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SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES

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"RUN FOR IT!"

(The dare-devil juniors, out on a moonlight foray in the woods, make a dash to escape from the pursuing keepers. An incident from this week's magnificent school story.)



Address all letters: The Editor, The "Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4. Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

My dear Chums,—Mr. Martin Clifford has had heaps of triumphs since he first weighed in with his stirring yarns of St. Jim's. I take leave to doubt, however, whether he has ever scored higher than with his new holiday series. The summer would be incomplete without a rollicking set of stories about the holidays as enjoyed by the chums of the famous school. You will all remember some of the adventurous expeditions undertaken by Tom Merry & Co. They have been simply great. On these celebrated occasions Gussy has played up well. Never is D'Arcy seen to finer advantage than when on holiday. He is himself then, his brilliant, unfettered self; a princely personality able to evoke laughter without end. Well, the opening story of this season's holiday series will be found in the very next issue of the GEM. Its title indicates something of the subject. Look out for it!

"CHUMS OF THE RIVER!"
By Martin Clifford.

As usual, the clever author jumps right into the thick of things. The old favourites of St. Jim's start out to find new excitements up the river. If you have the correct holiday spirit in you it is never particularly difficult to discover something fresh and exhilarating, often even romantic, in the course of a trip of this sort. That's the beauty of a river. It is always new, while, of course, the St. Jim's fellows make the very most of their opportunities. There is sparkle and fun in the opening yarn, but that is not all. Some extremely surprising happenings have to be recorded, and D'Arcy simply shines, like his best "toppah," as the select company of summer adventurers push on their way. Tom Merry makes an excellent leader. His doughty

followers know he is the best man for the job. Even Gussy would admit this much, though he may show an inclination at times to strike out a line for himself. Make sure of next Wednesday's splendid yarn in the GEM. Tell your chums about those chums of St. Jim's who sallied forth and fifth in quest of adventure. The new story will establish a further record for summer tales, namely the lighthearted, jolly kind of stories for which the GEM is famed the world over.

"PUTTING MATTERS RIGHT!"
By Gordon Wallace.

This is a thrilling and adventurous story of the stalwart Chums of Thunder Creek. We know how, up to now, the six fine fellows have played up in grand style in the face of innumerable difficulties. In next week's story they will be found in the most awkward position yet. Everybody will be interested in the dexterous manner in which these true sportsmen acquit themselves. The odds are tremendous, and the author shows in vivid fashion some of the complex problems which must be faced in all kinds of industry. It is this way. Some utterly false idea is set going, and then rumour starts to make further mischief. It is on occasions such as these that cool, calm commonsense has to take a back seat for a time. The misapprehensions which exist at times are not to be got rid of in any sort of a hurry. Stir up strife, and you get a regular mix-up, with everything at sixes and sevens, and a peck of trouble. It is noteworthy how the Chums of Thunder Creek come to the rescue, and by their spirited, sportsmanlike tactics manage to avert irremediable disaster. Elkhorn Bend is just one of those places where hard work is called for. This is the rock-bottom fact which the Sportsmen realised, and they went in like men, and succeeded in setting things right. The task was Herculean. The spluttering train of malice and ill-report had a long start. I am quite sure that every true sport will revel in this yarn of sheer grit and tremendous excitement.

"REG O' THE RAILROAD!"
By Vincent Owen.

Those fellows who have had the good luck—and I do not hesitate to style it that—to see the long freight trains out West making their way onward across hundreds of miles of territory, will delight in this great yarn due on Wednesday next. The GEM has a myriad readers far away on the frontiers of our Empire. I was going to say they would relish this road patrol yarn more than others. That would not be accurate. The magnificent story appeals unerringly to everybody. But one thing it will do is to set you thinking of the priceless cargoes which do these immense journeys across the prairies, and across the mountains. It will put you wise as to the questionable actions of a certain so-called firm. Actually, this "firm" was a gang of freight stealers, men who stopped at nothing to seize the wealth which had been handed over to the stewardship of the railroad for safe transport from the wilds to the factories in the towns. Just read about the depot of mystery in the hills, and the missing freight-cars with their contents. It will all grip you. The fight which the thieves put up is described in such vivid style that you feel you are present; actually seeing what took place, and a witness of the courageous action of Reg, the plucky young representative of the law, a fellow who would not take defeat. He is just a type of the great service which faces death in the work of every day.

OPINIONS WANTED!

Please remember that I want your candid opinions regarding the amusing story in this week's issue of the GEM entitled, "Mike Makes a Motor-Car!" Is it what you want as a real mirth-provider? Does the resourceful and energetic Mike interest you? A few words on a postcard letting me know your impressions after reading this humorous tale would oblige. Don't forget.

A GRAND NEW COMPETITION!

This is on the way. It is something quite out of the way, and crammed full of interest, a perfect brain-wave on the part of its originator. The prize list is the finest yet. I shall have more to say shortly about the new feature. The Biggest Money Prizes ever offered!

THE "HOLIDAY ANNUAL."

There is a tremendous rush for the new volume. I hope those of my friends who have not as yet booked their orders will stand not on the order of doing so, but start right away for the newsagent's. It would be a pity to lose this splendid opportunity to possess a book which will be an unfailing companion and a real cheerer-up for months to come. Don't forget that this bumper budget of bright stories will be on sale next week, so you really must ORDER NOW!

YOUR EDITOR.

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GEM H., 1923.

TRUE CHUMS!



Ralph Reckness Cardew, in joining Racke and Crooke in their midnight poaching expedition, little realizes the extent of his folly until the truth is brought home to him in drastic fashion.

A Magnificent School Yarn of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By

Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

The Cardew Mystery!

"COMING down to the nets, Cardew?"

"Not to-day, old top—other business on," smiled Cardew.

Levison, of the Fourth Form, at St. Jim's, frowned, and gave his study chum Clive, a quick glance.

"Look here, Cardew," he said quietly. "We're getting just a little tired of this. How long is this palling with Racke going to go on?"

"Palling with Racke!" echoed Cardew, with faint surprise. "My dear man what do you mean?"

"You know jolly well what we mean, Cardew!" said Sidney Clive sharply. "What on earth has been the matter with you? You've taken to giving your own chums the go-by consistently lately—not that we've any claim on you; you're your own master, and if you're not keen on our company, well, we don't want to shove ourselves on you. But—"

"But we want to know how we stand," finished Levison grimly. "You can't be chums with us and with that cad Racke at the same time—you ought to know that, Cardew. It's bound to end in a split sooner or later."

Ralph Reckness Cardew sighed deeply.

"Excuse me, you fellows," he murmured, as if overcome. "But this is no end of a surprise to me, y'know. I'd no idea you chaps regarded my company—or is it my welfare—"

"Perhaps it's a little of both," said Clive gruffly. "You'll get nothing good out of chumming with Racke—and you know it, Cardew."

"But am I chummin' with dear old Racke?" questioned Cardew, smiling serenely. "Can't a fellow accompany a chap on little outings without becoming chummy—what? Besides, how do you know that I'm not trying to reform him—to snatch him as a brand from the burning—to save the reckless youth from goin' to the merry old how-wows? I might be, y'know."

Clive gave an impatient shrug. Great chums as the three juniors of Study No. 9 were, there were often times when Clive and Levison were annoyed and irritated by Cardew's sarcasm, his cynicism. And they were in no mood for it now.

Clive curbed his rising temper with an effort.

"Listen to me, Cardew," he said. "This may be a joke to you, but it isn't to us. You're getting rather too thick with Racke and his pals for our liking. It isn't our business, what—"

"Oh, you've discovered that?"

"Rats! Anyway, it's pretty plain you're acting the giddy ox, and—"

"What a chap for jumpin' to conclusions," sighed Cardew.

"What else can we think?" snapped Clive. "It's no good rotting, Cardew. It's come to this: either you drop Racke, or us? You can make your choice."

Cardew raised his eyebrows.

"You fellows amaze me—you do really," he said, in a tone

of mild reproof. "What, I ask, have I done to deserve this? I'd no idea when I started to honour dear old Racke with my fascinating company that I should be incurring your dreadful displeasure. This is a sad blow to me—"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" grunted Levison.

"Sorry—clean forgot you'd monopolised that avocation, old bean. However, as I was about to remark, you fellows can have no idea what a charming fellow Racke is—most entrancing conversationalist, y'know. What he doesn't know about gee-gees and starting prices—"

"The less we hear about Racke the better," snapped Clive. "Look here, are you coming down with us to the nets or not, Cardew?"

"If you must have the bitter truth," murmured Cardew sadly, "no; I am not, dear men."

"Going with that rotter, Racke, I suppose?"

"Exactly! You've guessed it, old bean!" yawned Cardew.

"To smoke and play cards or billiards, I expect, you idiot?"

"Misjudgin' me again!" groaned Cardew. "Not at all, dear man. We're goin' to wander hand in hand o'er Wayland Heath, to listen to the skylarks, but mainly to study wild life. Wouldn't care to come with us, I suppose?"

"You know jolly well we wouldn't, Cardew."

"Pity," smiled Cardew. "You'd enjoy it no end, old tops—especially dear old Racke's entrancin' conversation. However—Hullo! Here's dear old Tommy, with a fightin' gleam in his merry old eye."

