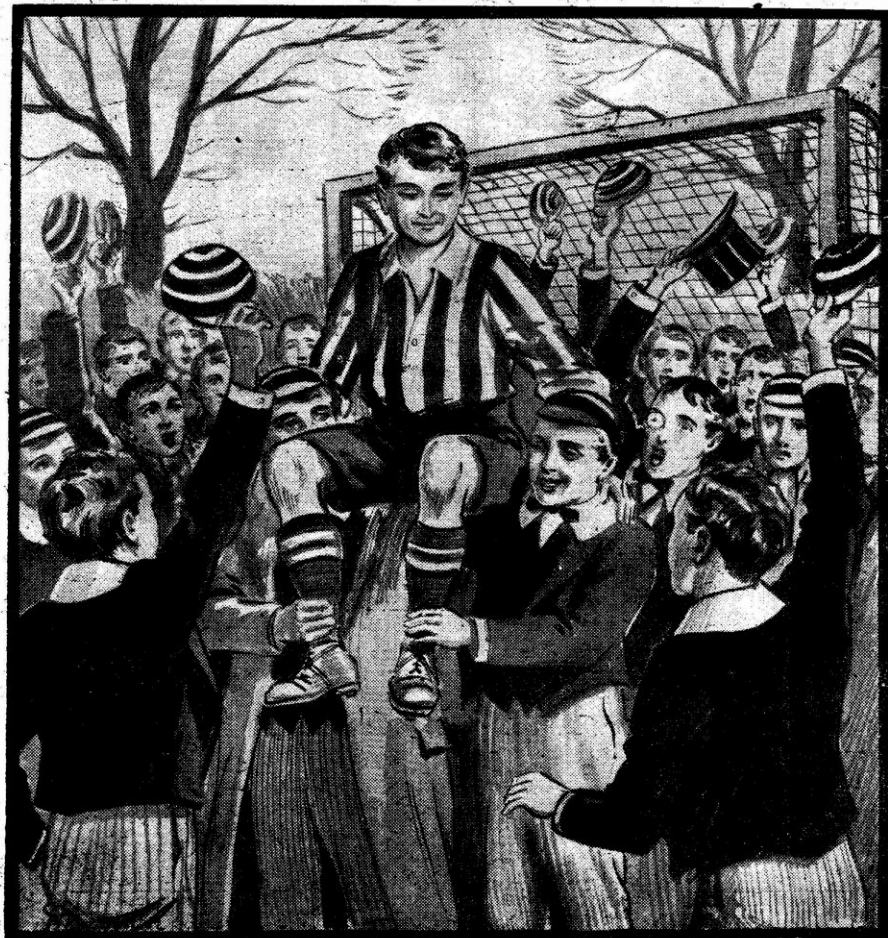


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BY...

**MARTIN
CLIFFORD.**

CHAPTER 1.

One Man Short!

WHERE'S the silly duffer got to?"

Kildare of the Sixth was waxing impatient. So were the other Sixth-Formers who stood in a group on the football-ground.

It was an important occasion—nothing less than a senior match between St. Jim's and Greyfriars.

The visiting eleven had arrived, and they were already indulging in pot-shots at goal. But the St. Jim's team was incomplete. Monteith, Kildare's first lieutenant, was missing.

"I've scoured the building for the fellow," growled Kildare, "but he can't be found! I'll give him a piece of my mind when he does turn up!"

"He ought to know better than to leave us in the lurch like this," said Baker.

"True we kicked off, too," said Trushman.

Kildare glanced at his watch.

"I'll give the fellow five minutes to turn up," he said.

The minutes passed, but there was no sign of Monteith.

The captain of St. Jim's gritted his teeth with annoyance.

It was most essential that the Saints should be at full strength. Greyfriars had brought over a very strong team, and if there was any loophole in the St. Jim's side they would be certain to find it. And Kildare & Co. shrank from the prospect of being defeated on their own ground.

The five minutes slipped by, and still there was no sign of Monteith.

Kildare was debating what should be done, when a flushed and panting junior came tearing across the turf. It was Tom Merry.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Langton. "Young man in a hurry! What's Merry want, I wonder?"

Tom came to a halt beside the group of seniors.

"I say, Kildare!" he gasped. "I've got a message for you!"

"Eh? Who from?"

"Monteith."

Kildare frowned.

"Where is he?"

"He's been called away by telegram. He hadn't time to come down to the ground and let you know. His train left in ten minutes, and he had to do a jolly Marathon to the station. I met him on the road, and he told me to explain matters to you."

Kildare gave a grunt.

"Just our luck!" he said. "Who can I get in Monteith's place?"

"What about Knox?" suggested Darrell.

"Ed rather play a man short than include that snaky bouncer!"

"There's Dudley and Mulvaney major," said Rushden.

"They've both gone out," said Tom

Merry. "In fact, there isn't a Sixth-Former in the place."

"We shall have to get somebody from the Fifth," said Macgregor. "What price Lefevre?"

"He's in the sanny," chimed in Tom Merry.

Kildare turned irritably upon the captain of the Shell.

"You've been flinging bad news at us ever since you turned up!" he said.

"Can't you say something cheerful?"

"There are some topping players in the Shell, Kildare," murmured Tom Merry.

Kildare gasped.

"Great Scott! You don't suppose I'm going to play a fag, do you?"

"If you remember, old man," said Darrell, "you played halloo once in a senior match, and he came off."

"Yes, but these things don't happen twice. Anyway, I'm not taking the risk. Surely there's somebody in the Fifth that we can play in Monteith's place?"

But inquiries proved that all the Fifth-Formers were out of gates. For it was a half-holiday, and the call of spring was irresistible.

Kildare was almost at his wit's end. The problem of finding an eleventh man seemed insoluble.

Wingate, the captain of the Greyfriars eleven, strolled up to the worried-looking group of seniors.

"Excuse me, you fellows," he said politely, "but is there a match on this afternoon?"

"Of course!" said Kildare. "Why ask such an asinine question?"

"I wondered whether you intended to make a start to-day or to-morrow—or next week!" said Wingate.

Kildare crimsoned.

"I'm awfully sorry!" he said. "But we're a man short."

"Haven't you a substitute?"

"Not a satisfactory one."

"There are some topping players in the Shell, Kildare," repeated Tom Merry meekly.

Kildare gave a sort of snarl.

"Cut off, you cheeky young cub!" he said. "When I want your suggestions, I'll let you know!"

Tom Merry turned away and joined his chums on the touchline.

"What's the delay, Tommy?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Monteith isn't available, and Kildare can't get anybody in his place."

"My hat!"

"He might do worse than try a Shell fellow," said Manners.

"Or a Fourth-Former," said Jack Blake.

"I suggested a Shell fellow," said Tom Merry, "but Kildare's not having any."

George Alfred Grundy, who was standing in the offing, so to speak, overheard this conversation, and a thoughtful expression came over his rugged features.

"I think I'll offer Kildare my services," he said slowly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Grundy looked puzzled.

"Dashed if I can see what there is to cackle at!" he said.

"Weally, Grundy!" protested Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "If you offah Kildare your services, they'll be promptly wejected—"

"Without thanks!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"I'm a first-class player," declared Grundy. "I can hold my own with the best. When I was at Reddylfe—"

"But you're not at Reddylfe now," said Tom Merry. "You're at a real school—not a kindergarten!"

Grundy frowned.

"I'm going to offer Kildare my services, anyway!" he said.

"You'll be asking for trouble if you do," said Tom Merry warningly. "Kildare isn't in a very angelic mood at the moment."

But Grundy, with his usual disregard of warnings, strode on to the playing-pitch.

"The mad duffer!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "By the time Kildare's finished with him we shall have to take him away on a stretcher!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare spun round irritably as George Alfred Grundy came up.

"Well?" he snapped.

"I hear you're a man short, Kildare," said Grundy. "You needn't look so cut up about it. It's a blessing in disguise, really. You'll be able to fill the vacancy with a much better player than Monteith."

"Produce him, then!" said the captain of St. Jim's.

Grundy pointed to himself.

"Here he is," he said modestly.

"Shall I go and get into my footloose?"

For a moment Kildare was too flabbergasted to reply. And when his reply did come, it took the form of a resounding slap across Grundy's cheek.

"Buzz off!" thundered Kildare.

And the expression on the speaker's face was so ominous that Grundy promptly "buzzed." A moment later he was complaining bitterly to Tom Merry & Co. that Kildare didn't know a really class player when he saw one.

Meanwhile Kildare turned to his fellow-players.

"I suppose we'd better make a start with ten men?" he growled.

"If you want an eleventh man, I am at your disposal," interposed a quiet voice.

The seniors looked up quickly.

A tall, athletic-looking young man, who was a complete stranger to the St. Jim's fellows, had come up unobserved.

"Who are you?" demanded Kildare.

"My name is Tremaine—Jack Tremaine. And if you're wanting an eleventh man, I shall be delighted to play. I won't take me long to get into football-garb."

The stranger said nothing concerning his abilities as a player, but the St. Jim's seniors could see at a glance that

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he was a splendid athlete. His broad chest and well-developed limbs suggested a sportsman.

"You certainly look a footballer," said Kildare, "and if you only belonged to St. Jim's, I should be keen on your filling the breach. But we make it a rule never to play outsiders."

The stranger smiled.

"I am not an outsider," he said. "In fact, I belong to St. Jim's."

"Eh?"

"I have just been engaged as games master, and, after reporting to Dr. Holmes, I thought I'd stroll down to the football ground."

Kildare looked amazed.

"I'd no idea that a games master was being appointed," he said. "But I'm jolly pleased. You've come just in the nick of time, sir."

"Then you've no objection to my playing?"

"Not the slightest! It's jolly decent of you, sir, to offer to turn out for us."

"But how do you know that I shall give satisfaction?" asked Jack Tremaine.

"I can see that you're a player, sir. And I seldom make a mistake in sizing people up. We'll wait while you change."

The new games master hurried away, returning after a brief interval in football-garb.

"What position would you like to take, sir?" asked Kildare.

"Outside-right will suit me down to the ground," said Jack Tremaine.

"Will that be all right?"

Kildare nodded.

Many curious glances were directed at Jack Tremaine as he lined up with the St. Jim's team.

"Wonder who the new merchant is?" said Monty Lowther.

"He must have some connection with the school, for he wouldn't be allowed to play," said Tom Merry.

"He may be a new fellow coming into the Sixth," suggested Manners.

"That's hardly likely. Dash it all, the fellow looks about twenty-two! He's left his schooldays behind him long ago."

Cardew of the Fourth was regarding Jack Tremaine very intently. A rather grim smile lurked about Cardew's lips.

"Do you know that fellow, Ralph?" inquired Clive.

"I fancy I do, but I'm not sure," said Cardew.

And he continued to take stock of the new games master.

Then the whistle blew, and the rival teams rushed into action.

CHAPTER 2. The Real Goods!

"PLAY up, Saints!"

"On the ball, you men!"

The crowd had grown weary of waiting for the match to start. They were restless in their weariness now. Their eyes were focussed upon the Kildare, who was racing along with the ball at his feet.

The captain of St. Jim's possessed a fine turn of speed, and only one other forward was able to keep pace with him. This was Jack Tremaine, who flashed along the wing with the speed of a hare.

Kildare tricked two opponents in turn. But he saw two more bounding up to intercept him, so he neatly swung the ball across to the games master.

What followed came like a lightning-flash across a summer sky.

Z-z-zip!

The leather went whizzing in, and the Greyfriars goalie was beaten all ends up.

Fortunately for the Friars, however, the ball, instead of entering the net, struck the cross-bar, and rebounded into play. One of the backs got his boot to it, and punted it well up the field.

But the Saints came again. They attacked fiercely, despite the fact that a strong wind was against them.

Kildare snapped up a pass from Rushden, and fired in a terrific shot, to save which the Greyfriars goalie had to throw himself at full length.

"A jolly good shot, and a jolly good save!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I doubt if I could have done bettah myself, deah boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Kildare's bang on the top of his form," said Manners.

"So's that new merchant," said Jack Blake. "I can see some goals coming along presently."

The downfall of the Greyfriars goal was imminent, for St. Jim's were attacking strongly and with great resolution.

It was Rushden who eventually scored; but he had to thank Jack Tremaine for sending across a delightful pass.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

The applause rang out over the playing-fields. The keenest rivalry existed between St. Jim's and Greyfriars; and Tom Merry & Co. were overjoyed to find their team a goal to the good.

"Keep it up, deah boys!" shouted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Put it across 'em!"

Having scored a goal within ten minutes of the start, the St. Jim's players seemed to imagine they were on a good thing. They began to take things easy; and this slackening of their efforts proved fatal.

So far, the Greyfriars forwards had not been allowed to get within shooting distance. But they were now given an opportunity, and their marksmanship proved deadly and dangerous.

Wingate, their skipper, fastened on to the ball a few yards out, and fired in a shot with such force that the ball nearly broke the rigging.

"Goal!"

"Level pegging!" grunted Jack Blake. "I knew what would happen if our fellows started slacking."

"Wake up, Saints!"

"You've a long way to go, you know!"

The ball was kicked off again from the centre of the field, and the Friars, now that they had drawn blood, played dashing football. They had the wind at their backs, and again and again they invaded their opponents' territory.

