out from his car a box encased in sack, which he transferred to the Lexham car.

"I say, you know, Cardew, this is pretty cool!" growled Manners. "Old Benjy seems to think he's running this show."

"If you ask me, he seems to be running it, too!" said Roylance, smiling.

"I am fain to admit that it does look a bit that way, dear boys," replied Cardew. "But Benjy may be mistaken in thinkin' he's havin' it all his own way, bless him! Do you know, I rather fancy his friend Simons is not quite precisely the clean potato!"

"Why, what do you think is wrong with him?" asked Manners, in surprise.

"Not knowin', can't say. What I think, old gun, is no more evidence than what the soldier said, y'know. But there's somethin' dashed queer about this bizney. That identification-plate wasn't knocked off in a smash. It was taken off. If there isn't one on the back either it will look suspicious to me, by gad!"

Simons was moving his car with some little difficulty to the side of the road. He did not ask for aid, and it was not volunteered. Mr. Bultitude, with his legs wide apart, stood gazing at the last red gleams of the setting sun, looking like the monarch of all he surveyed, the setting sun included. The three St. Jim's fellows had drawn apart. Now Cardew left the other two.

He strolled round to the back of the car so strangely about to be left by the roadside.

"What do you want?" snarled Simons. "Nothin'—not even civility!" drawled Cardew.

And he strolled back again.

"That car's been in an accident," he said. "The bounder may have run out of petrol, but I don't fancy it's that. If it had been he'd have asked his dear friend Benjy for some."

"I can't make it out a little bit," confessed Manners. "Why is he going to leave the car here? He might come back to find it stolen!"

"Stealin' a motor-car that has no petrol on board is not so dashed simple a proposition, dear boy," said Cardew. "But I don't really fancy friend Simons would mind if someone did bag it. He's done with it, an' it isn't his!"

"How do you know that?" demanded Manners, with wide-open eyes.

"Sounds like Kerr, with his deductions," remarked Roylance.

"It goes a lot farther than Kerr ever does," Manners said. "There has to be a crime before Kerr can get to work on it, but Cardew can smell a rat without knowing anything about any crime, it seems."

"I don't know, dear boy; an' I'm not

sayin' there has been any crime," replied Cardew coolly. "But Simons is behavin' in a dashed queer way, an' he fancies he's safe because he only has an old fool an' three kids to deal with. He's asin' Mayor Benjy as a stakin'-horse, I rather surmise; an' he thinks little us of no account in the transaction."

"You would rather like to know what's inside that box he's so anxious about?" said Roylance shrewdly.

"Yaas. If we knew that we'd have the clue to the whole mystery, I guess, old bean."

"Well, I'm not so sure that there is any mystery; but if Simons is a fishy character, I'm blessed if I care about being dragged into the bizney!" growled Manners. "They'll call us accessories after the fact, or some silly rot like that, if it ever comes out. Besides, we're wasting time here."

"Couldn't stand that chap's company," said Manners. "His blessed box was in the way of my legs, too. I say, Cardew, do you really think—"

"Whispering's rude," said Cardew.

Manners took the hint.

Mr. Bultitude and his protegee did not exchange many words; but Roylance heard the fellow tell his patron where he wished to be put down in Hovenden.

The New Zealand junior was more than half inclined to think that there was something in Cardew's theory, which, as far as he could make out, was that Simons had bolted with the car and the proceeds of a burglary, and was now seeking to cover his tracks by leaving the car behind and getting away in highly respectable company.

The identification-plates had doubtless been removed in order to render the task of tracing the ownership of the car more



The Chase of Simons.
(See Chapter II.)

"Oh, we sha'n't be dragged in!" yawned Cardew. "Who's goin' to make three mere schoolboys responsible when there's a great man like Benjy to stand the racket? Personally, I should gloat to see Benjy brought up in court charged with helpin' the naughty Simons to get off with the guilty swag, an' I'd give my evidence like a true little Briton not to be beaten by any dashed American in his absolute inability to say the thing which is not!"

"My hat, how you gas!" said Manners.

"House of Lords some day, dear boy. Make 'em all sit up—what? Not too much eloquence there. Could do with me to buck them up some."

But now Mr. Bultitude began to show impatience. Simons had put his box into the trolley, and had installed himself there. He had been careful that the box should not be in the way of the mayor, but he had not taken nearly so much heed to the comfort of Roylance and Manners.

Cardew found Manners by his side as he started.

difficult for the police. Roylance could see how it would help in that, though he could not follow out Cardew's whole chain of reasoning.

He had some doubt as to whether it was really a chain of reasoning. Cardew's mind was much more of the type that works by flashes of intuition. And, of course, Cardew might be all wrong. But it was not easy to see how the suspicious facts were to be explained away, although in themselves they offered no ground for the juniors to interfere.

"Ha, hum! Will you have the goodness to inform your friend in front that Simons here desires to be put down at the Baldface Stag Inn?" said Mr. Bultitude to Roylance, as they entered the one long, sleepy street which constituted the town of Hovenden.

Roylance spoke to Cardew.

"An' where would baldface Benjy himself like to be put down?" asked Cardew.

"He thinks he's going back to Lexham in the car, you know," said Manners. "I'm blessed if I see how, though, for

"I don't suppose he can drive; and you'll hardly take on the job of chauffeur to him—eh, Cardew?"

"It would give me positive delight, dear boy, if only I could spare the time, by gad!" replied Cardew gravely. "But I fancy the Head may be pinin' for me if I'm not back to-night."

"Here's the Bald-faced Stag," said Manners.

Cardew halted the car. A man with a crafty face came forward from where he had been lounging in front of the inn, cigar in mouth. He did not speak to Simons, but Roylance saw their eyes meet, and fancied it was with recognition, and something more.

Simons got out, and tugged at his box to get that out.

"Shall I give you a hand, old pal?" asked the crafty-faced man.

He did not say "old pal" as one might say it to a friend, but only in the offensively familiar way in which men of his type often address strangers. But Roylance felt almost sure that he and Simons were not strangers.

"Thanks, if you will!" growled Simons.

They got the box out, and carried it between them into the quiet inn. Simons touched his cap to Mr. Bultitude.

"One moment—ha, hum!—Simons," said that gentleman. "Will your arrangements permit of your driving me back to Lexham in about an hour?"

"Ours won't!" murmured Manners in the ear of Cardew, and Cardew grinned.

Mr. Bultitude was fixing up things for himself in complete ignorance of the fact that the real hirers of the car had fixed them up quite otherwise with Miss Patty Adkins, as her father's representative, though it is doubtful whether the worthy Mr. Adkins would himself have agreed to plans which made so light of the great man's convenience.

"Oh, certainly, sir!" said Simons.

He spoke with some eagerness. It occurred to all three of the juniors that if he were really bolting with the swag from some burglary this arrangement would be just the sort of thing to suit him. It would confuse his tracks quite nicely, and no one could suspect the driver of so eminently respectable a person as Mr. Benjamin Barker Bultitude, Mayor of Lexham!

"On the whole, perhaps it would be as well if you—ha, hum!—young gentlemen alighted here," said Mr. Bultitude.

"What for?" snapped Manners.

But Cardew drove an elbow into his ribs.

"Cannot I have the pleasure of puttin' you down anywhere first, sir?" he asked politely.

Mr. Bultitude beamed upon him, ready to forgive the grandson of Lord Reckness anything for the sake of that one smooth speech.

Little did he guess what was in the wayward mind of Ralph Cardew!

"Ha! Hum, hum! Ha! Since you are so very obliging, you might drive me to the last red-brick house on the right-hand side at the other end of the town," he said affably.

"An' all shall be forgiven an' forgotten!" murmured Cardew in the ear of Manners.

He drove slowly through the sleepy street, and Mr. Bultitude lolled back, and enjoyed to the full the glory of being driven by the grandson of a member of the House of Lords.

Cardew jumped down, and opened the door for him with a flourish.