There was a tramp of feet in the passage, and next moment Tom Merry, of the Shell, came into the study. Behind him were his chums, Lowther and Manners, and behind them were Blake, Herries, Digby, D'Arcy, and several more of the Fourth and Shell of St. Jim's; and all were in flannels, and looking business-like.

Levison and Clive looked rather surprised at the invasion; Cardew smiled serenely. He had already guessed more or less whom the crowd of juniors had come to interview.

"Not in flannels yet, you chaps," said Tom Merry, addressing Clive and Levison. "Buck up, then!"

"Ready in a few minutes, Merry," granted Clive. "We're just trying to persuade this lazy slacker to turn out."

Tom Merry looked at the smiling Cardew; so also did the rest of the juniors.

"That's just what we're here for," said Tom Merry grimly. "We've turned up in full force in order to help you to persuade Cardew. Between the lot of us I think we'll manage it."

"Sort of press-gang—what?" inquired Cardew blandly.

"Exactly! The fact is, we're getting just a little tired of your silly slacking, Cardew," said Tom Merry bluntly. "We don't mind so much chaps like Racke, or Mellish, or Trumble, missing cricket practice. They're hopeless duffers, and can go to pot. But you—"

"Little me," murmured Cardew encouragingly.

"Ass! But you have the makings of a fine cricketer,

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Cardew, and it's not right that you should be content to slack about as you've been doing lately," said Tom Merry firmly. "Anyway, we've decided to take you in hand, Cardew."

"Thanks, old bean," said Cardew airily. "Anythin' else?" "You'll find that enough," said Tom Merry grimly. "Are you coming down to the nets, Cardew?"

"Not to-day, old top!"

"Better come, there are a dozen of us here, and if you won't come willingly, we're going to yank you along by the scruff of your neck."

"Yaas, wathah! Better come, Cardew, you wotten slackah!" advised Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in a fatherly manner. "We'll cawwy you there if you don't."

"Your mistake, old tops?" said Cardew. "You won't!"

"Oh, and how will you stop us?" grinned Lowther.

"Like this!" said Cardew.

As he spoke, Cardew's lackadaisical manner left him suddenly, and he made a leap for the door. He went through the group of juniors like a knife through butter. At the door he paused for a fleeting second to change the key from the inside to the outside of the door, and next instant the door slammed behind him. The slam was followed by a sharp click.

Taken completely by surprise, the startled juniors blinked at each other for a moment, and then rushed at the locked door.

CHAPTER 2. On the Trail!

"MY hat! Locked in, by Jove!"

"The—the cheeky rotter!"

"We'll scrag the swanky slacker for this!"

"Weally, you fellows, this is the absolute limit, bai Jove!"

There were grim looks among the juniors in the locked study.

Clive and Levison looked very unhappy. They were angry with Cardew, and in full sympathy with the deputation of cricketers. But they could not forget that, after all, Cardew was their study-mate—their chum.

Tom Merry's face was red with anger. Not only had his authority been flouted, and he and his chums fooled, but it looked as if they were doomed to be stuck in the study for the afternoon—unless someone rescued them.

Thump, thump, thump!

In the hope of attracting attention, Blake, Herries, and Talbot kept up a continuous hammering on the locked door. The others watched them, fuming with angry impatience.

"We'll give the mad rotter a Form licking for this!" shouted Tom Merry. "Keep it up, you chaps—someone's bound to hear! It's no good hoping that idiot will—Hullo! Stop a minute, you chaps!"

The juniors ceased their thumping as a gentle knock sounded at the door. It was followed by a cool voice—Cardew's voice.

"You there, Tom Merry, old scout?"

Tom Merry approached the door, breathing hard.

"You—you rotter, Cardew!" he answered sharply. "Of course I'm here!"

"Good! I thought you'd be interested to hear that there's hardly a soul indoors—such a topping afternoon, y'know. Pity if you're stuck in here all the afternoon—what?"

"You'll get a Form licking for this, Cardew!"

"Splendid!" drawled Cardew. "Anxious to get down to the nets, I suppose, old scouts?"

"After we've dealt with you, you crass ass!" fumed Tom Merry. "Open this dashed door, you rotter!"

"Presently, perhaps," came Cardew's cool voice. "It's like this, Thomas, old son. I'm not over keen for cricket this afternoon. Got other pressing business on. If I let you out, you won't want me, will you? You'll let me go my own sweet way—what?"

"You—you—"

"Oh, let the slacker have his way! Let him go to pot!" shouted Blake angrily. "What's the good of mucking up a half?"

There was a roar of acclamation, and Tom Merry bit his lip hard. It went very much against the grain to give in to the dandy of the Fourth. But he knew that Cardew would be quite capable of leaving them; and to spend a half-holiday prisoners in a locked study was not to be thought of.

"All—all right, Cardew!" he hissed, through the keyhole. "We'll let you off practice. Now open this thundering door!"

"Good! By the way, what about that Form lickin', old top? Shall we call it off?"

"Open this door, hang you!"

"Good-bye!"

There was the sound of departing footsteps, and Tom Merry gave an alarmed yell.

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"All right, you rotter! We'll call that off! Open the door."

The footsteps returned and a soft chuckle reached the enraged juniors.

"Did you say 'Yes'?" called Cardew pleasantly.

"Y-yes, hang you!"

"Thanks! Of course, you'll give me your word that you won't attempt any—ahem!—physical correction; you'll call it pax, old bean?"

"Yes, hang you!"

"Good! I fancied you'd see reason, Tommy, somehow."

The key turned in the lock, and Blake dragged open the door. As the savage juniors trooped out, Cardew met them with a bland smile. Then he strolled away with his hands in his pockets.

Fuming with anger, the juniors watched the dandy strolling away. They were fairly itching to get their hands on him. But Tom Merry's word covered them all. Vengeance was "off."

Tom Merry breathed hard through his nose.

"I—I'll scrag that idiot one of these days!" he said, through his teeth. "He's fairly done us, but—but our time will come, you chaps. I suppose the silly fool's going off with his pal, Racke, Clive?"

"Fraid so!" grunted Clive.

"Well, he can go to pot after this, for me!" growled Tom.

"Chap who prefers Racke's doggy company and shady games to cricket and our company isn't worth troubling about. Blow him!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And in an extremely exasperated frame of mind, Tom Merry led his growling men out of the School House en route for the cricket-field. They were "fed-up" with Cardew for that afternoon. Clive and Levison closed their study door and made for the dormitory to change into flannels.

"Look here, Clive," said Levison abruptly. "It's time we put a stop to this. That silly duffer's up to no good or he wouldn't be so thick with Racke. We ought to chip in, you know."

"What can we do?" grunted Clive. "We don't even know where they go or what their game is!"

"We could find out," said Levison, his face grave and troubled. "Hang it all, he isn't like that cad, Racke—fond of rascality for its own sake. The silly ass does it out of sheer boredom—for the excitement and risk of it all. It's up to us as his pals to save the chump from himself. What about following them to see what the game—"

Levison broke off. They were traversing the Shell passage at the moment, and even as he spoke, the door of Study No. 7 opened and three juniors emerged. They were Racke, Crooke, and Cardew.

Crooke and Racke scowled at Levison and Clive, and strode along the passage; Cardew paused to give his chums a cheery smile, and then he followed the two black sheep.

"Here's our chance!" muttered Levison eagerly. "What about it, Clive?"

"You mean now?"

Levison nodded.

"Cardew will be wild if he knows we're watching him," said Clive slowly. "But—but you're right, Levison. Anyway, I'm on. What about cricket practice, though?"

"Blow cricket!" muttered Levison impatiently.

"Whether that ass likes it or not, we're going to keep a fatherly eye on him. Come on!"

The two juniors, their eyes gleaming now, went after Racke, Crooke, and Cardew. Whether Cardew was likely to resent their interest or not, they were determined to look after Cardew's interests—for his own good.

Apparently the three were in a hurry, for by the time Clive and Levison had reached the quad, they were just passing through the gates.

"Better keep them in sight," muttered Levison. "Buck up!"

The two hurried across the quad. Outside the gates they caught sight of their quarry a hundred yards ahead. Even the usual lackadaisical Cardew was striding along at quite a brisk pace—a fact that struck his chums as curious.

"Must have something unusually exciting on," remarked Clive.

"Nothing on specially in Rylcombe that I know of. I—My hat!"

Clive broke off with a whistle. The three figures ahead had paused suddenly, and then were seen to clamber over the stile that led on to the rough track across Wayland Heath. Both Clive and Levison were perplexed now.

"Can't be going to Wayland," said Levison, with a grim smile. "Old Cardew's too slack and lazy to walk the distance. Funny! Cardew said something about wandering over the heath—"

"To listen to the skylarks and to study wild life," sniffed Clive. "That's likely, isn't it! I can see Cardew doing that. I think I can spot the game now. The smoky duffers must



Peering over Clive's shoulders, Levison gazed out over the quiet, lonely heath. He saw three straggling figures in the distance, and the sun shone brightly on the long, glittering objects they carried. "My ha!" said Levison. "Shooing rabbits, I suppose!" (See page 6.)

be holding secret card-parties in the old mill. I'll bet anything that's it!"

