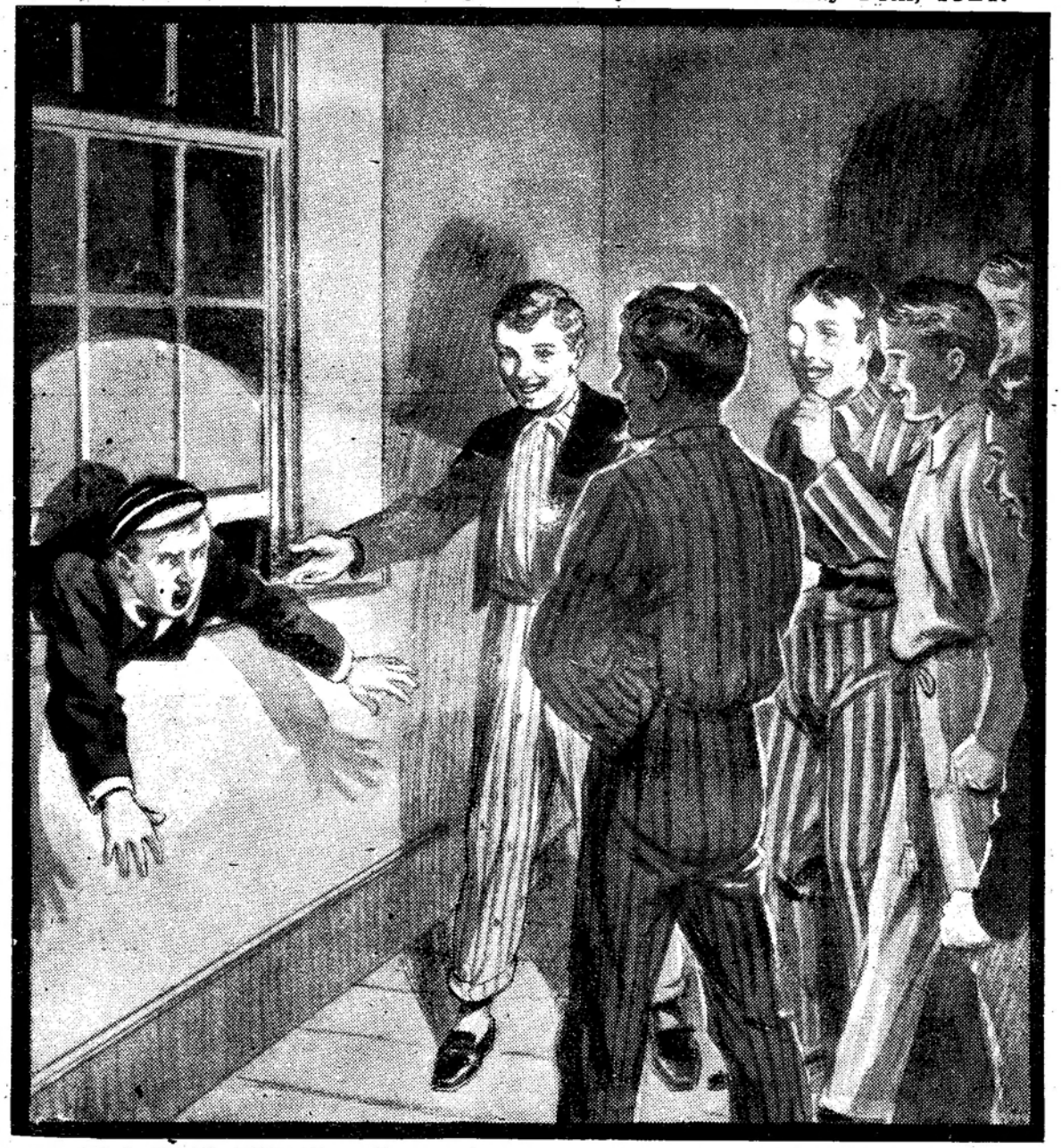
FAMOUS FOR SCHOOL STORIES!

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CARDEW CATCHES A CORKER!

An Amusing Incident from the Gripping Long Complete School Story Inside.

MY READERS' OWN CORNER.

Half-a-crown is paid for all contributions printed on this page.

SOLOMON GRUNDY.

Solomon Grundy, born on Monday,
Christened on Tuesday,
Married on Wednesday,
Taken ill Thursday,
Worse on Friday,
Died on Saturday,
Was buried on Sunday,
And that was the end of Solomon Grundy.

Norbert Ford, Salesian School, Surrey Lane, Battersea, S.W. 11.

A SLIGHT DIFFERENCE.

"My dear," said a gentleman to his newly-married wife, "where did all those books on astronomy come from? They are not ours."

"It is a pleasant little surprise for you," responded the lady. "You know, dear, you said this morning that we ought to study astronomy, and so I went to the bookseller's and bought everything I could on the subject."

It was some minutes before the husband spoke.

"My dear," he said slowly, his voice husky with emotion, "I never said we must study astronomy. I said we must study economy."

F. H. Cooper, 2, Market Row, High Street, Gosport.

KITES.

The kite was invented by the Chinese. It was the favourite pastime of the children to fly them, and although it was a simple invention, it led to the coming of aircraft. The drawings on some of these kites were very weird, some representing the rank of their parents, and others were just birds and animals. The French were the second to improve on these things. One Frenchman made a great amount of money by printing on a large kite his name and trade. Later on another Frenchman made a balloon, and printed on in French his name and trade, and tied it to his flag-pole. It was a strong wind that day, and the balloon broke from its moorings, and was found the next day in a field thirty miles from the house it was moored at. This led to men making balloons to carry human freight, and since then a great number have been used for scouting and signalling purposes. Kite-flying seems to be dying down in England, but is still a favourite with the Chinese.

S. Robinson, 137, Chanterlands Avenue, Hull.

THE PIG.

I must tell you what I know about a pig. A pig has four legs, one at each corner—two in front, two behind. Pigs' feet are good to eat, but not until the pig has done using them. They are good pickled. A pig has a tail. He sometimes wears it on one side, sometimes on the other. I don't know what the pig fashion is now. A pig is just as big as a sheep—that is, unless the sheep is bigger. A sheep gambols. A pig never does. Pigs wash in mud. The more mud a pig gets, the cleaner he thinks he is. I had a pet pig once. He was just like my brother Bill—always had his nose in other folks' business. He's dead now.

Ernest Stretton, 112, Station Road, Wylde Green, near Birmingham.

THE MATCH.

Old lady who sleeps badly:

"Now, Mary, if I should want to light my candle, are the matches here?"

"Yes, ma'am; here's wan."

"One! Why, if it misses fire, or won't light——"

"Oh, never fear that, ma'am. I've thried it."

H. Price, 52, Hewertson Street, Newport, Mon.

THE NEWSBOY.

A comedian stopped a newsboy who was vigorously plying his trade.

"I say, sonny," he said, "do you want a new job?"

"Yes, sir," replied the boy. "What is it?"

"Well, my manager is looking for a lad like you to play the fool."

"Oh, he is, is he?" cried the newsboy. "What's his idea—to sack you, or keep two of us?"

T. Towler, 125, Forest Road, Dalston, E. 8.

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SHARP'S SUPER-KREEM TOFFEE

CHUMMING with WILDRAKE

A Grand Long Complete School Story of Ralph Reckness Cardew and the Chums of St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.
Cardew Finds a Friend!

"YAW-AW-AW-AW!"

It was a long, deep yawn, and it proceeded from Study No. 2 in the Fourth Form passage.

Cardew of the Fourth stopped.

He was loafing along the Fourth Form passage, with his hands in his pockets, and an expression of deep boredom on his face.

Cardew had just turned out of Study No. 9. In Study No. 9 his study-mates, Clive and Levison, were talking cricket—with deep interest to themselves. Ralph Reckness Cardew had stood it as long as he could. He flattered himself that he had stood it rather well. But Cardew felt that endurance had its limits, and he had turned out.

He had paused in the passage, uncertain whither to wend his way. He thought of dropping in at Study No. 6, and finding a little harmless and necessary relaxation in pulling the noble leg of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. But it was only too probable that he would find Blake and Herries and Dig there, talking cricket. Cardew decided not to risk it. Then he thought of Study No. 10 in the Shell—Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were cheery company. But he realised dismally that he would be bored in Study No. 10.

So he drifted along the passage, without any definite aim in view, till he was brought up by the sound of that deep and prolonged yawn reaching his ears from the half-open door of Study No. 2.

Cardew smiled.

Evidently he was not the only fellow in the School House at St. Jim's who was bored that evening.

He turned in at the doorway. Study No. 2 belonged to Mellish, Trimble, and Kit Wildrake, the new boy from Canada. Cardew was curious to know from whom the yawn had proceeded. He had a fellow-feeling for the yawner.

Kit Wildrake was alone in the study.

He was seated in the armchair, which was tilted back; his hands were driven deep into his pockets, and his feet rested on the table. His handsome, sun-browned face was quite cheery in expression, as usual. But undoubtedly he had yawned.

He glanced up as Cardew's whimsical face looked in.

"Peut-on entrer?" asked Cardew politely.

Wildrake stared.

"What are you pitching French at me for?" he inquired. "You can come in if you like, of course."

Cardew strolled in.

"Merci bien!" he said.

"Is this a new game?" asked Wildrake, "or are you doing your French exercises as you walk about?"

"Anythin' for a change!" explained Cardew. "I'm bored, tired, fed-up to the chin!"

"Nothing to do?" asked Wildrake.

"Absolutely nothin'!"

"What about prep?"

"Prep is a bore, like everythin' else. I'm not goin' to do any prep. I suppose you've done yours, like an industrious youth brought up carefully on a Canadian ranch."

Wildrake laughed.

"As a matter of fact, I haven't," he said. "I was thinking."

"I find thinkin' a bore, too. I heard you yawn," said Cardew cordially. "I was wonderin' on whom to inflict myself. That yawn decided me. You're bored, an' I'm bored! Let's bore one another, shall we?"

And Cardew took a seat on the corner of the table, and smiled benignanily at the rather puzzled Canadian.

"I guess I'm not exactly bored," said Wildrake. "That's a complaint I never suffer from. And I suppose you're only pulling my leg."

Cardew shook his head sadly.

"Bored stiff!" he said. "Bored to the point of weepin' bitter tears! What do you think they're doin' in my study?"

"Give it up."

"Talkin' cricket."

"I'm getting rather keen on cricket," said Wildrake. "It's rather a new game to me; but Tom Merry says I'm beginning to shape."

"Happy youth!" said Cardew. "I envy you! Perhaps you know there's a match comin' off soon with—what-d'ye-call-'em? I forget whom. And a score of strenuous youths are pinin' to get into the eleven. The great question in Study No. 9 now is whether Clive will play against Thimgummy. Levison's pretty certain of a place. The What's-his-name's are in great form, it appears. I stood it for ten minutes or so. I'm hardy! There's a great reserve of strength an' endurance in this delicate form."

Wildrake smiled. He did not quite know what to make of Cardew, who seemed to be speaking with intense seriousness. But Wildrake was not alone in that; there were few fellows at St. Jim's who knew what to make of Cardew. Perhaps he did not always know himself.

"In Study No. 6 the same topic will be ragin'," continued Cardew. "If I put my head into that study, I'm quite certain Blake will say 'What do you think of Dig's chances for the Thimgummy match, Cardew?' Am I borin' you, Wildrake?"

"I guess not."

"You're borin' me," said Cardew. "But I'm curious. What were you yawnin' for? I've always looked on you as a strenuous youth, full of push an' go, and so on. You can ride bare-back horses, and like doin' it. You can walk ten miles, and come in smilin'. If it's not an indiscreet question, wherefore that yawn, which brought me into this study to be bored?"

"I was thinking," said Wildrake. "I feel a bit shut in here. It's no end of a jolly place, I guess, and I'm glad I came to St. Jim's. Most of the fellows are splendid, especially D'Arcy and Tom Merry, and that New House chap, Figgins. But——"

"There's a but?" inquired Cardew. "Isn't it odd, that there always is a but?"

"But I do miss the ranch," confessed Wildrake. "I hate getting in at gates by dark. I'd like sometimes to take a horse out for a gallop by moonlight. I suppose the Housemaster would be no end shocked if I suggested it."

Cardew chuckled.

"Just a few!" he answered.

"I've been out over the wall several times, after lock-up!" said Wildrake. "Just for a ramble, you know. I suppose there'd be a row if it were known. But, after the Boot Leg Ranch, this does seem a bit—a bit——"

"Cabined, cribbed, and confined, as the excellent Shakespeare has remarked!" suggested Cardew.

"Well, yes."

"Hence that anguished yawn?"

"Yes," said Wildrake, laughing.

"I know what it's like," said Cardew. "I've been there. I'm there now. I've noticed you a good bit since you came to St. Jim's——"

"Thanks!"

"Not at all; I'm a keen student of the human animal, and you're a new specimen. I've been wonderin' whether I should make up my mind to be pally with you."

Wildrake stared at him.

"It takes two to make a bargain!" he suggested mildly.

"Quite so," assented Cardew, unmoved. "But I'm no end of a fascinatin' chap when I exert my powers. I feel quite chummy towards you already; that terrific yawn is a bond of union. I was wonderin' whether, if I chummed with you, you might infuse a little of your strenuous energy into my tired frame. Now I find you're bored, too. What is it Goethe says——"

"Goethe!" repeated Wildrake, in astonishment.

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"It will surprise you to learn that I'm fairly well up in German, and that I read the giddy Goethe out of class!" said Cardew. "No accountin' for tastes, is there? Fancy a Fourth-Former quotin' Goethe! It would make my Housemaster no end proud of me if he could hear. The chap was a Hun, you know, but he expresses some things quite neatly. Where is it he says:

"'In jedem Kleide werd' ich wohl die Pein,
Des engen Erdensleben fuhlen.'"

"And what may that happen to mean?" asked Wildrake.

"Construe!" grinned Cardew. "It means that in any clobber or in any circs a chap still feels bored stiff with narrow existence. That's a free translation, of course; it wouldn't do for the Form-room."

"I think you're rather an ass!" said Wildrake, after some thought.

"How well you know me already!" smiled Cardew. "I can see that we're goin' to be pally. The fact is, you're the chap I've been lookin' for. You'd enjoy a little outbreak, I'm sure!"

"Correct!"

"I dare not suggest it in my study," said Cardew pathetically. "Clive was born good, and he's never likely to recover from it. Levison used to kick over the traces, but he has seen the light, and he won't take his eyes off it. If I suggested to either of them to wander forth, like the babes in the wood, when the clock strikes eleven, they would be shocked! They would upbraid me. They would sermonise me. They would think it was me for the downward path, with a jump. They would almost fold me to their bosoms, and weep! They're my dear pals, and I love 'em, and they bore me dreadfully! Wildrake, old bean, will you come out to-night at eleven?"

Kit Wildrake looked at him curiously.

"No harm in that," he said. "I guess it's against the rules, but so long as we don't do any harm——"

"My dear chap, there's no harm to be done!" said Cardew. "That's what tries a fellow's patience so. I'm not suggestin' that we should roll down Wayland High Street an' knock off the policeman's helmet."

Wildrake chuckled.

"I'm game!" he said. "It's going to be a ripping moonlight night, and I'd give a bag of dollars for a gallop across country, about thirty miles!" And the junior from the Boot Leg Ranch sighed a little.