The St. Jim's backs were dogged and stubborn, but just before half-time a misunderstanding arose between them, and the Greyfriars centre-forward was allowed a clear passage to goal. He jumped at the opportunity—and at the ball—at the same moment, and with a quick jerk of the head he sent the sphere into the net.

Oh-h-h!"

It was a long-drawn-out groan of dismay from the crowd on the touchline.

The Friars were on top!

"This is sickening!" growled Tom Merry. "Our fellows got off the mark well, and now they've gone all to pieces!"

"The new fellow's doing well," said Talbot. "But he isn't getting enough support."

"I'm givin' two to one on Greyfriars!" drawled Aubrey Racke. "Any takers?"

"You'll have a thick ear if you start that game!" growled Manners.

During the interval there was a

marked contrast between the rival elevens.

The Greyfriars fellows were on the best of terms with themselves, and they were sniling. But Kildare & Co. were looking decidedly glum.

"We're in a tight corner, sir," remarked the skipper of St. Jim's to the new games master.

"True. But we shall have the wind in the second half."

"We shall need it!" grunted Kildare.

An amazing change came over the game when it was resumed.

The St. Jim's forwards attacked in great style, and Jack Tremaine was a giant in the play. He played with rare dash, and he was tireless in his efforts to equalise the scores.

The critics on the touchline were unanimously of the opinion that this stranger was one of the best players who had ever appeared on that historic ground.

He was half a team in himself. Without doubt, he would have done credit to any of the big League teams. There was method and judgment in all that he did.

The Greyfriars defenders played pluckily, but they were run off their feet. They could not withstand the hurricane rushes of the St. Jim's forwards; and only a superb display of goalkeeping kept the Saints at bay.

Midway through the second half the score remained the same—two to one in favour of the Friars.

St. Jim's had been having all the play, but the things that mattered—goals—were denied them. They had sent in some storming shots, none of which had been allowed to enter the net. Kildare turned to Jack Tremaine.

"I wonder if you'd mind changing places with me, sir?" he asked. "If you play at centre-forward, I fancy we shall do better."

The games master readily consented to this arrangement. He transferred to the centre, while Kildare went on the wing.

The wisdom of the change became apparent at once.

Jack Tremaine led the forwards with great dash, and he gave Langton a pass which the Sixth-Former could not help converting. All he had to do was to push the ball over the goal-line with his foot.

"Goal!"

"We're level, deah boys—we're level!" chorled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in great excitement.

"And we shall soon be in front, at this rate!" said Blake. "That new fellow's worth his weight in whipped-cream wauhts!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Saints continued to attack. They swarmed like bees round the Greyfriars goal.

But it was not until five minutes from the finish that their reward came.

Kildare sent in a fast, low shot, which the goalie saved by flunging himself full length at the ball. While he was stiff on the ground, however, Jack Tremaine raced up, took the ball in his stride, and sent it crackling into the net.

"Oh, goal shot, sir!"

"Splendid, but Jove!"

But Jack Tremaine was not finished yet. His appetite for goals was not yet satisfied, and in the last minute of the match he scored again, amid a storm of cheering.

St. Jim's had beaten their biggest rivals by four goals to two.

Tom Merry & Co. swarmed on to the playing-pitch.

"Who's the new man, Kildare?" asked Manners breathlessly.

"His name's Jack Tremaine, and he's just been appointed games master here." A cynical smile played about the lips of Cardew of the Fourth.

"Did he tell you that his name was Jack Tremaine, Kildare?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then he's a direct descendant of Ananias!" muttered Cardew, under his breath.

Kildare turned sharply upon the Fourth-Former.

"What did you say?" he demanded.

"Nothin' of any consequence, Kildare."

"Well, don't matter to yourself. It's a bad habit to get into."

Meanwhile, Tom Merry & Co., having learned the stranger's identity, had gone up to him, and were congratulating him boisterously.

"You were great, sir!" said Tom Merry with enthusiasm. "You put up a much better show than Monteith could have done."

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's cawwy him in, deah boys!" suggested Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, rather!"

"Shoulder-high! Up with him!" Jack Tremaine tried to dodge the crowd of demonstrators. But there was no way of escape, and he found himself swung off his feet and borne aloft.

Shouting and cheering, the excited juniors marched away, bearing the hero of the match into the building.

Ralph Reckless Cardew surveyed these proceedings with a sneer.

"Very touchin' an' affectin', begad!" he drawled. "The sort of thing you read about in footer serials. Stranger turns up in the nick of time, an' wins the match for his side. Then he's hero-worshipped by an admirin' throng, an' he bears his bla-hin' honours thick upon him. I shouldn't begrudge this new games master any of his glory if he happened to be a decent fellow an' a good sportsman—but I've reason to believe that he's neither!"

So saying, Cardew strolled thoughtfully away in the wake of the demonstrators.

CHAPTER 3.

Very Mysterious.

JACK TREMAINE, flushed and breathless, was at last set down upon his feet. He smiled round upon the juniors.

"It's immensely kind of you to make such a fuss of me—" he began.

"Rats!"

"You played like a giddy Trojan, sir!" said Jack Blake. "You deserve an O.B.E., at least!"

"I'm not a bad playah myself," said Arthur Augustus modestly, "but I take off my hat to Mr. Twemaine. Those two goals of his were real corkahs!"

"Will you do us the honour of having tea with us, sir?" asked Tom Merry.

The games master smiled.

"I shall be delighted!" he said. "By the way, I don't know your names!"

Tom Merry introduced himself and his followers, and Jack Tremaine shook hands all round. He was very gratified to observe that all the faces were friendly, and that he was welcome at St. Jim's.

"I'll join you in a few moments, Merry," he said. "I'm just going to relieve myself of this superfluous mud. Which is your study?"

"No. 10 in the Shell passage," said Tom. "We shall be able to get everything ready while you're gone!"

The Terrible Three were in funds, and they had laid in a goodly supply of pro-

visions from Dame Taggles' little shop in the Close.

"Would you fellows care to come along to the feed?" asked Tom Merry of Jack Blake & Co.

"Like a shot!" said Blake.

"Delighted, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus.

At that moment Ralph Reckless Cardew came strolling into view. His hands were plunged into his pockets, and there was a sardonic smile on his features.

"Where's the merry hero?" he inquired.

"Gone to get a wash and brush-up," said Monty Lowther. "Tommy's invited him to a feed in the study."

"Entertainin' the stranger within the gates—what?" said Cardew. "Well, that's all right so far as it goes, but you want to make sure, first of all, that the stranger's the right sort!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Tom Merry.

"What I say."

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"There's nothing wrong with Mr. Tremaine, is there?"

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't like runnin' anybody down behind his back," he said, "so I'll say nothin'."

Tom Merry & Co. glanced curiously at Cardew. They could see that he was "up against" the new games master; though why this should be they hadn't the foggiest notion. For their own part, they liked Jack Tremaine immensely. He struck them as being just the right sort of person for a games master—young, good-looking, athletic, and devoid of "swank." Why, then, should Cardew dislike him?

But then, Cardew was a curious fellow. He had peculiar likes and dislikes. And Tom Merry & Co. reflected that he would soon come round to their own way of thinking, so far as Jack Tremaine was

concerned. The man was a thorough sportsman, and it would be impossible to dislike him for long.

"Coming along to the feed, Cardew?" asked Tom Merry.

"Thanks, deah boy! I feel quite flattered at bein' allowed to sit at the same table as Mr. Tremaine."

"Don't be so beastly sarcastic!" said Jack Blake, in his blunt way. "Mr. Tremaine's one of the best!"

"Judgin' by the way you fellows treated him just now, he might be the King of England!" said Cardew.

"He played a ripping good game!" said Tom Merry. "You can't deny that!"

Cardew said nothing. He accompanied the juniors to Study No. 10.

It was rather a tight squeeze to accommodate all the guests, but by moving the bookcase and Tom Merry's desk, it was possible for everyone to get seats at the table.

"Let's buck up and cook the festive kipper!" said Monty Lowther. "Mr. Tremaine will be here in a jiffy!"

Tom Merry pushed back his cuffs, and got busy with the frying-pan.

There were no kippers on the menu, but the sausages which the captain of the Shell proceeded to fry gave forth an appetising odour.

Presently there was a knock at the door, and Jack Tremaine entered. He had changed into his ordinary attire, and he was the picture of health and freshness.

"Take a seat, sir!" said Manners, indicating the place of honour at the head of the table.

The games master sat down. "Pardon my lapsing into boyish language, but it isn't so very long ago that I was at school myself."

"You were at Grandcourt, I believe?" said Cardew.

Jack Tremaine gave a start. He glanced keenly—and somewhat uneasily—at Cardew.

"How did you know that?" he asked.

"Oh, one picks up these scraps of information!" said Cardew carelessly. And Tom Merry & Co. could not help noticing



Skimpole took a run and a flying kick at the ball. He managed to uproot a considerable portion of turf, but the ball remained stationary. Skimpole lost his balance and pitched forward in the mud. "Ow! Oh, deah!" he gasped. (See page 8.)

that he refrained from addressing the new games master as "sir."

"If I remember rightly, you left school before your time was up?"

Cardew's remark caused a sensation. It seemed to suggest that Jack Tremaine had been expelled.

"That is quite correct," said the games master quietly. "While I was in the Fifth Form at Grandcourt, my father died. He was reputed to be a wealthy man, but it transpired that he had no assets whatever. Consequently it was impossible for my term-fee to be paid, and I had to leave school."

"Rough luck, sir," said Tom Merry. The sausages were then served up, and conversation languished. The clatter of knives and forks was the only sound which broke the silence of the study.

Presently, however, Talbot set the ball rolling by a query as to which team would win the English Cup.

"Personally, I think it will go to a Lancashire club," said Talbot.

"Rats! London will bag it!" said Manners.

"What do you think, sir?" asked Tom Merry, turning to Mr. Tremaine.

"Well, I've a strong notion that the Cup will come South this year," said the games master. "The southern teams have been playing very fine football, and I shall expect to see one of them in the Final. But, of course, it's difficult to prophesy. Anything can happen in a Cup tie."

"I should like to see a Yorkshire team bag the Cup," said Jack Blake.

"Yorkshire's dead in this act," said Manners. "I tell you a London team's going to carry off the honours. And if we get permission to go up to see the Final, I shall take my camera with me, and try to get a snap of the winning goal."

"Some hopes!" said Monty Lowther. "They won't allow you inside the ground at all unless you're on a lead!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here!" howled Manners wrathfully. "Do you want your nose in a sling?"

"Nunno!"

"Well, dry up, then!"

Then followed a discussion concerning the merits of the various clubs.

"The finest team in the country, dear boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "is Aston Villa."

"How do you make that out, fathead?" growled Jack Blake.

"Because they wear claret and light-blue shirts," said the swell of St. Jim's.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm afraid it isn't the colours that matter," said Jack Tremaine, with a smile. "It's their merit that counts."

"You seem to know a lot about this subject," said Cardew, almost insolently.

"Have you ever played in first-class football?"

Jack Tremaine nodded.

"You have, sir?" said Tom Merry eagerly.

"Yes."

"My hat! I thought, when I was watching you this afternoon, that you'd had tons of experience."

"Which team did you play for, sir?" asked Talbot.

The games master looked uncomfortable.

"I—I'd rather not say," he stammered.

The juniors stared at the speaker in astonishment.

Why should Jack Tremaine decline to mention the name of his old club? Surely he was not ashamed of the team whose colours he had worn?

"I expect you will think it curious that

I should volunteer no information on the subject," said the games master. "But I have good reasons for remaining silent."

Cardew was smiling scornfully. "Ever heard of a team called Burchester United?" he inquired.

The effect which this apparently harmless question had upon Jack Tremaine was extraordinary. He started violently, and the colour mounted to his cheeks.

"Evidently you have heard of Burchester United," Cardew went on. "They got into the semi-final of the English Cup a few seasons ago. They would have won, too, if it hadn't been for—"

Jack Tremaine rose hurriedly to his feet.

"Excuse me," he said. "I—I must be going!"

And before Tom Merry & Co. could recover from their astonishment the games master had left the study.

A gasp followed Jack Tremaine's departure.

"My only aunt!" ejaculated Jack Blake. "What was the matter with the man?"

"I expect the sausages made him come over queer," said Monty Lowther.

"Rats!" said Tom Merry indignantly. "I feel those sausages myself, and they're tophole, fit to set before a giddy king!"

"Mr. Tremaine didn't seem to relish Cardew's questions," said Talbot. "What were you driving at, Cardew?"

Cardew smiled grimly, but said nothing.

"You seem to have something up against Mr. Tremaine," said Tom Merry.

"Have you ever met him before?"

"Never," said Cardew.

"Then what?"

"If you object to the man, Cardew," said Jack Blake, "it's up to you to explain what your objections are."

"Vaaa, wathah!"

Cardew yawned.

"I don't feel like explainin' anything just now," he said.

"You think Tremaine's a wrong 'un?" said Manners.

"Yes."

"My hat! He hasn't come here to burgle the school, or anything, has he?"

"He's not a crackman or a swell mobman?"

"Not to my knowledge," said Cardew.

"Then what's wrong with him?"

But Cardew refused to state the nature of his objections. Even under pressure he remained silent.