"I don't know. Looks as if they're making for the old mill, anyway!" muttered Levison, frowning. "I can't think of any other place for them to visit, unless it's the old castle."

"It's the mill, right enough," grunted Clive. "It's a lonely spot and would just suit the rotters' games. Look! I told you so!"

Clive pointed across the gorse-covered heath. In the distance far away across the heath, stood the gaunt form of the old ruined mill topping a slight rise. And the juniors ahead of them had suddenly left the rough track leading to Wayland, and had started through the bush and heather in that direction.

"Making for the mill right enough!" said Clive grimly. "Look here, Levison, as we've started this job we may as well see it out. We're going to put a stop to Cardew's silly antics if we have to smash the blessed card-parties up to do it. Come on!"

Levison grinned slightly and followed his chum as he shinned over the stile on to the heath. When the South African junior once went on the warpath, he usually went the "whole hog," and made things hum.

But Levison was just as keen on putting a stop to Cardew's "silly antics" as was Clive, and next moment the two were hurrying across the breezy heath with the sweet smell of gorse and heather in their nostrils. They plodded on warily, ready to duck into cover at a second's warning.

But not once did those in front glance round—or, if they did, Clive and Levison failed to notice them. Presently the three vanished from sight over a distant ridge near the mill. But the trackers did not worry about that. It was scarcely necessary to keep their quarry in sight now; they were pretty certain as to their destination.

When next the old mill came into view there were no signs of Racke, Crooke, or Cardew. Apparently they had vanished within the mill.

CHAPTER 3. Trapped!

"THEY'RE safe inside now," said Clive. "Better go warily, though. If they spot us from the windows they'll keep us out, you can be sure."

Levison nodded and followed his chum cautiously up the rise towards the mill. Luckily there was plenty of cover, and a last rush from shelter took them up to the door of the crazy structure. It was closed, and outside Clive waited a moment listening his hand on the latch.

But no sound of voices came from within—no sound at all. Clive gave his chum a surprised look, and opened the door softly. A glance inside the gloomy interior showed that the apartment was empty.

"Rummy!" said Levison. "Must be upstairs." Clive stepped softly across the dusty, rubbish-covered floor, and his chum followed. They were making for the rickety staircase leading to the floor above. But they never reached it—then.

A sudden faint sound from the door made them wheel round, with gasps of alarm—too late! The sunlight streaming through the open doorway abruptly vanished, and the door went to with a slam, leaving them in pitch darkness.

"My hat!" yelled Clive. "We have been trapped." There was little doubt about that. As they rushed towards the door, they heard a whisper of voices and a low chuckle, well known to Clive and Levison.

"Cardew!" snapped Levison. "Quick!" Clive tore desperately at the door, guessing what it meant. He could hear someone fumbling with the latch.

"Cardew, you silly ass!" howled Clive furiously. "Let us out, you rotter! We know it's you."

Another soft chuckle and a splutter answered him, and then the sound of retreating footsteps reached the prisoners' ears.

Clive and Levison regarded each other speechlessly in the gloom for a moment. For the second time that

afternoon Cardew had done them—had locked a door upon them, making them prisoners.

It was the "limit."

"Well, I'm hanged!" choked Clive at last. "This is the outside edge, Levison. What asses we were to take it for granted they hadn't spotted us!"

"Must have done," groaned Levison. "Oh, won't the sarcastic beggar pull our legs about this! We fairly asked for it, though. I suppose he'll keep us penned up here all the blessed afternoon."

"Very likely," granted Clive irritably. "He'd do it like a shot, and think it a fine joke. Blow him! Sooner we start trying to get out the better."

But this was easier said than done. It was not the first visit of the two Fourth Formers to the mill, and they did not feel very hopeful. A moment's examination of the door showed them the helplessness of attempting to get out that way. Though black with age, it was built of stout timber, and resisted their utmost efforts. The juniors then turned their attention to the window.

This was small, and boarded up with strips of match-boarding. Clive's eyes fell upon an old, dusty packing-case in the corner, and he grasped it, intending to drag it under the window to stand on. As he pulled it away from the wall he gave a yell.

The box was not empty. It was turned on its side, and hidden within was a queer assortment of articles. There was a small spirit-stove, a tin of coffee, sugar, matches, biscuits, three or four cups, and last, but not least, a number of square packages.

Clive picked one up and blinked at it.

"So that's the game?" he breathed. "See what this is—a packet of pellets for an air-gun! I wonder—Come upstairs a sec."

Wonderingly, Levison followed his chum as he clattered up the rickety stairs to the floor above. There was another small window here, the glass and framework long ago departed; and it was unboarded. Clive looked out for some moments, and then he gave an exclamation.

"There they are! And the beggars have got air-guns," he gasped. "Look!"

Peering over his chum's shoulder, Levison gazed out over the quiet, lonely heath. He saw three straggling figures in the distance, and the sun shone brightly on long, glittering objects they carried—obviously guns.

"My hat!" muttered Levison. "What nerve! Shooting bunnies, I suppose. So that's what the asses are up to! I suppose this is their headquarters, and they keep their air-guns and stuff here. It's not as bad as we supposed, then. I feared they were visiting some rotten gambling den."

"It's bad enough, I fancy," granted Clive. "See where they're making for—Colonel Blunt's preserves. There aren't many bunnies on the heath, but there are plenty there."

"It's poaching," said Levison seriously. "There'd be a fearful row if they were caught."

"I should think there would!" said Clive. "But that reckless duffer would dare anything—the riskier the better. Anyway, it's Cardew's own funeral; if he wants to risk the sack, we can't stop him. He wouldn't let us, anyway. I'm fed up with him. Let's get out of this."

And Clive turned away from the window, his face clouded. Levison stopped to take a last look over the heath. Racke, Crooke, and Cardew were still going ahead towards the hazy stretch of woods bordering the heath which hid Rylcombe Manor from sight. He could recognise Cardew leading, while Racke and Crooke were dragging behind, taking odd pot-shots as they went.

"The mad fools!" breathed Levison, aghast. "If they're caught, it means the sack. You know what an old fire-eater the colonel is. I thought Cardew had more sense."

Clive granted, and was about to lead the way downstairs, when he stopped as his eye fell upon a loose floor-board.

"Give me a hand with this," he said grimly. "We'll use this as a battering-ram on that blessed window."

Levison grasped the idea, and with little difficulty the two juniors wrenched the floor-board up and carried it into the basement. They then began an onslaught on the window.

After five minutes' strenuous work, one of the boards went crashing outwards, and the rest was easy.

In a very few moments the two had clambered through the aperture and dropped to the ground outside. Then they started back gloomily for St. Jim's. They had done what they had set out to accomplish—they had found out what Cardew and his new pals' little game was. But the discovery gave them little comfort—quite the reverse. This last mad escapade of the reckless, erratic Cardew's was the limit of hare-brained rashness—even for Cardew.

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CHAPTER 4.

Cardew Explains the Game!

CLIVE and Levison were just finishing tea when Cardew turned up that evening. Both the juniors looked up quickly, and fixed grim looks on the face of the dandy of the Fourth as he lounged negligently into the study.

Cardew gave them genial nods. He was as urbane and spick-and-span as ever, and he did not appear to be in the least disturbed by his chums' looks.

"Well, old tops!" he began cheerily. "Finished tea—what? And how did the merry old game go—score many goals, Levison, old bean? No, Well—I forget, though; it was cricket practice, wasn't it?"

Clive and Levison said nothing for a moment; then Clive set his lips.

"You can drop that silly rot, Cardew," he said quietly. "You know perfectly well where we were this afternoon. You spoofed us pretty well at the old mill, but—"

"My dear, dear men!" ejaculated Cardew, with an affected start. "Was that really you fellows? Well, I am surprised, begad! I know, of course, that two silly, meddling bounders had poked their inquisitive noses in a business that didn't concern 'em; but I'd no idea the merry old jokers were you two. Fancy that, now!"

"Oh, dry up!" snapped Clive impatiently. "You needn't be afraid of a study licking, Cardew, though you deserve one for your thundering cheek. We're going to let those tricks you played on us pass—under the circumstances."

"Thanks," murmured Cardew blandly. "This is no end of a relief, you—"

"Oh, don't be an ass! Look here, Cardew! How long have you been playing this mad game—shooting bunnies, I mean?"

"Only a few days, old top. Want to join us?"

"No, we don't," said Levison gravely. "For goodness' sake be serious, Cardew, you ass! This is jolly serious."

"For the bunnies, yes," murmured Cardew. "And I might tell you fellows in strict confidence that it will be jolly serious for Crooke or me if that ass Racke doesn't shoot where he aims instead of where the dear chap doesn't aim. He nearly—"

"Hang Racke!" exclaimed Clive angrily. "You say you've only been doing it some days, Cardew? Then why—"

"Only shootin' bunnies, I mean," smiled Cardew. "The fact is, we got tired of rats."

"Rats?"

"Yes. You see, we started first pottin' rats in the mill and up at the old castle on Wayland Hill. It was toppin' sport, but we got bored with that, specially as we'd about exterminated the little beggars."