"I can't promise you that!" said Cardew. "But if a run in a motor-car will do as a substitute——"

"Good!"

"And a little excitement——"

"Any old thing!" said Wildrake. "I'm your man!"

"Good man!" said Cardew affectionately. "I'll try to make you enjoy your evenin' out. You've got plenty of nerve?"

"Lots!" said Wildrake.

"That's the worst of blackguards like Racke and Crooke," said Cardew. "They'd come like a shot if I asked them—but they've got no nerve!"

"Hold on!" said Wildrake quietly. "I know something about Racke and Crooke, and their shady little ways. I've no taste for their kind of amusement out of bounds."

Cardew looked pained.

"My dear chap——" he began reproachfully.

"Sorry, if I misunderstood you," said Wildrake frankly. "Nothing like plain speaking, though. It prevents mistakes."

"Quite so. Now, listen to me, while I expound unto you," said Cardew. "Let's make a go! You come out with me to-night, and I'll be master of the ceremonies. You'll follow my lead like a pet lamb. Next half-holiday I'll come out with you, and you shall be leader, and I'll follow. And we'll compare notes, and see which of us can dig up the most excitement—what?"

"Done!" said Wildrake, laughing.

"That's a go?"

"Yes."

"Honour bright, then," said Cardew, slipping off the table, his bored look quite gone. "I'll wake you at eleven in the dorm."

"Right-ho!"

And Cardew strolled out of the study, humming a tune. And Wildrake, without giving much thought to his rather peculiar compact with the dandy of the Fourth, set to work on his preparation.

CHAPTER 2.

Tom Merry is Not Pleased!

"HERE he is!"

Tom Merry of the Shell was in Study No. 9, when Ralph Reckness Cardew returned thither after his visit to Wildrake. Levison and Clive were chatting with the captain of the Shell when Cardew strolled in. Cardew had quite lost his "fed-up" look. There was a sparkle in his eyes, and a smile on his well-cut lips, which had a sardonic curve. Levison glanced at him rather uneasily. He knew what the expression on Cardew's face meant.

"I looked in to speak to you, Cardew," said Tom Merry genially.

"Ever so much honoured," answered Cardew. "Cricket, of course! Fire away! It's my favourite topic!"

"Well, it is cricket, as a matter of fact," said Tom, with a smile. "I can give you a chance to play for St. Jim's again; it wasn't really your fault you lost your chance last time, as it turned out. You know we're meeting Greyfriars on Saturday?"

"I've heard it mentioned," said Cardew gravely. "I believe Levison an' Clive were mentionin' it when I had to quit the study on important business."

"Well, I'll play you, if you like," said Tom Merry. "You're quite good enough, if you choose to do your best, and Levison has been ragging me to give you another chance."

"So much obliged to you, Ernest, old bean!"

"It's a chance for you, Cardew," said Levison. "If you kept to your best, this study would always have a good show in the games."

Cardew stifled a yawn.

"Well, shall I put your name down?" asked Tom Merry.

"Oh, do!"

"Of course, it's understood that you put in regular practice between now and Saturday, and keep yourself at the top mark."

"Oh!"

"Don't be an ass, Cardew!" growled Clive. "Of course you'll do that. I'll jolly well see that you do, in fact!"

Tom Merry frowned a little.

"If you're not prepared to play up to that extent, Cardew, you'd better say so at once!" he exclaimed. "Places in the junior eleven don't go begging, as you ought to know. I shall be jawed by a dozen fellows for putting you in at all."

"It's all right," interrupted Levison hastily. "We'll jolly well see that Cardew is at the top of his form on Saturday!"

"There's another point," said Tom Merry.

"More points?" asked Cardew. "This seems to remind me of somethin'. Wasn't there once a tiresome old johnny who used to go around borin' people with fourteen points? Chap named Wilson, or Pecksniff, or somethin'?"

"Be serious, you ass!" said Levison.

"Serious as a judge, dear boy; in fact, more serious than most judges in these merry days. Go on, old bean; I'm all ears!"

Tom Merry made a slight movement of irritation. He already half-repented that he had come to Study No. 9 at all.

It was difficult for the healthy, frank Shell fellow to understand Cardew at all, and Tom liked a fellow he could understand.

"Well, the point is this," he said. "If you're going to play for St. Jim's juniors, you've got to be fit on Saturday—at the top of your form. It's not my bizney what you do when you're not in the eleven, but when you are in it, I've got to be satisfied. It's pretty well known that you are one of the fellows who play the goat——"

"You shock me!" said Cardew.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" exclaimed Tom. "I don't believe you're a black sheep like Racke, or Crooke or Clampe, of the New House. But you've broken bounds after lights out more than once, and you are acquainted with that gang of sharpers at the Green Man. As I've said, it's not my business to preach at you——"

"But you're goin' to do it, all the same?" asked Cardew urbanely.

"No, I'm not. But if you've got any foolery in mind for this week, you'll have to drop it till after Saturday. That's what I mean. I want your word that you don't smoke or break dormitory bounds till after the match. You can play the fool as much as you like after that, as far as I'm concerned."

Tom Merry spoke rather sharply. Cardew's mocking smile had an irritating effect on him.

"That's all right," said Levison anxiously. "That's understood, Tom Merry."

"If it's understood, Cardew can give his word."

Cardew was silent.

He was reckless, careless of many things that he knew he ought to be careful of. But his word was his bond; and he could not give it meaning to break it. And that night he intended to leave the dormitory after lights out.

"Well?" said Tom.

Clive and Levison regarded their chum anxiously.

"Can't you speak, you ass?" demanded Clive, at last.

"Certainly, old top!"

"Then give Tom Merry your word."

Cardew shook his head.

"Never could stand bein' tied down," he said lightly. "A sudden temptation might smite me to look upon the wine when it is red, or the billiard-table when it is green. Resistin' temptation is a bore. No go, Merry!"

Tom knitted his brows.

"I suppose that means that you've got some fool game on for this week?" he said gruffly.

"Aren't they bright in the Shell?" said Cardew admiringly, appealing to his chums. "This shows what a good, strict Form-master can do for a fellow."

"Very well," said Tom Merry, setting his lips. "You won't play on Saturday, Cardew."

"Awf'ly sorry, old bean! Try to win without me."

"We shall do quite well without you. I was giving you a chance, that is all," said Tom impatiently.

"So glad you won't miss me," said

Cardew politely. "Will it give you any gratification if I turn up and cheer?"

"Oh, don't talk rot!"

Tom Merry turned impatiently to the door. He was feeling extremely sore. A dozen fellows were anxious for the place he had offered Cardew, and Cardew had thrown it aside as a thing of no value. Tom Merry mentally resolved that he would not be in a hurry to offer Cardew another chance.

He returned to No. 10 in the Shell passage, where Manners and Lowther were finishing their prep.

His clouded brow drew the attention of his chums at once.

"Not been ragging in No. 9?" asked Manners.

"That ass Cardew turns up his nose at a place in the eleven," said Tom. "I was an ass to offer it to him."

"You were, dear boy," said Monty Lowther cordially. "This comes of being obstinate, Tommy. I've often pointed out to you, with regret, that you are an ass, but you never would believe your Uncle Monty."

"But why has he refused?" asked Manners curiously.

"He hasn't exactly refused; but he won't give his word to keep within bounds after lights out till Saturday. That comes to the same thing. He's blagging again," growled the captain of the Shell. "I almost wish a prefect would drop on him."

"Serve him jolly well right!" said Manners.

"So the dear boy is blagging again, is he?" said Monty Lowther thoughtfully. "Breaking dorm bounds and risking the sack! When is he going?"

"Blessed if I know or care!"

Monty Lowther held up his hand reprovingly.

"My dear Tommy, you ought to care! Here is a thoughtless youth treading the downward path, which leads to whackings and the sad, sad sack. And here is a benevolent youth with a strongly-developed sense of humour, ready to catch him bending and give him a valuable lesson. If you don't care, Tommy, I do! I'm going to look into this, and if Cardew goes on the tiles to-night——"

Monty Lowther did not conclude, but there came a glimmer into his eyes. He strolled out of Study No. 10, smiling. Manners went sedately on with his prep, and Tom Merry scanned over the cricket-list for the Greyfriars match. And the name of Kerr, of the New House, went down in the place he had left blank for the name of Ralph Reckness Cardew.

CHAPTER 3.
Trouble for Trimble!

"YOU ass!"

"You goat!"

Clive and Levison made those remarks simultaneously in Study No. 9 when Tom Merry had gone. They fixed their eyes upon Cardew with an expression that could not be called chummy.

Cardew sighed.

"What are you goin' for me now for?" he inquired. "Have I been doin' anythin'? Have I left undone that which I ought to have done?"

"Look here——"

"Or done that which I ought not to have done?" continued Cardew, unmoved. "Put it down to the weakness of human nature, old tops, and let me off."

"So you're at it again!" growled Clive.

"At what?" asked Cardew innocently.

"Playing the goat!" exclaimed Clive angrily. "That's the only reason why you couldn't satisfy Tom Merry."

"Look here, Cardew, this won't do!" said Levison quietly. "There's been more than enough of that rot, and you've got to chuck it. I can guess well enough what you've got in your mind. I've heard something about Lodgey, that blackguard at the Green Man, and his little game. You can't go!"

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm goin' to-night," he said coolly.

"You—you utter idiot!" exclaimed Levison, half angry and half distressed. "Do you understand the risk?"

"Quite! That's what makes it worth goin'."

"Who's Lodgey, and what's his game?" asked Clive gruffly, looking at Levison.

"I don't know anything for certain," answered Levison. "But——"

"You used to," smiled Cardew.

"Well, I don't now. But I believe that rogue Lodgey is running some swindling gambling game at a place in Wayland, under the rose. Cardew, just think what you're doing. That kind of show is raided by the police."

"How excitin'!" yawned Cardew. "Fancy the cheery old Head gettin' a telephone call in the mornin' from the police-station: 'One of your boys in the cells. Please come and bail him out.' The Head's face would be worth a tenner to view, wouldn't it?"

"So that's it, is it?" said Clive grimly.

"I haven't said so; Levison says so," answered Cardew lightly.

"Do you deny it, then?" demanded Clive.

"Denyin' anythin' is a bore!"

"Well, you can have your own way," said Clive. "But if you leave the dorm after lights out to-night——"

He paused.

"What awful thing will happen if I do?" asked Cardew.

"I shall let you pretty severely alone, if that's anything," answered Clive. "I don't chum with blackguards."

Cardew winced slightly. But he smiled the next moment.

"Et tu, Brute?" he asked, turning to Levison.

"I hope you won't play the fool," said Levison uneasily. "Look here, Cardew, listen to me."

"I'd listen to you till the cows come home, old top, but you bore me," said Cardew. "Keep it till to-morrow. I shall then be in a repentant mood—you know I always am after a bender—and your words of wisdom will fall upon fruitful soil. Ta-ta!"

"Cardew, old chap——"

Cardew opened the door of the study and stepped out. The next moment there was a wild yell. Cardew's knee, as he swung out of the study, had come into sudden and violent contact with a fat nose. Baggy Trimble had been bending at the keyhole.

"Yoooooop!" yelled Trimble, in anguish, clasping his nose with both hands, and still on his knees.

Cardew stared at him.

"By gad! The giddy way of the transgressor!" he said. "Fairly on the boko—what?"

"Yow-ow-ow! My nose is broken!" howled Trimble. "You did it on purpose, you beast! Ow!"

"Not at all; but I'm goin' to do this on purpose," said Cardew, taking the fat junior by the collar and swinging him into the study. "You must really not listen at keyholes, Baggy, dear boy; it's a bad habit, and leads to a fellow being booted round a study like this——"

"Yaroooh!"

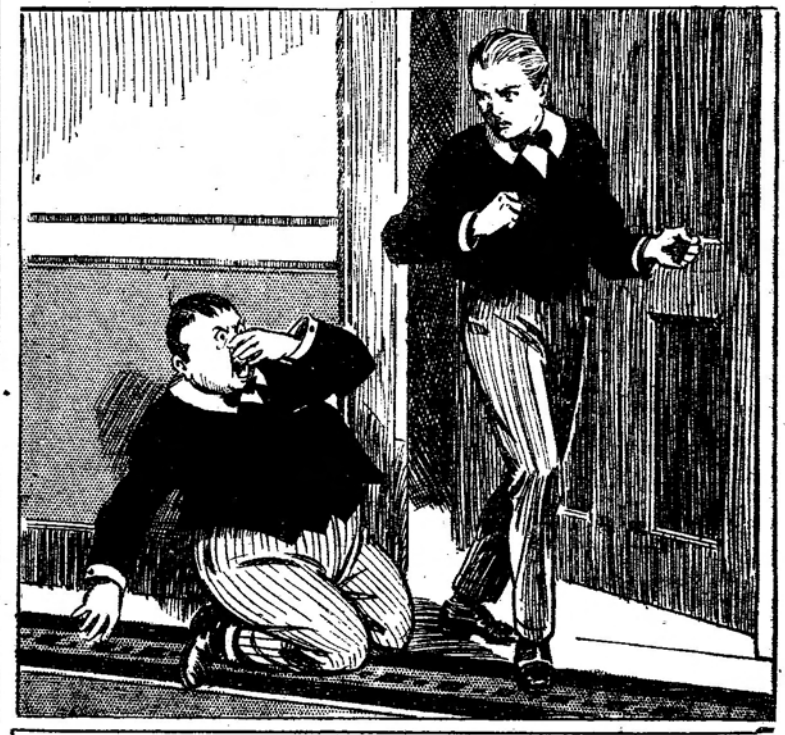
"And this!"

"Yooop! Help!"

Bump!

Baggy Trimble collapsed on the floor as Cardew released his collar, after delivering two hefty kicks on Baggy's fat person. He sat on the carpet and roared.

"Yow-ow-ow! I've a jolly good mind to go to the Housemaster and tell him



Cardew opened the door of the study and stepped out. The next moment there was a wild yell. Cardew's knee, as he swung out of the study, had come into violent contact with Baggy's fat nose. "Yoop!" yelled Trimble in anguish, clasping his nose with both hands. (*See this page.*)

you're breaking bounds to-night, you rotter! Yow-ow-ow! And I wasn't listening at the door. I never heard a word. Just like you to suspect a chap of listening, you beast! I've a jolly good mind to tell Mr. Railton the whole yarn—yarcooh!—and I will if you kick me again—ow!"

Cardew's foot came out, and Trimble rolled on the hearthrug, with a yell.

"Yowp! I mean, I won't tell him. Leave off kicking me, you beast! I won't say a word about you and Wildrake."

"Wildrake!" exclaimed Clive and Levison together.

Cardew compressed his lips. Evidently Baggy Trimble's long ears had heard something of the talk in Study No. 2. Doubtless that had excited his curiosity, and brought him along to Study No. 9 in search of further information, with rather painful results to Baggy.

"Is it with Wildrake you're going, Cardew?" asked Levison, his face clearing.

"Better ask Trimble; he seems to know."

"If you'd told us that——" began Clive.

His clouded face had cleared, too. Wildrake, of Canada, had been only a short time at St. Jim's as well, but long enough for the fellows to learn that he was as straight as a die. If Cardew was breaking bounds in company with the youth from the Boot Leg Ranch, it was a reckless escapade, doubtless; but there was not likely to be any real harm in it.