"Well, if you ask my opinion," said Jack Blake, "it's jolly caddish to say that a man's a wrong 'un, unless you can produce evidence to prove that he is!"

"Heah, heah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus. "You're actin' like a cad, Cardew!"

Ralph Reckness might have been expected to jump up indignantly from the table. But he didn't. He remained perfectly cool.

"I'm not goin' to argue about it," he said. "Life's too short. Pass the toast!"

The meal proceeded. But Tom Merry & Co. failed to do justice to it. They were thinking of Jack Tremaine, and of his extraordinary behaviour.

There was a mystery of some sort connected with the new games master. That was certain. Why had he acted so strangely when the name of Burchester United was mentioned? Why had he been so uneasy and flustered when Cardew questioned him?

Those were riddles which only Ralph Reckness himself could answer.

CHAPTER 4.

A Short Way With Slackers!

"THIS is the latest!" said Tom Merry.

"Quite a bombshell, by Jove!" said Manners.

"It's knocked our trip to Wayland on the head," said Monty Lowther.

Twenty-four hours had elapsed since the juniors had entertained Jack Tremaine.

Afternoon lessons were over, and the Terrible Three were standing before the notice-board in the Hall.

A new announcement had been posted up in bold, clear handwriting. It ran thus:

"NOTICE!

"The members of the Shell and Fourth Forms will assemble on the football-ground at four-thirty this afternoon for compulsory practice."

"No junior will be excused, except by special permission."

(Signed) J. TREMAINE.
"Games-Master."

Tom Merry & Co. had intended going over to Wayland, to see a new film which had aroused world-wide interest. But their intentions were knocked on the head by Jack Tremaine's announcement.

"We shall have to see that picture some other time," said Tom Merry.

"It's rotten!" growled Manners.

"Oh, I don't know! I don't object to a game of footer."

"Neither do I. But it's being ordered to play that gets my back up. Anybody I think we were a set of giddy slaves! I expect to be a free country, too!"

added Manners bitterly.

"Cheer up!" said Monty Lowther consolingly. "I don't suppose Tremaine will keep us long. But the slackers will go through the mill, and no mistake!"

"Serve 'em right!" said Tom Merry.

"They want a fellow like Tremaine to wake 'em up!"

"Hullo! What's all this?" said George Alfred Grundy, elbowing his way to the notice-board, with Wilkins and Gunn in close attendance.

"My hat!" said Wilkins. "Compulsory footer!"

"What awful cheek!" growled Gunn.

As for Grundy, he frowned darkly.

"Dashed if I'm going to be ordered about like this!" he said hotly. "I shall play footer when I please—"

"But you can't!" said Monty Lowther.

"Eh?"

"You can't play footer at all! Even if the Head stood over you with a birch, and commanded you to play, you'd have to disappoint him. You can't shoot, you can't tackle, and you can't pass!"

"Look here—"

"Otherwise, of course, you're a topping footballer!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy gave a snort.

"I've a jolly good mind to dust the floor with you, Lowther!" he said. "But I don't want to soil my hands. As for this fellow Tremaine, he deserves to be flayed alive! Compulsory footer, indeed! I've never heard of such cheek!"

George Alfred Grundy continued to let off steam in this manner. But the Terrible Three merely smiled.

"Are you fellows going to obey this order?" demanded Grundy.

"Of course!" said Tom Merry.

"My hat! You're like a lot of scared rabbits! Fancy being funky of a blessed games master, a Johnny who is of so many more account than Iaggle the porter! Why, I'd see Tremaine to Jericho before I turned out!"

"Sounds very brave, and defiant, and all that," said Manners. "But when it

comes to the point, you'll go toddling down to the ground as meekly as a lamb!"

"No jolly fear!" said Grundy. "If this new merchant thinks he can boss me about, he's mistaken! Britons never shall be slaves, as Shakespeare says."

"I don't remember that Shakespeare said anything of the sort," said Tom Merry. "Still, here comes Tremaine. Now we shall see whether you'll toe the line or not!"

The games master strode up to the group of juniors, and Grundy's store of courage oozed out at his finger-tips.

There was something in Jack Tremaine's manner which showed that he would stand no nonsense. His expression seemed to say: "Obey me, and all will be well. Defy me, and you'll get it in the neck!"

But Grundy felt that he must make some sort of a stand, just to show Tom Merry & Co. that he was not the sort of fellow who could be "bossed about" with impunity.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "but I'm not turning out this afternoon!"

Jack Tremaine eyed Grundy steadily. "Are you ill?" he inquired.

"Nunno!"

"You are sound in wind and limb?"

"Yes."

"Yes, what?"

"Er—yes, please!" said Grundy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I should like to remind you, Grundy," said the games master, "that my position here entitles me to be addressed as 'sir.' I shall not punish you for the omission, as you doubtless acted from ignorance. As to your statement that you are not turning out this afternoon, I am afraid I must disagree with you. You will accompany me to the football-ground immediately!"

It was not so much the words themselves, as the way they were uttered, which caused George Alfred Grundy to obey. He regarded discretion as the better part of valour, and set off in the wake of the games master.

"Told you so!" muttered Manners, nudging Tom Merry.

"Would you like us to change into our football togs, sir?" asked the captain of the Shell.

"No, Merry," said Jack Tremaine. "I don't think it will be necessary. You are merely going to indulge in shots at goal. I shall not keep you more than an hour."

On their way to the ground the party was reinforced by a crowd of fellows.

Figgins & Co. of the New House came along, and Talbot and Noble, Bernard Glyn and Clifton Dane, and many others. Some of them did not look best pleased at being compelled to attend practice, but they had more sense than to defy Jack Tremaine.

There were, however, four absentees. These were Racke, Crooke, and Scrope of the Shell, and Cardew of the Fourth.

The three first-named were playing cards in Racke's study, and Cardew had joined them—not with the intention of playing, but as a looker-on in Vienna, as he expressed it.

Evidently the four juniors imagined that their absence would not be noticed. Jack Tremaine being not yet thoroughly familiar with names and faces. In thinking this, however, they imagined a vain thing.

On reaching the football-ground, the first thing Jack Tremaine did was to call the roll. Mr. Raitton had provided him with a list of names, and he called them out one by one, with the rapidity of a machine-gun in action. But he did not fail to notice that four juniors failed to respond.

"Merry!" said Jack Tremaine, when he had finished.

"Sir?"

"I will trouble you to ascertain the present whereabouts of Cardew, Racke, Crooke, and Scrope, and to tell them that they are to come down to the ground immediately."

"Very well, sir."

"You might add that if there is anything in the nature of defiance, they will find that I am not a person to be trifled with!"

Tom Merry hurried away towards the building. He went along to Racke's study, and threw open the door without ceremony.

Racke & Co. promptly slipped the playing-cards into their pockets. They were not quick enough for Tom Merry, however. Tom had noticed their actions, and he also noticed a half-smoked cigarette lying in the fender.

"Get out of here!" snarled Racke, starting to his feet.

"Oh, I'll get out quick enough!" said Tom Merry contemptuously. "I shouldn't care to breathe this sort of atmosphere for long."

"What do you want?"

"I've brought a message from Mr. Tremaine. You're to go down to the ground at once!"

"How did Tremaine know we were absent?" growled Racke. "You sneaked, I suppose?"

"Nothing of the sort!" said Tom Merry indignantly. "Mr. Tremaine called the roll. He's waiting for you now, and I shouldn't advise you to keep him waiting long. He's got a short way with slackers."

Aubrey Racke looked alarmed. So did Crooke and Scrope. They had hoped that their absence would be undiscovered, but now that the games master had sent for them, they knew that it would not pay to defy him.

Racke moved sullenly to the door, and Crooke and Scrope followed suit.

Cardew, however, who was embedded in the armchair, did not budge.

"Come along, Cardew!" said Tom Merry sharply.

"I prefer stayin' where I am, thanks!"

"But Mr. Tremaine insists upon your coming, fathead!"

"He can insist till he's purple in the face," said Cardew coolly. "I'm stayin' here!"

"Ass! Chump! Imbecile!"

Cardew laughed.

"You won't lure me out of this study by slinging' fancy names at me," he said.

"You can tell Tremaine, with my compliments, that I prefer giving footer a miss this afternoon. You can also request him to go and masticate coke!"

"Look here—"

"Better come along, old chap!" muttered Crooke. "Tremaine seems a pretty determined sort of cove!"

"He'll find that I can be determined, too!" said Cardew.

"Then you're not coming?" said Tom Merry.

"The answer is in the negative, dear boy. I'm goin' to take forty winks."

So saying, Cardew settled his head comfortably on the cushions, and closed his eyes.

"You'll get it in the neck for this, you chump!" said Tom Merry.

"Who cares?"

The captain of the Shell gave a snort of exasperation. He had done his best to bring Cardew to reason, but without success. He turned, and strode out of the study, followed by Racke, Crooke, and Scrope.

When the juniors reached the football-ground they found that the practice was already in progress.

Jack Tremaine had divested himself of his coat, and he was standing in goal. A few yards out stood Skimpole of the Shell, with the ball at his feet.

"Shoot!" commanded the games master.



Kildare, Darrell, and Baker surveyed Jack Tremaine in blank astonishment. "My hat!" gasped Kildare. "What's the trouble, sir?" Jack Tremaine smiled grimly. "Cardew cannot get to the football ground without assistance," he said, "so I'm giving him a helping hand." (See page 8.)

Skinpole blinked round him in great perplexity.

"But—but I haven't a rifle!" he protested.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shoot! Kick the ball! Urge it into the net with your foot!"

Skinpole understood at length, and he took a run and a flying kick. He managed to apportion a considerable portion of turf, but the ball remained stationary. Skinny lost his balance, and pitched forward in the mud.

"Ow! Oh dear!" he gasped. "My equilibrium has been disturbed to such an extent that I am utterly prostrated!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fear I am unsophisticated in the art of propelling a leathern sphere between two perpendicular posts!" said Skinpole. "Cut out the long words, Dr. Johnson," said Monty Lowther, "and try another shot!"

"One moment!" said Jack Tremaine, as Roke & Co. came up. "Why did you boys disregard my order?"

"We—we forgot the time, sir," stammered Scope. "We'd no idea it had gone four-thirty."

"Very well. I will accept your explanation this time. You will line up with the others, and take turns at shooting at goal. Where is Cardew?"

The question was addressed to Tom Merry.

"No—he doesn't feel that he can turn out, sir," said Tom Merry, trying to put it as gently as possible.

Jack Tremaine frowned.

"He refuses to come, Merry?"

"Yes, sir—putting it bluntly."

"Then I shall have to go and fetch him. You boys will continue to practice during my absence."

So saying, the games master strode away, with an expression on his face which boded ill for the defiant Cardew.

Ralph Reckness was in the act of nodding off to sleep when Mr. Tremaine entered the study. He opened his eyes wide, however, as the games master advanced into the apartment.

"You got my message, Cardew?" said Jack Tremaine quietly.

"I did."

"Why did you not act upon it?"

"I've no intention of turning out to footer practice," answered Cardew rudely. "You've no right to introduce any system of compulsion at St. Jim's. When lessons are over, we're free agents."

"I am not prepared to argue with you, Cardew. When I give an order, I expect it to be obeyed. You will come down to the football-ground at once."

"I won't!"

Cardew was on his feet now, reckless and defiant. His gaze fearlessly met that of the new games master.

"Very well," said Jack Tremaine. "Since you adopt that attitude, I shall have to take you down to the ground by force."

"You wouldn't dare—"

The games master took a quick stride towards Cardew, and Ralph Reckness found himself swung off his feet. The next instant he was struggling in a firm, muscular grasp.

"Leggo!" he panted. "You're no right to lay your paws on me! Leggo, I tell you!"

For answer, Jack Tremaine slung the junior across his shoulder as if he were a sack of coals. Then he strode out of the study with his human burden and made his way to the football-ground.

Cardew wriggled and writhed and struggled, but all to no purpose.

The games master seemed to have the strength of three men, and Cardew was quite powerless to free himself.

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three seniors surveyed Jack Tremaine in blank astonishment.

"My hat!" gasped Kildare. "What's the trouble, sir?"

Jack Tremaine smiled grimly.

"Cardew cannot get to the football-ground without assistance," he said, "so I am giving him a helping hand."

"Let me down, you rotter!" panted Cardew.

But the games master strode on without heeding. He carried Cardew all the way to the ground, and the junior's novel sensation.

A roar of laughter went up at Cardew's expense.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here comes the merry slacker!"

"He's being carried unanimously!" murmured Monty Lowther.

Cardew was at last set down upon his feet. His handsome face was white with passion. He had been humbled and humiliated before his schoolfellows—he had been held up to ridicule by the man he disliked. His eyes flashed as he confronted Jack Tremaine.

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"You've exceeded your duty in carrying me down here like this!" he exclaimed. "If I were of a sneaking disposition, I'd say that Mr. Railton heard of this!"

"I am perfectly willing for the matter to go before Mr. Railton, if you wish," answered Jack Tremaine quietly.

Cardew was silent. He knew that he was in the wrong, and he knew whose part the Housemaster would be likely to take.

"We shall both be saved a great deal of trouble, Cardew," said Jack Tremaine, "if you will obey my orders."

"You've no right to introduce compulsory footer at this school, and if you try to do so I—"

"It is not for you to criticise my actions. We will now proceed with the practice."