"Then you started going after rabbits—"

"Yes; you've no idea what a game it is. I was bored almost to extinction before I started it. It was really dear old Racke's idea, and I'm no end grateful to him for lettin' me in. You fellows wouldn't like to join us—what?"

"You know we wouldn't, Cardew!" snapped Sidney Clive.

"You realise the risk you're running, Cardew—"

"No harm in pottin' a few bunnies on the heath!" yawned Cardew.

"Perhaps not; though I can guess what the Head would say about it," rejoined Clive warmly. "But I'm not thinkin' of the heath. You were perilously near to Colonel Blunt's estate when we spotted you this afternoon, Cardew."

"I admit it, dear man," smiled Cardew. "In fact, we had a few shots over the dear old man's preserves, and almost got collared by keepers. That was sport if you like. Pity there ain't more bunnies on the heath. Save us trespassin' on the dear old fire-eater's land, wouldn't it? But—"

"You—you fool, Cardew!" said Levison. "Can't you see the risk you're running? Why, it's poaching—nothing less. If—"

"Chaps must take a bit of risk, or it wouldn't be sport," grinned Cardew. "Be rather a joke, though, if we got landed in quod—what?"

"I believe it would be a joke to you," said Clive. "You wouldn't give a thought to the school—the disgrace of it all. You deserve to be boiled in oil, Cardew!"

"Thanks! You're not thinkin' of joinin' us, then?"

"We've not come down to rotten poaching yet!" exclaimed Sidney Clive, rather tartly.

Cardew chuckled.

"Come with us to-night—just to do a bit of rattin'," urged Cardew. "You'd enjoy the excitement no end."

"To—to-night?" gasped Levison. "Mean to say you've been dodging out at night on this game, Cardew?"

"Naturally," smiled Cardew serenely. "It's no fun at all pottin' at rats in the daytime. We've got an acetylene lamp, an' it's no end excitin'. I'll promise you we'll steer clear of bunnies. What about it, old tops?"

Clive and Levison fairly blinked at their chum. Cardew



Cardew reached the far bank, panting and gasping, and hauled himself out in the blackness of the overhanging trees. He had just done so, when from behind him came a queer, gurgling gasp and a strangled cry. Cardew wheeled round to see the keeper in the throes of cramp. What should he do? (See page 19.)

knew perfectly well that Clive and Levison wouldn't dream of accompanying them on such an adventure; and they knew he knew it. He was simply pulling their legs—extracting great enjoyment from the sight of their shocked faces.

"It isn't a joking matter, Cardew," said Levison quietly at last. "You know we won't come with you quite well; but I can promise you this—if we get a chance to put a stop to your game we'll do it like a shot! You won't always have the luck you had this afternoon!"

"That's a fair warnin'—what?" said Cardew coolly. "From a pal—eh?"

"Yes; from your chums," rejoined Levison, in a softened tone. "It's for your own good, Cardew. You're too decent for a silly, rotten game like that. We don't care overmuch what happens to Racke—he's a rotter through and through. But you're our pal, and we know you're acting the giddy goat out of sheer recklessness. Why don't you chuck it all, Cardew?"

"Finished your little sermon yet, old top?" inquired Cardew, unmoved.

"No, I haven't!" said Levison quietly. "I'd like to say—"

"Then don't bother, old chap," murmured Cardew blandly. "I see you've about finished tea, though."

"Yes; but—"

"Then I'll trot along to dear old Racke," said Cardew. "He's just had a whackin' remittance, an' I'll just be in time to pick up the leavin's from the rich man's table. You're no end entertainin', Levison, old bean, when you get on the high horse. Sorry I can't stop. Cheerio!"

And with that Ralph Reckness Cardew lounged from the study. He left Sidney Clive biting his lip wrathfully and Levison frowning uneasily.

"It's no good, old chap!" grunted Clive. "We'll have to let him stew in his own juice. Hang the duffer! He can go to pot now for all I care!"

Levison nodded silently, and the subject was dropped. But, despite his angry words, Sidney Clive was looking just as troubled as Levison. He was just as fond, in his own way, of their reckless, lawless chum, and he had no intention of letting Cardew "go to pot" if he could prevent it.

CHAPTER 5. To Save Their Chums.

AN hour after lights out that night Clive awoke to find Levison shaking him gently by the shoulder.

"Get up, Sid—quick!" whispered Levison, in response to his drowsy questions. "Cardew's just gone out. Feel up to going after the ass?"

"He—he's gone out?"

"Yes. After what he told us to-night, I determined to keep awake and watch!" whispered Levison quickly. "Unluckily, I must have drowsed and only woke up just as the idiot was going out. We're too late to stop him now; but we could catch him up, with a bit of luck—"

Clive was out of bed, and donning his clothes before his chum could finish. He was surprised—not at the news of Cardew going out—he had expected that—but at the fact that Levison had thought of the idea. Curiously enough, though he had not mentioned it to his chum, he also had determined to keep awake for the same reason. And he also had drowsed off, despite his resolution.

At top speed the two dressed in silence, and left the dormitory. Neither had any clear idea of what they intended doing. But at the back of their minds was a resolve to put a stop to Cardew's madness—for madness it was—if at all possible.

With their boots in their hands, they trod silently along the still corridor, and turned into the Shell passage. As they were passing the Shell dormitory the door opened softly, and a pjama-clad form stepped out.

Clive fairly bumped into him, and there came a startled exclamation in the gloom.

"Shush! It's all right, Tom Merry!" hissed Levison, recognising the junior from his voice. "It's Clive and Levison. Don't make a row!"

"I'm not going to," said Tom Merry, peering curiously at the two shadowy forms. "You're dressed, aren't you? What's the game? Not going out?"

Tom Merry's voice, though quiet, showed his amazement. But Levison did not answer for a moment. He was thinking rapidly. After their experience with Cardew that afternoon and evening, he suddenly realised that Cardew would not allow himself to be brought back. He would meet their entreaties with sarcastic toleration; but he would go his own, stubborn way.

Levison made his mind up in a moment. Tom Merry was to be trusted not only to keep his mouth shut, but to help. With his aid they could do what they intended to do—bring Cardew back by force, if necessary.

"We're going out—yes," he rejoined grimly. "The—the fact is, Tommy, we're after Cardew. The silly ass has gone out—"

"I guessed as much," breathed Tom Merry. "Racke and Crooke have gone out, too. They woke me up going out. I was just slipping along to your dorm. to see if Cardew was there. The fools are up to some rotten game. It wants stopping."

"And we want your help to stop it, Tommy!" muttered Levison. "We happen to know what the game is—"

"Nothing good, I'll bet!"

"No time to explain now," interrupted Levison swiftly. "Look here, Tom! Are you game to come with us? We'll explain as we're going along. It's jolly serious, I can tell you!"

"I'll come quickly enough," said Tom Merry grimly. "I've suspected this sort of thing for some nights now. I mean to put a stop to Racke and Crooke's game, anyway. What about Lowther and Manners?"

"All the better. We'll be five to three then. Buck up, though."

Tom Merry vanished within the dark dormitory. In silence Clive and Levison waited, almost breathless with impatience. But they had not to wait long. Lowther and Manners were grumpy at being wakened; but immediately they grasped what was afoot their grumpiness vanished. They were by no means averse to what promised to be an exciting night out.

Silently the three Shell fellows joined the Fourth-Formers in the passage, and they moved on to the box-room. Here they found—as they had expected—the window already opened slightly, and, after donning their shoes, they slipped down in to the quiet quad one by one.

It was a moonlight night, and they had to take a tortuous route round the school buildings to avoid crossing the quad.

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But they reached the wall safely at last, and dropped over into the lane. Then they set out at a brisk trot, and as they went Levison acquainted the three Shell fellows with the facts.

"Phew!" breathed Tom Merry, when he paused at last. "So that's their little game! Why, it's poaching—that is, if they are potting bunnies and things on the Manor estate."

"Cardew himself admitted they'd been there this afternoon—said they were nearly collared by keepers!" muttered Clive. "You know what a mad batter Cardew is. He's got bored with rattling, and wants something more exciting and risky."

"And he'll get that poaching, all right!" said Manners grimly. "Those keepers are hot stuff, I believe! The fools!"

"Wouldn't have thought those funks Racke and Crooke dare risk such foolery," added Monty Lowther. "Anyway, what's the programme for us?"

"Better make for the old mill," Levison jerked out. "With luck we'll catch 'em before they start out."

Nothing more was said for some minutes. Tom had set a good pace and the juniors required all their wind for running. They soon reached the stile, and once on the open, moonlit heath, they were forced to slow down. Though they could see for some distance over the lonely heath, the ground was rough, and abounded in pitfalls for the unwary.

The juniors soon left the rough path, and plunged into the undergrowth, setting their course straight for the old mill, rising some distance away, and looking strangely gaunt and ghostly in the moonlight. Save for the occasional call of a night-bird, and the soft rustle of the breeze in the gorse, all was silence around them—a queer, eerie silence.

Suddenly Tom Merry called a halt.

"I'm not sure—but I fancied I saw three figures over there, you fellows," he muttered, a trifle breathlessly. "Can you see—yes, there they go—to the left there."

Tom's voice ended on an excited note as he pointed some hundred yards away to the left of the old mill. Next instant the others saw them, too—three dark figures skulking across the moonlit heath, and away from the mill.