"Well, if I'd told you that?" said Cardew mockingly.

"You ought to give it up, for the sake of the cricket-match," said Levison. "But there can't be much harm if Wildrake is present. I thought——"

Cardew shook a forefinger at him gravely.

"Never be suspicious, dear boy!" he said. "So you're quite satisfied that the esteemed and upright Wildrake won't lead me into any harm?"

"Quite!" said Levison.

"Are you equally satisfied that I sha'n't lead the spotless and virtuous Wildrake into any harm?"

Levison started.

"Cardew! You can't mean—you couldn't be such a—a——"

"Such a what?"

"You couldn't mean to land that new kid into anything!" exclaimed Clive. "If you do——"

"Well, if I do?" smiled Cardew.

Clive did not speak; he shut his lips hard. He could not guess whether Cardew was in earnest, or was trying to draw him on. Cardew looked from one to another with an ironical smile, and strolled out of the study. Baggy Trimble scrambled up as soon as he was gone.

"I've a jolly good mind to go to Railton," he mumbled. "This sort of thing, you know——"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Clive. "If you sneak to the Housemaster, you'll be jolly well ragged, and you know it! Get out!"

"Look here, Clive——"

"Get out!" snapped Levison.

He made a movement towards Trimble, and that fat youth promptly got out. He rolled away along the passage, feeling deeply injured and ill-used. At the corner he ran into Monty Lowther, who was looking for him. When a fellow wanted information in the School House, it was natural to look for Trimble. Baggy's long ears were well known. And Lowther was in search of information now.

"Hallo, my fat top! Been in the wars?" he asked, as Baggy came along, setting his collar straight on his fat neck.

"That beast Cardew!" groaned Baggy. "Made out I was listening at his door, you know, because I stooped to—to pick up a pin——"

"Hard cheese!" said Lowther sympathetically.

Baggy was glad of a sympathetic listener. In two or three minutes he had related the story of his uncommon wrongs to Monty Lowther—with all other details. Having learned all he wished to know, Monty Lowther left Trimble quite suddenly — his sympathy, apparently, being exhausted. He came back into Study No. 10 in the Shell with a smile on his face.

"To-night's the night!" he announced.

"Eh! What?" said Tom Merry.

"Cardew's going on the tiles to-night——"

"Bother Cardew and his foolery!"

"Hear, hear!" said Manners.

"You fellows don't feel inclined to sit up for him?" asked Lowther.

Tom Merry stared.

"Sit up for Cardew? What the thump do you mean?"

"Well, I'm going to," said Monty Lowther. "I've got a kind heart, Tommy. I can feel for a giddy youth who kicks over the traces. I can afford the time to give him a lesson——"

"Oh, it's a jape!" said Tom.

"Dear man, have you guessed that already?" said Lowther. "Did you work it out in your head, and without the aid of a net? Yes, dear boy, it's a merry jape, with your Uncle Monty as the japer, and dear old Cardew as the japee. I suppose the fellow who's japed is a japee, isn't he? Now, don't talk while I figure it out."

And Monty Lowther was plunged in deep reflection for quite a long time, all for the benefit of Ralph Reckness Cardew.

CHAPTER 4.
Out of Bounds!

"AWAKE?"

All was dark and silent in the Fourth Form dormitory, in the School House of St. Jim's.

Eleven strokes had boomed out dully from the clock-tower.

Downstairs, lights still gleamed in some windows; some of the masters, and one or two of the Sixth, were still up. But in the junior quarters slumber reigned.

The faint whisper beside Wildrake's bed hardly broke the silence in the Fourth Form dormitory.

Kit Wildrake sat up.

In at the high windows of the dormitory glimmered the moonlight. A silver crescent floated in a sky dotted with fleecy clouds. It was a fine, clear night; a night that tempted one to be abroad. It strongly tempted the boy from the Boot Leg Ranch, remembering old days when he had ridden on boundless prairies under the soft moonlight of British Columbia. He was not sleepy; he was eager to be up and out. According to Cardew's arrangement, an automobile was to be in readiness near the school. Wildrake would have preferred a gallop on Wayland Moor, but he was looking forward to a rapid run through the moonlit night in a car. He smiled through the shadows at the dim form standing beside his bed.

"Wide awake!" he answered. "Time to turn out—what?"

"Yes; don't make a row."

"You bet!"

Wildrake slipped quietly from his bed, and dressed in the gloom quickly. The rest of the dormitory was sleeping. Levison and Clive had had some thought of remaining awake, perhaps to remonstrate with their chum if he persisted in carrying out his reckless intention. But they were sleeping; and Cardew was anxious that they should not wake. He did not want remonstrances and arguments just then.

Wildrake was quickly dressed, and the two juniors crossed silently to the door, taking their boots in their hands. Cardew brushed against a bedstead in the dark, and there was a movement and a murmur.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had awakened.

The two juniors stopped, and stood quite still. Arthur Augustus raised his head from his pillow.

"Is that somebody up?"

Silence.

"Bai Jove! I wondah what woke me up!" murmured the swell of St. Jim's. And he laid his head on his pillow again, and dropped back into slumber.

Cardew allowed a minute or two to elapse, and then he whispered:

"Come on!"

The two juniors quitted the dormitory silently, and Cardew closed the door behind him without a sound.

The corridor was densely dark, though from the direction of the lower stairs there came a faint glimmer.

"This way!" murmured Cardew.

On tiptoe, they moved cautiously down the passage. Cardew opened the door of the lower box-room, and closed it after they had entered.

"Put your boots on now, Wildrake."

"Right-ho!"

In a few minutes the two juniors had dropped softly on the leads under the box-room window, and gained the ground. They glided silently round the dark mass of the School House. From the quad Cardew glanced at the window of the Head's study; the blind showed the light within.

"The old scout's still up!" murmured Cardew. "What a howlin' joke if he had a fancy for makin' a round of the dormitories!"

He watched Wildrake's face in the moonlight. He was testing his companion's nerve; but Wildrake only smiled.

"Do the masters ever do that?" he asked.

"Sometimes."

"Well, the chances are in our favour, anyhow," said Wildrake lightly. "And even if we were caught out, it's only a licking."

"Might be the sack!"

"What rot! We're breaking no end of rules, I know, but the Head wouldn't be ass enough to sack a fellow for that, unless he was up to some real mischief!"

Cardew smiled—not a very pleasant smile.

"Come on!" he said.

A few minutes more, and they were outside the school wall. Cardew led the way in the shadow of the trees along the road, and they crossed a field, into a shadowy lane. A car with shaded lights loomed up dimly.

"That you, Jorrocks?"

A chauffeur emerged into view, and touched his cap very respectfully to the grandson of Lord Reckness.

"Yes, sir!"

"Good! You know where to go?"

"Yes, sir."

"Roll in, old top!"

The two juniors entered the car, and

the chauffeur took his seat. The engine began to throb.

Wildrake sank back in the soft upholstery, wondering a little. He knew that Cardew was wealthy; that his indulgent grandfather allowed him much more money than was good for him. But he was surprised at the luxurious appointments of the big car; he was surprised that the car was there at all, in fact. The hood was down; even Cardew was not reckless enough to drive in an open car in bright moonlight at such an hour of the night. But the windows were open, and the night breeze blew in as the car glided along the lane. Wildrake had a sense of adventure, and he certainly was enjoying himself. Cardew's expression, as he looked at his companion, was an odd one. The car was soon putting on speed, eating up the miles as it buzzed and tore through the moonlit night.

"This is ripping, I guess," said Wildrake, at last. "We must be a good many miles from St. Jim's now, Cardew."

"Twenty or so," answered Cardew.

"Where are we going?"

Cardew smiled.

"My dear man, remember our compact——"

"Our compact?" asked Wildrake. He had forgotten.

"I'm leader to-night," said Cardew. "Next time, you're goin' to be leader, an' give orders. To-night you follow my lead faithfully, without raisin' objections or askin' questions."

The Canadian junior laughed.

"I don't mind," he answered. "But when you come out with me, don't look for expensive cars, old scout. I'm not grandson to a giddy millionaire."

"All the better for you, perhaps," said Cardew, a cloud coming over his face for a moment. Then he smiled again. "I'm awf'ly glad to have you with me, Wildrake. If there's any trouble, you're the fellow to stand up to it, and see a pal through."

"I hope so; but what trouble is there likely to be?" asked Wildrake, in surprise. "I'm not afraid of trouble; but what the thump can happen to us?"

"Lots of things; there might be a row——"

"A row?"

"Even a scrap——"

"With whom?"

"Oh, anybody."

"Blessed if I catch on," said Wildrake. "But I'm your man, anyhow. This is getting quite interesting and mysterious—unless you're pulling my leg."

"Not at all! We're goin' to make a night of it."

Wildrake gave him a sharp look. Once again his doubts smote him.

"A night of it! In what way?" he asked.

"Any old way!" yawned Cardew. "Mind, you've promised honour bright to follow my lead, an' ask no questions. I hold you to it."

Wildrake was silent; but he was feeling rather uneasy now. He did not like the mocking smile on Cardew's face. The car raced on, mile after mile. Outside a radius of a few miles from St. Jim's, the new junior was unacquainted with the country, and the roads, the fields, the sleeping villages, were strange to his eyes. He did not know that the car was making a wide detour, and bearing back to a point quite near the starting-place. It slowed down at last in a lane deeply shadowed by overhanging trees.

"Stopping?" asked Wildrake.

"Yes; this is our destination."

"But what——"

"Follow your leader, dear boy, and ask no giddy questions," answered Cardew lightly.

He stepped from the car, and Wildrake followed him silently, but with a cloud on his brow.

CHAPTER 5.
"Make Your Game!"

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW opened a gate under the trees, and held it open for Wildrake to enter a dark path. The Canadian junior did not hesitate. What wild excursion Cardew might have brought him upon, he could not guess; but he had a strong suspicion that the dandy of the Fourth was pulling his leg, and putting his nerve to the test. Whatever might chance that night, Kit Wildrake's nerve was not likely to be found wanting.

He found himself in a rough, unkept garden, the limits of which he could not see. Heavy branches intercepted the moonlight, and nothing was to be seen of any building at hand. Wildrake glanced back as he heard the car move again.

"The car's gone!" he said.

"It will come back for us."

"How far are we from the school?"

"Guess."

Wildrake compressed his lips.

He could see that his companion was in a whimsical, tantalising mood, and not disposed to give him any information. He knew that that rapid run in the automobile must have covered at least fifty miles, but there had been so many windings and turnings that he had no idea of the actual direction taken. Where he was he could not guess, but he supposed that he was at a great distance from St. Jim's; and in that case, if the car failed them, it would be impossible to get back before morning. Wildrake was reckless—though his recklessness was of a very different kind from Cardew's—but the bare thought of turning up at St. Jim's in the daylight, after a whole night spent out of school without leave, was dismaying to him. Cardew's eyes were upon him, and he smiled, reading the thoughts in the Canadian's mind.

"Beginnin' to get nervy?" murmured Cardew. "Shall I call the car back to take you home?"

"With you?"

"No; I'm goin' on," said Cardew. "I didn't come out simply for a drive. But if you're funky——"

"Don't be a silly ass!" interrupted Wildrake brusquely. "I don't know what your game is, and I suspect that you're fooling me. But whatever it is, I'll see it through."

"Good man! I thought you had some grit."

Cardew led the way up the weedy path, in deep shadow. They turned from the garden path into a track that led away among trees, deep and dusky. Through the trunks Wildrake became aware at last of the dim outlines of a building. They stopped in a deep porch, in which the darkness was intense. Wildrake could hardly see his companion, but he was aware that Cardew was feeling over the surface of a closed door.

"Why don't you knock?" he asked.

"That's not the way. Wait!"

Somewhere from the darkness came a whispering voice, and its suddenness made Wildrake start.

"What price?" whispered the voice.

Evidently it was a pass-word.

"Golden guineas!" answered Cardew.

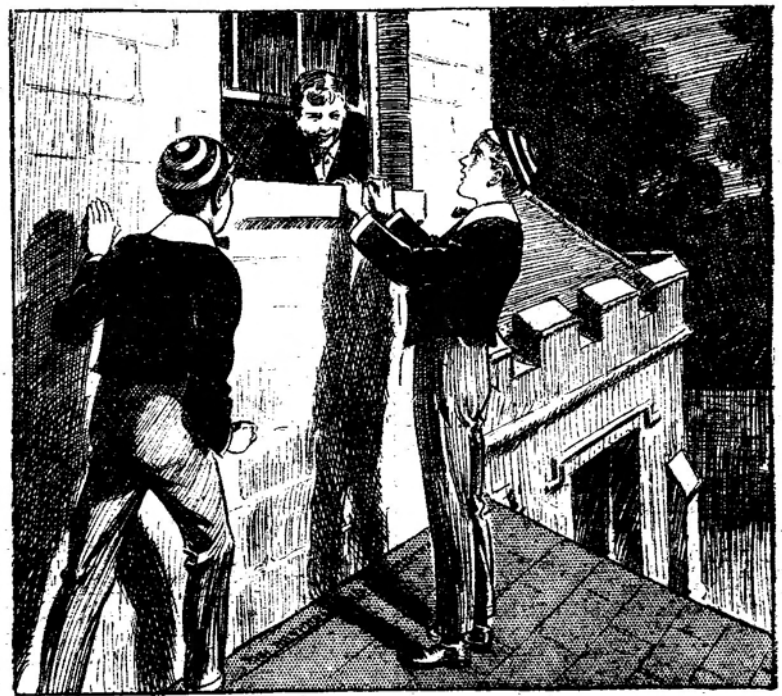
"All serene!" came the answering whisper.

The door before the juniors opened, and Cardew led his companion in. Behind them the door closed, and there was a click of a spring-lock.

Wildrake drew a deep breath.

They were still in darkness; the doorkeeper, whoever he was, was invisible in the shadows.

In spite of his coolness, Wildrake felt



Wildrake dropped back to the tiles. The chins of the two juniors were on a level with the sill, and they looked fairly into the face of Monty Lowther, as he pushed the sash higher, and looked out. "So you've come back!" he said. (*See page* 12.)

his heart beat a little faster. What was the mysterious building in which he now stood? For what purpose had his strange companion brought him there? He could not guess; but he no longer thought that Cardew was pulling his leg. There was an adventure before him—though what was about to happen he could not guess.

"This way!" murmured Cardew. "Keep hold of my arm. Keep close to the wall; there's a trap-door in the middle of the passage."

"A trap-door?" repeated Wildrake.

"Yes; that is the way strangers are welcomed here." Cardew chuckled softly. "Any interferin' johnny who came here without a guide would take a nasty tumble—and ring an electric bell in doin' it. That would give them time to clear. Savvy?"

"Whom?"

"You'll see. Come on!"

Cardew led his companion along the dark passage. At the end he pulled aside a heavy curtain, and they passed into a small apartment, dimly lighted by a small electric bulb.

The room was empty, save for a table upon which stood an open box. In the box, as Wildrake saw with astonishment, were a number of flimsy cardboard masks.

Cardew selected one, and placed it on his face. It covered him from the brow to the lips, and his eyes gleamed whimsically through the eye-holes. He tied the strings carefully behind his head.

"Put yours on," he said.

"Look here, what's this game?" demanded Wildrake restlessly. "Wherever we are, why can't we show our faces?"