Mr. Bultitude dismounted slowly and with dignity. Manners joined Roylance in the tonneau.

"You will, of course—hum, ha!—take

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the car back to the Bald-faced Stag," the mayor said pompously. "And, in consideration of the fact that Miss Adkins has—hum, ha!—deserted us, and that you have had the trouble of driving, I will myself defray the cost of its hire."

They knew that it was not generosity which prompted that offer. It was sheer snobbery.

"No, you won't, Benjy!" said Cardew, with a sudden change of manner. He was back in his seat now, with his hand upon the clutch.

"I—really—"

"Ta-ta, Benjy! Be good, an' you may perhaps hope to meet us again some day!" cried Cardew.

And as he uttered those words the car glided forward in quite the wrong direction for the Bald-faced Stag!

"Here, come back! What do you mean by—Come back, you most unprincipled young ruffians!"

"Not to-day, Benjy, old file!" shouted Cardew. "S'm'other day, Benjy dear!"

"Come back!" howled the mayor.

He was rushing after them now, too enraged to realise the futility of a chase.

"The old hoss runs like a dashed colt, for all the weight he carries," said Cardew critically, craning his head round to look, at imminent risk to his steering.

"But I don't fancy he'll catch us, dear boys—not with the start we've got!"

Far down the road a voice of wrath howled: "Come back!"

CHAPTER 7.

At St. Jim's.

DR. HOLMES, the reverend Head of St. Jim's, came along the corridors of the School House to Mr. Railton's study with a telegram in his hand.

Baggy Trimble of the Fourth Form chanced to see the Head, and his cunning little eyes fastened at once upon the flimsy paper.

The chief character of Baggy was gluttony. His greed was insatiable. Perhaps his only other marked trait—unless one reckoned cowardice among his principal qualities—was his inquisitiveness.

Baggy pounced on news with almost as great avidity as upon tarts.

When Dr. Holmes walked into Mr. Railton's room Baggy—who had no right in that part of the House at all—once stole up to the door.

Before the Head had fairly begun to speak Baggy had his ear to the keyhole.

"A rather unfortunate contretemps has occurred, Railton," said the Head.

"Have you heard anything of a railway strike?"

"I have not, sir. But then, I have scarcely been in the way of hearing anything of the sort, as I have been busy here all the afternoon."

"Here is a wire from Merry, at Greyfriars," said Dr. Holmes, putting the telegram into the hands of the House-master.

Baggy quivered with curiosity. He could guess that the wire had been handed over, and he feared that he would not hear its contents.

But Mr. Railton read it aloud, and he caught every word.

"I hung up here by railway strike Greyfriars puts us on Manners Roylance missed train Lexham not with us.—MERRY."

"It is annoying," said the Head, knitting his brows. "The strike may last days, and, meanwhile, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for the boys to get back."

"On the other hand, it may soon be over," replied Mr. Railton cheerily.

"And, if this had to happen, it could not have happened better. We know the hospitality of Greyfriars, and we know that they will be all right there."

"That is so. But the boys who were dropped on the road—what of them?"

"Difficult to say, sir. They may turn up. We know nothing as to the strike—whether it is local or general. If they cannot get through either to Greyfriars—which is nearer Lexham—or here, I do not think you need fear for them. Manners and Roylance are both level-headed lads, and are not likely to be penniless."

"H'm! Can you give me an idea as to the boys who are away?"

"An idea, certainly—not a guaranteed accurate list. But that I could get from the notice-board, I think."

Baggy scented danger, and mizzled at once.

It was as well for him that he did so, for next moment the door opened. Mr. Railton, leaving the Head in his study, went at once to look at the board in the hall.

It really did not matter greatly who the absentees were—at least, as far as the footer team was concerned. And up to this time the question of other absentees had not arisen. But the Housemaster saw that his chief was anxious, and he was keen to relieve his anxiety as far as possible.

He was back in a minute or two with the list. But Baggy did not bother about returning. He had heard all that mattered, and he was in haste to tell his news.

It was to the junior Common-room that he went.

Tea was over, and prep had not yet begun. Most of the Shell and Fourth in the School House were in the Common-room.

George Alfred Grundy stood in front of the fire. His coat-tails were not turned up simply because an Eton jacket has no tails; but his attitude was the traditional British one of which upturned coat-tails are generally part. And he was keeping the fire from other people—or other people from the fire—after the manner of the traditional Briton who affects that attitude.

Wilkins and Gunn were close at hand. There were also Herries and Digby, looking rather lonely without Blake and the noble Arthur Augustus; and there was Clive, still more obviously missing Levison and Cardew, although Durrance, with whom he got on well, was with him.

"I say, I've got news!" said Baggy importantly.

"Lies!" snorted Grundy.

"Oh, is it, then? Do you suppose the Head tells lies?" sniffed Baggy.

"We don't. And we don't suppose the Head tells lies!" replied Wilkins incisively.

"That's all you know—I mean, do you mean I'm a liar, Wilkins?" burred Baggy.

"Oh, no, of course not!" said Ker-ruish.

"Don't argue, you silly fatheads!" boomed Grundy. "What's your news, you fat worm?"

"If I'm going to be talked to like that I sha'n't."

"You're going to be talked to just as I choose to talk to you," replied Grundy. "If you don't like it, you can lump it. And if you've got any news—"

"He's probably got it by eavesdropping!" said Clive contemptuously.

"Yah! Nothing of the sort! I say, Clive, what will Cardew do if he can't get back by train? It's all very well for those other chaps; no one can blame them. But Cardew—"

"Cardew's affairs are none of your bizney, you Paul Fry!" snapped Clive,

with more warmth than the situation seemed to call for.

"But Clive was very uneasy about his chum. He did not know where Cardew had gone, but he knew that he had gone without leave. He had not thought that anyone else—even Levison—knew.

"But why shouldn't anybody be able to get back by train?" asked Durrance.

"Ah! That's my news. There's a railway strike on, you know."

"Gammon!"

"Rot!"

"Right-ho! Go and tell the Head and Raiton it's rot, that's all!"

"Shall we tell them that you sent us to say so, Baggy?" inquired Julian quietly.

"Er—as a matter of fact—"

"Prepare for an extra-special whooper!" put in Gore.

"They don't know that I know. I happened to hear the old boy tell Raiton. That was how it was."

"Where were they?" asked Walkley.

"In the quad. The Head came in with a wire, and gave it to Raiton to read. And he read it aloud. 'Twasn't my fault that I heard. I happened to be stooping to pick up a pin, you know—"

"When was this?" snapped Digby.

"About five minute ago."

"It's been pitch-dark in the quad for the last hour and a half," said Dig. "But Raiton could read a wire there, and Baggy could see to pick up a pin!"

"Did I say the quad? I meant—I—that was a slip of the tongue. It was really—"

"Don't tell us any more of your rotten lies!" hooted Grundy. "Let's hear about the railway strike, if that isn't lies, too!"

"Oh, that isn't!" said Baggy eagerly. "That's all true, every word of it. Tom Merry's wired to the Head to say that they're hung up at Greyfriars."

"Lucky barges!" said Herries enviously. "They'll get off classes to-morrow. The Greyfriars beaks can't very well ask them to go into Form."

"And Roylance and Manners missed the train at Lexham. They may turn up at any time."

"How could they miss a train if there weren't any running?" asked Gunn.

"Oh, you're an ass!" sniffed Baggy. "Of course there were trains running!"

"What! During a strike?"

"That must have been before the strike began," said Clive. "If the other chaps got through to Greyfriars—"

"That's it. Manners and Roylance got left behind on the way there," said Baggy. "Of course, that's it. You're an ass, Gunn!"

"Look here—"

William Cuthbert Gunn was quite a peaceful fellow as a rule; but it was really more than he could stand to be called an ass twice by Baggy.

Grundy broke in upon his protest.

"Shut up, Gunn! You are a bit of an ass, you know, though it's like Trimble's rotten cheek to talk in that way to a chap in my study. What else, you fat frog?"