Only for a brief moment did they see the figures, and then they vanished over the brow of a bracken-covered hill.

"Those silly idiots right enough!" breathed Tom Merry.

"And—and they're making for the Manor Woods. Buck up, or we'll be too late!"

At a reckless pace Tom Merry led the way, stumbling over hummocks, dropping into unseen holes, but never slackening speed.

Once Clive fancied he spotted the dim figures again some considerable distance ahead, but if so, that was all they did see of their quarry—then.

A barbed-wire fence brought the five juniors to a halt at last. This marked the boundary between Wayland Heath and the Manor Estates. Beyond the fence was a stretch of open ground, hilly and fairly riddled with rabbit-holes, and beyond this still was the dark mass of the Manor Woods.

"Looks as if we're stumped!" grunted Tom Merry uneasily. "We can only wait and see—"

"Rats to that!" muttered Clive through his teeth. "Let's go on. What have we come for?"

"Not to get collared ourselves!" retorted Tom Merry. "I don't see why we should risk—what's that?"

From the open ground before them came a faint, crisp report—the unmistakable report of an air-gun. Glancing quickly in that direction, the juniors were just in time to see three shadowy forms slip from a near-by coppice, and race, crouching as they ran, towards a spinney some fifty yards from it.

They were across the open ground in a flash, and vanished like shadows into the undergrowth.

But in that time, Tom Merry and his chums had seen them—had recognised them as juniors; the moonlight glimmering on their faces and on the shining air-guns they carried told them that.

"That settles it!" snapped Tom Merry grimly. "No good shouting—have to go after them. Come on. Make for the shelter of the coppice first, though."

Tom Merry scrambled through the fence, and his companions followed. Across the open ground they went with a rush, and melted into the shadows of the coppice.

"Lie low for a sec," whispered Tom Merry. "Let's get our bearings first!"

The juniors crouched down in the brush, and peered across at the spinney. There was no movement there, and whether Cardew and his companions were still there, they could not tell.

"We'll try now," whispered Tom Merry, after a few moments. "When I give the word. 'Sh-sh—'"

Tom broke off abruptly with a warning hiss. From somewhere behind them came the sharp crack of a stick snapping under a stealthy tread. It was a tiny sound, but it rang out clear on the still night air, and it came from the far end of the spinney they were in—the end nearest the woods.

"Quiet!" breathed Tom Merry.

With hearts thumping, scarcely daring to breathe, they

crouched listening and waiting. They had not to wait long. Presently a dark form, burly and ominous in the gloom, crept cautiously and softly through the thin belt of trees. Behind it came another, just as stealthily.

"Keepers," whispered Tom Merry, almost under his breath.

But his chums had already guessed that. They watched as the burly figures passed their hiding place—obviously without dreaming they were there—and halted together at the edge of the spinney. Then came gruff, whispered words.

"I tell you I heard it plain as plain, Bill," one of the two muttered. "The young rips are out there somewhere. With luck we'll catch 'em red-handed! Go carefully, though; the little varmints are slippery!"

"What'd we better do—wait until we spot 'em?"

"No. You'd best work round by the fence—get behind 'em! I'll stand by the far side o' the warren yonder. We'll watch till Mason comes up—he's not far away. Get me?"

"Right!"

The two keepers separated with scarcely a sound. The juniors saw their forms flitting amid the trees for a moment and then they vanished as silently as they had come.

Monty Lowther broke the tense silence.

"Phew!" he breathed. "This looks as if we're all in the soup, Tommy. What's the next move—skedaddle for home, I say!"

"We've got to warn Cardew!" muttered Clive doggedly.

Tom Merry nodded silently in the gloom. He realised that they were in as desperate a position as the reckless "sportsmen" they had come to save. But the generous skipper of the Shell had no intention of trying to save himself until he had, at least, warned Cardew and his friends of their peril, little as they deserved it.

"Clive's right, you chaps!" he whispered quietly. "We've got to get across there and warn those fools. Then we'll all take our chance. When I give the word, cut across like lightning."

The juniors moved stealthily to the edge of the coppice. Tom Merry waited a second, his eyes scanning the gorse pasture between them and the spinney, then he gave the word:

"Now! Let it rip!"

As one man they left the shelter of the fringe of trees, and scudded across the open, moonlit stretch of grazing ground.

CHAPTER 6.

Cardew Shows Grit!

"OH gad!" groaned Ralph Rackness Cardew. "Looks as if our cheery old numbers are up this bright night, dear old tops—what?"

The "dear old tops"—otherwise Aubrey Racke, and Gerald Crooke of the Shell at St. Jim's did not reply in words. Racke shivered, and Crooke's teeth chattered.

The three St. Jim's "sportsmen" were lying low—very low. They crouched, scarcely daring to breathe, amid the eerily rustling bracken of the spinney.

Though Tom Merry and his chums were quite unaware of the fact, the three sportsmen had seen their mad rush from the fence to the coppice, and not dreaming the five dim forms would be their schoolfellows, had naturally taken them for keepers. And now they were—as Cardew coolly put it—waiting for the next "cheery old move!"

They had not to wait long.

A sudden rustle sounded, and from the dark shadows of the coppice the five figures leaped and came scudding with a soft thudding of feet towards them.

"Look out! Oh, run for—"

Racke's startled words ended in a gasp as the five came up with a rush, and before any of the three could move Tom Merry and his chums were upon them.

Tom Merry almost went headlong over Racke's crouching form, and only just in time did he stifle Racke's alarmed yelp by clapping a hand swiftly over his open mouth.

"Quiet—not a sound!" hissed Tom. "Are you there, Cardew?"

There came a soft chuckle in the gloom, and then came Cardew's cool reply. Racke and Crooke were astounded, but apparently Cardew wasn't.

"Dear old Tommy—can it be really you?" he drawled softly. "On the spot as usual—what? Naughty, naughty! Fancy old Thomas leavin' his little bed to—"

"Shut up, you fool!" breathed Tom Merry, angrily. "Listen, Cardew! The keepers are after you—they're among the trees there somewhere now. Lie low for goodness' sake!"

As he spoke Tom Merry peered anxiously about him. That wild rush across the open had only occupied several brief seconds, but during each second they had expected to hear a shout—a shout to tell them they were discovered.

But no shout had come, and Tom Merry was puzzled. It seemed impossible that the watching keepers had not seen them.

Yet they had—as the waiting juniors soon discovered.

From the direction of the heath there sounded a sudden call—like the sharp call of a night-bird. It was answered at once from the direction of a dark spinney to the left of the juniors.

"A signal!" muttered Tom Merry. "No good, you fellows—they know we're here. We'll have to make a bolt for the woods—it's our only chance. When I give the word, cut for your lives—and every man for himself. Ready?"

"Ready, aye ready!" murmured Lowther.

"Waitin', old top!" added Cardew.

"Then go!"

As he spoke, Tom Merry leaped suddenly to his feet. Next instant the other seven were up also, and in a bunch they were away, racing towards the dark woods.

Almost at once a sharp whistle rang out on the still night air; it was swiftly followed by another and yet another.

"Go it!" gasped Tom Merry. "That's three of 'em. This way!"

Through the corner of his eye, as he raced away, Tom had caught a swift glimpse of a dark form thudding towards them from the fence. Another was coming at top speed from the left. Where the third keeper was he did not know, but he realised their best chance was to lose themselves in the dark woods—if they could.

Neck and neck they raced along. Even Cardew, the slacker, was putting all he knew into his pace, while Racke and Crooke, rendered desperate by fear, fairly flew along. In that moment, Tom Merry felt thankful for the bright moonlight—without it they could not possibly have avoided the rabbit holes and hummocks that abounded. As it was, though, only by a seeming miracle, did they escape disaster. "Keep it up!" panted Clive. "Only another fifty yards."

The black maw of the woods loomed before them now. From behind them came the thudding of heavy boots, and loud shouts. Another few yards left, and then quite suddenly they realised what the shouts were for, and where the third keeper was.

From the woods came a sudden answering shout, and a burly figure emerged from the trees, and ran to meet them.

"Look out!" yelled Tom Merry.

He swerved suddenly, and easily eluded the grabbing fingers of the keeper—as did Lowther, Levison, and Manners. Next came Cardew. That junior half-swerved, changed his mind suddenly, and went straight for the waiting man, with head lowered.

His lowered head took the astonished man full in the waistcoat with the force and speed of a thunderbolt. He gave a grunt and collapsed, doubled up on the ground.

Cardew dashed on after his chums, now vanishing into the thick trees. To do him justice, he could easily have eluded the clumsy clutch of the keeper without stopping to butt him—it was solely an unselfish effort to save Racke and the others behind. But the delay looked likely to cost him dear.

As he dashed away again, the nearest keeper was barely three yards behind him, and going strong. When Cardew dived into the black woods, he had reduced this to one yard. Cardew could almost feel his clutching hand—he could plainly hear his panting breath.

"Got you—you little imp!" gasped the keeper.

But he hadn't. Cardew, realising the fellow was too good for him at running, had resorted to strategy. Even as the fellow stretched out his arm, Cardew, twisted suddenly, dropped, and jabbed out the barrel of his air-gun.