"Too jolly risky."

"Where's the risk?"

"Dear man, do you want to be recognised as a St. Jim's chap, out of bounds at this witchin' hour of night?"

"Well, no," said Wildrake.

"Put on your mask, then."

Still Wildrake hesitated. Cardew's eyes glittered at him mockingly through the slits in his mask.

"Cold feet?" he asked. "There's still time to call the car back if you're afraid?"

"That's enough."

Wildrake fastened the mask on his face.

"Good man! This way."

Cardew drew aside another curtain. Before the juniors could pass through the doorway, however, a man came unsteadily through, and they stepped aside for him. Wildrake glanced at the man curiously. He was in evening clothes, a diamond gleaming in his white shirt; his face was hidden by a mask such as those juniors were wearing. Under it his mouth drooped, the lips quivering. It was easy to see that the man had been drinking heavily. He muttered curses under his breath as he passed the two schoolboys, without even a glance.

"Come on!" whispered Cardew.

"Who is that—what is he?" breathed Wildrake.

"Only a lame duck."

"A lame duck?" repeated Wildrake.

"Yes; come on."

The curtain fell behind them. They followed a dimly-lighted passage; a large door was closed at the other end. Cardew opened it, and bright light flashed on Wildrake's sight. Cardew's hand drew him into the room, and he gazed about him in astonishment, as a low, droning voice fell upon his ears.

"Make your game, gentlemen! Make your game!"

CHAPTER 6.
The Green Table!

"MAKE your game!"

The droning voice struck on Kit Wildrake's ears; but he hardly realised, for the moment, what it meant. He stood dazzled by the sudden light—dazed. Cardew's hand, on his arm, drew him forward.

"They're goin' it!" said Cardew lightly. "Brought any money with you, kid?"

"Money! No!"

"Never mind. I'll lend you a tenner. You can change it at the table."

"What——"

"Come on!"

The scene cleared before Wildrake's eyes; he gazed about him, comprehending at last.

The room he found himself in was a long and lofty one. The windows—if there were windows—were covered with hangings, which draped the walls all round the apartment. The floor was covered by a thick carpet from wall to wall. At one end of the room was a bar, where a tired-looking, brutal-featured man presided over bottles and glasses. Three or four men in evening clothes were leaning on the bar, smoking and talking. The odour of tobacco was heavy in the air. In the centre of the room stood a long table, covered with green baize, marked with sections and numbers. At one side, in the middle of its length, was a raised seat, upon which sat a portly figure, also in evening dress, with a big artificial diamond glittering in a shirt-front stained with wine. The man's face was masked; but a square chin and a brutal mouth were disclosed to view. Before the man—evidently a croupier—the centre of the table was sunk in a large bowl, formed of metal, round the circumference of which were eighteen compartments, numbered one to nine—the numbers being repeated twice. The man held lightly in his stubby fingers a rubber ball.

"Make your game, gentlemen!"

Wildrake almost gasped for breath.

He had heard some talk about Cardew among the fellows at St. Jim's; he had heard something of his reckless escapades.

But he had not thought of anything like this.

He had never been in such a place before; but he knew well enough in what kind of a den he was.

It was a gaming-den; and the men crowded up and down the long green table were gambling.

There were nine numbered squares on either side of the croupier in the centre, as well as sections marked "odd" and "even."

Wildrake caught Cardew by the arm.

"Cardew! What is this——"

"The game?" asked Cardew, his lips curving in a smile below the mask. "It's called la boule——"

"La boule!" repeated Wildrake.

"The same game as 'petits-chevaux'!" explained Cardew. "Only played with a ball instead of little wooden horses on wires. Somethin' like roulette, but simpler."

"Cardew!"

"No end of a game!" smiled Cardew. "No end of fun in it! Change your tenner with the croupier's man—that chap with a mouth like a gash. He's there to change notes."

Wildrake pushed Cardew's hand away.

"Keep your money!" he said fiercely. "Do you think I am going to gamble here with a gang of blackguards?"

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"Please yourself, dear boy; but it's rather dull lookin' on without playin'."

"I'm not going to look on. I'm going out."

"Dear man, what about your promise?"

"What?"

"You're followin' my lead to-night," said Cardew coolly. "Honour bright, you know! I hold you to it."

Wildrake stared at him.

"You want me to stay here?"

"I insist upon it, old bean! I have your word."

Wildrake drew a deep breath.

"I've never broken my word!" he said quietly, though his eyes were blazing with anger. "If you hold me to it, I'll stay. But I shall have something to say to you about this——"

"Don't, dear boy! I get all the sermons I need from Levison and Clive; too many, in fact. Besides, I'm doin' you a good turn! You're a pilgrim and a stranger here, and I'm showin' you life."

"Life!" Wildrake laughed contemptuously. "I guess I'd rather not see life, as you call it, on these lines."

"You haven't tried yet," answered Cardew placidly. "No end of fun in twistin' the tiger's tail, once you begin. Anyhow, I hold you to your word; you don't leave till I do."

Wildrake nodded grimly.

"I offered to let you slide out, if you had cold feet!" smiled Cardew. "You should have taken the chance if you were funky."

"Funky! What is there to be afraid of here?" said Wildrake. "I'm not afraid; but I'm ashamed."

"Lots to be afraid of; the police would give a good deal to know the address of dear old Lodgey's show!" answered Cardew. "They'll get it some day, and there'll be a little surprise party here."

"And you're risking that, for the sake of this—this foolery."

"Risk is the only thing that makes life worth livin'. But there's more than that. You may have guessed already that the johnnies who come here are not all men of the highest principles——"

Wildrake laughed scoffingly.

"None of them, I should think," he said.

"Quite so—bloated rascals, the lot of them," assented Cardew easily. "Myself as shady as any. Well, sometimes when they lose their money they try to bag another man's winnin's—same as at dear old Monte Carlo, you know. At Monte, I've heard my dear uncle say, they manage such affairs quietly and with tact; but here a fellow sometimes gets over the limit. I've seen a scrap in this room more than once."

Wildrake made a gesture of disgust.

"Low, what?" grinned Cardew. "Admitted, dear boy—low and disgustin'. But life is nearly all low and disgustin'. Virtue is no end admirable, but it's so cold and lonely on top of a virtuous pinnacle. Come and look on at the game if you won't play."

Cardew dropped into a vacant chair at the green table.

Wildrake stood behind his chair, looking on.

Angry as he was, he could not help being interested in a sight so new and strange to him.

He was aware that in every seaside town in France such places flourished, and the law did not say them nay; indeed, in la belle France the law only claimed a percentage of the ill-gotten profits for the Government. But in England——! Every person in the room was liable to instant arrest, if the police should get wind of the place. That thought came uncomfortably into Wildrake's mind—a night in the cells, and expulsion from St. Jim's to follow, with-

out the shadow of a doubt. But Cardew had been right in counting on his nerve. Wildrake was unconscious of any feeling of fear. He had given Cardew his word, and he was standing by his word; and if there was a "row," as Cardew half seemed to anticipate, he was ready to stand by his companion. But on the morrow the fellow who had brought him there should be called to account.

Why had Cardew brought him?

He could not understand the whimsical, gnomish nature of the fellow that had made him play such a frick.

Cardew was playing already.

He had come well supplied with money, that was clear. He threw a pound-note on the number seven.

"Make your game, gentlemen!"

Mr. Lodgey rose from his chair, and spun the rubber ball round the metal bowl.

It spun and danced and bounded, watched eagerly by the thirty or forty pairs of eyes up and down the long table.

It settled at last in one of the little slots.

Cardew smiled, as he received seven pound-notes from the banker, in addition to his stake. He looked round at Wildrake with a smile.

"Won't you try your luck?"

"No!"

"Please yourself!"

Cardew shrugged his shoulders, and turned to the game again.

CHAPTER 7.

Fallen Among Thieves!

KIT WILDRAKE stood looking on over Cardew's shoulder, his hands in his pockets. The heavy atmosphere of the room oppressed him, the fumes of cigars and cigarettes troubled his healthy lungs. Cardew seemed unconscious of it. His mouth was setting in a hard line under the edge of his mask—the game was getting hold of him. He was playing now with every spin of the ball, and his luck was good. Mr. Lodgey glanced at him once or twice, but he paid up every win with business-like alacrity.

"Make your game, gentlemen!"

"The game is made!"

"Rien ne va plus!"

Mr. Lodgey repeated the words with every spin, in the dull, droning voice of the croupier, bored to extinction by the dull monotony of his task. Only the fact that he was raking in cash on all sides could have compensated Mr. Lodgey for that heavy boredom.

The punters round the table were excited, eager. Wildrake found himself interested. In spite of the masks on the faces, he could read the expressions on many—the glitter in the eyes, the curves of the mouths, gave them away. Eagerness, anxiety, greed, fatigue, desperation, along with boredom—he read them all there. And this was what Cardew called life—what all these over-excited, unhealthy blackguards looked on as pleasure! Across the Channel such scenes as this—without the masks—were going on in a hundred places, in five hundred places.

Wildrake was thankful to feel that it did not go on in any land where the British flag flew—save in holes and corners where rogues and their dupes hid from the police.

Cardew had a little pile of pound-notes before him, and his eyes were blazing with excitement.

He had forgotten his companion now—forgotten his design in bringing him there. He was thinking only of the green cloth and the yellow numbers and the spinning rubber ball.

His luck was amazing.

Doubtless it was partly due to the fact that he did not place his stakes till after the ball had left the croupier's hand, for Cardew was no fool. He was not simple enough to believe that the croupier had no control over the numbers that came up. He was well aware that the gentleman with the ball could land it in any number he pleased—a facile feat with a little practice.

But after the ball had spun, Mr. Lodgey could not touch it again till it stopped, without giving himself away a little too palpably. For it was not a roulette-table, which is sometimes furnished with a secret contrivance for controlling the numbers, worked out of sight under the bowl. There was no wheel to be controlled by a hidden mechanism. After the ball had spun, whether it ran by aim or by chance, Mr. Lodgey had no further power over it.

Every chance, of course, was against the player. There were nine numbers, but only seven times the amount of the stake was paid to the winner. Nine chances against, seven for—when Mr. Lodgey was not cheating. And he was cheating every time a large stake was laid before the ball rolled.

It was a strange game that Cardew was playing. He knew that "la boule" was not a game of chance, he knew that Mr. Lodgey was aware what number would come up when he sent the rubber ball spinning.

Cardew was playing, not against the game, but against the croupier—trying to read his thoughts, and stake accordingly.

Young as he was, Cardew had seen much of the seamy side of life—the pet grandson of a wealthy and indulgent old lord, whose years had not brought him discretion. In some respects, he was as old as any man in the room, and he was cooler, more self-possessed, than any. The game he was playing—which old gamesters call "twisting the tiger's tail"—needed coolness and self-command and steady resistance to the influence of the gambling fever.

Excited as he was growing, Cardew remained cool enough on that point. Never once did he throw down a hasty stake before the ball spun, and he noted, coolly, the large and careless stakes on the board, and played against them. Again and again, when Mr. Lodgey raked in a little sheaf of banknotes from the other players, he had to pay out seven pounds to Cardew as a penalty.

The croupier's eyes turned very frequently on Cardew now, with a very unpleasant glitter in them.

No man like to be beaten at his own game, and more especially a swindler at his own game. Mr. Lodgey had been very glad when the wealthy grandson of Lord Reckness was first introduced to his secret night club. He was not feeling so glad now.

Heavily as he was winning, he did not like losing. And Cardew's game—which the watchful croupier had, of course, spotted at once, showed that the St. Jim's junior knew the game was a cheat, knew more than men in the room who were three times his age!

And that was very exasperating to Mr. Lodgey. The most unscrupulous cheat does not like being recognised as a cheat.

But Mr. Lodgey had more cards up his sleeve, as it were, than Cardew was yet aware of. Knowing as the junior was, he did not know, by any means, all the depths of swindlery and rascality in the gambler's profession. Mr. Lodgey resorted at last to a "dodge" not uncommon in Continental casinos, when a punter, aided by knowledge of the true inwardness of the game and a run of luck, begins to "skin" the bank too severely.

A fat man in evening-dress had been winning heavily, and several times Cardew's eyes had dwelt upon him cynically. He guessed easily enough that the fat man was a "stool-pigeon"—a partner in the bank, put up to win to encourage the others.

The fat gentleman loafed round the table, and took up his position close behind Cardew.

Over the junior's shoulder he began to toss stakes carelessly on the table, generally on the same numbers as Cardew.

Cardew's run of luck might have turned at any moment. He had been very successful for a time in "twisting the tiger's tail," but it was very unlikely that it would have lasted. But Mr. Lodgey was leaving nothing to chance.

"Five!"

Cardew had a pound-note on five. There were half a dozen pound-notes on one, which was farthest on the bowl from five. Cardew had calculated correctly, that the croupier would allow himself a margin of safety, and let the ball drop quite far from one. So, after the ball had rolled, he had dropped his pound-note on five.

It came up.

Mr. Lodgey carelessly threw a five-pound note and a pound-note to the stake, and Cardew stretched out his hand to gather in his winnings.

A hand came over his shoulder, and gripped his wrist like a vice.

"Mine, I think!" said a whisky-roughened voice.

It was the fat gentleman.

Cardew looked up.

"Mine!" he answered.

"I placed the stake!" said the fat gentleman threateningly.

"You did not," answered Cardew coolly. "I placed it, as my friend here can witness!"

"That is so," said Wildrake.

"I appeal to the banker!" said the fat gentleman.

Mr. Lodgey shook his head. The banker had seen nothing; in such circumstances the banker makes it a point to have seen nothing.

"Let go my wrist, please!" said Cardew quietly, but with a hard note in his voice.

"Not to let you snatch my stake!" sneered the fat man. "Let it alone, you young thief!"

Crash!

At the word, Cardew's left hand came up, clenched and as hard as iron, and struck the fat man fairly on his flabby chin.

The rascal went over with a crash, and sprawled on the carpet.

Cardew was on his feet in a twinkling.

There was a buzz round the table. All eyes were turned upon the startling scene.

Mr. Lodgey's thick lips closed hard.

The fat gentleman staggered up. Cardew was coolly gathering up his winnings from the green cloth.

The fat man lurched towards him, spitting out curses. Probably he had never in his career as a gaming-house bully been knocked down so quickly and effectively, though he had probably had a good many hard knocks in his career. His mask had fallen off, revealing a hard, brutal face, pug nose, and little, ratty, glittering eyes, deeply sunken, and cheeks puffy and unhealthy with late hours and fast living. His unpleasant face was crimson with rage now, as he clutched at the St. Jim's junior.

Wildrake struck his clutching hand aside with a rap that made the fat man give a yelp of pain.

He turned on the Canadian junior.

"Good man!" said Cardew coolly.

He stuffed the notes into his pocket.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" exclaimed Mr. Lodgey.

"I'll smash him!" panted the fat man.

Wildrake drew close to Cardew as the latter faced the infuriated rascal. Evidently there was going to be a "row" now, as Cardew had more than half expected.

"Hands off," said Cardew between his teeth, "or——"

The man was rushing upon him.

Flabby as he was, he was big enough and heavy enough to have crushed the slim dandy of the Fourth in his grasp; but Cardew was not alone to face him. The two juniors stood shoulder to shoulder.