"Oh, nothing much! I might tell more if I was talked to civilly, but I don't see why I should let out all I know. I say, Clive, what about Cardew?"

"Dry up about Cardew!" said Clive hotly. "Don't I tell you it's no bizney of yours about him?"

"There's something here that wants looking into, seems to me," said Grundy seriously. "I've nothing against you, Clive."

"Thank you for nothing!" snapped Clive.

"And I must say Levison isn't the rotter he used to be—"

"He's not a rotter at all—any more than you are!"

"Well, I'm not saying he is. But that chap Cardew—"

"Don't say anything against Cardew!" cried Durrance, flushing, as he stood by Clive's side. "Wait till he's here to answer for himself!"

"That's it!" said Clive. "And if you can't wait till then, just remember that there are two of us here who aren't going to have Cardew run down!"

"My hat! Here's a silly row about nothing at all!" snorted Grundy. "My point is that Cardew ought to be here to answer for himself—"

"Who says he ought?" demanded Clive.

"I do!" roared Grundy.

"Who are you, you burbling chump?" demanded Clive.

"And what do you know about it, anyway?" added Durrance.

"I know he's absent without leave, and—"

"Do you know that?" Julian asked.

It was plain that there were more than two to stick up for Ralph Cardew in his absence.

"And how do you know it, dummy?" inquired Kerruish.

The chums of No. 5 had not forgotten that Cardew had stood by them in a recent trouble.

Grundy glared at them all—a comprehensive glare which should have been awe-inspiring, but somehow did not inspire awe in anyone.

Then he tried a fresh tack.

"In Tom Merry's absence I've a right to—"

So he began, but Gore cut him short roughly.

"Tom Merry's absence doesn't make you any less of an ass than usual, Grundy!" said the polite Gore.

"Look here, you chaps know very well that I ought to be junior captain if I had my rights. I'm not making a fuss about it. Merry has his good points. I'm willing to see him posing as skipper, though I must say he neglects his duties terribly. But in his absence I'm undoubtedly the responsible person in the Shell, you must—"

"Not while I'm here!" roared Gore.

"And there's me!" said Clifton Dane, ungrammatically but emphatically.

"Also me!" remarked Bernard Glyn.

"There's old Skinny, too!" said Dig.

"Skimmey's a silly old ass, but he isn't quite such an ass as Grundy!"

"Cardew's Fourth," said Durrance.

"You Shell chaps may settle your argument among yourselves, but Cardew's our bizney, if he's anyone's!"

"He'll be Raiton's bizney after call-over, fancy!" said Grundy.

That was just what Clive feared. He drew Durrance aside, leaving Grundy to make clear his claims to any of the Shell willing to listen.

Julian & Co. followed the two.

"What do you chaps want?" asked Clive.

"If Cardew's in any sort of a mess, and we can help to get him out of it, we're game!" said Kerruish.

"Sure, we are that!" agreed Reilly.

"But we don't want to go shovin' our noses into what doesn't concern us!" added Hammond.

"Come along with us!" said Clive briefly. And the six went off to take counsel together in Study No. 9 on the Fourth passage.

Baggy Trimble sneaked out of the Common-room in their wake.

CHAPTER 8.

Cardew Acts.

"MY hat! I should like to have heard what Benjy said when he had to stop and give up the chase!" said Manners, lifting his teacup.

Roylance lifted his.

"Here's to dear old Benjy's health!" he said. "I only hope he came through it without quite bursting a blood-vessel!"

Two hours had passed since Mr. Bultitude had been deserted at Hovenden, and the three juniors were at tea in a small town some twenty miles nearer St. Jim's.

They had nearly finished their meal now. Throughout it Cardew had been unusually quiet and thoughtful.

Call-over at St. Jim's must have come and gone before this; and Manners and Roylance were inclined to put down their companion's unusual seriousness to his worry as to what would happen on his return.

They knew nothing beyond the few words of explanation he had offered at first as to why he had been away without leave; and he evidently did not intend to tell them anything more. But there might be something he could tell the Head and Mr. Raiton which would serve to lessen the gravity of his offence.

It was not like Cardew to worry so much, they thought, though it was very like him to tell no more than he chose.

But it was not chiefly of his own danger Cardew was thinking. He recognised that danger, and had in mind a scheme for making it less. But his thoughts were much more occupied with the problem of the man Simons, Mr. Benjamin Barker Bultitude, and the fellow at the Bald-faced Stag at Hovenden.

"I don't fancy our dear friend Benjy would have anything to do with helpin' a burglar to get clear with the swag if he knew it, do you, Roylance?" he said now.

"What? Oh, I say! Of course he wouldn't, Cardew!"

"That jolly girl seemed to think he was a good deal of a wrong 'un, though!" remarked Manners.

"Yas! But in quite a respectable way, dear boy—mortgages, an' putting on the dashed screw, an' all that sort of thing, y'know! Heaps more profitable than burglary, an' miles safer. I prefer a burglar myself, by gad! But the law doesn't!"

"You're still thinking about that chap Simons," said Manners.

"I am, old gun! I've been thinkin' about him quite a dashed lot, an' the more I think the more I think—"

"Naturally!" put in Roylance, smiling.

"Don't be funny, old bean! I've a good mind to go to the police—a jolly good mind!"

"I don't think I was funny enough to justify anything so drastic as that!" Roylance said.

"About Simons, I mean. The swag ought still to be at the Bald-faced Stag. Simons hasn't had the chance to drive dear old B.B.B. to Lexham, an' he may be at the B.F.S. too—or he may not! But the swag's the main thing—except the knotty point whether it would be quite playin' the game to drag dear old B.B.B. into the mess!"

"Look here, Cardew," said Manners, "we don't even know that there's been a giddy burglary!"

"True, O Daniel! But we know that there's somethin' dashed suspicious about a chap with a box like that in a motor-car with the identification-plates removed. They hadn't been off long, y'know; he risked somethin' in takin' them off, but he had his reasons for it. He didn't want

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a car with that number to be seen too near Hovenden, where he had arranged for it to be met—see? Would he have bailed us if Benji hadn't been there? I fancy not—not sure, though. He might have done, thinkin' us mere kids. His petrol had given out—I spotted that the tank had been leakin', an', of course, he had to get to Hovenden some way, an' with the box, if possible.

"My hat! You've thought it all out, Cardew!" said Roylance.

"Yaas, I have been doin' a bit of hard thinkin' about it! You see, you two chaps, havin' always been straight walkers, are so dashed unsuspish! I'm not, bein' rather a livery cove myself!"

"If there's been a burglary, the police would have had word about it!" Manners said, in the tone of one raising an objection.

"Yaas, old gun! An' how do we know that they haven't had word?"

"Well, there's a chance to find out, for here comes a bobby!" said Roylance.

A solemn-faced man in blue entered the tea-shop, and looked over to the comfortable corner in which the three sat. There was no one else at all having tea; it was, indeed, rather late for that meal. The constable stood a moment as if making up his mind, and then came over to them.

"This is where I see the Hidden Hand—the hand of Benji!" said Cardew.

The other two could only guess vaguely at what he meant. But next moment they realised that he was right.

"Beg pardon, young gentlemen," said the policeman, very civilly; "but I understand that you are the gentlemen that came in the car outside."

"That's so," replied Cardew easily.

"Nice car, don't you think?"

"Belongs, I believe, to Thomas Adkins, of High Street, Lexham."

"Right again, inspector! You are a most accurate person, I see."

The constable smiled. No constable ever minds being called inspector; it is a kind of prophetic compliment. But this man in blue had his duty to do.

"If my information is correct," he said, "that car was hired this afternoon by Mr. Bultitude, the Mayor of LEXHAM?"

"Your information is not absolutely correct, superintendent. But we will not blame you for the—hum, ha!—mistakes of another. Let us assume that as you say so it is. What then? Please don't say that anything we say may be used in evidence against us!"