And they did.

Tom Merry & Co. thoroughly enjoyed themselves, but Cardew was sulky and rebellious. When it came to his turn to take shots at goal, he deliberately sent the ball over the hedge.

Jack Tremaine crossed over to the Fourth-Form.

"Be careful that you do not try my patience too far, Cardew!" he said.

The junior shrugged his shoulders as though in disdain.

"I'm not afraid of you or your threats!" he said. "What's more, I've had enough of this Tommy-rot, an' I'm gone!"

"You will remain here until I choose to dismiss you."

"I'm gone, I tell you!"

And Cardew turned on his heel.

"The—silly ass!" muttered Tom Merry. "He's making a rod for his own back by chocking Tremaine like this!"

"Yas, wathat! He's fairly askin' for twouble, but Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Acey.

Cardew had barely taken half a dozen paces when the games master gripped him by the collar.

"Hands off!" said Cardew angrily. "I'm fed up with your confounded interference!"

Jack Tremaine maintained his grip. Whereupon Cardew, who was in a white heat by this time, spun round suddenly, and shot out his list.

The blow caught the games master fairly between the eyes, causing him to reel.

A dead hush fell upon the assembled throng.

Even Cardew, furious though he was, realised that he had exceeded all bounds. His action was scarcely less grave than that of a soldier who strikes his superior officer.

For an instant the reckless junior felt like rushing up to Jack Tremaine and apologising. But this impulse speedily vanished, and Cardew—not without a certain amount of apprehension—waited for what would happen next.

CHAPTER 5.

The Shadow of the Past!

"AFTER that exhibition of temper, Cardew," said Jack Tremaine, when he had recovered from the blow, "I have no alternative but to take you before your Housemaster. You will come with me."

The juniors thought Cardew would maintain his attitude of defiance. But they were wrong.

Ralph Reckness hesitated a moment. Then he turned, and accompanied Jack Tremaine from the field.

Master and junior spoke no word on their way to the School House. In silence they proceeded to Mr. Railton's study.

Jack Tremaine tapped on the door, and the Housemaster's voice bade him enter. He stepped into the room, followed by Cardew.

"Good afternoon, Tremaine," said Mr. Railton. "Is anything wrong?"

The games master nodded.

"When I took up my duties here, sir," he said, "I hoped that I should never have occasion to report anyone to you for misconduct. But this boy has acted in such a manner that it is impossible for me to overlook his offence."

"Bless my soul! What has Cardew done?"

"He has treated me with studied insolence from the outset, and a few moments ago, on the football-ground, he struck me."

Mr. Railton looked very grave.

"Do you admit your offence, Cardew?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"And you have nothing to say in explanation of your conduct?"

"I'm afraid it won't be any use trying to justify myself, sir," said Cardew bitterly.

"I am prepared to consider anything you have to say."

"Very well, sir. The long an' short of it is that I object to Mr. Tremaine's high-handed methods. He's no right to force us to play footer against our will. An' he'd no right to lay hands on me an' carry me down to the ground."

"Is that what you did, Tremaine?" asked Mr. Railton.

"Yes, sir. It was necessary. Cardew defied me, and that was the only way in which I could enforce my orders."

The Housemaster turned to Cardew. "You had no justification whatever for striking Mr. Tremaine," he said. "Your offence is a serious one—too serious to be dealt with by me. You will come before Dr. Holmes."

Cardew began to feel very alarmed. When, in the heat of the moment, he had dashed his fist into the games master's face, he had not realised that such an action might be punishable by expulsion. Mr. Railton had described the offence as too serious to be dealt with by him. And if he had took an equally serious view of the matter, Cardew's days at St. Jim's would be numbered.

It was with a fast-beating heart, therefore, that Cardew accompanied the two masters to the Head's study.

Dr. Holmes listened carefully to the evidence, and his grave, judicial expression held out little hope for Cardew. "You have behaved abominably!" said the Head at length. "You deserve to be expelled from the school in disgrace. However, I am disposed to give you another chance, in view of the fact that your conduct up till now has been fairly satisfactory. You will receive a public flogging."

Cardew drew a deep breath of relief. He had expected the worst, but he had escaped by the skin of his teeth.

The prospect of a public flogging was anything but pleasant, but Cardew would have preferred a dozen public floggings to the shame and disgrace of expulsion.

Half an hour later, a general assembly was summoned in Big Hall.

Rank by rank file by file, the St. Jim's fellows trooped into their places.

The Head—a solemn, impressive figure—stood on the raised platform at the end of the lefty room, and the masters were ranged in a row behind him.

In a few terse sentences Dr. Holmes explained what had happened. Then he beckoned to Taggles, the porter, on to whose broad shoulders the culprit was hoisted.

Then the birch came into play, rising and falling a dozen times.

Cardew made no mummur. He bit his lower lip tenaciously, until the blood came, but he was determined to utter no sound.

It was a more severe flogging than most, and the St. Jim's fellows could not but admire Cardew for his pluck.

"There!" panted the Head at length, laying the birch aside. "I trust that will be a lesson to you to respect those in authority!"

As Cardew was lowered to the floor his eyes rested upon Jack Tremaine, and he fancied that the young master was glowing over his discomfiture. As a matter of fact, Jack Tremaine was far too good a sportsman to do anything of the sort. But Cardew imagined he saw a smile flickering on the master's lips, and he clenched his hands fiercely.

"The school will now dismiss," said the Head.

When Cardew left the Hall he found himself surrounded by a crowd of juniors. "You had duffer!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Fancy lashing out at Tremaine like that!"

"It's a wonder you weren't sacked!" said Manners.

"Well, you certainly caused a 'striking' sensation, old chap!" said Monty Lowther, unable to resist the pun.

Cardew grunted.

"I'd do it again in similar circumstances," he said. "If ever I detested a fellow, I do detest Tremaine! I've never been very strong in the hatin' line, but I hate that boulder as much as it's possible to hate!"

The juniors gasped at Cardew's vehement words.

"Wally, Cardew," protested Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "I quite fail to understand why you should hate Mr. Tremaine. He's a wippin' good sort!"

"Opinions differ," said Cardew. And he strode away.

For upwards of an hour Ralph Redness sat in his study brooding. He was feeling very sore physically and mentally. He had disliked Jack Tremaine from the first, for reasons which he had not divulged to anybody. The dislike had now been fanned into hatred. Never in his life had Cardew really hated anyone until now.

After a long spell of gloomy reflections the junior rose to his feet and paced to and fro in the study.

"Yes!" he muttered at length, as if coming to a sudden decision. "I'll do it! I'll expose the boulder! I'll show him up in his true colours! What's more, I'll go an' tell him what I intend to do!"

Having formed this resolve, Cardew went along to the games master's study.

The junior's face was pale and set, and his hands were tightly clenched.

Jack Tremaine was taking his ease in the armchair, enjoying a quiet pipe after the duties of the day.

When Cardew strode into the study without knocking the young master rose to his feet.

"What do you mean by bursting into my study like this?" he demanded.

Cardew halted, glaring defiantly at his questioner.

"I'll tell you what I mean!" he exclaimed. "I mean to expose you—to show you up as a fraud, an impostor! Yes, I thought that would make you wince! I know your secret, my friend! Your name is no more Jack Tremaine than mine is!"

The games master started as if he had been struck. He was white to the lips.

"Might I inquire how much you know?" he said at length.

"Everything!" said Cardew. "I suspected your real identity the moment I clapped eyes on you. You're not Jack Tremaine at all. Your name's Lewington—Ralph Lewington—and you used to play footer for Burchester United. You were chucked out of the team on your neck for selling an important Cupbie!"

"Stop!" cried the games master. "I will hear no more of this!"

"You've got to hear me out, whether you like it or not!" said Cardew. "You were offered a hundred quid by some rascally crook to let your side down—and you did it! The papers were full of it at the time. Your photograph was in 'Daily Sport,' an' I kept a cuttin' of it! That's how I came to recognise you when you set foot in this place. Besides, my uncle was a director of the Burchester United club, an' he told me all about the blackguardly business."

Cardew paused breathlessly. He waited for Jack Tremaine to speak, but the games master said nothing.

"You don't deny havin' sold the match, I suppose?" said the junior.

"No, I do not deny it."

"An' you accepted a hundred quid for the job?"

"I did."

"Then you're a disgrace to this school, an' a disgrace to the game you play!" said Cardew cuttingly. "I'm not in the habit of mincin' my words: It was a downright cadish trick to do! I suppose we all stray from the path of virtue sometimes, but Heaven forbid that I ever stray so far as that! Dash it all, it's up to a man to be loyal to his club! An' I'd die rather than deliberately let my side down for the sake of makin' money!"

The games master winced at Cardew's passionate outburst. But he quickly pulled himself together.

"And what do you propose to do, now that you are armed with this knowledge?" he asked quietly.

"Do!" echoed Cardew. "Why, I shall expose you! I shall go to the Head an' tell him the whole story. An' you'll be out of this place within twenty-four hours!"

"You will resurrect the past—things that happened over three years ago?"

"Certainly! It isn't right that a beastly blackleg like you should hold a position at this school. A fellow who sells a match once is likely to do the same thing again. I know it savours of sneak-in, to take tales to the Head, but I'm actin' in the interests of the community."

"Are you sure of that, Cardew? Are you sure that you are not prompted by a spirit of revenge?"

"Well, I'll admit I shall be jolly glad to see the back of you," said Cardew. "You've made things dashed unpleasant for me since you've been here—in fact, you nearly got me sacked!"

"That was entirely your own fault. You should have known better than to strike a master."

"I'd have no compunctions about strikin' anybody whom I didn't respect," retorted Cardew.

"And you have made up your mind to expose me!"

"Quite! It'll be no use your whinin' for mercy."

"I have not the slightest intention of doing anything of the sort," said the games master with dignity. "I shall not hinder you in any way from carrying out your intentions."

"Very well," said Cardew.

And he turned to go.

He expected to be called back—to be pleaded with and expostulated with. But Jack Tremaine, alias Ralph Lewington, made no attempt to recall the junior who knew his secret. Instead, he seated himself at the table and buried his face in his hands.

"The crash has come!" he muttered. "I might have expected that this would happen. Still, it is hard—very hard! The miserable past has risen to haunt me; I can never seem to live it down. And now I suppose I must get ready to quit. It's morally certain that my career at St. Jim's is finished."

CHAPTER 6.

Cardew Changes His Mind!

"W" HITHER bound?"

Clive of the Fourth asked that question as he stood in the school gateway.

The winter dusk was falling, and Cardew was wheeling his bicycle, lighted fore and aft, down to the gates.

"I'm going to run over to Abbotsford," he explained. "There's a new play on at the theatre."

"Got a late pass?" asked Clive.

"No. I ought to be back by lockin'-up time, barrin' accidents. You see, it's the first house that I'm goin' to."

"Well, don't be late in, whatever you do. You've collected quite enough trouble as it is."

Cardew mounted his machine and rode away. He was glad to get away from St. Jim's for a time, and to forget his troubles.

The junior had not yet put into effect his threat to expose Jack Tremaine. He had decided to wait till the morning before going to Dr. Holmes.

Riding hard up hill and down dale, he reached Abbotsford in record time, and

was able to secure a comfortable seat in the stalls of the local theatre.

The play was of the serious, dramatic order, and it suited Cardew's mood. He followed the piece closely from the opening scene to the fall of the curtain. And when the curtain shot up again and the artists had grouped themselves together in a final tableau Cardew joined heartily in the applause.

"A rattlin' good play!" he murmured, as he made his way out of the building. Then, glancing at his watch, he saw that it was an hour to looking-up time.

"Jove! I shall have to put a spurt on!" he muttered.

A moment later he was whizzing at breakneck speed along the cobbled High Street of Abbotsford. He was soon out in the open country beyond, his machine racing swiftly through the darkness.

He had proceeded four miles or so without mishap, when suddenly there was a loud popping sound, and his back tyre dragged in the dust.

Cardew jumped off with an exclamation of dismay.

"Oh crumbs! That's fairly caused it!"

He went through his saddle-bag, only to find he had no solution wherewith to mend the puncture.

"There's nothing for it but to walk!" he muttered. "It's a cheerful prospect, an' no mistake! I shall get to St. Jim's, if I'm lucky, about midnight!"

Cardew set out on foot. He had covered about a mile when he caught sight of a little cottage by the roadside. From the front windows gleamed a ray of light.

"Wonder if these people can help me!" he mused. "I'll go an' see, anyway."

Leaving his machine outside the front gate, Cardew walked up the garden path to the door of the cottage. He was about to knock, when through the illuminated window of the sitting-room he saw something which caused him to utter a low exclamation of astonishment.

Seated in chairs, and facing each other across the table, were Jack Tremaine and a silver-haired lady, apparently his mother.

Impelled by curiosity, Cardew stepped close to the window. He saw that the sitting-room was a very modest and sparsely-furnished apartment. The threadbare carpet, and the dilapidated couch, suggested a long struggle with poverty. Cardew knew little of the seamy side of life, and he was strangely impressed by what he saw.

The junior had almost forgotten his object in calling at the cottage, so intent was he upon the scene which met his gaze.

Through the open window came the sound of voices.