Too late the keeper saw the move; before he could pull up, the gun barrel had tripped him up and he went headlong with a crash like a falling tree. Cardew chuckled and leaped to his feet again.

"You—you tricky little imp!" roared the man, scrambling up, though he must have been badly shaken. "I'll ketch you for that if I 'as to chase you half across Sussex, hang you!"

"Ta-ta, old top!" called Cardew.

He vanished amid the trees. But he was not long in possession of the start the incident had given him. The keeper was a young fellow, light and active, and keen as mustard on his job. Moreover, he was vengeful now for the nasty fall.

He was after Cardew in a flash, dogged and determined. The chase which followed was no chuckling matter to Cardew. He hadn't the faintest idea where he was, or where he was making for. Under the trees it was pitch dark, save for white patches here and there where the moonlight filtered through the broken foliage.

The advantage was all with the young keeper. He knew exactly where he was, and he was used to the woods at night-time. Cardew heard his crashing advance drawing nearer and nearer, and he began to be seriously alarmed. He flung away his air-gun, and his teeth set hard as he plunged blindly on.

But the chase did not last long. Quite suddenly Cardew heard the man behind him shout something—a warning it

seemed to the junior. And it was—as Cardew realised quickly enough the next instant.

With startling abruptness the black trees seemed to drop away from the junior, and he found himself in the bright moonlight again. But he was not "out of the wood" by any means. Only just in time did he pull himself up short with a gasp.

Before him, shining placid and silvery in the moonlight was the glimmering Rhyll, its softly murmuring waters mirroring the dark banks of woods.

There was no time to turn—no time even for thought. And Cardew attempted to do neither. The dogged young keeper was less than a yard behind.

With a muttered "Oh gad! My clobber!" he dived in, and the dark water closed over his head.

The young keeper pulled himself up and stared blankly at the ever-widening circles of rippling water, where the dandy of St. Jim's had vanished.

"The—the daring young rip!" he ejaculated.

He watched anxiously, and gasped his relief as he saw the water part suddenly a few yards further across, and Cardew's head and shoulders appear. But as he saw Cardew strike out leisurely for the opposite bank, he set his teeth. To see his quarry escaping after all was too much for him.

For a brief second he hesitated, and then he lunged aside his gun and his heavy coat and went in with a mighty splash.

Cardew heard it, but he was already going all he could. The bitter chill of the water had soon made him drop his leisurely stroke for something brisker and more energetic. He fairly forged across like a hungry pike.

He reached the far bank, panting and gasping, and hauled himself out in the blackness of the overhanging trees. He had just done so, when from behind him came a queer, gurgling gasp and a strangled cry.

Cardew wheeled, startled. He was just in time to see the man's hand shoot up, his head and shoulders disappear.

"Good gad!" he gasped. "Cramp!"

Cardew hesitated scarcely a second. He knew he was jeopardising his chance of escape—that capture meant the sack. But for the second time that evening the reckless young scapegrace put self last.

With scarcely a splash he jumped into the river again and went, hand over hand, like a human torpedo, to the rescue. He came up to the drowning keeper, and grasping the almost inert form, twisted him round and sank on his back. Then he kicked out vigorously for the near bank.

It was no easy matter—clothed, chilled to the bone—as he was. The man began to struggle, to twist and turn in his grasp. But Cardew held on savagely, and after ages of desperate striving—so it seemed to him—he won through, and dragged his burden on to the bank.

He sank exhausted and panting heavily on to the grass. He lay there until a sudden movement from the keeper brought him up to a sitting position.

"Feeling better, old top?" gasped Cardew feebly.

The man sat up with an effort, his breath coming in great gasps.

"Bo—all right in a minute," he choked. "I owes you summut for this, young gent—"

"Don't mench!" murmured Cardew airily. "I—"

"Someone comin'" gasped the keeper. "You—you may be a young rascal, sir, but—but you're true blue to come back after me like that there. Better hop it; go while the going's good. Go on, quick!"

"Thanks—I will," said Cardew.

He listened a brief second to the sound of heavy feet crashing towards them, and then he dropped softly into the river, and swam swiftly across. He reached the far side safely and clambering out with seeming difficulty, vanished amid the trees.

The keeper staggered to his feet, still half-dazed and dripping with water. As he did so his keen eyes fell on something lying in a patch of moonlit grass close by. Stooping, he picked it up. It was a school cap.

With a sudden movement the keeper stuffed the cap into his pocket.

"Safer with me, that is!" he grunted. "Duty or no duty, that kid's a good plucked 'un, and 'e's earned 'is getaway!"

CHAPTER 7.

Bribery and Corruption!

"O H crumbs!" groaned Aubrey Racke. Ralph Reckness Cardew was not the only junior to meet with an exciting adventure during that mad stampede through the dark woods.

Aubrey Racke had also been unlucky.

Before he had been plunging and stumbling blindly through the trees many seconds, Racke had discovered not only that he was separated from the others, but that he was hopelessly lost.

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But he plunged on, blind with fear, panting hoarsely, and presently he became aware that he was running alone and that sounds of pursuit had died away.

It was no little comfort to Racke; but he had stumbled on desperately, until, like Cardew, he had been brought unexpectedly to a halt by the sight of the glimmering river before him.

"Oh gad!" repeated Racke, with a shiver. "I'd forgotten the river!"

The dark water, looking unusually forbidding in the shadowy moonlight, presented to Racke an unsurmountable barrier. Racke would have submitted to capture a hundred times rather than brave its unknown depths.

For a few seconds the junior blinked at the shadowy waters, and then he turned away and tramped back into the woods. He knew his wisest course was to follow the river bank; but the river, ghostly and misty, frightened him, and he was glad to turn his back upon it.

Moreover, no sounds came from the woods now, and, thinking the three keepers were still chasing his school-fellows, he deemed it safe to retrace his steps and return home by way of the heath.

But now a fresh fear began to grip Racke. As he trod nervously on the crackling undergrowth, the fear of the unknown began to fall heavily on him. The oppressive loneliness, the dark trees, with their foliage waving fantastically against the bright moonlight overhead, began to get on his nerves. He jumped and trembled at every slight sound.

But he kept on, though now his feet had broken almost unconsciously into a trot. Tripping over hidden creepers, stumbling into holes, blundering into tree trunks, he hurried on, panting and gasping, his heart thumping, his mouth dry and parched.

And then, quite suddenly, from immediately above his head came a queer, wailing cry, sharp and eerie.

It was the hoot of an owl, but it put the finishing touch to Racke's terror. He jumped convulsively, and next moment, his nerve gone completely, he was plunging blindly through the trees.

Heedless of scratches, bumps, and falls, he blundered on, mad with terror, and careless of direction. For how long he ran he never knew, but his wild career was brought to an end with startling suddenness.

With head down he crashed into a bulky something—something which gave vent to a wild bellow, and doubled up abruptly.

It was a keeper—the very keeper Cardew had butted in the waistcoat earlier on—and naturally he didn't like the second dose. Before Racke had regained his scattered senses and realised his danger, the fellow was upon him, gripping the frightened junior in an iron grip.

"You—you young rascal!" he gasped. "I—I've got yer this time, and—"

Then it happened—though Racke himself never knew how. But as the man's grip tightened on Racke's wrist the junior wrenched his arm desperately, and his finger must have unconsciously pressed the trigger of the air-gun he still carried.

But from whatever cause the result was the same. There came a sharp "ping," followed instantly by a wild howl from the keeper—a howl which rang through the still woods.

It was a howl of pain, and as he gave vent to it the keeper flopped down, dragging the startled Racke down with him as he went, and the air-gun flew from the junior's nerveless fingers into the bushes.

The fall, curiously enough, brought Racke to his senses, and to a full realisation of the danger he was in. Like lightning, he wrenched himself from the keeper's grasp and leaped to his feet.

But the keeper was too quick for him. The air-gun pellet had entered the calf of his leg, and though he was hurt, he was not badly hurt—not too hurt to prevent the junior's escape, at all events.

With a snarl he shot out a huge hand, and gripped the fleeing junior by the ankle. Racke went down again with a thud that shook half the breath from his body.

"No you don't, me lad!" hissed the keeper viciously, through his teeth. "You've got to pay for this night's work, you little whelp! Poaching and shootin' a keeper—eh? That'll sound nice in the police-court, won't it? This means quod for you, my fine bird!"

He dragged the terrified and shaking junior towards him by the ankle, and pressed a knee into his chest. Then he sent a shrill whistle echoing and re-echoing through the dark trees.

Racke stared up at him, panting and livid with fear.

"It—it was an accident," he panted. "A pure accident, I'll swear! I don't know how it happened! Let me go—please let me go! I shall be sacked if—"

"You'll be worse than sacked, me lad!" muttered the



Racke, his eyes burning, took out his wallet. He withdrew two Treasury notes and handed them over savagely to the grinning keeper. As he did so there came a curious clik from the direction of the hedge, and Manners lowered his camera, with a soft chuckle. (See page 15.)

keeper, through his teeth. "Let you go—hey? Likely enough I'll do that, isn't it, after you pluggin' me like this? Ho, yes! My mates'll be along soon, my fine—"

"Let me go—for Heaven's sake, let me go!" pleaded Racke, almost sobbing with fear. "Look—look here! I—I'll pay you well—anything. I've plenty of money! You can have a fiver now; five pounds if you'll only let me go!"