"Well, sir, it's not for me to say that it's as serious as that. But we've been rung up both by Mr. Bultitude and by Mr. Adkins, seemingly at Mr. Bultitude's request. Mr. Bultitude, he lays a complaint against you of running away with the car under his very nose—"

"And his three chins, superintendent! Don't forget Benji's three chins while you're talking about his nose, which is really a much less conspicuous feature of the charmin' landscape of his countenance."

The constable grinned.

"My superintendent doesn't appear to think that Mr. Bultitude has any case against you of which we can take notice—"

"Congrats to him! Evidently a man of perspicacious views," Cardew said.

"But, on what Mr. Adkins says, we're bound to stop you and take over the car."

"I finished the constable."

"I say, that's rot, you know!" said Manners hotly. "We hired the car—lying old swine!"

"Sorry, sir, but we've no evidence of that. If you admit that the car belongs to Mr. Adkins—"

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"We're not denying that," Roylance said.

"That settles it, then. He says you can't be allowed to take it a mile farther, that's all."

"It's an arguable point whether the police have any jurisdiction in what is essentially a civil, not a criminal, dispute," said Cardew; and the constable stared at him in open-mouthed surprise, for he spoke like a man of thirty.

"Suppose we chose to drive on at our risk the consequences?" went on Cardew.

"What could you people do, by gad? Mr. Adkins has not charged us with stealin' the car, I take it? An' all that Mr. Bultitude can charge us with is stealin' away from the mayor, which, after all, isn't quite the same as horse—or car—stealin'."

The constable tilted his helmet and scratched his head. He was not at all sure what he could do, or what the superintendent could do, except that he knew the superintendent would give him a first-class wiggling if things went wrong.

"You might all come along of me and put that to the super, sir," he said.

"I'll come," said Cardew readily. "I say, you fellows, will you go to the post-office for me? There's half a chance of gettin' a wire through to Olive, if it goes at once, I fancy."

The constable looked as if he regarded this splitting-up of forces as doubtfully safe from the police point of view. But Cardew was going with him, and the other two were not likely to try to escape without their comrade. Moreover, the constable had a colleague outside, who could be left to keep watch over the car, so he agreed.

Cardew paid the bill for tea, wrote a telegram and handed it to Manners, and went off quite cheerily with the man in blue.

"Don't look too sympathetic, Roylance, old bean!" he said. "I'm to be spared the durbies—for the present, anyway!"

At the post-office the two read the telegram before sending it. It had been given to Manners open, and they knew that there was no secret about it.

"An' hung up for the night here with Manners and Roylance—CARDREW."

So it read.

"He's made up his mind that we shan't get any farther to-night," said Manners.

"Well, there wasn't much chance of that, anyway," replied Roylance.

"Twig the way he puts it? He wouldn't ask Olive to tell lies for him—Clive isn't that sort—"

"Nor Cardew the sort to ask him, I fancy."

"No. But he'd draw the wool over Railton's eyes—and the Head's, too—if he could. This may do it. I fancy it would if Levison were there and got it. Levison's wide and crafty. Clive—well, it all depends upon how much Railton asks him. He won't blurt out anything; but he wouldn't stand for a searching examination."

"I hope they will think the boulder was with the team," said Roylance.

"He's a queer beggar, but I like him."

"Same here! That's what he wants them to think, of course. But he won't say so if he's asked point-blank. I say, old man, what's your notion about his burglar theory?"

"Can't help thinking there's something in it. Seems to fit, anyhow."

"Wonder whether he'll say anything at the police-station? It's just struck me that perhaps that was why he took a notion to go there."

"It may have been," admitted Roylance. "But I fancy it was more because

he knew that neither of us would be keen on going. I suppose we had better get back to the car!"

Roylance did Cardew's concern for the comrades of his adventure rather more than justice. In an ordinary way it would rather have tickled Ralph Reckness Cardew to see those two being questioned by the superintendent. But, as he had to talk of other things, he preferred to spare them that.

They had been waiting twenty minutes or so, sitting in the car for warmth, when a tuneless voice singing "Love Me and the World is Mine," drew nearer, and the owner of the voice appeared, revealing himself as their comrade.

"Everythin' else bein' off my mind, I was thinkin' of Miss Adkins," Cardew said lightly. "Nice girl—what? Lucky bargee, James, V.C.—what?"

"Everything else off your mind?" said Manners, in astonishment.

"Well, in a way. I've learned that there has been a burglary—at a place more than a hundred miles away—that the chauffeur was implicated—that he borrowed a car an' is supposed to have escaped with the swag in it—sounds like friend Simons—what? An' I've given our parole, so to speak; we're bound in honour not to take the car on to-night. In the mornin' I shall ring up Adkins—he's left the garage—an' talk to the bouncer for his good."

"But what about your being absent to-night?" asked Manners.

"Can't be helped, dear youth. Clive, though incapable of a wangle—unfortunately for me—will yet do what may be done in the way of honesty for his luckless chum. I hope, therefore!"

And Cardew began again to awaken the echoes of the sleepy street with the strains of "Love Me, and the World is Mine."

"We've got to sleep somewhere, I suppose?" growled Manners.

"I admit the necessity," said Cardew blandly. "Lead on, MacDuff!"

CHAPTER 9.

Clive Does His Best.

MR. RAILTON had taken call-over himself, and at its finish he went at once to the Head.

"Thirteen boys are absent, sir, he said: 'Marry, Lowther, Manners, and Noble of the Shell; Blake, D'Arcy, Levison, Roylance, Cardew, Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, and Redfern of the Fourth. I have sent word to Mr. Ratcliff of what has happened.'"

"Are all these boys accounted for by the match?" asked Dr. Holmes. "It is unusual to take more than one reserve, is it not?"

Only one was taken," replied the Housemaster.

"Who, then, is the thirteenth? You mentioned Redfern's name last. Possibly Mr. Ratcliff gave him permission to go with the players."

"No; Redfern was in the team," Mr. Railton said. "Roylance was the reserve. Cardew is the one not fully accounted for."

A cloud came over the Head's brow. Cardew had been before him more than once for grave reasons. Yet he liked the wayward junior, and saw promise of manhood in him.

"He did not ask you for leave, Railton?"

"He did not."

"You think he went without it? That was distinctly wrong, and he must expect punishment for it. At normal times it is not unusual for a number of juniors to follow the team to an out match, of course; but this season it has been clearly laid down that permission must be had."

"I am not at all sure that he did go

with Merry and the rest, or that he went to Greyfriars at all," replied Mr. Railton. "I feel certain, on the contrary, that I saw him at dinner, which was long after the team left. He would have had to get special leave from Mr. Lathom, too; they went before classes were over. I doubt Lathom's giving it—I feel almost positive that he would not have given it without reference either to you or to me."

"The boy may have followed by a later train. But it is unfortunate, for we cannot be sure that he is at Greyfriars, or where he is."

"Levison and Clive share a study with him," said the Housemaster. "Levison is absent; but Clive—a much keener follower of the game than Cardew, by the way—answered his name at roll-call. I will see Clive."

"Thank you, Railton. I will leave the matter to you. I do not see what we can well do, as it is certainly too late for a wire to Greyfriars to be answered to-night."

Three minutes later Mr. Railton tapped at the door of No. 9, and Sidney Clive called: "Come in!"

Clive was alone, and had just started his prep. He flushed slightly as the master entered.

"I came to ask you about Cardew, Clive," said Mr. Railton.

"Yes, sir?"

"He did not answer his name at call-over."

"No, sir."

Mr. Railton did not guess that Clive had been very near to answering to Cardew's name for him. It was not the risk that had kept him from doing so; but the dodge itself was not of the kind that appealed to his candid and straightforward nature.

"Did he go to Greyfriars after the team?"

"One moment Clive hesitated. Then he said:

"I don't know, sir."

He did not know. He was not certain, that is. But he felt very much as if he were lying, for he believed Cardew had gone elsewhere.