"It's all up, mater," said Jack Tremaine. And he spoke as one without hope. "That affair of a few years back has been remembered, and it has been thrown up at me. You remember that fatal Cuppie? I shouldn't have dreamed of selling the match in ordinary circumstances, but I needed money to keep the home going—to provide you with the necessities of life. I loathed the idea of selling the match, but it—it was the only way to keep the wolf from the door."

The silver-haired lady nodded.

"Your motives were honourable, Ralph," she said. "But, of course, it was a great pity that the money could not have been raised in some other way."

"Yes, mater; I know. I've suffered for my action over and over again. I'm not allowed to forget the wretched business. I thought the footballing public had short memories, but such is not the case. For three years I have been prac-

tically without employment, and now—now that I have secured a comfortable position at St. Jim's, it seems that I am to lose it."

"But—but what has happened, my boy?"

"It's like this, mater. I went to St. Jim's as Jack Tremaine, little dreaming that anyone would suspect me of being Ralph Lewington. I thought I should be safe, but I have been sadly disillusioned. There is a fellow in the Fourth Form—a kid called Cardew—who knows my secret. He intends to expose me—perhaps he has already done so. That means that I shall again be thrown out of employment."

"Is there no hope, Ralph, that the boy you refer to will hold his peace?"

"No hope whatever," said the games master dully. "I have reason to know that Cardew dislikes me intensely—that he will stop at nothing in order to get me bounced out of the school. On my return to St. Jim's this evening, I shall expect to be summoned by the headmaster, and given notice to quit. Just as I was settling down nicely to my duties, too! Oh, it's hard—terribly hard—that the events of a few years ago should continually rise to thwart my progress."

And the speaker bowed his head, until it rested on his arms.

Peering through the window, Cardew saw Ralph Lewington's attitude of utter dejection. He saw, also, that the eyes of the silver-haired lady were brimming with tears.

Cardew was by no means "soft" or sentimental, but the sight of mother and son, threatened with poverty and ruin, moved him immensely.

The junior's own eyes were strangely misty as he turned away from the window, and retraced his steps down the garden-path.

"If I'd only known!" he muttered to himself. "I thought that Ralph Lewington was an out-and-out rotter—a fellow without scruple. I heard all about his selling the match, but I little guessed why he had done it. It was to save his home, and his mater. He simply had to raise the wind somehow, and he did it by that method. After what I've seen an' heard to-night, I can't expose him—I couldn't dream of such a thing!"

Cardew decided that he would say nothing to the Head concerning the games master's past. Moreover, he made up his mind to treat Jack Tremaine with respect in future.

On reaching the next cottage, Cardew was able to borrow some solution for his punctured tyre; and by dint of hard riding he managed to reach St. Jim's just before Taggles locked the gates.

He returned his machine to the shed, and went along to the junior Common-room.

CHAPTER 7.

Marching Orders!

CARDEW found the Common-room in a buzz.

Over a score of fellows were there, and they were talking in excited tones.

"Heard the latest, Cardew?" asked Levison. "That fellow Tremaine is an upstart! His name isn't Tremaine at all. It's Ralph Lewington—the man who sold an important Cuppie two or three seasons ago!"

Cardew was beside Levison in a couple of strides.

"How did you know this?" he demanded sharply.

"It's common knowledge," answered Levison. "Baggy Trimble was the first to make the discovery, and he's been to the Head about it."

"The beastly fat toad!" exclaimed Cardew. "I'll slap him when I see him!"

Cardew's schoolfellows were surprised at his vehemence.

"But I thought you hated Tremaine—or, rather, Lewington—and would be glad to see him hooped out," said Tom Merry.

"Yes, I hated him right enough," said Cardew. "But that was before I knew the true facts of the case. I've made a discovery this evenin', you fellows. I've found out why Lewington sold that Cuppie."

"Why? Tell us why!" urged a score of voices.

Cardew explained what he had seen and heard outside the cottage.

"Bai. Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, when Cardew had finished. "It will be fightfully wuff on poor old Lewington if he gets fired out! I don't approve of any man lettin' his side down, but Lewington acted from the best of motives. He did it to save his matah from wuin."

"He shan't get the push, if I can help it!" said Cardew grimly. "If I find that the Head's given him notice, I shall go an' beg him off."

"Good!" said Talbot. "But I doubt if you'll be able to get the Head to change his decision."

"I'll do my best, anyway," said Cardew.

And he strolled out of the Common-room.

The first person he encountered in the passage was Baggy Trimble. The fat junior was chuckling as if in enjoyment of a huge joke.

"He, he, he! Tremaine—I mean, Lewington—has been sacked! He's got the order of the boot, and serve him jolly well right! Have you heard about it, Cardew?"

For answer, Cardew gripped Baggy Trimble by the collar, and shook him violently.

"Yow-ow-ow! What's the matter?" panted Baggy, squirming in his school-fellow's grasp. "Why are you sh-sh-shaking me like this, Cardew? I thought you'd be awfully backed to hear that Lewington had been fired! You were up against him from the start, you know! Ow! Leggo!"

"You spying worm!" hissed Cardew. "You were listenin' at the keyhole durin' my conversation with Mr. Lewington! You heard all that was said, and you went and told the Head the whole story!"

"Of course!" said Baggy Trimble. "I did it to save you the trouble. You wanted Lewington exposed, and I've exposed him! Aren't you satisfied?"

Cardew seemed far from satisfied. He continued to shake the fat junior until his arms ached. Then he planted his boot behind Baggy Trimble with considerable force, and propelled him along the passage.

"Yaroooooh!"

"Take that, you speaking worm!" muttered Cardew.

And then, jerking his necktie into its place, and smoothing his ruffled hair, he went along to the Head's study.

"Come in," called Dr. Holmes, in response to Cardew's tap on the door.

The junior stepped into the study.

"Well, Cardew?"

"I have come to speak to you about Mr. Tremaine, sir."

The Head frowned.

"There is no such person," he said. "The man who masqueraded under that name is in reality Ralph Lewington."

"Yes, I know, sir. And I came along to ask if you'd definitely decided to sack him."

The Head rose majestically to his feet. He pointed to the door.

"Go!" he thundered. "How dare you presume to cross-examine your head-master!"

"No offence meant, sir," said Cardew, standing his ground. "But I happen to know something of this business, and my evidence may be of value."

"Oh!"

The Head motioned Cardew to remain. "I suppose you are fully aware, Cardew," he said, "that this man Lewington acted very dishonourably a few years back?"

"Yes, sir. And I also happen to know why he sold the match."

"Indeed!"

"It was to save his home from going to pot, sir—to save his mater from ruin. Money was urgently needed, and that was the only way that Mr. Lewington could raise it."

"Bless my soul! How did you discover this, Cardew?"

The Fourth-Former recounted his recent experiences. He described in detail the conversation he had overheard between Ralph Lewington and his mother.

"If you've decided to sack Mr. Lewington, sir," said Cardew, "I want to ask you to reconsider your decision. I know it's awful cheek on my part to come to you like this, but I don't want to see Mr. Lewington kicked out. I'm sure that he'd never have sold that match unless he was absolutely driven to the wall."

"Dr. Holmes shook his head gravely.

"I am afraid it will be impossible for me to do as you request, Cardew," he said. "Personally, I am prepared to make all allowances for Mr. Lewington. But if he remained here as games master, it would doubtless come to the knowledge of many of the boys' parents, with the result that a strong protest would be made."

"But no decent parent would blame the man for what he did, sir!" said Cardew.

"On the contrary, there are many who would say that Mr. Lewington was not justified in selling a match, whatever the circumstances."

"Then you can't allow him to stay, sir?"

"I fear not, my boy."

"But if he goes, sir, it means that he'll be out of a job, and that's no joke nowadays. Good jobs aren't as plentiful as blackberries, and Mr. Lewington will be stranded."

The Head sighed.

"It will be very hard for him, I know," he said; "but in all the circumstances I do not think I should be justified in permitting him to remain."

"Have you seen him yet, sir?"

"Not yet. Doubtless he will be in soon, and then I shall make my decision known to him."

"Poor old Lewington!" murmured Cardew under his breath. "Wish I could save him!"

And he left the Head's study in a dejected mood. He felt that he could have cheerfully wrung Baggy Trimble's neck at that moment, for if the fat junior hadn't split all would have been well.

Half an hour later Ralph Lewington returned to St. Jim's. He was immediately summoned to the Head's study.

"It's all up," he muttered, as he made his way along the corridor. "Cardew has carried out his threat, and I am to be hounded out of this place!"

Dr. Holmes greeted the games master kindly.

"Sit down, Lewington," he said.

The games master looked up quickly.

"You know my real name, sir?"

"Yes. The unfortunate affair of a

few years back has also come to my knowledge."

"You don't seem very angry about it, sir."

"I am not angry, Lewington. I am only sorry. I have reason to believe that you did not act from ulterior motives. So far as I personally am concerned, I should like you to remain here in your present capacity. But I have to consider the views and wishes of others. There are certain parents and guardians who would strongly resent your presence at this school."

Lewington nodded.

"I quite understand, sir," he said quietly.

"It is painful for me to have to talk to you thus," said the Head. "But I must ask you to leave these premises within twenty-four hours. You will be given a month's salary in lieu of the usual notice."

"Thank you, sir."

Ralph Lewington rose to go. His face was pale and drawn. He seemed to have aged considerably during that brief interview.

He was sacked from St. Jim's! The verdict had been given kindly and politely, like a sugar-coated pill; but the fact remained that he was sacked.

Just as he was hoping that he would be able to maintain his widowed mother in comfort the blow had fallen.

Another long and bitter struggle with adversity now lay before him. For himself he did not mind. He had endured privation and hardship before, and he could endure them again. But his mother! Oh, it was hard—terribly hard! All St. Jim's was ringing with the story by this time, and Ralph Lewington expected to meet cold and scornful glances on every side. He was agreeably surprised, therefore, on meeting Tom Merry & Co. in the passage, to receive looks of sympathy and concern.

"I say, sir," said Tom Merry, "we're awfully sorry to hear about this!"

"And you do not condemn me?"

"Condemn you?" echoed Talbot. "No jolly fear! We happen to know why you sold that match, and I believe that any one of us would have done exactly as you did, in the same circumstances."

"Yaas, wataah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcey. "I trust, Mr. Lewington, that you are not going to be made to suffer for what happened several years ago?"

The games master smiled faintly.

"I've already got marching orders," he said.

"Oh cwums!"

"It's a thumping shame!" said Manners indignantly.

"Dr. Holmes could have done no other," said Lewington. "As he said, there would be a strong protest from some of the parents if I were allowed to remain."

"What are you going to do, sir?" asked Tom Merry.

"Heaven knows!"

"Perhaps the Head will relent at the last minute?" suggested Monty Lowther hopefully.

Ralph Lewington shook his head.

"I must resign myself to the worst," he said. "But I am most gratified to find that you fellows are not against me. In some places it's the fashion to hit a man when he's down."

"Let's hope we shall never be in the fashion, then!" said Talbot. "When do you go, sir?"

"To-morrow night."

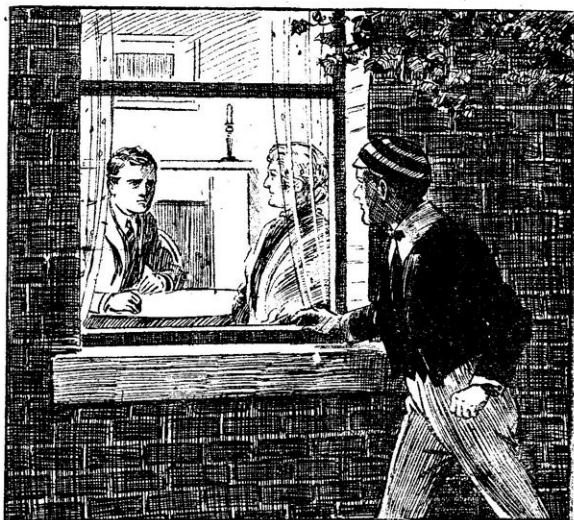
"It's quite possible that something will happen before then."

The age of miracles is past," said Ralph Lewington. "Good-night, all!"

"Good-night, sir!"

"And keep a stiff upper-lip!" murmured Tom Merry.

With heavy steps the man who had received notice to quit went along his study.



Cardew walked up the garden path and peered through the illuminated window. Seated in chair, and facing each other across the table, were Jack Tremaine and a silver-haired lady, apparently his mother. (See page 10.)

CHAPTER 8.

Bravo, Cardew!

THERE were two persons at St. Jim's who spent practically sleepless nights. One was Ralph Lewington, the other was Cardew of the Fourth.

Thoughts of the future kept the games master awake, and concern for the games master kept Cardew's brain active. "I must help Lewington out of this mess, somehow!" muttered the junior for the sixth time.

Try as he would, however, he could not think of a satisfactory plan by which he could save the games master.

It would be no use appealing again to the Head to reverse his decision. Dr. Holmes' decree was as inexorable as the laws of the Medes and Persians. He had given Ralph Lewington marching orders, and nothing would cause him to retract.

"What's goin' to happen to the poor beggar?" reflected Cardew. "He'll be kicked out of St. Jim's, with a month's salary, I dare say; but in a short time he'll be absolutely on the rocks! If only I could fix him up with a job!"