It was Wildrake's fist, clenched and as hard as iron, that met the fat gentleman on the chest and sent him staggering back.

Three or four of the punters detached themselves from the table and ran on the scene.

Wildrake did not need telling that they belonged to the establishment; he could guess that. Mr. Lodgey's confederates were mingled with the company, ready in case of a row.

"Back up!" grinned Cardew.

"Gentlemen!" gasped Mr. Lodgey.

"Call your bulldogs off, Lodgey, old scout!" chirruped Cardew. "Otherwise there'll be no end of a merry row."

"Throw them out!" called out somebody.

"I'll smash him!" roared the fat man.

"Gentlemen——"

Mr. Lodgey was anxious to make it clear that he had no personal concern in the "row," though Cardew was well aware that he had set the rascals on.

"Order, there!"

"Gentlemen——"

"Get on with the game!"

There was a sharp and fierce struggle. Wildrake found himself struggling with a wiry man who smelt strongly of tobacco and whisky. Cardew was in the grasp of two or three. A thievish hand was groping over him as he was held, and he knew that he was being robbed. Wildrake tore himself loose, sending his adversary spinning with a hefty blow on the chest, and rushed to Cardew's aid. For the time, at least, he forgot the miserable trick Cardew had played on him, in bringing him to such a den at all. For the moment he thought only of his comrade, robbed and hustled among the rascals of the gaming-house. The sturdy Canadian junior came with a rush on the struggling group, hitting out right and left.

For a moment Cardew was left free, panting.

"Come!" muttered Wildrake, and he grasped Cardew by the arm and hurried him to the door.

The curtain dropped behind them, shutting off the gaming-room. There was a buzz of voices behind them, but through it came the cold, droning voice of the croupier:

"Make your game, gentlemen—make your game!"

The game was going on. Little incidents like this did not disturb the even tenor of Mr. Lodgey's way.

Wildrake panted.

"Let's get out of this!"

"As soon as you like, old bean." Cardew was breathing hard, but he had recovered his coolness. "Enjoyed your night out?"

"Come on, for goodness' sake! The place makes me sick."

"Dear man!" smiled Cardew.

He led the way down the dusky passage to the door.

CHAPTER 8.

A Startling Discovery!

HONK, honk!

Wildrake breathed more freely when he sat in the car again, and the cool wind of the night blew on his face. Cardew lounged back on the cushions by his side, laughing softly. The car ran on through the moonlight.

"What an evenin'!" yawned Cardew. "How much did I win, Wildrake? Did you notice?"

"A great deal, I guess," answered Wildrake coldly.

"All gone—gone from my gaze like a beautiful dream," said Cardew, shrugging his shoulders.

"How——"

"They had it off me while I was scrappin'," said Cardew. "That was the dodge, of course. Some of my own money, too! Lot of good havin' a run of luck at la boule—what? It happens about once in a lifetime, an' when it happens——"

He laughed.

"You ought to have expected something of the kind," said Wildrake sharply. "It stands to reason that a professional gambler wouldn't let you get away with his money."

"It's not only that," said Cardew. "But Lodgey was ratty. Of course, that fat scamp was in the game with him. Lodgey doesn't know I know that, but I do know it. Lodgey was wild; he knows I know his game. I was playin' against him, you know, and rookin' him. Couldn't have done it without a run of luck, though. The ass! If he'd let me go on, it would all have run back. I shouldn't have left off till it was gone. But dear old Lodgey was ratty. Let's hope he will be in a better temper when I call again."

Wildrake stared.

"Do you mean to say that you'll ever go to that show again?" he exclaimed, in amazement.

"Why not?"

"Why not? I should think your lesson to-night was enough," said Wildrake. "Even if you win their beastly money, you won't be able to carry it away. And you'd never have the same luck again."

"True—too true!" sighed Cardew. "But I shall go again some day, when the spirit moves me. Thanks awfully for standin' by me as you did. If there had been two or three more like you, they wouldn't have cleaned me out. The odds were against us, dear boy. I'd be a little more careful next time."

"Next time!" said Wildrake. "I think you ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself, Cardew! I've got a bone to pick with you for taking me to such a show. You know I never expected—— Why did you do it?" demanded Wildrake, looking searchingly at the mocking face by his side.

"Why do I do anythin'?" yawned Cardew.

"I suppose you had a reason. You couldn't have thought I should like such a show."

"Dear man, it was rather amusin' to take a greenhorn there," explained Cardew. "I've been keepin' an eye on you, you know—admirin' your upright virtue an' impeccable integrity, and all that. I thought it would be no end amusin' to take you, an' watch results. I admit I'm surprised that you didn't fall to the game. Precious few fellows could have stood lookin' on without takin' a hand, if only for the experience, and once you played you'd go on. Savvy?"

Wildrake's jaw set grimly.

"You thought I might act like a blackguard, and you took me there to be tempted to do it, and you found it amusing?"

"You've got it."

"What sort of a chap do you call yourself?" said Wildrake, in wondering scorn. "You know how you've acted? You've acted like a rotten cad!"

Cardew winced.

"Only puttin' your giddy high principles to the test, old bean," he murmured apologetically.

"It was a cad's trick!" said Wildrake hotly. "If I'd been a weak fool——"

"Most fellows are!" murmured Cardew.

"All the more reason why they should be kept out of the way of temptation, then," said Wildrake. "I suppose you don't grasp that you've acted like a scoundrel!"

Cardew sat up.

"Wildrake!"

"Like a scoundrel!" said Wildrake. "That's the word. If you don't like it, you can lump it."

There was a long silence in the car as it ran on.

"And if I ever find out where that place is," said Wildrake, breaking the silence at last, "I shall inform the police."

"That's why I'm not lettin' you know where it is, O virtuous youth!" said Cardew sardonically.

"You ought to do so yourself!"

"Honour among thieves, you know," said Cardew, shaking his head, with a cynical grin.

"You were cheated and robbed there, and——"

"Quite so."

"That clears you of any concern for Lodgey, as you call him——"

"But the others?" murmured Cardew. "The sportin' gents who go there to be skinned? Rather rough to turn the bobbies on to them, what? You see, it's always a full house, and the bobbies would make a big bag if they ever dropped on the place. Can't be done, dear boy. Besides, I don't owe old Lodgey any grudge."

"You don't!" exclaimed Wildrake, in amazement.

"Not at all. He's only in his metier; every man to his business," said Cardew coolly. "Why should I owe him a grudge for bein' what I knew him to be? I can tell you, there are casinos on the Continent where you get a worse handlin' than that—a knife in your ribs if you're seen to leave with a pocket full of money. My beloved uncle has spun me yarns about them. You're found later with empty pockets, and it's called the suicide of a punter gone stony. My hat!" Cardew's eyes gleamed. "Some day I'm goin' to have a good time! Wait till I reach years of indiscretion; I'll paint the giddy Continent red from Amsterdam to Monte, same as dear old Uncle Lilburn."

Wildrake felt his anger dissipate. There was something like compassion in the glance he turned on Cardew.

"I suppose your uncle's a grown-up man?" he said.

"Eh! He's Lord Lilburn."

"And he talks of that kind of thing before you?"

Cardew chuckled.

"Dear man!" he said affectionately. "We're a shady family; my dear old granddad would still be one of the boys himself if it wasn't for the gout. His eldest son follows in his father's footsteps. So did my pater, as I hear, only he——" Cardew's face clouded. "Never mind my poor old pater. We're all bad hats, Wildrake; you've got nothin' like us in British Columbia—is it British

Columbia or Labrador you come from?"

"British Columbia," said Wildrake quietly, "and you're mistaken—we've got a good many of that sort; they're not called lords, though; they're called sharps."

Cardew burst into a laugh.

"I shall tell granddad that," he said. "But on your breezy old ranch, you really never found my sort—the worthless fag-end of an old fagged-out family. Oh, my hat! I'd like you to hear Uncle Lilburn talkin'. By gad! I'll run you home some day in the car, and——"

"You won't!" said Wildrake. "I guess I've no desire whatever to hear your uncle, Lord Lilburn, talking. I'm sorry for you; I believe you've got some decent points about you; but to-night you've acted towards me like a low-down blackguard. I was thinking I would give you a thundering good hammering for it to-morrow——"

"Oh, do!" said Cardew. "I expected that, if you didn't fall into the giddy snare. An' I can use my hands a little. I should keep you fairly busy for a while."

"I won't hammer you," said Wildrake. "I think you're more to be pitied than anything else."

"Pitied!"

Cardew's face flamed crimson.

"I guess so."

"You cheeky cad——"

"You're to be pitied," said Wildrake coolly. "You've got gifts; you're clever, and you use your chances only to make a fool of yourself. You dabble in silly wickedness, though you've got sense enough to know better. The best thing that could happen to you would be to lose your money, and have to turn out and work hard for your bread. That might make a man of you. You'll never be a man as it is."

Cardew set his teeth.

"I think I shall call on you to try that hammerin' to-morrow," he said. "And now shut up, unless you want to begin here, in the car."

Wildrake shrugged his shoulders, and was silent.

Not another word was spoken till the car stopped, but Cardew's face was hard and bitter. He could have forgiven anything but compassion; and this rough-and-ready fellow, from the backwoods, pitied him! Pitied the grandson of Lord Reckness, the elegant and wealthy dandy of the Fourth Form—the fellow who was envied by almost all who knew him. And deep down in Cardew's heart was the consciousness—which made him all the angrier—that Wildrake was right; that all the trappings of fortune, all the advantages of birth and title, could never make him the equal of that frank, manly nature that had the courage to despise vice and weakness, the strength of mind to resist temptation, or, rather, to regard it with contempt.

A sense of shame was upon Cardew, though he would not admit it even to himself. Why had he taken Wildrake to the gaming-den? Why would it have entertained him to see an upright nature sink to his own level? Wildrake had told him that it was the act of a scoundrel; and he knew that it was—the act of a blackguard at least. Beside the healthy, clean-minded Canadian boy, sitting beside him with a grim face, Cardew felt belittled; all his freaks of recklessness, his shady pleasures—what were they? They earned him Wildrake's compassion—the bitterest gift his proud nature could receive. He hated Wildrake at that moment, but he felt that he hated himself more. Why had he done this thing? What gnomish kink was there in his nature that drove him to such escapades? He could have borne envy, hatred, all uncharitableness, with a smiling calm—but contemptuous pity he——

He was glad when the car stopped.

He stepped out without a word, and Wildrake followed him. Cardew spoke a few words in a low tone to the chauffeur, and strode away towards the school. In a few minutes they dropped on the inner side of the wall of St. Jim's.

All was dark before them.

It was nearly three o'clock; the last light had long been extinguished in the school buildings.

In silence they threaded their way round the School House, and climbed to the leads under the box-room window.

Cardew had shut that window, but left it, of course, unfastened. Standing on the leads, he reached about the sill, and pushed at the sash. It did not move.

With a short, hard laugh he dropped his hands. Wildrake peered at him in the gloom.

"Why don't you open it?" he asked shortly.

"I can't!"

"Why not?"

"Because it's fastened inside."

CHAPTER 9.

Monty Lowther Does His Bit!

"FASTENED!"

Wildrake uttered the exclamation in startled tones. In an instant there flashed into his mind all that that might mean.

Cardew drove his hands into his pockets, and leaned against the window-sill. He, too, realised all that it might mean. But never had he been cooler than at that moment.

There was a mocking grin on his face. The bitter mood in the car had passed. Ralph Reckness Cardew was all himself again.

"But——" began Wildrake.

"We're shut out, dear boy," said Cardew. "We're booked for a night on the tiles. The merry Housemaster must have made a round after we'd left, and found the window unfastened. Put it down to some careless maid, I dare say, and fastened it. Or——"

"Or——" asked Wildrake.

"Or we've been bowled out," said Cardew coolly. "If we were missed from the dorm, they'd naturally look at the windows and fasten them. In that case, Mr. Railton will be sitting up for us—waitin' for us to ring at the door bell."

He laughed again.

"There was no light!" said Wildrake. "If the Housemaster was sitting up, there would be a light."

"By gad! That's true," said Cardew, puzzled. "Dashed if I catch on. No, we've not been missed. That's not it! Just some over-zealous master or prefect happened to blow into the box-room and find the window unfastened. Too much zeal, Mr. Easy!" Cardew chuckled. "We're done!"

"No other way of getting in?"

"Not without a burglar's outfit."

There was a silence. Cardew peered curiously at his companion's face.

"Why don't you begin raggin' me, for landin' you in this?" he asked.

"What rot! I came out of my own accord! We should have been landed like this just the same if you had played the game."

"You—you don't think I played the game with you?" asked Cardew hesitatingly.

"No!"

"I've booked myself to follow your lead, on our next day out, as you followed mine. I'm a chap of my word. You shall lead me over the highest peaks of frozen virtue, and I won't grouse."

"I intend to keep you to your word!" answered Wildrake coolly.

"Good! What's the programme?"

"That you'll learn when the time comes. It doesn't matter much now; the question at present is to get indoors."

Cardew gave a shrug.



The red ink was daubed on liberally, till Cardew had a complexion that would have made a Red Indian look pale beside him. Ink dropped from his chin and nose, and spotted the floor beneath the window. Monty Lowther stepped back at last to admire his handiwork. (*See page* 13.)

"Dear man, there's no way of gettin' indoors. We're out till mornin'."

"It may be possible to force the catch," said Wildrake. "Give me a bunk up to the window-sill, so that I can kneel on it, and I'll try with my knife."

"Try if you like, by all means."

Cardew gave the required help; and Wildrake, kneeling on the sill, opened his pocket-knife. He drove it between the sashes, and strove to force the catch back.

Snap!

The blade snapped off short.

"Satisfied?" asked Cardew, unmoved.

"My hat!" breathed Wildrake.

"What's the row now?"

"There's somebody in the box-room."

"Gad! Fairly caught!" said Cardew. "It's a giddy master waitin' for us to drop into his mouth like ripe plums! Deep old card! No good scuddin'. He'll have recognised us in this dashed moonlight, even if he doesn't know we're missin' from bed! Keep a stiff upper lip!"

"It's not a master," said Wildrake.

There was a glimmer of moonlight into the room, from the window, and it had given Kit Wildrake a start to see a shadowy form move within. But he was now watching it coolly. The glimmer on the panes made it difficult to see into the room; but Wildrake could discern that the figure was not tall enough to be that of a master or a Sixth Form prefect.

The shadowy form came closer to the window, and the face was pressed to the glass. Then Wildrake knew it.

"Lowther!" he said.

Cardew almost jumped.

"Monty Lowther—of the Shell! What the howlin' thunder is he doin' out of the dorm? He's one of the good boys—one of the dear little ducks! Is this some thumpin' jape of that silly ass?"

"He's opening the window!"

The lower sash came up a few inches. A voice whispered from within.

"Get off the sill."

"Why?" asked Wildrake.

"Because I sha'n't open the window unless you do," answered Monty Lowther.

Wildrake dropped back to the leads. The chins of the two juniors were on a level with the sill, and they looked fairly into the face of Monty Lowther as he pushed the sash higher and looked out.

Monty Lowther looked very sleepy.

"So you've come back?" he said, eyeing the two Fourth-Formers.

"Turned up like two bad pennies," answered Cardew lightly. "Quite sober, if you've any doubts on the point. Did you fasten the window?"

"Yes."