And he knew that if Levison had been in his place his chum would have had to endure the close scrutiny of the Housemaster's keen eyes. For Mr. Railton had no such full faith in Levison as he had in Clive. Levison's past record was against him.

But Clive was a fellow difficult even to suspect of double dealing. Mr. Railton hardly glanced at him.

"Very well, Clive," he said; and with that he went.

He left Sidney Clive to a very uncomfortable quarter of an hour with his conscience. Cardew would have giped at the notion that Clive had done anything that his conscience needed to reproach him for; and yet, in his own queer way, Cardew appreciated and even admired Clive's crystal candour.

He had gone back to his prep when the door opened and Frank Levison came in.

Clive welcomed the fag's advent. Both Clive and Cardew were very like extra elder brothers to their chum's minor, though Cardew spoke of them as "Franky's kind uncles."

"Want some help with Eutropius, kid?" asked Clive.

"Well, I could do with some—it's a rotten bit to-night. But it wasn't just that. I don't want to bother you, Clive."

"No bother, kid. Ernie's away, and so it would naturally fall on me."

"Cardew's away, too. Ernie's all right—he'll like having a bit more time at Greyfriars. But Cardew—"

"Well, what about Cardew, Franky?"

"Piggy says—"

"Young Piggott's a beastly young liar! Besides, what should he know?"

"Well, he says Baggy told him—"

"Baggy's a bigger liar than Piggy!"

"Not bigger—he couldn't be," said Frank. "As big, perhaps. Piggy says Baggy says that Cardew's away somewhere without leave, and hung up by the railway strike. Piggy says he's bound to be sacked!"

And Frank's eyes blinked. He was evidently troubled.

Clive knitted his brows.

"Look here, kid, I don't know what is up with Cardew—not for certain," he said slowly. "He may be at Greyfriars with the rest; but I fancy not. This jaw about him isn't going to be for his benefit, anyway."

"That's what I thought. But we can shut up Piggy—he doesn't count for much, anyway. There's Baggy, though."

"I'll deal with Baggy!" said Clive grimly.

But he was not at all sure in what manner he could deal effectively with the loquacious Trimble.

There came another tap at the door. It was Toby, the page, this time.

"Telegram for you, Master Clive," he said.

Clive handed him a sixpence. Toby departed, grinning cheerily. He would neither have departed so quickly, nor have grinned so cheerily, had no tip been forthcoming.

Frank Levison saw Clive's fingers tremble as he tore open the flimsy envelope. Clive's face altered, too, as he read the few words inside.

"It's all right, Franky," he said. "At least—yes, it's all right—it's bound to be. Cardew's at Raythorne, with Manners and Royleance."

"They missed the train at Lexham, didn't they?" asked Frank. "Reggie says it was just like his chump of a brother to go missing the train."

"Yes, they missed it."

"Well, Cardew couldn't have, for he was here a long time after the team went."

It was plain that Frank did not feel easy in mind. Neither did Clive, for that matter. But he resolved to do what he did not all relish the notion of doing—take that wire to Mr. Railton.

He took it at once, and came away without a single question asked.

He had done his best for his chum, but he did not feel comfortable about it. His feeling was that he had, in a way, traded on Mr. Railton's faith in him.

CHAPTER 10.

Trimble's Uncle Benjy.

"HERE they are, the bounders!"

A dozen or more fellows were standing at the gates of St. Jim's when Manners, Royleance, and Cardew were sighted coming from Rylcombe. They had had a shorter distance to travel than the fellows hung up at Greyfriars, and were getting back again well in advance of them.

Clive was there, of course; and the four from Study No. 5 were there—Julian, Kerruish, Reilly, and Hammond. Herries and Digby were also of the number; and Grundy brought to the assembly the weight of his important presence, backed by such addition as Gunn and Wilkins might be held to give it—which was not much in the eyes of Grundy.

On the outskirts of the crowd hovered Baggy Trimble. Baggy was restless and disgruntled. He had that morning tackled Clive without any result agreeable to himself, though Clive had not appeared to have any lively objection to giving Baggy something. Baggy had hoped for something at Clive's hands,

but what he had got was not in the least what he had hoped for.

Now Baggy was waiting to see Cardew. He knew something. Clive might be too strait-laced to pay blackmail. Baggy did not fancy that Cardew would be. But he failed to realise that Cardew might refuse from other motives than strait-lacedness. To a less obtuse person than Baggy the audacious Cardew might not have seemed a very likely person to pay through the nose for silence.

"Thought you were going to turn up in style and a motor-car," said Kerruish, as the three came up.

"Why should you think that?" asked Manners.

"Well, you must have had a car or something to get to Raythorne in, as the trains weren't running, and it's too far for you to have walked," said Julian.

"We had a car—or something," replied Cardew. "I don't remember walkin', anyway."

"I've got something to say to you, Cardew," announced the great George Alfred majestically.

"Hallo, Grundy, old bean—you there? How's your poor unfortunate face?"

"Eh? I don't understand you, Cardew! There's nothing the matter with my face, and nothing unfortunate about it."

"Think not? Well, that's pleasant for you. But, of course, it's a matter of opinion."

"Oh, you're a silly ass! What do you think is the matter with my face?" snapped Grundy, passing a hand carelessly over his classic features.

"Calmly, dispassionately, an' merely, of course, as a matter of individual opinion, I should say practically everything there would be, old top," replied Cardew.

"I don't say my opinion's final an' conclusive. It's pos that your face may have redeemin' features that I have failed to notice. But all I can say is that I really have not noticed them."

"Why, you silly, fatted chump, I'm a jolly sight better-looking than you are!" roared Grundy.

"Alas, poor me!" murmured Cardew.

"Look here, Cardew—"

"Spare me, Grundy! Anythin' in reason, but not that!"

"I want to know what you were after, being absent without leave; that's what I want to know!"

"Is that all, Grundy?"

"Yes, and enough, too!"

"Too, too much! Ask a policeman."

"Wha-a-at?"

"Ask a policeman, old gun!"

And Cardew thrust his arm through Clive's and walked on, leaving the great George Alfred gasping.

"It's all very well, old chap, but others besides Grundy may be asking that question," said Clive anxiously. Then he turned his head and snapped: "Seat, you fat frog!"

"But I want to speak to Cardew," protested Baggy, the person thus politely addressed.

"The desire, Baggybus, is not a mutual one," said Cardew blandly.

"I—I—See here, Cardew, I know a thing or two about you!"

"I regret to say that that gives you no special advantage over the rest of St. Jim's, Baggybus. Everyone here knows a thing or two about me that I should prefer, on the whole, to have decently interred. But this is no time for raking up the past."

"Tain't the past!" howled Baggy. "Then I refuse to listen. I propose to scrap the past, let the future take care of itself, an' in the words of the poet, 'act, act in the livin' present.'"

But it was Clive's rush, not Cardew's.

talk, which he only half understood, that caused Baggy's retreat.

"Don't worry, old top," said Cardew to Clive. "Wasn't Raitlon satisfied? Most unreasonable man if he wasn't, I consider."

"I'm not sure. He was no end decent—he always is. He didn't try to pump me; and when I took him your wire he made no remarks about it. But—"

"Oh, you took him my wire, did you?"

"Yes. Wasn't that what you expected?"

"I hoped for it. But I had a kind of notion that you wouldn't be dashed keen on doing it."

"I can't say I was, to tell you the truth, Cardew. I felt—well, a bit of a liar!"

"Sidney, dear boy, you are, I think, the most absolutely truthful boulder at St. Jim's!"

"Brrrrr!" was all the answer Clive made to that.

It chanced that neither Mr. Raitlon nor Dr. Holmes was present at dinner. Mr. Lathom, who was Cardew's Form-master, was there; but he said nothing. Indeed, he knew nothing, except that Cardew had been absent from class that morning, which, as some seven or eight others were absent for known reason, had not struck him as a noteworthy fact.

So the afternoon wore on, and classes were over for the day, and word had arrived that the fellows coming from Greyfriars might be expected shortly, and still Cardew had not been brought to book.