"Ho! Bribery, eh?" muttered the fellow. "Five quid, did you say?"

There was a sudden change in the man's tone, and under the dark trees his eyes seemed to gleam strangely. Racke felt a sudden thrill of wild hope.

"Yes. Five quid—I mean it!" he panted, with desperate eagerness. "Five pounds now just to let me go. It's more than worth it to you!"

The keeper straightened himself up. Then he stooped suddenly over Racke's prostrate form, and peered into his face.

"What's your name, kid?" he whispered.

"Racke," breathed the junior, far too agitated and afraid to think of deception. "Aubrey Racke, of the Shell at St. Jim's. You—you'll let me go?"

The fellow chuckled softly, and lifted his knee from the boy's chest.

"Hand over the fiver," he said, in a low tone, "then you can clear!"

Racke's heart leaped. He shoved a shaking hand into his pocket, and, withdrawing a wallet, fumbled in it for a moment. Then he drew from it a rustling piece of paper, and handed it into the man's greedy clutch.

The keeper pocketed the note swiftly, with scarcely a glance at it; the crisp rustle was enough for him.

"Shove off—quick!" he muttered, pointing behind him. "That's your way. Nobody that way, and a couple of minutes'll bring you to the heath. You'll be safe enough then. Go on—someone coming!"

Scarcely believing his good fortune, Racke leaped to his feet, and, without a word, without thinking of his air-gun, he plunged into the trees and vanished into the darkness.

The keeper chuckled softly as he watched the junior go. Had Racke only seen the evil look on his face, he would have wondered perhaps. Racke thought himself lucky—and to some extent he was lucky! He had fallen into the hands of a man who was a traitor to his employer, and to his own principles and standard of duty—if he possessed any—and to whom bribery was no new thing.

The keeper was, in fact, an unprincipled rascal, who was hand in glove with all the poachers of the neighbourhood. He had jumped at Racke's offer; but it remained to be seen if Racke was as lucky as he fancied he was.

After Racke's form had vanished the keeper remained still crouching down and listening. He was puzzled. From the direction of the river came the distant crashing of heavy feet—obviously of fellow-keepers who had heard his whistle.

But from the other direction came the sound of someone else approaching much nearer, and the footsteps were blundering and uncertain.

Nearer and nearer they came, and then quite abruptly a figure plunged from the trees and tripped headlong over him. There came a startled gasp in the darkness—in a boy's voice.

"Hallo! Another of 'em!" muttered the keeper.

He caught the gleam of a white collar, and next instant

the boy was struggling in his grip. But in the man's iron grasp he was like a child.

"No you don't!" muttered the keeper. "Let's have a look at you, my lad!"

He hauled the struggling junior up to a sitting position, and a stray shaft of moonlight filtering through the foliage shone on the boy's white face.

It was Sidney Clive. Like Racke, he had become separated from the others, but unlike Racke, he had not even reached the river. He had blundered about, and, becoming hopelessly lost, had worked round in a circle.

He blinked at the keeper, half dazed. That unexpected, headlong dive over the crouching man had been a tremendous shock in more ways than one.

But as he realised into whose hands he had fallen, his wits came back with a rush, and he began to struggle again furiously. He was still struggling and fighting to free himself from that iron grasp, when there came a sudden crashing behind him, and the next second he was gripped and held fast from behind.

At the same moment a bright light from a pocket torch was flashed upon the scene.

"Hallo!" came a gruff voice. "You've managed to collar one of them, Mason. Good! Chuck it, kid—we've got you! The game's up!"

Clive realised with a thrill of dismay that it was. One of the newcomers was dripping with water. Though Clive did not know it, he was the young keeper who had been rescued by Cardew. The other was an older man, obviously the head keeper. The latter held the light, and he turned it from the boy to the keeper.

He gave an exclamation as he saw Mason stagger to his feet, leaning heavily on his gun.

"What's the matter, man? You're injured!" he ejaculated.

"One of them confounded air-gun pellets!" muttered the man, with an uneasy glance at Clive. "It me right in the calf."

"You—you mean to say this youngster shot at you?" gasped the head keeper.

Only for the fraction of a minute did the rascal hesitate. He saw his own danger in a flash. He knew that if he said no—that if he gave a hint there was another junior still in the vicinity, his fellow keepers would immediately go after him. He must prevent the boy who had bribed him from being captured at all costs.

"Of course it was 'im!" he granted viciously. "I don't say the kid did it a-purpose—we was strugglin', an' 'is gun went off. There it is."

He pointed to the shining weapon lying in the bushes, and the head keeper stooped and picked it up, his brow dark. He eyed it a moment, and then he looked grimly at the astounded Sidney Clive.

"Wha-what?" gasped that junior, aghast. "You—you say I shot you? Why, you rotter, I've not even—"

"Goin' to deny it, are you?" sneered the man. "You've got a nerve, an' no mistake! It's plain—"

"You thundering liar!" breathed Clive, staring round him dazedly. "Why, I've never seen the gun before! I—I—"

"That's enough, my lad!" snapped the head keeper. "You can have your say after the colonel, and afore the magistrates in the morning, like as not. Can you walk, Mason?"

"I can 'obble a bit—"

"Right! Now, my lad, leg it out! March!"

And Sidney Clive marched. With a grip of iron on his collar, and the young keeper's knee prodding him in the back, he had no choice in the matter.

With a keeper on either side, and Mason limping in the rear, he stumbled on through the dark woods, with bewilderment in his eyes and bitter despair in his heart.

CHAPTER 8.

Consternation!

ON a bright summer morning, rising bell at St. Jim's was, to Tom Merry, usually, the signal to wake fresh as a daisy, and to leap from his bed merry and bright.

But on this particular summer morning, rising bell found the junior skipper of St. Jim's anything but fresh, and instead of leaping from his bed merry and bright, he lay there yawning, grunting and rubbing his eyes sleepily. For some moments he lay there half awake, and then suddenly the events of the previous evening flooded his mind. In a flash he was wide awake, and, leaning on one elbow, he glanced quickly across the dormitory.

In that mad rush for safety the previous evening, lie, with Lowther, Manners, Levison and Crooke, had managed to keep together, and eventually they had emerged from the Manor Woods in safety and found their way into Rylcombe Lane, and from thence to St. Jim's.

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Not knowing whether Racke, Clive, and Cardew had returned or not, they had entered the school stealthily and sought their respective dormitories. In the Shell dormitory Tom Merry & Co. had found that Racke's bed was still empty, and when Tom Merry, tired out, had at last fallen asleep, Racke had not returned.

And now, as he glanced anxiously across at Racke's bed in the early morning sunlight, Tom Merry gave a deep gasp of relief. Racke was there right enough—sleeping soundly and heavily.

At that moment Tom's chums, Lowther and Manners, awoke almost together, and they, too, glanced simultaneously across at Racke's bed.

"All serene," whispered Tom Merry. "The beggar's returned all right."

"Like a bad penny!" grunted Monty Lowther. "Wonder what's happened to the Fourth chaps? Hallo, here's Levison now!"

As Lowther spoke, the dormitory door opened, and Ernest Levison entered. He was in slippers, with trousers pulled up over his pyjamas. His face was pale, and there were dark rings under his eyes. Evidently he had spent a very bad night.

Ignoring the few fellows who were awake, he moved across to Tom Merry as that junior slipped from his bed. The Terrible Three saw at once that something was wrong.

"What's the matter, Levison?" asked Tom Merry quickly. "Haven't Cardew and—"

"Cardew came back a few minutes after we did last night," said Levison. "But—but Clive hasn't come back yet."

Levison's words were husky, and the Shell juniors eyed him aghast. Had it been Cardew, they would not have been so worried at the news. But Clive—

"Oh, that's rotten, Levison, old man!" gasped Tom Merry. "Then—"

"He must have been caught," muttered Levison. "Nothing else for it. I—I see that Racke's got back all right?"

"Yes; pity it isn't him instead of Clive," grunted Manners, glaring at the still sleeping Racke. "What has Cardew to say about it, Levison?"

"He's feeling sick, but he's trying not to show it," said Levison, his brow clouding. "He's not out of the wood himself though, yet. He lost his cap in the woods somewhere last night, and it's got his name inside."

"But—but what about Clive?" said Levison. "Isn't the rotter going to own up? He's a beastly cad if he doesn't do something."

"I don't know," said Levison uneasily. "You know what he is—says it's no good doing anything until we know for certain what's happened. I suppose he's right."

"Well, that's so," said Tom Merry quietly.

For some moments the juniors discussed the matter in low tones, and then Levison returned to his own dormitory. As he had said, it was useless thinking of doing anything until the worst was known.

And the juniors were not to be left long in doubt about that.

Just before breakfast a smart trap was seen to drive up to the schoolhouse entrance, and from it descended Colonel Blunt, his head keeper, and last, but not least, Sidney Clive, of the Fourth—obviously a prisoner. Leaving the trap—the old colonel was old-fashioned, and detested cars—in charge of a groom, they disappeared in the direction of the Head's study. And before breakfast was over, the news had leaked out—startling news. Clive had been caught poaching on the colonel's estate—and worse, had resisted capture, and wounded a keeper.