"Like your cheek! Let's get in!"

"Not yet, my infants," said Monty Lowther calmly. "Have you been here long?"

"Five minutes or so. Let us in!"

"I suppose it's past one o'clock——"

"Nearer three."

"Phew! No wonder I fell asleep while I was waiting for you," said Monty Lowther. "I thought even a blackguard like you, Cardew, would be in by twelve!"

"You don't know my size in blackguards, old bean. Are you settin' yourself up at that window as a permanent ornament?"

"Let us in, there's a good chap," said Wildrake quietly. "You're not called on to interfere in this, Lowther."

"Not with you, my dear man," answered Monty Lowther. "I sat up to jape Cardew. You're square, I know; I'm not going to judge you by the company you're keeping. But I've lost my beauty sleep for the sake of giving Cardew a lesson."

"Nothin' will induce you to mind your own bizney, I suppose?" inquired Cardew.

"I've made this my business," explained Lowther.

"You cheeky ass——"

"Dear boy, I'm going to bring you up in the way you should go," said Monty Lowther. "You want a lesson, and you're going to have one. It may save you from the sack some day."

Cardew gritted his teeth.

"I'm comin' in!" he said savagely. "If you try to stop me, Lowther, so much the worse for you!"

"Or for you," grinned Lowther.

"Hold on a minute——" began Wildrake. "Look here——"

"Oh, rats!" snapped Cardew. "I'm goin' in! I've got a set of knuckles ready for any chap that tries to stop me!"

He grasped the window-sill and pulled himself up, and plunged head and shoulders into the opening of the window.

In a moment Monty Lowther had grasped him by the back of the neck and pinned him down helplessly; and with his left hand he drew down the sash.

The sash came down till it touched Cardew's back, and could come down no farther. The dandy of the Fourth was a helpless prisoner—shut in the window! His legs lashed outside, his hands inside.

Monty Lowther stepped back, and surveyed him with an air of approval.

"Nice!" he remarked.

"You—you rotter!" breathed Cardew. "Let me loose! I——"

"Not yet, old top!"

Lowther picked up a thin wooden wedge, and forced it between the sash and the window-frame, so that the sash could not be raised by Cardew's efforts or by the help of Wildrake outside.

Then he went towards the box-room door.

"You rotter!" hissed Cardew. "You're not goin' to leave me like this!"

"Coming back, dear boy," smiled Lowther. "If you find it uncomfy, yell for the Housemaster. I dare say Mr. Railton would come up and let you loose, if you woke him."

"You rotter!"

Monty Lowther chuckled and quitted the box-room. Cardew writhed furiously in his imprisonment. He realised now that his attempt to enter had been exactly what the humorist of the Shell wanted; what he had planned, in fact. The sash was jammed; he could not move it. He could only wait, panting with rage, until Monty Lowther chose to return.

The minutes passed—five—ten minutes! Had Lowther gone back to bed, leaving him thus? Cardew could not believe that. Lowther was japing him, as he



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fully deserved, but he would not leave him to be discovered.

There was a sound of pattering bare feet at last. Monty Lowther was coming back, but he was not coming alone.

Cardew's furious eyes discerned six or seven dim forms in pyjamas crowding into the box-room.

The door was shut after them; and then an electric torch was turned on, and the box-room was lighted.

"Bai Jove!"

It was the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's was in his beautiful pyjamas; but he had not forgotten his eyeglass. He jammed that celebrated monocle into his eye, and fixed it upon Cardew with a withering look. Cardew recognised Blake, and Herries, and Digby of the Fourth, and Tom Merry and Manners of the Shell, along with Lowther. Evidently the humorous Monty had brought them there as witnesses.

"Cardew," said Arthur Augustus, "I am surpwised at you! I am shocked at you! It is neahly thwee in the mornin'! I wegard you as a disgwace to the school!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"I wefuse to shut up, Cardew! I am ashamed that you are a distant welation of mine!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I am vewy thankful that you are only a distant welation, howevah. I wegard you with uttah contempt! Bai Jove! Who is that?"

The box-room door opened.

Instantly Lowther shut off the light of the electric torch.

"All serene!" said Levison's voice.

Lowther turned on the light again. Levison came in, followed by Clive, and shut the door.

"Don't mind us," said Clive. "We want to see the little joke, whatever it is. Hallo! Cardew!"

Cardew turned a crimson face up to his chums.

"Make that fool release me!" he muttered thickly.

"Hands off!" said Lowther. "I'm not done yet! You fellows are simply here to see the show; I wouldn't be so selfish as to keep it to myself. Dear old Cardew went out to paint the town red. He's come home to be painted red himself. Makin' the punishment fit the crime, you know."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Keep back, you chaps!" he said. "This is Lowther's game! No chipping in!"

"Oh, we're not going to chip in!" said Clive coolly. "Cardew's asked for it, and he can have it!"

"Certainly!" said Levison.

"Gentlemen," said Monty Lowther, "the great exhibition of Futurist art is now about to begin! Cardew, old top, if you have tears, prepare to shed them now!"

Monty Lowther uncorked a bottle of red ink, and took a brush from his pocket. Cardew writhed convulsively.

"Keep off! I——"

"Don't wriggle, old scout, you'll hurt your back!" said Monty Lowther, soothingly.

"Keep off!"

"Dear boy, you've been painting the town red; I should have thought you'd like painting in red!" said Lowther. "Has your taste changed since you came home? Sorry, but you're going to have it!"

Cardew made a wild clutch at him. Tom Merry and Manners, laughing, took hold of his hands, and held them.

Then Lowther took his chin and lifted his head up, and started operations with the brush and ink.

The juniors looked on, grinning.

Cardew's face was already crimson with fury, but it was redder still when Monty Lowther had got through with his Futurist art.

The red ink was daubed on liberally, till Cardew had a complexion that would have made a Red Indian look pale beside him.

Ink dropped from his chin and nose, and spotted the floor beneath the window. Monty Lowther stepped back at last to admire his handiwork.

"Now let me in, you rotter!" said Cardew, in a tone of cold fury.

"Wait for the ink to dry, old top!"

"I—I——" Cardew choked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quiet, my infants!" murmured Blake. "If Railton hears you chortle he will want to know."

"Yaas, wathah! Ha, ha, ha!"

Wildrake, outside on the leads, was grinning now. Cardew's ordeal was over at last, and Monty Lowther released the window-sash, and he rolled in, panting.

"Step in, Wildrake!"

"None of that for me!" said the Canadian, laughing. "I guess I'd rather stay outside!"

"Honest Injun!" said Lowther.

"All right, then!"

Kit Wildrake climbed in, and the window was closed and fastened. Arthur Augustus' eyeglass turned on Wildrake in surprise.

"Bai Jove! You were out of bounds with that wottah, Wildwake?"

"Yes," said Wildrake shortly.

"I am surpwised at you, Wildwake!"

"Go hon!"

"Weally, deah boy——"

"Let's get back to the dorm!" chuckled Jack Blake. "Happy slumbers, Cardew! You'll dream of painting things red, and that's just in your line."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shush!"

The juniors, chuckling softly, filed out of the box-room, and vanished. Cardew stood still, in the glimmer of moonlight, palpitating with fury. He had a keen sense of the ridiculous; and he had been made to look completely ridiculous. A "night out" that ended in this ludicrous way could not be called dignified. Wildrake remained with him.

"Better get off to the dorm, Cardew," he said, at last. "No good staying here, you know!"

"I—I'll——" Cardew broke off. "What are you grinnin' at, you fool?"

"Was I grinning? Ha, ha! I—I mean—I guess—well, you do look a bit of a picture!" chuckled Wildrake. "Sorry! Still, it serves you right! You've got a lot to blush for, old scout, and you're blushing now, with a vengeance!"

"Get out, confound you!"

"Oh, I'll stick to you to the finish!" said Wildrake good-humouredly. "You've asked for what you've got, and you deserve it, and more, but you've got to get to your dorm. You want a wash before you turn in. Ha, ha——"

Cardew pushed savagely by him, and strode away in the dark. Wildrake followed him to the Fourth Form dormitory.

There, after the door had been carefully closed, a candle-end was lighted, and Cardew proceeded to rub and scrub, with a set, furious face. All the Fourth was awake now, and the juniors sat up in bed and watched Cardew.

There were chuckles and chortles up and down the dormitory.

It was some time before Cardew felt clean enough to go to bed. Then he blew out the candle, and turned in. He did not sleep at once—he was too enraged for that. But he lay silent, and did not answer any of the remarks that were addressed to him from the other beds. The last remark was a fat "He, he, he!" from Baggy Trimble; and then the hapless dandy of the Fourth was, at length, left in peace.

* * * * *

The next morning, when Ralph Reckness Cardew walked out into the quad before breakfast, his complexion was still of a rich pink.

In the Fourth Form room that morning Mr. Lathom glanced at him once or twice, curiously, no doubt struck by that unusual richness in his complexion. After morning lessons Kit Wildrake joined him in the passage.

"To-morrow's a half-holiday!" he said abruptly.

"Well?"

Cardew had not quite recovered his usual insouciant humour yet.

"I guess you remember our compact!" said Wildrake coolly. "I had a night out with you. You're going to have a day out with me!"

Cardew nodded.

"I'm a chap of my word!" he said. "We shall most likely wind up the day with a scrap. But I've no objection. You're leader, and I'll follow! Anythin' in the nature of fun?"

"Lots!" answered Wildrake. "Only I doubt whether you'll see the fun. But we must hope for the best!"

And with that he walked away, whistling. Cardew glanced after him rather uneasily. He did not quite know whether he liked Wildrake, or hated him; but he knew that he was looking forward to the "day out" with very considerable misgivings.

(Another grand long story of Wildrake and the Chums of St. Jim's next week, entitled: "HIS CHUMS AGAINST HIM!" By Martin Clifford. Make sure of ordering next week's copy of the GEM Library early.)

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Joy's Gossip

That Odious Baggy!

Dear Mr. Editor,—I was extremely surprised the other day to receive a message from my uncle, asking me to meet him in a quaint little market town some good few miles from St. Jim's. I had not the least idea that he thought of paying another visit to the country; but it was good news, and off I went on my bike and all on my lonesome. I will spare you a description of the buttercup fields I passed and all the rest of it, and cut along straight.

Uncle was not at the appointed place, opposite the little clock-house in the market square. He was not in sight; there was no indication that he meant to turn up, no message—nothing. But Baggy Trimble was. The horrid little person was staring into Morris', the pastrycook's.

I darted into shelter for fear he should see me. There was only just time. Then if Baggy did not come mooning up to the entrance of the telegraph office, into which I had popped! I made myself as small as I could and pretended to be writing a telegram. But I did not get far. Someone had been wasting the forms. I started, for I saw my name written with a pencil as blunt as a stick. "Joy meet me." "Please be by the clock." There were lots more attempts, and it was Baggy's handwriting. I knew it. He sent a letter to Doris last week.

The little toad had had the audacity to bring me all those miles on a bogus errand! And why?

I peered out of the window. Baggy had gone back to the survey of the pastrycook's. I was so angry! There was the detestable fellow waddling up and down. Now he looked at the clock, now at a cheesecake.

I saw it all. I felt very angry. I had snubbed Baggy roundly several times. Perhaps he wanted revenge. No, that was not it. I collected a few of the scrawled-on telegraph-forms and crammed them into my dorothy-bag. The Government would not want them. Baggy should have a lesson.

My bike was standing against the kerb. I strolled out of the office and stood idly fingering the bell, waiting for Baggy to look round. It was not for long. Baggy swung about, and his eye fell on me. He came across to me and raised his cap.

"Good-afternoon, Miss Joy!" he said. "Waitin' for someone?"

"I was," I said; "but I am not going to wait any longer. My uncle won't turn up now; and if he does, he can seek me in that pastrycook's. I am frightfully hungry!"

Baggy inquired if he might come, too. I knew he would follow me, so I said there was no objection. I had never seen Baggy eat before; but I managed to smile most of the time, and pretend it was all awfully jolly.

"You haven't done your tie right, Baggy," I said, as I ordered a fresh supply of tarts. "It should be more like this, you know."

I waggled Baggy's fat head this way and that, and the waitress smiled as she saw me rearrange the bow. Baggy grew impatient, but I was very hard to satisfy. Then I meant him to have a lesson he would not forget. There is no shame about Baggy. He pretended to feel for his money when the bill came; but, of course, he had not got any, so I paid and looked pleasant. I marched out of the shop. Baggy followed.

"I say," he said thickly, "you are not going to ride that blinking bike, are you?"

"My bike never blinks," I said. "But what has it to do with you?"

"I should like a walk," said Baggy.

"Very well," I replied, eager to oblige. "We can have a walk if that is really what you want, and I will push the machine. I have had about enough riding for to-day."

So we walked, and we walked, and we walked. It was quite a harmless little market town, and we were very soon out of it. I told Baggy that I much preferred the open country. Somehow I don't fancy he feels the same way. I said my bike liked woods and stiles and footpaths. When I asked my companion if he was really enjoying himself, he said he was, but he did not sound like it—though that was after he had sunk into a lot of ooze getting me water-lilies upon which I had set my heart.

I did not feel a bit sorry for Baggy when at last we emerged on an open road. There was no fingerpost, but I guessed that St. Jim's must have been at least fifteen miles away. It was getting late. Baggy took off his cap, mopped his shiny forehead, and sat down on the grass.

"Not tired, are you, Baggy?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, "I am rather. Aren't you?"

"Not in the least," I answered, as I prepared to mount my trusty bike.

"You—you—you aren't going to leave me, are you?" wailed Baggy, starting to his feet.

"I suppose I shall have to," I replied. "Pity you didn't bring your bicycle."

"But—but it ain't fair!" gasped out Baggy. "This lonely road ain't safe, y'know. There might be gipsies or something who'd run off with me!"

"Oh, I wouldn't worry about that if I were you!" I cried. "I don't suppose the gipsies will want you. Good-night, Baggy! You'll get back to St. Jim's before morning!"

"But I say!" panted the nasty little fellow, as he ran alongside. "I am not going to have it! I——"

"I'm afraid you are," I said, as I turned my head. "Next time you send a telegram you will be more careful, perhaps!"

Baggy dropped out of sight. I enjoyed my ride home. I knew the nice walk would do Baggy a world of good. I could not be held responsible that he had not brought his bike, could I? And I did pay for his enormous meal. I am thankful Baggy is not my brother!

JOY.



"Good-bye, Baggy! You'll get back to St. Jim's before the morning!"



The INVISIBLE HAND



JOHN SHARPE.

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.

New Readers Start Here.

John Sharpe, the great analytical detective, is engaged by Chief Burnett, of the Secret Service, to track down the band of organised and dangerous criminals operating under the guidance of Iron Hand, a fearless, clever man of dominating personality. Marna Black, one of the band of crooks, is captured, and 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 instructed to keep her real identity a secret even to Sharpe; but she often assists him and sends him information concerning the movements of the gang, and he is puzzled to know just where it comes from.

Iron Hand has a number of hiding-places in different parts of the country, which are referred to as "Nests," the most important of which is Eagle's Nest, situated on a deserted cliff. The leader's chief assistants are Potsdam and Black Flag. John Sharpe has had many big tussles with the gang, and has foiled many of their deepest schemes. Iron Hand has robbed Colonel Bledson, the Cattle King, of a casket of valuable jewels, and he takes them to his assistant in Chinatown, Wong Li, to take care of.