He was optimistic enough to believe that any peril he had been in was now over. But Clive did not agree with him.

Mr. Raitlon's memory was not so short as all that came to. And, even had it been, there were those who might do something to buck it up. Racke, Crooke, and Scrope had all said things that suggested their willingness to give Cardew that lift, if needed. And there was Baggy.

Baggy had made three determined attempts at blackmailing Cardew, and had met with three complete failures. Yet Baggy had not given up the notion of either making something out of Cardew, or, as he eloquently put it, "making Cardew jolly well sit up!"

And the attitude Cardew had adopted was just the sort of thing calculated to make Baggy do his worst. Cardew refused to understand what the fat fellow was driving at. He professed to see in what he said nothing but a reference to some bygone misdemeanour—refused to admit by as much as a word that there was any present trouble of which Baggy could take advantage.

"Unless Benjy turns up, Clive, I fancy I'm all serene," Cardew said. "An' even if Benjy butts in I think I may be able to clip his wings sufficiently to nip the serpent in the bud, an' silence the hundred mouths of the hydra."

Clive grinned; he could not help it. He had now heard all about Mr. Benjamin Barker Bultitude, whom Cardew called affectionately Benjy, and his hope was strong that Benjy would not turn up. If he did, he might enlighten several people about several things.

Baggy found himself that day an object of unusual interest to Dick Julian & Co. Wherever he went he seemed to be running against either Julian or Kerruish, either Reilly or Hammond. As a rule, those four youths were not specially interested in Baggy, but they seemed quite considerably interested now.

They were acting upon a hint from Clive. The danger that Baggy might go straight to Mr. Raitlon was not, perhaps, a big one. Mr. Raitlon had a short way with tale-bearers. But Baggy was just the kind of obtuse person to forget that, if he felt moved to split out of revenge; and Julian & Co. were making it their business to see that he did not get a chance of splitting.

But of that Cardew knew nothing. Afternoon classes were over when the ten who had been hung up at Greyfriars appeared at the gates, where again a crowd—a bigger one this time—had gathered.

Scarcely were they well inside, escorted by the eager crowd, when a motor-car drove through the gates, the chauffeur heading not all the frantic objections of Taggles; and Cardew, standing on the steps of the School House with Levison and Clive, recognised the gentleman in the car as Mr. Benjamin Barker Bultitude.

In the same moment someone else recognised him.

"By gad, that's Benjy, dear boys!" said Cardew.

"Why, if it ain't my Uncle Ben!" squeaked Trimble.

"Julian—Kerruish—oh, I say, you fellows, get that fat ass out of the way quick!" hissed Clive, sighting two of his aides.

"What in the world is the matter?" asked Levison, in wonderment.

"Yow! The cad's biting my hand!" howled Kerruish.

But he kept his hand over Baggy's capacious mouth; and Reilly and Hammond hurried up; and Baggy, squirming and gasping, was rushed off before Mr. Bultitude caught sight of him.

Clive had seen at once that it might be perilous to let the Mayor of Lexham and his charming nephew put their heads together.

CHAPTER 11. The Way Out!

CARDEW advanced to meet Mr. Bultitude as that gentleman got out of the car.

"Delighted to see you again so soon, sir!" he said airily. "An' in such eminently gloomin' health, too!"

Mr. Bultitude gasped and glared.

"Hum! Ha, ha! Hum!" he began.

"Oh, don't mention it, sir!" said Cardew.

"But I am goin' to mention it! I have come here—hum, ha!—with the express intention of recounting the whole story of your misdeeds, you—you—you—"

"Do you really think you know them all, sir?" inquired Cardew politely. "I don't fancy anyone else does, y'know. You may be able to remind me of some of them that my memory has let slip."

Mr. Bultitude was completely at a loss for intelligible words for a moment or two. He could only say "Hum! Ha, ha! Hum!" which scarcely carried the conversation farther.

"You have called to see me, I take it, sir?" said Cardew. "Or to have a look round the dear old place, so full of memories of the days when you were a bright an' bonnie boy? I shall have great pleasure in takin' you round, I assure you."

"I have called to see your—ha, hum!—headmaster!" thundered Mr. Bultitude.

"It will be a pleasure for Dr. Holmes, I am sure. But before you see him, will you be kind enough to walk with me once or twice around the quad—the dear old quad—an' lend me an attentive ear?"

"Ha, hum! I never in all my life heard—"

"Your old fault, dear old pal—your old fault! Why not think out something more novel than that extremely outworn openin'?"

"You are the moist—ha, hum!—audacious and impertinent—"

"Now you're gettin' unpleasant, Benjy!"

"I say, Cardew!" protested Clive.

"You madman!" muttered Levison.

"Leave me to handle Benjy my own way, dear boys," said their chum. "If Benjy an' I do not quite understand one another yet—Benjy is solid rather than rapid—we shall in a few moments."

Then he spoke something very quietly into the ear of Mr. Bultitude—something which caused that gentleman to shake in his boots and mutter dazedly: "Wha-a-a-at?"

As he did so he looked curiously at the back of his chauffeur, whose face Cardew had not noted.

Manners, who had just come out of the House, also saw it, and his eyes fell upon the figure of the chauffeur with a light of recognition in them.

"Roylance," he whispered to the New Zealand junior at his side, "see that chap!"

"It's Simons!" said Roylance. "Cardew must have been wrong."

But Cardew was at that very moment giving Mr. Bultitude proofs that he was not wrong.

"It would be uncommonly awkward for a man in your—er—exalted position to have to answer a charge of being accessory to a burglary," Cardew told the angry man. "But there's no possible, probable shadow of doubt that a burglary was committed at Beechwood Towers, an' that your friend Simons made off with the swag in a motor-car. You kindly gave Simons a lift into Hovenenden—"

"You did; you mean, young Reckness!"

"Not at all, sir—not at all! How could I? Did you not make it clear through Mr. Adkins to the police at Raythorne that we had no right with the car—that we eloped with it, so to say? But at the time we had not eloped, an' you were in charge of it."

Mr. Bultitude groaned. He was absolutely innocent in intent, but he saw how very black matters would look against him if the story ever came out.

"Hum, ha! Did you mention my name when you gave information to the police?" he said nervously.

"I carefully abstained from doin' so, an' I trust you will be equally considerate to me when you see Dr. Holmes."

Somehow, though Mr. Bultitude had never thought of connecting Simons with the burglary till he heard Cardew's story—though he had only that morning engaged the man, whom he had formerly hired in his employ, to drive him to St. Jim's in a car hired at Hovenenden—he did not doubt. Everything fitted in too well.

There was Simons under his wing, so to speak. Here was this cool, strange, impertinent sprig of the aristocracy with the reputation of the Mayor of Lexham at his mercy. And how the enemies of the mayor would exult if that story ever became public property!

No longer did Mr. Bultitude think of vengeance upon Cardew.

Manners came hurrying across the quad to them.

"Cardew, I say, that's Simons! Oh, look! He's sliding off!"

(Continued on page 16.)

THE ST. JIM'S GALLERY.

No. 30.—Ralph Reckness Cardew.

IF the order of this series were that of seniority at the school Cardew would come in much later than this. But if it were that of popularity with readers he would certainly have had to be given an earlier place.

There are some few readers who do not like him at all, I know. But they are very few. I fancy that if a poll were taken he would come among the first six on the list. Tom Merry, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Figgins, Talbot, Kerr, Jack Blake—well, let us say, in the first seven; for all these six have many staunch admirers.

They are all less mixed characters than the wayward and whimsical grandson of Lord Reckness, who is also a distant relative of the D'Arcy family. But it is just the complexity of Cardew's character that makes him so interesting. In that he resembles Vernon-Smith of Greyfriars, though there is quite a lot of difference between the two in other ways. In other respects he is somewhat like Rupert De Courcy of Highcliffe, though here again it is easy enough to find many points of dissimilarity.