Cardew thought of the silver-haired lady he had seen at the cottage, and he sighed to think how hard she would be hit by her son's misfortune.

Not often did the cynical and unsentimental junior pause to think of others. But this was an exception to the rule. He felt that he had treated Ralph Lewington badly, and that it was up to him to make amends.

Throughout the long night Cardew lay staring into the shadows, but he could find no solution to the problem.

He arose next morning, weary and heavy-eyed, and still without any suitable scheme whereby he could help the unfortunate games master.

It was not until lessons were over for the day that Cardew had an inspiration.

"Why didn't I think of it before?" he ejaculated. "I'll pop over to Burchester and see my uncle, an' tell him the whole story. He'll remember Lewington as a player in the Burchester United team, an' when I explain the true facts of the case he'll do all he can to help the fellow."

A difficulty then cropped up. Burchester was many miles distant, and the trains were few and far between.

It would be madness to attempt the journey on a bicycle. He could not hope, by so doing, to be back at St. Jim's in time for locking-up.



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"What about a motor-bike?" muttered Cardew. "I can easily hire one in Wayland."

He at once started to put his resolve into execution.

As he hurried across the quad he caught sight of Ralph Lewington.

The games master gave him a reproachful glance. He quite thought that it was Cardew whom he had to thank for his downfall. He did not know that Baggy Trimble had been listening at the keyhole of his study on the previous day.

Cardew lost no time in getting to Wayland. He set out at a long, loping stride across the fields, and within half an hour he had reached the motor-garage.

"I want to hire a motor-bike for the evening," he said breathlessly to a man in oilskins.

The man regarded the St. Jim's junior doubtfully.

"Can you manage a machine?" he asked.

"Can a duck swim?" said Cardew.

"Buck up, man! I'll make it worth your while!"

Five minutes later Cardew was speeding along the main road to Burchester. He felt in fine fettle as he flashed through the deepening dusk. The machine bounded along like a live thing.

Cardew did not slacken his speed until he reached the High Street of Burchester. He swung off to the left, down a fashionable avenue, and came to a halt outside a majestic-looking house. Shortly afterwards he was in his uncle's drawing-room.

This particular uncle of Cardew's—Major Rupert Carlyon—was a fine, upstanding man of about fifty. He had retired from the Army, and he took an active part in connection with local sport. For years he had been a director of the Farns Burchester United Football Club, and he remembered perfectly the circumstances under which Ralph Lewington had been expelled from the club.

"Well, my boy," he said, shaking hands with Cardew, "what is the meaning of this unexpected visit?"

"I've come over to see you, uncle, with reference to a fellow called Lewington," said Cardew, dropping into a seat.

"Ralph Lewington?"

"That's the chap."

The major frowned.

"I hoped I had heard the last of that low-down traitor!" he exclaimed.

"What do you know about him—eh? In what way have you been brought into contact with the precious scoundrel?"

"He's a games master at St. Jim's," said Cardew.

"What! Do you mean to say that he is being received into decent society? Surely Dr. Holmes can know nothing of his past?"

"Dr. Holmes knows everything," uncle, an' he's sent Lewington packin'."

"About the most sensible thing he could have done!" said the major gruffly.

"Do you know the full facts concernin' Lewington, uncle?"

"Of course! I was here when he disgraced himself by letting Burchester United down in the Cup tie. In fact, being a director, I was one of those who were responsible for his expulsion from the club."

"But didn't you know that there were extenuating circumstances?"

The major shook his head.

"So far as I know, the man acted dishonourably without an excuse or justification."

"He had every excuse, every justification," said Cardew. "His home was the point of his head broken up, his motor was threatened with ruin, and he simply had to raise money somehow. So he

sold the match. He deliberately played below form, so that Burchester United should lose, and a hundred quid come his way. With this money he managed to save the home from goin' to pot."

Major Carlyon looked astonished.

"Pon my soul, you surprise me, Ralph!" he said. "I thought the man was an out-and-out scoundrel, but it seems that he acted from unselfish motives, after all. I was very bitter against Lewington at the time, I remember. I told him that if I had a hunting-crop handy I should give him the biggest thrashing of his life! You see, I knew nothing of his domestic affairs."

"Lewington's quite a good sort, uncle," said Cardew. "An' he's been punished a thousand times over for sellin' that fixture."

"And you say that Dr. Holmes has sent him packing?"

Cardew nodded.

"He's got to clear out this evenin'," he said. "and he'll be absolutely stranded unless somethin' can be done for him. You've got a lot of influence, uncle. Couldn't you possibly get him a job?"

The major twirled his moustache thoughtfully.

"Yes, I think I can fix him up," he murmured.

"Oh, rippin'!"

"As you know, I happen to be a governor of St. Clive's, and they are in need of a games master. They've been advertising for one for months, but they can't get hold of the right sort of man. I'll arrange for Lewington to fill the post. St. Clive's is a long way from here, and I don't suppose anybody will recognise him as the man who caused such a sensation in sporting circles a few years back."

Cardew rose to his feet.

"This is tremendously decent of you, uncle!" he said.

"Not at all. After the way I treated Lewington, I feel that it's up to me to make amends. You can tell him to call at this house on Saturday, by which time I shall have made all arrangements for his future. And now, my boy, you must be hungry. Let's adjourn to the dining-room."

But Cardew declined his uncle's hospitality.

"I must whizz back to St. Jim's at top speed," he said, "or I may miss Lewington."

"Right you are, Ralph," said the major. "Keep your eyes open for police-traps."

NEXT WEEK!

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Cardew shook hands with his uncle, and a moment later, feeling greatly relieved in his mind, he was threading his way through the traffic in Burchester High Street.

The ride back to Wayland was glorious. The roads were in excellent condition, and overhead myriads of stars twinkled down upon the motor-cyclist. The miles glided swiftly by, and the St. Jim's junior did not slacken his speed until he drew near to the cottage where Ralph Lewington's mother lived.

Suddenly a tall figure loomed up in the dusk. It was the figure of a man who walked with bent head, and with his hands thrust deeply into his pockets.

The solitary pedestrian seemed to be in a state of utter dejection, for his steps were heavy and slow, and his eyes were fixed upon the ground.

Cardew brought his machine to an abrupt halt.

"Mr. Lewington!" he exclaimed.

The man addressed stopped short in the roadway. He uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Cardew! What—what are you doing here?"

"I've got good news for you, sir," said the junior.

Ralph Lewington's surprise grew.

"You are the last person in the world whom I should expect to bring good news," he said. "I think I may say that I have good news for you, also. Your wishes have been gratified, and I have been hounded out of St. Jim's. You have carried out your threat with great thoroughness."

The young man's tone was very bitter. "It was not I who exposed you, sir," said Cardew quietly.

"Not you? Then who—?"

"It was that fat toad Trimble. He overheard the conversation we had in your study, and he went straight to the Head."

"But—but what induced you to change your mind about exposing me?"

Cardew explained.

"I heard you talkin' to your mater about it, sir," he said. "An' then I understood, for the first time, why you sold that match. I only wish I had known before, 'then I shouldn't have been so beastly to you. I hadn't a civil word to say to you while you were at St. Jim's, an' I want to tell you that I'm sorry. Will you shake hands, sir?"

Ralph Lewington readily extended his hand, and Cardew took it in a tight grip. These two, who had been at loggerheads for days past, were now behaving like old chums.

"I am delighted to hear that you are not responsible for my ejection," said Ralph Lewington.

"If I had gone to the Head with the story, sir, I should never have forgiven myself," said Cardew.

"By the way, what is the nature of the good news you mentioned just now?"

"I've just been over to see my uncle, Major Carlyon," said Cardew. "I've told him the full facts of the case, an' he wants you to call at his house on Saturday. Here's his card. He's definitely promised to get you the job of games master at St. Clive's."

For a moment Ralph Lewington was unable to speak.

This was indeed good news! In his darkest hour, when everything had seemed hopeless, relief had arrived.

And a great burden had slipped from Ralph Lewington's mind.

Presently he found his voice. And it was strangely husky as he said:

"I cannot thank you enough, Cardew!"

"Rats! I only did what any fellow with a spark of decency in him would have done in the cits. I hope you'll get on famously at St. Clive's, sir. It's a big school—much bigger than St. Jim's, I understand. An' the governors believe in payin' liberal salaries. So it'll be a change for the better."

"Indeed it will! My mother will be overjoyed when she hears the news. Do you mind if I hurry in and tell her now, to relieve her suspense?"

"Do, sir! An' I wish you luck!"

They shook hands for the last time, and Ralph Lewington walked on. And his footsteps were no longer heavy, but light and springing. For the clouds had rolled by, and Ralph Lewington's heart was light as he went to communicate the glad tidings to the silver-haired lady who was awaiting him.

Tom Merry & Co. were delighted when Cardew told them what had happened. They were sorry to lose the young games master, but they were glad that he had been given a fresh start.

And when, after a few days had elapsed, Ralph Lewington started on the long journey to St. Clive's, a host of St. Jim's fellows turned out to give him a hearty send-off, and to wish him good luck and God speed for the future!

THE END.

(Do not miss next week's grand, long story of the Chums of St. Jim's entitled: "The Best of Pets," by Martin Clifford.)

MY READERS' OWN CORNER.

A Soapy Erasmism.

"I—I s-a-y, ma!" stammered Johnny, throwing the soap, as his mother scrubbed and scrubbed his face and neck. "I think you want to get rid of me, don't you?" "Why, no, Johnny dear!" replied his mother. "What ever put such an idea into your head?" "Oh, nothing!" said Johnny. "Only it seems to me you're trying to rub me out!"—G. Davies, 79, High Street, Abertridwr, near Cardiff.

Two Hints.

Thin cycle-tyres: If your cycle-tyres are rather thin, try this plan. Put a piece of lamp-wick, two inches wide, all round the inside of the outer cover, and stick with ordinary rubber-solution. Damp boots: It is often difficult to get a polish on damp boots. The difficulty can be overcome by applying a little olive oil to the brush. The oil also keeps the boots waterproof.—G. Wilson, 125, Devizes Road, Salisbury.

Among the Kangaroos.

I am going to tell you something about our land—Australia. It is getting hot again here now; but there is a nasty, biting wind blowing, and until it drops we shall have no really good weather. As all the water in the pools in the country round is drying up, the kangaroos, wild turkeys, and emus come in very close to the town; but, although the kangaroo-hunters are hard at the job of killing kangaroos, the latter seem to get thicker and thicker. A short time since, I had a trip overland from here—Carnarvon—to Perth, our capital city, and the journey was very interesting.

especially the change of country, as there was a drought up here, while all was nice and green down below.—Roderic Egan, Olivia Terrace, Carnarvon, Western Australia.

The Wireless.

Everyone now looks upon the wireless as commonplace, but few really understand it. Theoretically it is difficult, but the principle is remarkably simple. Communication by wireless consists of disturbing an unfathomable property or medium which is present in the earth atmosphere, thus giving rise to pulsations, or wireless waves, which travel outward in all directions from the transmitting apparatus. The most simple analogy is the stone thrown into water. If a cork be placed in the water at a distance from where the stone was thrown, the ripples will cause the cork to bob up and down. Thus energy has been transferred from the stone to the cork. The electrical parallel is obvious. The wireless waves extend in all directions, striking any receiving apparatus within radius.—W. H. Lampard, Helmswood Gardens, Shipplake, near Hanley, Oxon.

Butchers' Row.

Crossing the Minorities, one reaches Butchers' Row in Whitechapel. The gas flares from primitive tubes on a long vista of meat and provisions of all sorts. Women are here by scores—pretty, ugly, old, young—all chaffing, higgling, beating down prices, and joking. On the opposite side are interminable lines of trucks, barrows, baskets, trestles of oysters, vegetables, fish, flowers, chairs,

candles, cakes, Bibles, toys, firewood, and so on. Boys turn somersaults for coppers. It is a combination of commerce, fun, cheating, begging, mouldy umbrellas, and dirty faces.—Sadie Davies, 24, The Rise, Beaumont, South Wales.

Pink Primroses.

People who take an interest in gardening will be interested to know that by planting a primrose root upside down the flowers will turn pink. If the excitement is repeated you will find the flowers have assumed a darkish red colour.—For Harris, Cardigan House Hospital, Clynha Park, Newport, Mon.

A Terrible Tale.

Tramp: "Yes, lady, it was awful! I heard the chug-chug of the motor, and smelt the petrol, and made a spring; but I wasn't quick enough, and the roaring machine passed over me prostrate form." Housewife, sarcastically: "And you live to tell the tale!" Tramp: "Yes, lady. You see, it was an aeroplane!"—A. Sullivan, 61, Solgrave Road, Hammer-smith, W.6.

Cheap and Dear.

A stingy foreigner and an Englishman entered a cafe together. "What will you have—mutton or venison?" asked the Englishman. "Mutton," replied the other. "But why mutton?" asked the astonished Englishman. "Because I prefer zat which ees cheap to zat which is deer!" was the answer.—A. Morris, 44, Stafford Street, St. George's, Wellington, Salop.