Sharpe succeeds in getting the jewels, and he hides them in a well. But the gang get on his track, and they tie the detective to the bow of a motor-boat. Colonel Bledson rushes to the rescue, and a tramp on the wharf tells him what has happened.

(Now read on.)

Just In Time.

COLONEL BLEDSON took out his note-case, and handed half-a-sovereign to the tramp, who seized it eagerly, with gloating eyes.

"Come on!" he shouted to the others. "We must hurry along and see if anything can be done for poor old Sharpe."

The three men scrambled back to their motor-car, and the chauffeur started the engine and dashed away in the direction of Shipwreck Point. It was seen that the motor-boat to which Sharpe was tied was now rapidly heading towards a forbidding line of cliffs.

The motor-car whirled along at top speed, and all the time Bledson urged the chauffeur to go faster and faster. He was very excited, and was frantically waving his arms. Fortunately, John Sharpe still kept consciousness, and he fought hard to free an arm or a leg. All the time the spray was dashing over him with great force.

The boat was now but a short distance from the cliffs, and the detective, struggling fiercely, had succeeded in freeing one leg. Then he looked ahead, and was aghast to see the surf pounding hard against the rocks.

The motor-car had now reached its destination, and Colonel Bledson ordered the chauffeur to stop, and all the occupants alighted from the car and rushed to the edge of the cliff. The cowboys carried their rifles with them.

Everyone looked down horrified at the dangerous rocks towards which the motor-boat was carrying the helpless Sharpe.

The detective, still struggling fiercely, shuddered as he saw ahead almost certain death.

The men stood paralysed on the shore, which was something like a hundred feet from the boat. Then Bledson cried out in desperation:

"He's doomed!"

But a sudden desperate idea had occurred to Cactus Bill.

"Not if we can stop that engine!" shouted the burly cowboy, in a voice feverish with excitement.

Bledson and the others at once grasped the idea, and at that moment the cowboys raised their rifles and aimed at the motor-boat. They took quick sights, and fired rapidly.

The two Westerners were splendid shots, and their bullets struck all around the little cabin on the boat, and splintered their way through the woodwork. The boat continued its progress towards the shore, when suddenly it stopped and slowed down.

The shooting of the cowboys had been successful, but they were so intent on their job that they did not notice this until Bledson shouted out:

"All right; you've stopped the engine!"

The trio now were very excited, and one of the men pointed to a side of the cliff, indicating a way to get down. The motor-boat, with Sharpe still tied to it, continued to drift towards the shore, bow on, and the detective, who had succeeded in freeing his right leg, thrust it out to act as a buffer between him and the rocks. This move was successful, for the boat turned sideways, and drifted slowly away from them.

The chauffeur, who had noticed a small boat a little way along, made off in that direction, while Bledson and the cowboys continued their progress towards Sharpe.

Just then a huge wave drove the boat in sideways to the shore, and Bledson and his assistants were just in time to ward it off and prevent it smashing to pieces on the rocks. Then, as swift as lightning, he leaped on board and hurried to the bow, drawing his pocket-knife as he went.

By this time the chauffeur had arrived at the place where a small motor-dinghy was moored. He started the engine, and drove off in the direction of Sharpe's boat.

Bledson lost no time in cutting Sharpe's bonds and dragging him on board, while the two cowboys also made themselves useful by holding the boat from dashing on the rocks.

The chauffeur's newly-acquired boat was now nearing, and he managed to throw them a line, which was speedily fastened to the stern of the larger boat. The chauffeur indicated that he had control, and Bledson and Sharpe leaped ashore. The smaller boat then pulled the larger one safely away from the rocks.

Sharpe, Bledson, and the cowboys next commenced their climb up the rocks in order to gain the top.

"Where do we go now, Sharpe?" inquired Bledson, after they had exchanged greetings and the detective had related the story of his thrilling experiences of the last few days.

Sharpe smiled.

"There is no time to be lost!" he said. "We're going back for those jewels at once at the bottom of the well under Nest 1."

In spite of his many perils and hardships, the plucky detective still had the courage of a dozen men in him, and he was even now anxious to try further conclusions with Iron Hand.

The whole party entered the car, and Detective John Sharpe took the wheel, and they were soon well on their way again.

The Next Move.

AT Wong Li's office, the Chinese merchant was boastfully telling Iron Hand how he had managed to dispose of John Sharpe. Besides these two, Anne Crawford, still posing as Marna Black, the woman crook, and the notorious Potsdam and Black Flag were there.

Iron Hand roared with laughter as the crafty and cruel Wong Li related how he had tied the detective to the bow of the motor-boat, and sent him to his doom; but Iron Hand had been so often disappointed that he did not feel inclined to take any more risks.

Turning to his second-in-command, Potsdam, he said:

"You had better search the shore and verify Sharpe's death. You know what a slippery customer he is."

Then he spoke to his able lieutenant, Black Flag.

"You," he said, "can watch Bledson's office."

The man departed, and Iron Hand consulted with Wong Li. Although an

apparently interested listener, Anne was horrified to hear of the terrible fate of John Sharpe.

"I am convinced the jewels are hidden in Nest 1," Iron Hand told Wong Li. "I'll spend the night here, and in the morning we'll search for them."

The yellow man nodded approval at this agreement, while Anne rose and bid them good-night, saying that she was tired, and would go to her room.

Iron Hand and Wong Li continued to discuss matters of importance well into the small hours of the night.

Anne went straight to her rest-room again, and her faithful assistant, Lee Chow, was not long in coming to her in order to see of what use he could be. The poor girl was still worrying over the report of Sharpe's death.

Suddenly she called Lee Chow to her side, and the devoted servant bowed humbly.

"Go quick!" she said to him. "Search the shore, and bring news of Sharpe and his boat!"

The yellow man bowed and left the presence of the girl whose kindness to him he could never forget, and Anne sank down in a very despondent mood.

John Sharpe drove the party back to another isolated wharf which he knew was also connected to the opening of the sewer that led to the secret well under Nest 1.

Bledson, Honeydew, and Cactus Bill were thoroughly excited over their new adventure. Sharpe gave them orders to keep a good look-out lest they be observed. Then they made for the small skiff which was moored to the wharf.

The four men got into this, untied it, and rowed towards the sewer entrance. Sharpe was carrying with him an unlighted lantern.

Arriving at the sewer opening, the detective lit the lantern, and the skiff was driven into the tunnel, but this was so narrow that it was quite impossible for them to use the oars naturally, so they pushed the boat along as well as they could.

At last they arrived at the well, and Sharpe held up the lantern in order to verify their location; then, turning to the others, he informed them that this was the place where he dropped the jewel-case.

Cactus Bill volunteered to dive for it, and started making preparations. But suddenly, Sharpe, looking round, stopped him, for he saw the sluice-gates at one side, and he instructed them to push the boat over towards them. Then the detective opened the gate, and the water started to rush out.

It was a difficult job for the four men to hold the skiff from being swept back into the tunnel by the flow of water. At last all the water receded, and revealed the bottom of the well. The bottom of the well was on a higher level than the sewer, so the skiff still floated.

The jewel-case was plainly visible to them, and Sharpe hurriedly picked it up and showed it to Bledson and the others, who were thoroughly delighted.

The lid of the casket was at once opened, and Bledson examined the jewels to verify the contents, and when he was satisfied that they were indeed the long-lost gems, the party made preparations for the return journey.

Hot on the Trail !

INTO Anne's rest-room Lee Chow, hot and excited, suddenly entered. "White man escape," he told the delighted girl. "Boat at dock with bullet-holes in the cabin!"

She was elated over this glorious news, and, thanking Lee Chow, somewhat impatiently put him to one side, for there was still much important work to be done, and time was precious.

Anne thought for a moment, and reasoned out the situation.

"If he has really escaped," she reflected, "he will almost certainly return to Nest 1 for the jewels."

She gave some hasty instructions to Lee Chow, and then, opening the door, peered out carefully. Seeing that there was no one about, she departed, and made her way straight for the Chinese den above the well. Then she tiptoed to the panel which led to the ladder reaching down to the well.

It was quite dark, and a ray of light, coming from Sharpe's lantern below, was reflected on her face. She could not have been better pleased with the sight that met her gaze.

There was Sharpe, alive and well again, and with the jewels in his hands!

Meanwhile, there was great activity in Wong Li's office, for suddenly Potsdam burst in and interrupted the deliberations of Iron Hand and the yellow man by reporting that Sharpe had escaped once again.

The leader of the gang could scarcely believe what he heard. Again the detective had foiled him! His frame shook with rage. Then, recovering his senses, he realised that in all possibility the detective would again risk his life by returning to Nest 1.

He told Wong Li to summon several assistants, and then ordered them to go at once to the sewer opening.

"Let no one escape!" he thundered.

The Chinamen rushed out towards Nest 1, intent on carrying out the orders of the chief.

Anne, who was still intently watching what was going on below, suddenly registered tense alarm on her face, and she ducked back out of sight. She had just time to go back through the panel leading to the well, when Iron Hand, Wong Li, and Potsdam entered. They at once looked round for signs of Sharpe. Then they noticed that the panel to the well was open, and they rushed towards it.

Iron Hand, followed by Potsdam and the others, hurried down the ladder, and the fact that the water had been let out of the well was revealed to them. Iron Hand quickly surmised the truth of the situation.

"Fool that I was," he muttered, "not to have known that he hid them there!"

He called upon his second-in-command and the others to follow his lead, and they all waded along with their weapons ready.

The skiff containing Sharpe and his friends still drifted merrily along, until presently the party came to a manhole, and, indicating it, the detective said:

"Here's a quick way out of here!"

The cowboys and Colonel Bledson made a pyramid of themselves for Sharpe, who quickly climbed up this novel ladder and reached the manhole, and Sharpe was thus able to pull himself through. When he emerged, he found himself in a deserted street, and as it was night it was quite dark.

Sharpe reached down in order to give Bledson a lift. Then Honeydew climbed up on the shoulders of Cactus Bill, and he in turn was pulled up by John Sharpe.

Two leather belts were then tied together, and this was lowered and Cactus Bill was soon yanked up also; but before leaving he gave the skiff a hefty kick which sent it drifting further along the sewer, so that its presence there should not give the game away. Then the cover of the manhole was replaced, and all four walked away well pleased with themselves.

Iron Hand and his party continued to wade through the sewer, pausing every now and again to flash the light around. Presently the manhole was disclosed, but the leader did not suspect that Sharpe made his escape that way, and they continued on their journey.

After much grumbling and cursing, they reached the end and swam towards the wharf, and they came in for a warm reception which they did not expect: for the Chinamen whom Wong Li had ordered to watch the entrance, in the belief that they were Sharpe and his party, leaped on them.

The yellow men pummelled Iron Hand and Potsdam round the wharf in an endeavour to overpower them, and the others were also fighting for all they were worth, until Wong Li, who saw what was going on, ordered his men to stop. The Chinamen then released the two, and were able to recognise them.

The two leaders of the gang were naturally very annoyed and angry at being treated in this disrespectful manner; but they could not but realise that the mistake was unintentional. The leader was even more wrathful over his failure to catch Sharpe.

"Too late!" he growled. "They have escaped us! We'll go back and wait for a report from Black Flag."

Potsdam was still growling over the rough time he had been given by them. He was a bad-tempered brute, and as he walked away, he swore vengeance against the Chinamen who had so upset his dignity.

Shadowed !

AT the table in Bledson's office Sharpe and the cowboys were seated. They had sandwiches and other refreshments all round them, which they were consuming with great vigour, for they were all very thirsty and hungry after their exertions.

The jewel-case also rested upon the table, and everybody, especially the jovial Cattle King, was delighted at the recovery of them. Colonel Bledson vowed that he would take great care of them this time.

They were so engrossed in their conversation that no one realised for a moment that a servant of Iron Hand was but a short distance away from them. Black Flag had succeeded very cautiously in entering the hall outside the panelled door of Bledson's office, and at this moment he had tiptoed close enough to be able to hear what was going on.

Bledson had left the door slightly ajar, and the man could not only hear, but also see what was going on. Stealthily he pushed the door open a little further, and this was unnoticed by anybody in the room.

Sharpe and Bledson had been talking over plans, then the detective remarked that he would go to the ranch belonging to Colonel Bledson, and see the treasure placed where he had got men enough to keep it safe.

The Cattle King thanked him heartily, and the cowboys said that once the jewels got on the ranch, no power on earth could get them away.

Once again the colonel desired to reward John Sharpe for his great services.

But the detective would not hear of this, and replied simply:

"I am on Government Service."

Bledson could only express his great admiration for the detective's cleverness and pluck. At length he rose from his seat.

"Then it's agreed that Honeydew and I will take the trail in the morning, and that you and Cactus Bill will bring the treasure in my car through Avalanche Pass. You'll drive the car yourself."

The sneaking Black Flag smiled with satisfaction when he heard all these plans in detail.

The detective nodded in reply.

"We'll fix up a dummy box for you, and you can lead them on a wild goose chase," he said laughingly. "We'll carry the real box in the motor."

Black Flag pricked up his ears again.

"Right! I'll have a big bunch of cowboys meet us at the station, declared Colonel Bledson, the Western rancher. "Now we'd better turn in; it's getting late!" Honeydew can sleep by the window, Cactus Bill by the door—they're tough enough for anything—and you and I in the outside office."

It was no hardship for Bledson or his assistants to sleep anywhere. They had, in fact, spent the night in far more uncomfortable places than this. The colonel then took hold of the jewel-case and placed it in his safe, closing and locking the door securely after him.

Black Flag had now obtained all the information he desired, and he considered it would be wise for him to make himself scarce as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, Honeydew, who was dead-tired, had already gone to his place by the window. He arranged his coat for a pillow, and laid down. Cactus Bill made his way to his "bunk" by the door, and Bledson started for the outer office. As he did so Sharpe said:

"I guess I'll take a look round before settling down."

He went over to the hall door, making Cactus Bill move, much to his annoyance, for he was already half asleep.

Sharpe opened the door and went into the hall, but saw nothing to attract his attention. Then he commenced to close the door after him, and at that moment he felt something on the knob, which caused him to raise his hand and look at the palm.

There was a fragment of damp earth clinging to it, and the detective's suspicions were immediately aroused. He looked at the knob again, wiped his hand over it, and discovered more dirt. He thought for a moment, and suddenly took it into his head to go outside and investigate.

The reason for the grime on the handle was soon apparent to him. Outside on the wet, muddy pavement he could distinctly see the marks of the palm of a man's hand, who had evidently crawled along in the dark in order to avoid possible detection as he entered the office.

Sharpe was convinced that their actions in the office had been closely watched, and he smiled to himself. When he went back into the office again Honeydew and Cactus Bill were sound asleep.

Sharpe closed the door, but did not lock it. Then he extinguished many of the lights in the office, leaving one burning to provide a dim light in case it were necessary. After this he made his way again to the outer office, where Bledson had already settled himself comfortably in a chair, leaving a couch for Sharpe.

The detective considered it necessary to arouse Bledson, in order to acquaint him of his discovery. He showed him the mud on his palm, and informed him of the hand-prints on the pavement outside.

"Iron Hand's agents have undoubtedly overheard," he explained. "This man was probably sent to break in the safe. If Iron Hand comes for the jewels tonight, we'll bag him; if not, we'll play a fine trick on them."