But he is not enough like anyone else to prevent his being very completely himself. His coolness, his unexpectedness, are very peculiarly his own. He is so much in the way of doing the unexpected thing that it would be tolerably easy to see him up—if there were only one unexpected thing that could be done. But there are always more.

His best chums do not know what to make of him at times; others are even more utterly puzzled than they. D'Arcy almost gives him up in despair now and then.

Clive and Levison are his best chums, of course. But the manner in which he and Levison made friends was distinctly queer. Few had heard about Levison before he came to St. Jim's. He had been given to understand that Levison was rather a gay fellow, and thought him likely to be the sort of fellow after his own heart. For Cardew had been going the pace at Wodehouse, his former school, and he had no particular intention of altering his ways at St. Jim's.

But he came too late to find a partner in playing the giddy ox in Levison. Levison had chucked all that. And it had never been in Clive's line. Thus the addition of Cardew to the pair who were already shaking down pretty well together in No. 9 might easily have made things uncomfortable there. And for a time it threatened to, for Cardew's little flutters with Racke and Crooke, as well as many of the other things he did, hardly appealed to Levison, determined to go straight for the future; or to Clive, a fellow who had always gone straight.

They grew really chummy before long, however. Whatever his faults—and there are plenty of them—Ralph Cardew is a very likeable fellow.

He did not begin well at St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus and Digby went to meet him at Wayland Station, and he impressed them unfavourably. He swanked and he smoked; he did not look at things at all in the way in which Gussy and his chums looked at them. But even then he did things that had a queer strain of generosity in them. He wanted a car to the school. It was explained to him that it was not considered the thing to have a car for selfish purposes. So he went to the Wayland Hotel, and he begged thence a staff of ten or so wounded soldiers, and took them off to St. Jim's, assuming as a matter of course that they could have tea there. And they were given tea—the hospitality of St. Jim's was not likely to fail in such a case—but Mr. Raiton did not wholly approve. It would have been surprising if he had. He said nothing, either, about Cardew's smoking—until after the soldiers had gone. Then Cardew heard about that. But he was not punished.

Cardew fought Cutts of the Fifth, who was bullying Frank Levison. He had no chance against Cutts, of course; but he stood up to him until he could stand no longer. Cutts was a good deal afraid and ashamed of what he had done; he rather expected the sack for

it. Such a brutal thrashing administered to a fellow so much under his weight, with right on the side of the beaten fellow, too, was the kind of thing that called for drastic punishment, he knew.

Cutts did not get the sack. But in saving him from it Cardew went his own way to work, and it was not a way that gave Cutts early peace of mind. He did not tell Mr. Raiton that it was a St. Jim's fellow who had so dealt with him; but he did not say that it was not. He said that he had never seen the fellow before that day, but could describe him—he was about five feet nine, and a regular hooligan. Mr. Raiton inferred a village loafer, and Cardew let the inference pass.

Cardew was then, and long remained, "a puzzle for St. Jim's." He gave a house-warming, and insisted in a most snobbish way Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence, the three scholarship boys from the New House, whom



Levison had invited on his behalf. The consequence was that all his other guests walked out, and he got some very straight talk from Clive and Levison, talk which culminated in a fight in the gym with Clive. Cardew was beaten. There was a good deal of indignation against him, and Levison planned something to take down his snobbish conceit. Lowther made up as "Cousin Dick"—a very seedy relative of whom Cardew had never heard, naturally, and whom he repudiated fiercely. After that Cardew fought Lowther, and was again licked.

Then again came evidence of the curious mixture in his strange nature. Redfern and Lawrence had planned and carried out a very foolish and audacious trick on Mr. Raiton. Cardew was accused of that trick, and accepted the blame—took a flogging, even risked expulsion, for fellows who were certainly not his friends, and who had only a little before told him very plainly what a cad they thought him.

He fell foul of Tom Merry after that, and he played a nasty trick upon Tom. So bad was it that the Head could see nothing for him but expulsion. The Raiton affair, of which he had taken the guilt, told against him now. But Redfern and Lawrence would not have that. They went to the Head and

confessed their guilt, and Cardew got off with a public flogging—no light punishment that for a fellow of his type.

His next fall from grace—if one may use the expression in writing of so graceful a young rascal—was the breaking of bounds specially set by the Head. Tom Merry cautioned him particularly against anything of the sort, for he knew that Cardew had a footer engagement which would take him beyond the limits set. Cardew glibbed at Tom's warning, and went, taking the two fellows with him. Of course, was to have gone, but refused to break bounds. Levison major was less scrupulous, and Levison minor was ready to take any risk which his brother took.

Other fellows were supposed to have broken bounds, and Mr. Raiton pushed for an inquiry. Mr. Raiton handed the matter over to Kildare, and Kildare handed it over to Tom Merry. A court of justice was formed among the juniors. Levison admitted the jurisdiction of the court, said frankly that he saw he had been wrong, and that he was sorry, and was practically let off. Frank was considered as having acted under undue influence, and there was no question of punishing him. But Cardew would not allow that the amateur court had any right to try him, and refused to plead. He was whacked with a cricket-stump and sentenced to a week in Coventry.

More trouble! Cardew and Tom Merry got scrapping in the quad, and Ratty came upon them and hauled them before Raiton. Cardew was absolutely fed up with Coventry, and had been trying to make Tom and others speak to him against their wills. Mr. Raiton reported the Coventry affair to Mr. Raiton, speaking of it as a form of persecution. Cardew coolly denied that he had any cause of complaint; he even said that he admitted that his sentence was just. Again the fellows were puzzled. But there was one thing that had to be done—the Coventry sentence was removed after that.

Cardew, Levison, and Clive began to be rather mysterious. Racke set Melish to spy upon them; Racke was sure that they were up to something fishy. They were not. What they were doing was not very harmless, but even creditable, though Cardew and Levison, both with a disposition to something like cynicism, though in different ways, were among the last fellows at St. Jim's to want to take credit for the kindnesses to the blind old sergeant. There was more trouble before the truth came out; but what it did come out everyone who mattered felt that they owed the trio something. Racke—not one of those who mattered in the sense intended—had something owing to him, and Clive duly paid him.

There had never been any reason to doubt Cardew's pluck; but if there had been, no one could have doubted it after the affair of Grundy's Secret Society, when the juniors were shut in the vaults of the ancient castle ruins, and he took a big risk which no one had required of him in an attempt at rescue.

But other things about Cardew were doubtful. To Tom Merry and his chums, as to Levison and Clive, it seemed more than a pity that a fellow with so much really good stuff in him should be weak and silly enough to gamble with cads like Racke and Crooke. Cardew would do that from time to time; he was still in something of the gambling taint, as he showed lately, when Clive intervened so effectively and drastically in the game of "little horses." Though he played with the black sheep, however, Cardew was never one of them. He never treated them as equals. He snubbed them; he won their money, and flung it back in their faces; he watched for their swindling tactics, and caught them out, and told them of it without hesitation or mercy. But he played with them—that was what those who wished him well objected to.

This sort of thing involved him more than once in difficulties. But heavier difficulties came about through the advent of Algernon Lacy at Rylcombe Grammar School.

Cardew had never told anyone, not even

his chums, at what school he had been prior to his coming to St. Jim's. But Lucy told, Cardew had been at Wodehouse, his own former school, and had left there in black disgrace. The story leaked out gradually; it was through Hacke, who was thirsting to score off Cardew, that the dandy of the Fourth was at last taxed with it.

He could not prove himself innocent—honour forbade. He had to stand a good deal. Only Clive and Levison, with Levison's minor, as a matter of course, stood by him. He exasperated everyone by his attitude. They had not the clue to it. Feeling himself unable to speak, Cardew affected to consider the whole business as having nothing to do with the St. Jim's fellows. They, naturally, could not see it that way. If Cardew were a thief it was quite considerably their business, they held. And when Cardew played a really cruel trick—when Cardew played the article of this series—upon Grundy, even Levison and Clive turned against him. It did seem that nothing could excuse that trick; and yet there was some excuse for it, had they but known all, as they came to know it later. What wonder he should feel bitter when he was accused of mean crime, and actually shamed by a fellow, and was still praising him, from sheer chivalrous generosity—or from mere whim? No, it could hardly have been that; slacker and dandy, gambler and cynic, Ralph Reckness Cardew yet has more strength of purpose, more strong feeling,

more brains, than most people give him credit for!