Joy's Gossip

Dear Mr. GEM Editor,—There is nothing I enjoy so much in the stories as the comic bits about Gussy, and his "toppabs," and the "feahful thwash-in's." He is always threatening somebody or other. To my mind, Gussy is the most popular boy at St. Jim's, and we girls admire him so much because he hasn't the least inkling of an idea that he is such a go-d fellow. He is thinking about himself, true, but not in that silly, conceited way some boys do. D'Arcy's affections are innocent and amusing, and he is so splendidly sincere. That's why I like him. Some folks call him a "simo," but one has one's days when simplicity of character is appreciated, with no perplexing subtlety at all.

You cannot have too much about the older boys to please me. I like the serious stories, and I never think, as some do, that Tom Merry is soft and too good. Such critics are talking out of their hats. But, Mr. Editor, you might have the girl characters more up-to-date. Their hair is far too curly, and their hats and dresses are never quite right.

What fascinates me is a glimpse of the characters when they are not actually engaged in a story. I did laugh when Baggy got into trouble with the cameraman who wanted to film him. How he ran! And Skimpole would not help. Skimpole was studying a book, and declined to move from the stile when Baggy tried to escape. Just like Skimpole!

Fatty Wynn is topping. The way he slipped off and saw to the garden of a poor woman whose hands were full of family cares made one long to call for three rousing cheers. It is funny, when you come to think of it, but it is just the odd, little actions which make you feel queer about the eyes, and blinky, and

puzzled whether you are going to laugh or cry. I am gone on Figgins, too, and Blake.

My friend—the girl I mentioned just now—says she likes "The Invisible Hand," but she thinks the portrait of Iron Hand is not horrible enough! I wonder what she does want!

This brings me back to Cardew; he is so real. I know he always wears the best sort of clothes, but he is not a dummy, like the well-dressed people in the lovey-dovey tales, where they all walk round in new suits and gowns, with perfectly-dressed hair and a lot of jewellery. Such individuals want towzling. They would get it in Australia, and sharp, too!

But Cardew is a genuine swell. I expect, if he had his way, he would cut school and go fishing. He thinks the world's most ridiculous, with a lot of squandering after fancy things people do not really want. That's why I admire Cardew. He does not care such a lot. He is not small, and mean, and faddy.

You could not rub out Baggy any more than Cardew. Really, in my inner mind—the mind one keeps shut up behind a lot of doors, you know—I am rather pleased with Baggy. You know what he will say before he opens his mouth. In a tight place he is screaming. And he is a grand coward. The less people have of life in them, the greater their fear of losing it.

Perhaps we should hear a lot more of these things if Tom Merry revived his "W-eekly." Everybody would contribute—including the fat chump Baggy, so long as it did not happen to be a cold morning when he was asked to write, in which case his literary output would be as meagre as that of the Eskimo.

BAGGY TRIMBLE.

Baggy makes me feel impatient. He goes about with his life in his hand, for he exasperates people. If he is not careful, his hand will be found empty one day. You don't precisely know why he is funny, but he is. He hardly knows a

horse from a cow. He is no sportsman. He knew he could not swim when he floundered into the lake to rescue Doris Levison. He said love made him do it! Love! He must have realised he could not sink. I suppose the drollest picture of Baggy was when he was in love, and rhymed Doris with "sorry is"! Out in Australia we could never quite make Baggy out. He was unlike anybody we had ever seen, and yet he was real enough, and, what is more, he seemed as happy as a hare in March. Alice in Wonderland could ask the Hatter what's the matter, but there never was anything really the matter with Baggy. You saw him looking well, and sleek, and immensely pleased with himself, and you wanted to throw paper-weights at him, or use a hairpin to wake him up. He is a herid little load, with his cawly ways.

A friend of mine, who dotes on the GEM stories, says the Editor must know there is not a boy on the earth who is absolutely perfect, nor yet one who is wholly bad, who thinks of his inner-man—or boy—to the exclusion of all else, such as Baggy Trimble. Tom Merry must have at least one imperfect spot in his apparently matchless character.

I am sure this is quite correct. But Tom Merry is not depicted as matchless. He has shortcomings. Personally, I should hate a boy who was perfect. He would be a prig.

THE NOWADAY GIRL.

We can play hockey, and give points to anybody, so why shouldn't we girls meet a boys' team at footer? We should beat them easily if this match came off—oh, indeed we should! There are plenty of London girls, and Birmingham girls, and Devonshire girls, all willing to show their ability in the football field. If it came to that, I could find a team out in Australia. A lot of old-fashioned folks may be astonished at this statement—that is, if old-fashioned cronies read the GEM—let's hope they do for their own sakes—but times have altered, and the afraid-to-be-spoken-to kind of girl has gone out of fashion. So please remember that football match—for next season, if too late for this.

Of course, we are close on to the spring now. I hope you will have some funny stories about the spring, with the fan-pobs writing lovely odds to the printers. Then you might have a jolly caravanning tale with plenty of adventures in the country, for there are heaps of adventures to be found every day of the week, and they make life all the more interesting to everybody.

Your chirpy chum,

JOY.

GOSSIP ABOUT ST. JIM'S AND GREYFRIARS.

It is rumoured that a certain party has fallen a victim to William George Bunter by secretly lending the Owl of the Remove some money. Well, we can rest assured that the whole world will know when he pays it back.

Herbert Skimpole, Socialistic member of the Shell, has kindly condescended to be a regular contributor to "Tom Merry's Weekly." Tom Merry now disagrees with the old saying "That one volunteer is equal to two 'pressmen'."

Richard Rake seems to have slipped the memory of a large number of the Companion Paper readers. We have made a mental note of this, and promise to "rake" the lost sheep out in the near future.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 681.

Has David Llewellyn Wynn as large an appetite as that of an elephant? I am asked. You will no doubt see for your selves if you turn to the "Zoo's Who?"

We hear from certain quarters that Minnie, the Greyfriars "Moggie," has been voted a useless mouser. Probably it lacks the necessary "talents."

That the Greyfriars prefects are having their annual "At-home" next Thursday. Gerald Loder has promised to oblige during the evening with "I'm for ever blowing 'smoke-rings'."

It has just been brought to our notice that Bagley Trimble has a great ear for music. We have repeatedly mentioned the "key-holds" a promising position for our worthy friend.

The Rev. Herbert Henry Locke, D.D., is very aggravated at the loss of his papers owing from his study. Perhaps, with a little persuasion, William George Bunter would fill the breach.

Tom Merry is greatly upset at the possible increase of telephone charges. He asks in attention the fact that he promises to answer all letters, should his admirers of the fair sex find this means cheaper.

Great excitement prevails at St. Jim's, owing to the fact that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy has composed a song, and promises to sing same in the Common-room next Saturday. Every precaution will be taken, and a doctor will be in attendance to render first-aid to fainting audience.



JOHN SHARPE.

The INVISIBLE HAND

This wonderful story has also been filmed by the popular VITAGRAPH Film Company, and readers of the "GEM" should make a point of seeing the picture week by week at their favourite cinemas.



IRON HAND.

At Grips With Iron Hand.

John Sharpe, the great analytical detective, is engaged by Chief Burnett, of the Secret Service of Chicago, to track down the band of organised criminals operating under the guidance of Iron Hand. Marna Black, one of the band of crooks, is captured. Burnett induces Anne Crawford, a woman agent of the Secret Service, to assume Marna's identity and get into the confidences of Iron Hand. She is not known to Sharpe.

The mountain den, Eagle's Nest, is run by Potsdam, Iron Hand's lieutenant.

Sharpe spoils many of the plans of the gang. Later he discovers that the gang possess a submarine, and they plot to blow up the Oriental mail steamer. Sharpe sends word for the steamer not to sail, and communicates with a border patrol to have a bombing aeroplane ready for instant use. In order to carry out his plans, Sharpe has entered the gang's observatory, but they capture him.

While Sharpe is held up, Iron Hand and the rest of his band watch the destruction of their submarine by a bomb from the aeroplane. With their attention distracted, Sharpe leaps into the observatory-house and slams the door. As the band seek to force their way in, Sharpe kicks a way through the rear. He has a parachute, and leaps from the cliff towards the sea. Iron Hand and Potsdam fire at him. He keeps under water, coming up under the floating parachute, hidden from the band.

Later, Iron Hand outlines plans for the capture of a gold shipment on a freight train. Anne telegraphs information to the Secret Service about the planned robbery.

The train robbery is foiled.

Sharpe follows Iron Hand to Nest 2, another lair of the gang, and succeeds in gaining admittance to the house, after a fight with a savage dog. Iron Hand is warned of his presence, and Sharpe is made a prisoner. Anne arrives in time to see Sharpe escape. Sharpe follows Iron Hand to the latter's hotel. Anne also goes there. Iron Hand prepares to receive Sharpe. In the adjoining room, a gas machine is arranged so that a bag is to be dropped over Sharpe's head. Sharpe senses the plan, and adopts means to circumvent it.

Sharpe is enveloped in the folds of the gas-bag. Iron Hand and others secure the bag around Sharpe. Inside the bag Sharpe adjusts a gas-mask and then pretends to grow weaker and weaker, until he apparently becomes lifeless. A trunk is brought in, unlocked, and Sharpe is thrown in.

(Now read on.)

IRON HAND glanced at Anne in order to see how she was taking the affair, and she quickly changed her horrified expression into one of satisfaction at the passing of John Sharpe, so that the leader should not interpret her real feelings.

Hartmann walked towards the chair containing the helpless detective, and tightened the mouth of the bag around his legs, while Iron Hand and the third man lifted him into the wooden box. The leader of the gang then shut the lid, and it closed with a snap. Their grim purpose was accomplished.

Iron Hand next turned to Hartmann. "Get a motor-lorry, and dump this trunk in some deserted place!" he ordered.

All this time Anne was standing by, feeling very despondent at the unfortunate turn of events. Presently Iron Hand busied himself with some papers on his desk, and she left the room, and went into her bedroom. She was so full of anguish that she felt she must be alone for a few minutes.

But if she had only known, there was really no need for her to worry. Jack Sharpe was, indeed, very much alive at this particular moment.

When he was supposed to have been struggling from the effects of the gas, he was in reality affixing a gas-mask to his face, for, aided by his mirror, he had been warned of the surprise which the inventive Iron Hand was preparing for him.

In the interior of the trunk the detective was struggling to make things more comfortable for himself. He had succeeded in getting a knife from his pocket, and thus managed to rip the cloth of the bag sufficiently to get free from it.

Iron Hand, who was still studying some important papers, was, naturally, quite unaware of what was going on. He fondly imagined that he had at last disposed of the clever detective, and that he would no longer be harassed and worried by his uncanny cleverness.

At that moment the telephone-bell rang, and he rose from his seat to answer it. John Sharpe was able to hear the bell, and placed his ear nearer to the crack in the box formed by the hinge.

Iron Hand was rather surprised at the message he received.

"A lady to see me in the office! Good! I'll come down at once!"

There was a big strain of vanity in the character of this amazing man, and, in addition to being a "man-killer," he rather fancied himself as a lady-killer. He smiled conceitedly to himself as he looked in the glass. Then he hastily removed his mask, and donned his thick motor-goggles, pretending that he was just off for a spin.

Before leaving, Iron Hand went across to Anne's room, and knocked at the door. "I'm going out for a moment or two!"

he answered through the half-opened door.

Anne Crawford smiled sweetly, and answered as calmly as possible, "Very well!" She did not, however, feel quite as much at ease as she wished the leader to believe. It was, in fact, Anne herself who had spoken to Iron Hand on the telephone, and she was now almost breathless through hurrying back to her room.

As he went downstairs, he muttered to himself:

"Just as well not to let her know it's a lady calling. She might be jealous!"

The excited leader deluded himself that Anne was an admirer of him, but he little knew how much she really loathed him!

Anne hurried into the room where the box containing Sharpe was deposited. She could not resist a smile as she thought how she had fooled Iron Hand. Although she felt that there was little hope that the detective was still alive, she determined not to fail for the want of trying, and she had hit upon this brainy idea to get the leader out of the room for a minute or two.

She knew that the key of the box was still upon the desk where Iron Hand had deposited it, and she hastily picked it up and inserted it in the box.

Sharpe heard the lock being turned, and he immediately took out his revolver, and prepared to spring out when the trunk was opened.

Anne was about to lift the lid, when she heard foot-steps along the hall, and she felt too terrified to move. But it was only the pageboy going up with a message for someone. The poor girl was now, however, thoroughly scared, and she flew into her own room without satisfying her curiosity.

When her courage returned, she again walked to the door of the other room, and was about to enter when she saw, to her great astonishment, that the lid of the box was being lifted from the inside.

So Sharpe was not dead, after all!

She knew that the detective would now be able to look after himself satisfactorily, and she once more returned to her room in the best of spirits.

Anne peered through the keyhole, and was amazed to see Sharpe standing up, and looking around the room curiously, with his revolver firmly gripped in his hand.

He remembered that he still had his gas-mask on, which he instantly removed and put into his pocket. Then he walked over to the fireplace, and hastily secured some heavy logs. Sharpe wrapped these in a large rug which he took from an inconspicuous part of the room, and carefully placed the whole lot into the trunk from which he had recently emerged.

Meanwhile, Iron Hand was feeling bitterly disappointed.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 681.

"Where is the lady who wishes to see me?" he asked the clerk below.

"Must be a mistake!" answered the man. "Nobody has called for you, Mr. Mansfield."

Feeling very annoyed, Iron Hand made his way to the stairs again.