Bledson smiled. He had every confidence in Sharpe, and felt sure that he would prevent the jewels from being stolen. He knew that he would not make the same mistake that his two cowboys did. Then, before dropping off to sleep, he asked somewhat anxiously what arrangements the detective had in mind about to-morrow.

"It will be quite all right," he replied, in answer to the Cattle King's question. "If only I can get Iron Hand and his gang at your ranch, we'll fix him beautifully then!"

At this, Colonel Bledson drew himself up, and with considerable pride he boasted of what his men would do if only they had an opportunity to get Iron Hand and his gang at the ranch. "He'll meet the fiercest crowd of cowboys he ever set eyes on," concluded the Westerner, with eminent satisfaction.

Detective Sharpe was also feeling perfectly satisfied with the turn of events, and somehow or other he felt that at last success would come to him.

Black Flag, full of the information he had obtained, lost no time in returning to Wong Li's office, where he met Iron Hand, Potsdam and Anne Crawford. He related exactly what he had overheard and seen at the colonel's office. For once in a way the leader was quite pleased.

"Good!" he exclaimed, when this dangerous and villainous servant of his had finished his story.

"We'll follow Sharpe, and get the jewels."

Then, turning to Anne Crawford, he said:

"Marna, you will at once go after Bledson, and get on his ranch by some means or other, in case there is any slip in the plans. You will be of great use to us there!"

Anne Crawford smiled. This was just what she wanted.

"You can rely on me to do my share," she answered readily.

Black Flag was listening very attentively to all that was being said, and then when the leader finished he asked with enthusiasm:

"Will not the master permit me to try for the treasure to-night?"

Iron Hand roared with laughter. It was an irritating way of his to belittle any of his servants whenever an opportunity availed itself.

"Try if you like," he said, in a depreciating manner, "but it is certain to prove useless. Sharpe will not be caught napping so easily."

Potsdam, who had so far remained silent, said that he agreed with his leader, and Iron Hand then outlined his own plans to the company.

A Clever Ruse!

BLACK FLAG, accompanied by another of Iron Hand's gang, stealthily approached the door of Bledson's office for the second time. For a while they listened outside, and in the dim light it could be seen that they both carried revolvers, while, in addition, Black Flag held a powerful flashlight.

A minute or two later he quietly opened the door and entered the office, followed by his assistant.

Cactus Bill and Honeydew were still heavily asleep, and the gangster behind Black Flag stood by the open door ready with his revolver if either of them roused.

Presently Black Flag went over to the safe; then, turning on his flashlight, he began to experiment with the combination lock. He was tense and eager, and showed every hope of being successful in opening the door.

The other man stood looking toward Black Flag, with his finger on the trigger of his revolver, ready to pull it at any moment.

Then suddenly Cactus Bill moved restlessly on the floor, but it was only for a moment, and he quietened down again. This incident gave the other gangster a rare fright, and he breathed a sigh of relief, and wiped the perspiration from his brow, when he saw that the man was not likely to awake. His nerves were of the shaky order.

Black Flag was still working desperately at the combination lock, endeavouring to hold his breath in an effort to remain perfectly quiet. Presently he paused in his labour, and turned round. Seeing that all was well, he set to work again with renewed energy.

The two men were so intent upon the object in view that they did not notice that the door of the outer office was opening very slowly. Finally, through the opening, the face of John Sharpe, the detective, appeared!

In a flash his sharp eyes took in everything that was going on in the office. A quiet smile of amusement passed over his face, and then he poked a revolver through the small opening in the door, and carefully aimed it.

Slowly the weapon was raised; then, when it reached the horizontal, it paused an instant, as though it was the detective's purpose to shoot the gangster at whom it was levelled; but it remained steady only for a moment. The holder had changed his mind.

The revolver continued upwards, until at last it pointed towards the ceiling, then suddenly the detective fired several shots in quick succession.

Black Flag, who did not expect anything so alarming as this, was scared stiff! Summoning up courage, he glanced around. The villain was trembling and shaking so violently that he could scarcely move. His muscles refused to work, but the nervy gangster was even more scared.

His revolver dropped to the ground with a thud, and his face was full of agonised fear as he looked around. The terrified Black Flag at last leaped to his feet.

Cactus Bill, groaning at being so rudely awakened, began to kick and turn, while the other gangster decided that it was time for him to clear, and he also made a wild dash for the door, but he only succeeded in tripping over the feet of the cowboy; and Black Flag, in his effort to escape, almost stumbled, too. At length he managed to make his exit, however, and he was quickly followed by his panic-stricken assistant. Both considered themselves very fortunate to get clear.

Honeydew had now awakened, and he was looking round in a sleepy, puzzled manner. Both cowboys had now quite come to the conclusion that there was something happening somewhere, and at the sound of scampering feet they both jumped up, clutched for their guns, and looked round for the enemy.

A moment later they were confronted by the detective, who was smiling pleasantly. Colonel Bledson was the next to arrive on the scene. He was all ready for action, too!

(This amazing story will be continued in next week's GEM.)

:: ANSWERS TO READERS. ::

"A FRIEND OF CARDEW" (Repton).—I think Ralph Reckness Cardew has about seventy-five thousand GEM readers who hold him to be their favourite schoolboy. Cardew has many pastimes. He takes a considerable interest in wood-carving, dancing and journalism. How much money is Racke's father worth? I really couldn't say. It is almost unlimited. He allows "Young Moneybags" to have every mortal thing he sets his heart on. I shall certainly speak to Mr. Martin Clifford on the subject of introducing Racke's sister, Gladys Sylvaine. I can tell you, the story in which she makes her appearance will be very interesting. Be sure to back up the "Boys' Herald" and GEM for all you are worth. I will think over the idea in which Herr Schneider and Monsieur Morny are at strife again. What did you think of "Talbot's Darkest Hour"? I think that was the story you wished to see appear.

"HANDSOME HAROLD" (Lincoln).—Ralph Reckness Cardew has spent about ten pounds on manicure sets since he has been at St. Jim's. Baggy's manicure set, comprising files, emery boards, polishers, cuticle scissors, and buffers, and all the rest of the paraphernalia, are contained in one object—his teeth.

E. M. H. (Hull). — Here are the answers to your questions. No. 1. Can Cardew play any musical instruments? I am afraid my answer will rather disappoint you. He has tried his hand at almost every instrument going, but had neither the will nor the inclination to endure the drudgery of practising. His sole accomplishments in this direction are only on such things as a comb and paper. But Ralph has a musical ear, and can tell a good opera or comedy. No. 2. Can Cardew dance? Yes. No. 3. Is he a Boy Scout? No. No. 4. What are the colours of Doris Levison's hair and eyes? Light-brown hair, blue eyes. No. 5. Trimble is smallest in the Fourth. He is 4 ft. 11 ins. No. 6. Cecilie Holmes has not been forgotten, my chum.

"ADOLPHUS" (Bournemouth). — There are quite a number of fellows at St. Jim's who do their hair in what you describe as the "onion fashion." Cardew, Racke, Cutts, Baker, Piggott, Scrope, Lumley-Lumley, and Clampe, to name a few. Cardew saw "Westward Ho!" He thought it a splendid piece of work, with the exception that the actor taking the part of Amyas Leigh had his hair swept back in this modern "onion fashion," and the period was in the time of the Armada!

"HILDA" (Liverpool).—Portraits of Lowther and Talbot have already appeared. The others will come along in due course. Monty Lowther is the best junior pianist at St. Jim's. I can't tell you the names of all the seniors who can play. Can Gussy play the piano? Well, according to Cardew, he can create a discord which speedily brings a person of authority on the scene to see if there is a murder taking place. D'Arcy minor is nearly thirteen.

"A RUGGER PLAYER" (St. Fillans).—The juniors at St. Jim's have a very small knowledge of Rugby. But I will see what can be done. The age of the "kids" you mention would be from 10½ to 12. The girls of Cliff House rarely ever come to St. Jim's. It is a considerable distance, and none of them know any boys there.

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CHAT ABOUT ST. JIM'S AND GREYFRIARS.

One would hardly credit the number of fancy ties possessed by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the famous swell of St. Jim's. Placed end to end, they would stretch as far as from St. Jim's to Greyfriars School. Irrespective of these, he has numerous other "ties," such as weekly visits to the tailor's, hosier's, hairdresser's, and so on.

Whilst searching through the letters from various readers, I have come across one asking me if Baggley Trimble, the Paul Pry of St. Jim's, has ever yet proved himself a hero. Well, seeing that he is able to master a dozen jam-tarts, four rabbit-pies, a dozen currant-buns, two tins of pineapple, and fourteen chocolate eclairs at one sitting comfortably, I firmly believe he is a hero of heroes.

I learn from good authority that Johnny Bull has soon proved his ability with bat and ball. Sure enough, his first hit of the season caused excitement in all quarters. Sir Hilton Popper benefited to the extent of a badly damaged greenhouse. It looks like proving very disastrous for our Johnny, as Sir Hilton will no doubt "Popper" word to the Head within a very short time.

To all those interested in the doings of the Greyfriars Eleven, the following is published: Highest batting figures for the week reads: Harry Wharton, 121; Bob Cherry, a century; Johnny Bull, 98; Frank Nugent, 89; whilst William George Bunter carried his bat for Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, of the "Boys' Herald," the fat porpoise knowing full well that the Nabob of Bhanipur was somewhat "flushed" at the time.

I cannot vouch for its correctness, but I have learned that David Llewellyn Wynn will never purchase any cake from the school tuckshop if Mrs. Taggles is wearing her spectacles. Probably this is due to the great magnetic powers they have. He has repeatedly told me that he thinks the price of cake is already far too exorbitant, without being dealt out with short measures.

Some of you may be interested to learn that William George Bunter, of the "Boys' Herald," has threatened to sever his friendship with both Alonzo and Peter Todd, purely on the grounds of jealousy. Well, I am very much of the opinion that it will be a great "weight" off the minds of the two cousins of Study No. 7 of the Remove Form.

Now, with the opening of the great cricket season, I hear that a concert is to be held in the "rag" in aid of subscriptions. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy is one of the many who have consented to oblige. I should hardly think he will be allowed to top the bill, as his tenor solos have already been weighed up on the "scale."

I don't think we shall hear of any further new masters at St. Jim's for a time, after the warming Dr. Grierson received. Without a doubt Bernard Glyn played the most important part with his gunpowder stunt, although I am requested to keep the affair dark for fear his cousin "Dina-might" hear about it.

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EDITORIAL.

My Dear Chums,—

As I fully expected, our two rollicking stories, "The Rebels of St. Jim's," and "Exiled From School," pleased you all very much. It is some time since we had yarns of this nature, and I am glad they proved so successful. I hope this week's story, "Chumming With Wildrake," will prove equally acceptable. Next week there will be an extra special story for you all, entitled: "His Chums Against Him!" and whatever you do, you must not miss this. It is written along the lines suggested to me by a large number of my chums in their letters. Tell all your friends what a splendid number next week's "Gem" will be! By the way, I have just received the startling news that Ernest Levison is missing from St. Jim's. Although every effort has been made by the school authorities to find him, the search has so far, proved unavailing. Everyone is wondering where this popular character can be. Next week, perhaps, some reason for his disappearance may come to light. Needless to say, everybody at St. Jim's is greatly concerned about the whole affair. "Where is Ernest Levison?" is the question everyone is asking. There is another splendid number of the "Boys' Herald" this week, and more valuable money prizes and delicious Tuck-Hampers are being given away in a simple and entertaining competition. Make up your mind to win one!

THE EDITOR.



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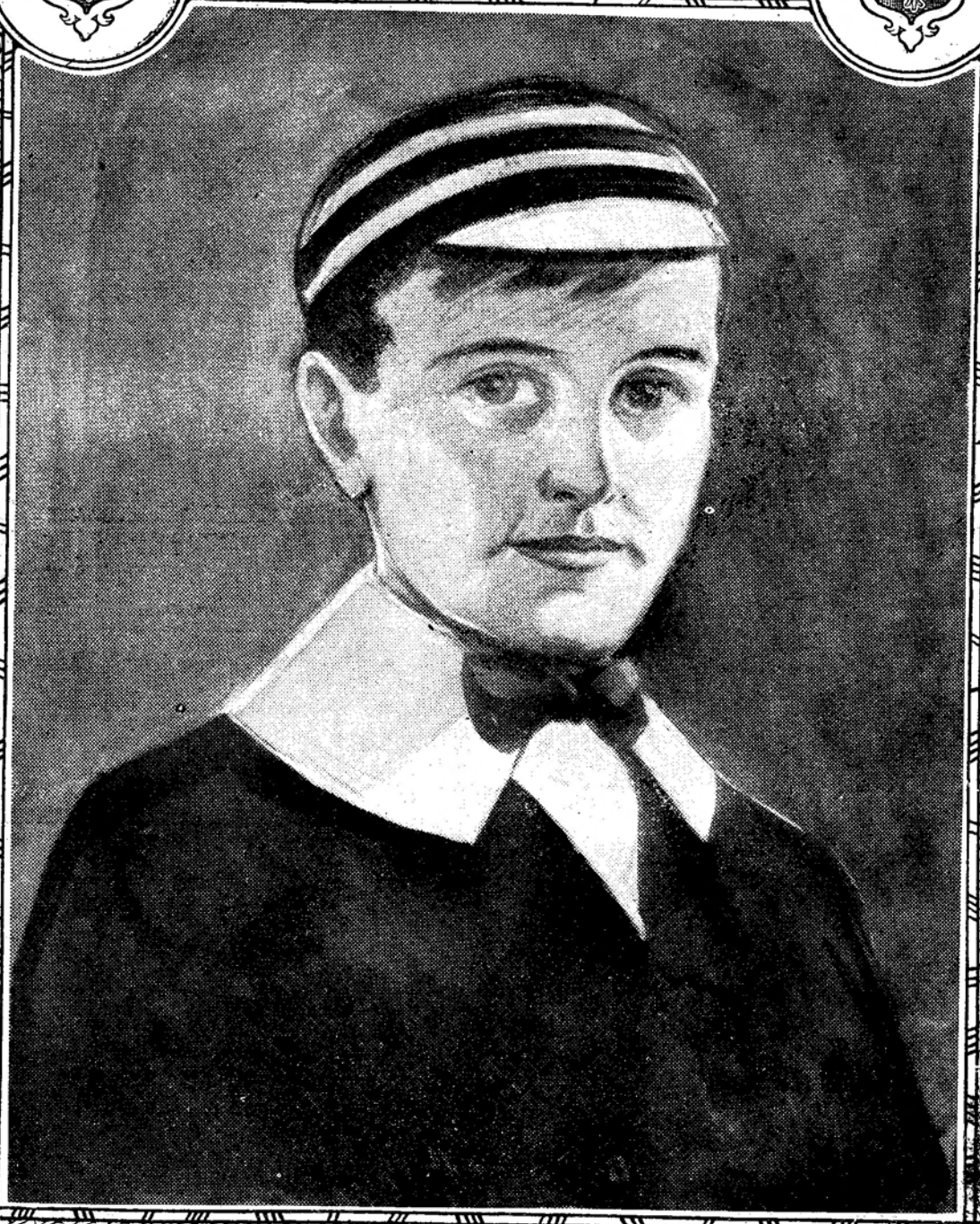
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