Do you remember how, while still under a cloud, he saved Gordon Gay's life, and kept clear about it? And how Baggy Trimble's dishonesty almost led to his expulsion? Baggy had been carrying about for days the letter which would have cleared him completely. Do you remember that last tea in Study No. 9—the last tea, as the three who had grown to be such good chums supposed—and how, for once, Cardew spoke out from his wayward heart?

"Life is a queer bizney," he said. "Things you've nearly forgotten get up an' hit you hard. You don't get what you deserve ninety-nine times in a hundred; an' then you get somethin' you don't deserve, an' it knocks haven't got much more than my deserts in hein' booted out. The dashed queer thing is that I haven't got it for things I've done here, but for something I didn't do at my last school."

Everyone was glad—except the enemies he had made—when it turned out that there was, after all, no reason why Cardew should be sacked. But if they expected that in future he would behave like a reasonable and consistent person—like Tom Merry, for instance, or his chum Clive, or Roylance—they must have been vastly disappointed. Again and again since then he has surprised St. Jim's. There was especially his treatment of

Paul Laurenz, who turned out in the event to be his own cousin George Durance. Cardew treated him very badly indeed, and did not seem to see that he was treating him badly. But the cousins are good chums now. There was the trick played upon the Grammar School in connection with the loss of Lucy's klepion. There have been ever so many other surprises, and they are not at an end yet by long odds.

He is not an ordinary fellow, this Ralph Reckness Cardew. Some of his faults are on the surface; his snobbery, for instance, does not really go deep, for the true spot likes fawners and sycophants, and Cardew hates them. But other faults of his are deeper in the grain; no use trying to make a pattern of him! And most of his best qualities want looking for.

Does anyone quite know him as Tom Merry knows his chums and as they know him, as the chums of No. 6 know one another? I doubt it. If anyone does it is Ernest Levison, who is better capable of understanding him than Clive. But Clive is as fond of him as Levison is, and Frank Levison has for him a real affection that is as strong as that of either, for there is a wealth of affection in that straight-going, loyal little face.

For the rest—most of them like Cardew, but don't and cannot understand the fellow, and perhaps like him less than they otherwise might.

But they would miss him if he went!

LEFT BEHIND.

(Continued from page 14.)

Cardew swept round. The fellow had got down from his seat and had started to walk towards the gates in quite a casual sort of way, as if merely to stretch his legs. But it was because he had recognised Cardew and Manners and Roylance that he had gone, and it is likely that once outside he would have quickened his pace and made a bolt for escape. He had certainly smelt a rat.

"Voicks! Tallyho!" yelled Cardew. "After him!"

And after him they went—Manners and Roylance and Clive, Tom Merry and Levison and Talbot, and a dozen more, pouring out of the School House.

They were almost at his heels as he dashed through the gates. Next moment he was pulled up short.

"Got you, my man!" said P.-C. Crump.

There was another constable with Crump, and it was evident that the superintendent at Raythorne had acted more decisively than Cardew had been giving him credit for doing. Cardew had been mentally setting him down as a rank duffer; but he was not that. Simons had been traced to Rycombe, and, as a matter of fact, the booty had already been recovered, and the man who had not met Simons at the Bald-faced Stag was in custody.

Struggling hard, Simons had to submit in the end to being handcuffed.

Mr. Bulitude came panting up. He was scarcely in a condition to explain anything, but Cardew spoke for him.

"This gentleman seems to have been rather done down by that rascal, whom he knew before he took to—er—the sort of thing he seems to have taken to, y'know, Crump," he said. "Most influential an' respected gentleman—Mr. Alderman Bulitude, Mayor of Lexham. You won't want to bother him, of course?"

Mr. Bulitude gave Cardew a look eloquent of real gratitude. Crump touched his helmet.

"Gen'l'man's evidence may be required," he said. "I don't want 'im, 'owever. No warrant out ag'in Mr. Bulitude as I've heerd of."

And the two constables led off their captive.

Now Mr. Railton came striding across the quad.

"Hum, ha! Young Reckness, I—hum, ha!—have a difficulty in—hum, ha!—in explaining my presence here to the master who is approaching," said the mayor helplessly.

"What? I thought you had come to see your nephew, Baggy Trimble, sir?" said Cardew, in apparent surprise.

"Why—hum, ha!—of course! Here, do not go, young Reckness!"

But "young Reckness" had no wish to talk to Mr. Railton just then.

He mizzled. Levison and Clive followed him.

"What's the use?" said Clive miserably. "You've got to have it out with Railton!"

"I think not, old gun!"

"Ass! You must!" said Levison.

"No, dear boy, no! For I am going to talk to my dear, kind headmaster, an' confess all to him. Well, not quite all, perhaps. Sha'n't tell him all there is to tell about Benjy, perchance. Shouldn't care to give good old Benjy away when he's brimmin' over with affection for me, y'know."

"My hat!" gasped Clive, as Cardew went. "Shall we ever know what that bouncer will do next?"

But Cardew was doing the safest thing for himself. Within twenty minutes he was back again, with smarting hands, but, as he expressed it, "a conscience newly waterproofed."

Mr. Railton saw the Head soon afterwards. The Housemaster looked very grimly at Cardew when they next met, but said no word.

Baggy was not treated to much of his loving uncle's society. But he was very pleased and swanky when Mr. Bulitude left, for he had a fiver to show.

"An' while the virtuous suffer, the wicked flourish like any number of green bay-trees!" said Ralph Reckness Cardew, pressing his hands under his armpits in exaggerated woe.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co., at St. Jim's—"RIVAL DETECTIVES!"—by Martin Clifford.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"RIVAL DETECTIVES!"

By Martin Clifford.

Few fellows in the Fourth or Shell really have very much doubt as to who it was that tried to poison Tower.

One fellow in the Fourth makes up his mind to find out who the criminal was. So does one fellow in the Shell. The quick intelligence and wonderful judgment of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and the massive brain of George Alfred Grundy are turned upon the problem.

Both approach it with open minds. Neither thinks it fair to assume Racke's guilt. However, it seems to both that there would more glory in proving someone else guilty. Racke, whom nearly everyone has condemned as an easy one, so to speak—far too easy for Gusky and Grundy!

So they look round for someone else, and each finds someone else.

And meanwhile a third detective—who shall remain unnamed here—is at work on the right lines.

SCOTLAND AGAIN!

I printed last week the verses about "The Seven Men of Meuvres," which were sent me by my disgruntled correspondent at Falkirk. They are not bad verses, but from the critical point of view they are not very good ones, and they are most certainly not poetry. The metre often goes to pieces, and the phraseology is trite and worn, things are said as thousands of other people have said them before. There is not a new thought, or a particularly well-expressed thought, in the whole poem. But there is some vigour in it here and there, and some feeling—more teasing than vigour. And the feeling matters most, for that is evidently real and personal, whereas whatever vigour there is can only be said to be borrowed. Nothing is much easier than writing verses. But writing real poetry is quite a different matter.

Then I have heard from "Falkirk" again. I cannot afford space to answer his latest letter. When a Scot begins to talk about Bannockburn, and his ardent wish that his countrymen should again treat the English as they were treated in that battle—when his blood boils at all sorts of imaginary slights to his country—well, he has got past where I can argue with him. Scotland has never been slighted of intention in these columns; I don't care a scrap about Bannockburn, except that I have always sympathised with the side that won there; and I would no more think of trying to raise the ire of a Scot by reference to battles in which England won than I would think of worrying about red hair and freckles!

YOUR EDITOR.