John Sharpe had now completed his little job, and after closing the box with a snap, he placed the key on the table. He was confident that there was no reason why Iron Hand should have the least suspicion of the transformation which had taken place during his temporary absence. It was unlikely that he would notice the missing rug, and the detective tested the box in order to see that the contents did not rattle.

Sharpe now decided that he had better make himself scarce, and with his revolver ready, he walked over to the room opposite, which happened to be that occupied by Anne Crawford.

The girl heard him coming, and darted back full of dismay.

A second later the detective had opened the door, and stood face to face with her. For an instant they stared at one another, and Sharpe covered Anne with his revolver. Then, to add to their confusion, there was the sound of voices in the hall.

Two porters entered the room, followed almost immediately by Iron Hand and the two other members of the gang. Sharpe was in a serious predicament, and he decided to re-enter the parlour and have the matter out with Iron Hand.

But Anne Crawford stopped him.

"Don't go!" she implored him frantically. "Quick! Hide in that cupboard!"

Sharpe suspected trickery. But as he caught sight of the girl's distracted features he hesitated. There was something in her face that reassured him and gave him confidence.

He obeyed her instructions, and entered the cupboard which she indicated. Then she closed the door tightly.

Iron Hand still looked annoyed at his disappointment.

"Anything wrong?" Anne asked him innocently.

The leader shook his head. He had no desire to tell her how he had been fooled.

Looking at Hartmann, he said:

"Did you get the motor-lorry?"

The man nodded, and at Iron Hand's instructions the porters commenced to remove the trunk.

When Hartmann and the valet had retired Iron Hand turned to Anne.

"Now we have something to eat and drink, to celebrate this victory over the dear departed Mr. Sharpe."

He went over to the phone, and, feeling very satisfied with his day's work, ordered a substantial meal for two. Down below, the porters, under the instructions of Hartmann, were loading the trunk, which he believed contained the body of the detective, on to a powerful motor-lorry.

When Hartmann and the valet mounted the seat beside the chauffeur the vehicle was driven rapidly away.

Captain West Arrives.

A LONG a crowded city street a small body of mounted and uniformed troops were making their way. At the head of them rode Captain West. Sharpe had asked his old friend to come to his assistance if he did not send word intimating his safety by nine o'clock that night, and the officer was loyally sticking to his word.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 661.

There was a slight block in the traffic, and Captain West called a halt.

"It's after nine, and we must hurry," he said to one of his subordinates. "Take five men, sergeant, and go to the street back of Alexandria Hotel. Let no one go out, and listen for my whistle!"

By a strange trick of Fate one of the vehicles in the traffic crush happened to be the motor-lorry upon which was mounted Hartmann and the other members of the gang.

Hartmann, who had trained himself to pick up scraps of conversation which did not concern him, more especially when they were connected with representatives of the law, became very excited at what he overheard.

He speedily jumped down from the lorry, and instructed the valet to go ahead with the grim duty, while he announced that he would go and warn Iron Hand.

The leader of the gang had already had more wine than was really good for him, and Anne, who was thoroughly bored with his company, noticed his look of alarm when he jumped up from the table in order to answer the telephone-bell.

"Who can that be?" he grumbled.

It seemed as though he had a premonition of coming disaster. Anne listened eagerly, in order to pick up as much information as possible.

"Well, what do you want?"

"Captain West's patrol are going to surround the Alexandria. Better get away at once, your Excellency!"

Such was the message he received from the panic-stricken man at the end of the telephone.

Iron Hand paled a little.

"How do you know?" he asked eagerly.

His assistant briefly explained how he had received the important information. Anne was watching intently every movement of his face.

Iron Hand was growing more alarmed.

"Good work on your part, Hartmann!" he growled. He very rarely condescended to give anyone praise, but when his own personal liberty was endangered he felt a little more generous towards his men than was usual. It was necessary for him to act without delay. Even now he feared that he might be too late.

The leader came to a quick decision.

"Marna Black and I will leave for Eagle's Nest immediately," he said.

"Join us there!"

John Sharpe, who was still in the cupboard, where he had been placed by Anne, could overhear every word that was being uttered, and he was naturally very interested.

Iron Hand angrily put back the receiver.

"Hurry!" he said to Anne. "Get your wraps!"

She was reluctant to leave the detective, but was naturally compelled to obey his instructions without question.

Anne dressed rapidly, and the two walked to the hall.

Sharpe waited a few minutes, and when he considered it safe to begin operations, he took a small saw from beneath his coat, and commenced cutting through the wooden panel of the cupboard close to the lock. He had almost completed his task when he was suddenly aroused by a challenging knock at the door.

He wondered who the visitor could be, and had visions of a visit from a member of the gang. The detective quickly withdrew the saw, and awaited further events. As there was no answer the visitors started to take matters into their own hands, and proceeded to break down the door. It did not take them very

long to accomplish their purpose, and they went through to the bed-room.

Sharpe was still feeling somewhat concerned, but relief speedily came to him when he recognised the voice of his old friend Captain West.

The detective banged at the door to attract attention, and instantly Captain West levelled his revolver in that direction. Then he ordered one of the men to force it open.

The gallant officer almost collapsed when he saw who it was concealed in the cupboard, and, feeling somewhat embarrassed, he dropped the arm holding the revolver limply to his side.

Sharpe laughed.

"You were in a tight corner," remarked Captain West.

"I never wanted you more," replied Sharpe. "Iron Hand and the girl are motoring to that place in the hills which I told you about. We must get them!"

Captain West had now recovered from his surprise. He had quite thought that Iron Hand was in the cupboard; but, of course, he had not had so much experience of the leader as Sharpe had, and did not know what an elusive bird he was.

West agreed with Sharpe's plan.

"We can ride over the mountain and cut them off. It's a rough trail, but if you can ride—"

Sharpe laughingly interrupted.

"I was born in a saddle, old man," he remarked.

There was, in fact, no better horseman than the intrepid detective, and he had proved his skill in the saddle on many occasions.

Sharpe and Captain West made their way down to the street, where a number of the troopers were minding their horses. There were some curious spectators hanging about, and amongst them, with his hat pulled down over his eyes, at a clumsy attempt at disguise, was Hartmann.

He had returned to the scene in an endeavour to learn something of the movements of the troops.

"Sergeant, I want you and half a dozen men to ride with me across the mountains to intercept the fellow Iron Hand."

It was Captain West speaking.

The soldier saluted, and gave the necessary instructions to the men.

Hartmann had heard quite sufficient, and hastened away with the precious information. Fortunately for his peace of mind, he had not caught sight of John Sharpe, and, of course, he imagined the detective was safely deposited at the bottom of the sea by this time.

The troops hastily mounted their horses, and they were looking forward eagerly to their little adventure.

John Sharpe jumped up on one of the horses, and prepared to accompany them on their mission. The trooper who had given up his horse remained behind, intending to join the party later.

The detective and Captain West took half of the company with them, and the sergeant rode off in another direction with the remainder.

The Ranch at Eagle's Nest.

THE ranchman and his wife, accomplices of Potsdam at Eagle's Nest, had just retired for the night, when they were aroused from their slumbers by the ringing of the telephone bell.

"It's from Hartmann," the man told his wife, in a somewhat agitated manner. "He says the chief is on his way here by motor-car, accompanied by Marna Black. Captain West and the border

patrol is planning to intercept him on the way up to Eagle's Nest. I have to warn Potsdam and get the men ready here!"

His wife was annoyed at being disturbed, and, rubbing her sleepy eyes, she replied disgustedly:

"I wish you'd get into some other business where a lady could sleep at nights!"

The seriousness of the position, and the danger which threatened Iron Hand, did not worry her very much at the moment. Iron Hand and Anne were now speeding along merrily in the splendid car which had been provided for their purpose. Now that he felt safe again he was enjoying the ride, and was, in fact, spending his time in endeavouring to create a good impression upon his fair companion. He was really madly in love with her, and was a trifle upset because she did not reciprocate his feelings.

It was part of Anne's game to humour him as much as possible, although words could not express how she loathed him, and hated to be near him.

In answer to his persistent questions she at length replied:

"When you've made your fortune, and are ready to leave this dangerous country, perhaps then I will marry you. Meanwhile I am afraid of this dangerous man Sharpe!"

Iron Hand roared with laughter at this, and his evil face quivered with mirth.

"Sharpe!" he managed to say between his guffaws. "He's feeding the fishes now—or will be when they get inside the trunk!" And again he laughed loudly and long.

Anne endeavoured to cover up her smiles, for she knew that Sharpe was still very much alive, and that he would no doubt be soon hot upon the trail of the criminal leader again. And she was not very far out in her conjecture, for at this moment Sharpe and the troops were speeding towards Eagle's Nest just as quickly as their horses could carry them.

The country was difficult, and at times very dangerous, but they were all expert horsemen, and rather enjoyed the great risks they were taking. At one time they would be scaling the side of a precipitous mountain, and at another descending at break-neck speed down the side of a steep valley.

It was pleasure combined with duty for these excellent fellows.

At length Captain West called a halt in order that the horses could have a breather and a much-needed rest.

When they were ready to start again he pointed in the direction of some hills a considerable distance off.

"The trail from there runs into the hills just beyond that ridge," he announced.

The party resumed again, and in order to take a short cut, climbed the steep ridge in front of them, although it was a very difficult business, and time and again only a miracle prevented one of the riders from being hurled to destruction on the rocks below.

It was almost dawn before Iron Hand and Anne Crawford arrived at their destination. Immediately they jumped out of their car they were met by the ranchmen and three other armed members of the gang. After greeting their leader with the humility which he expected from them, the man in command proceeded to tell Iron Hand the startling information that he was being chased by Captain West and some members of the border patrol.

Iron Hand intended to rest awhile at the ranch-house, but the receipt of the news had the effect of changing his plans entirely. He instructed the men to put up the top of the car, so that it would

afford some protection from bullets if they were attacked, and then the whole party entered and drove off in the direction of Eagle's Nest.

Potsdam had not been idle, and he had instructed about a dozen of the gang to arm themselves in preparation for the attack. Things were getting much warmer for them than they desired, and they realised that they would have to put up a strong defence. Of course, the gang did not intend to rely entirely on the force of arms alone. When they found themselves in a tight corner they took advantage of every means which they could command to achieve their ends, and they did not worry in the least whether they were fair or foul.

Horses were being saddled, and a large number of boxes of T.N.T., the powerful explosive, were being got ready in preparation for the oncoming fray.

Potsdam, who was really an ardent coward at heart, was not too happy at the thought of the danger which threatened, but if he had been aware then that John Sharpe was still in the game, he would have been a great deal more alarmed.

John Sharpe and Captain West were now hot upon the trail, and as they rode clear of the hills the quick eyes of the detective caught sight of a fast-moving motorcar in the distance.

In an excited voice, he shouted out:

"That's Iron Hand's car!"

All eyes were turned towards it.

Captain West at once gave his men the order to fire, but Sharpe stayed them. "Not yet!" he commanded. "The girl is probably there, too, and she did me a good turn recently. I don't want her to suffer yet; I feel that there is a mystery of some sort surrounding her!"

Captain West saw that it would be better to restrain his eager men for the time being, and the whole party rode off at terrific pace in pursuit of the car.

The men were thoroughly excited at the sight of their prey, for they had stuck splendidly to their exhausting task. A lengthy ride over such country as they had traversed was indeed no joy-ride, and there was not a man who did not feel saddle-sore, and have enjoyed a rest.

The men gave a cheer as they saw that by making a trail across country they would be able to cut off the car, which, of course, would have to stick to the roadway. Another point to their advantage was the fact that the trees would hide them, and they had no reason to suppose that the occupants of the car yet suspected that the patrol were hot upon them.

Presently the party came to a cluster of trees, and Sharpe decided that it would be a good plan to dismount. After tying up their horses, where they would be hidden by a "pocket" formed by the trees, they could go a little farther along on foot and await the approaching motor.

Captain West chuckled at this scheme. "Mr. Iron Hand," he said, "will receive the surprise of his life."

But Fate seemed to be against the gallant little band. Before the car reached the spot where the ambush was to take place, engine trouble developed, and the motor came to a stop.

The troopers, headed by Sharpe and West, were just about to advance in that direction, when a dozen or more rifle-shots rang out.

"By heavens, we are trapped!" muttered Captain West hoarsely.



Anne Crawford was about to enter when she saw, to her great astonishment, that the lid of the trunk was being lifted from the inside. So John Sharpe was not dead, after all! She knew that the detective would now be able to look after himself satisfactorily, and she once more retired to her room in the best of spirits.

The men glanced behind them, and saw, to their dismay, that a number of horsemen had opened fire on them from a hill some distance away. It was Potsdam and his crowd.

The members of the patrol crouched down in order to take advantage of the

cover afforded by the trees. Fortunately, Potsdam could not do them much harm; at present, it was beyond the power of their horses to descend the steep side of the hill, and they could only reach the patrol by continuing their ride for a considerable distance. Nor was it likely

that their bullets would reach home. It was evidently Potsdam's intention to alarm the troopers and prevent them surprising the occupants of the motor-car. (This amazing story will be continued next week. Don't miss next week's wonderful number of the GEM.)

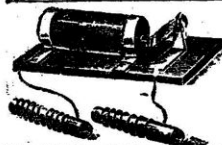
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