Naturally the news caused a sensation; but those juniors who had taken part in the night's adventure, were dumb-founded at the last item of news.

"It—it can't be true," muttered Tom Merry, as the Terrible Three met Levison in the passage after breakfast. "For one thing, Clive didn't have a gun. We can't let this go on, you fellows. Clive won't split—he won't give Cardew or anyone else away. And I don't see how he's going to clear himself without. We can't see him sacked—"

"We're not going to—at least, I'm not," said Levison, through his teeth. "I'm going to own up—to explain why Clive was there. No need to mention Cardew's name—"

"Here's Cardew now," said Lowther.

From the hall-way Cardew came along, looking as cool and self-possessed as ever. He nodded genially to the juniors.

"You chaps heard the news then?" he queried carelessly.

"Yes, we've heard the news," said Tom Merry, eyeing the dandy grimly. "You see what your foolery's resulted in, Cardew? You've landed Clive—"

"Amazin', isn't it?" said Cardew, undisturbed. "Old Sidney's been fairly goin' it. I've just been chattin' to the groom chap who brought them over in the trap. Fancy pottin' a keeper! Who ever would have thought old Sidney could be such a desperate ruffian? Shockin', I call it!"

"You—you know he couldn't have done it, Cardew,"

muttered Levison, eyeing Cardew queerly. "He hadn't a gun, and—"

"That's the surprisin' part, old beans. I shall point that out to the merry old Head when I explain matters."

"You—you're going to own up, then?" gasped Levison.

"Naturally. This is the merry last chapter, where the giddy villain confesses and clears the innocent victim—what? It'll rid this noble pile of a slacker and a bounder," drawled Cardew, a faint trace of bitterness in his tone. "I've had my fun, and now I'm goin' to pay up. Hallo, here's Railton now! Watch me startle him."

Mr. Railton, the School House master, his face grave, came along from the direction of the Head's study. Cardew stopped him coolly.

"Excuse me, sir," he murmured. "But I hear that Clive is in serious trouble—has been caught on Colonel Blunt's estate."

Mr. Railton's face went grim. The grimness lessened a little as he remembered that Cardew was Clive's chum.

"Unfortunately, that is quite true," he said gravely. "He is charged with shooting rabbits on the estate, and also with wounding a keeper. Why do you ask, Cardew?"

"Does—does he admit it, sir?"

"No, he does not," said the master sharply, irritated by something in Cardew's manner. "He denies that he went there to shoot, and that he was responsible for the keeper's wound. He also refuses," continued Mr. Railton, with a very hard look at Cardew, "to divulge the names of the boys who were with him at the time. What do you know about the matter, Cardew?"

"Oh, everythin', sir."

"What?"

"I was just comin' along to explain," said Cardew calmly. "It's all my doin' from beginnin' to end, sir. In fact, I was the fellow who shot the keeper man."

"You—were?"

"Yes, sir. Clive couldn't have done it. He hadn't a gun. He went there solely to fetch me back. He's quite innocent. He's just a victim of circumstances," said Cardew.

Mr. Railton was frankly staggered. The others were also startled at Cardew's revelation with regard to the keeper. Levison hesitated a moment, and then stepped forward, his face set determinedly.

"It's quite true, sir, what Cardew says about Clive being innocent," he muttered. "Clive went with me. I was there, too, sir."

Tom Merry looked at his chums, Lowther and Marners, and, as they nodded, he also stepped forward.

"We were also there, sir," he said quietly. "Clive is quite innocent of the charge of poaching, sir."

Mr. Railton's face went grim.

"Very well," he said briefly. "All of you will come with me to the Headmaster's study."

He turned abruptly, and led the way along the passage.

Mr. Railton rapped on the Head's door, and next moment they were inside and the door had closed upon them. The Head was there, looking grim. Seated near was Colonel Blunt, and the choleric old soldier looked angry—very angry. Facing the Head's desk stood Clive, his eyes steady, his face white. In the background, twirling his cap in his hands, stood the head keeper, and he looked very uncomfortable.

The Head looked up in astonishment as the House master came in with the five juniors at his heels.

"Mr. Railton—" he began, a trifle testily. "What—"

"These boys," said Mr. Railton quietly, "have just made certain statements to me which, I believe, will throw important new light upon the matter we are dealing with. Cardew, you will repeat your statement to Dr. Holmes?"

"Yes, sir."

Cardew did so, in detail. And he did not spare himself. But he spared Racke and Crooke. Whatever Cardew's faults were, he was no sneak, and, knowing he was mostly to blame, he carefully kept their names out of the confession—little as those rascals deserved it.

But Cardew told more than the truth. He did not know who had wounded the keeper, but he had a fairly good idea. He felt pretty certain he was booked for the sack, and he felt he might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb.

"So you see, sir," he ended coolly. "Clive couldn't have done it. He hadn't a gun, for one thing, and for another, well, I did it myself. These fellows will bear me out in what I say about Clive, sir."

"It—it's quite true, sir," said Tom Merry frankly. "Clive came with us to fetch Cardew back—to stop him from trespassing on the Manor estate. But we were too late."

The Head asked Tom Merry several more sharp questions, and then he nodded.

"Very well," he said at last. "I can believe that Clive and you other boys did go there for that purpose. There is, however, one point that is not at all clear. Cardew,

you state that you were responsible for wounding the keeper?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Then how is it that Clive is discovered struggling with the man, who states, I understand, that Clive was the culprit?"

Cardew did not hesitate. He had already "pumped" the groom to some purpose, and he felt fairly certain of his ground.

"He—he must be mistaken," he said serenely. "Clive must have come along just after I did it, sir."

"Then you ran away after the shot was fired?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Left my gun behind and ran like anything, sir."

At this juncture the head keeper stepped forward rather nervously.

"If I may make bold to speak, sirs," he exclaimed, "I think this young gent may be right. Mason was a bit dazed—queer like, when we came up. It was dark under the trees, and I expect when this other young gent tumbled over him he took him for the same young gent as shot 'im."

Dr. Holmes nodded, his brow dark. He had little doubt now that this indeed was the true explanation. He was angry, not only at Cardew's guilt, but at Cardew's languid, off-handed manner of confessing his guilt. There was no shame, no contrition whatever in Cardew's manner. Grieved as the old gentleman was at the whole affair, he was bitterly angry with the cynical, unruffled dandy of the Fourth.

But if Dr. Holmes was angry, the colonel was much more so. He shook his fist at the junior, his face purple with wrath.

"You—you hardened young scoundrel!" he gasped. "Begad! You—you shoot my confounded rabbits, you shoot my keeper, leaving him lying wounded in the woods, and—and you talk about it as if it were nothing—nothing at all, begad! Huh! I—I'd like to horsewhip you, sir; yes, horsewhip you! Dr. Holmes, I insist that this shameless young scoundrel is expelled—expelled at once, begad! Huh!"

Dr. Holmes coughed.

"You may be assured that justice will be done, Colonel Blunt," he said grimly. "We must admit that the boy, shameless as he undoubtedly is, has shown one redeeming feature. He has had the manliness to come forward voluntarily and confess—to acknowledge frankly his misdeeds in order to save his friend. I shall take that into consideration when deciding what his punishment shall be."

The colonel grunted. Dr. Holmes turned to Cardew, his face grave.

"Cardew," he said sternly, "you have only Colonel Blunt's kindness to thank for not having to answer for your grave misdeeds in a police-court. But for Colonel Blunt's happening to be an old St. Jim's boy, and having the welfare of the school at heart, that would have happened to you. I can hold out no hope that you will be allowed to stay here now. For breaking bounds for such an awful purpose alone you have richly merited expulsion. I will, however, reserve my decision until I have consulted with Mr. Railton. Meanwhile, you will be confined to the punishment-room."

The Head signed to Mr. Railton, who escorted Cardew from the room. Then he addressed Clive and the rest of the juniors.

"With regard to you boys, I will also reserve my decision," he said. "I am now satisfied that you broke bounds solely in order to save your friend from folly. But you have disregarded the rules of the school, and you must suffer the consequences. You may go."

The juniors left the room. Morning lessons had commenced long ago, and they proceeded straight to their Form-rooms, with pale, troubled faces. They were to be punished; but they were not thinking of themselves. They were thinking of Cardew. In their own minds they had little doubt as to the result. Cardew would be sacked. And the thought saddened them.

Had they known the truth, had they known that the worst part of Cardew's confession had been untrue—that he had lied to save his chum—they would have felt still more kindly disposed to the reckless, wayward dandy of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 9.

A Startling Discovery!

"HALLO! There's the fellow himself. That's the man. Bright sort of specimen, isn't he?"

Sidney Clive was the speaker. Afternoon lessons were over at St. Jim's, and the Terrible Three, with Levison and Clive, were sauntering along the towpath by the shining Rhyl. It was pleasant along the grassy banks of the river under the bright sun of the late

summer's afternoon. But, from the looks on their faces, Tom Merry and his chums were anything but bright and cheery.

Since that momentous interview there had been no fresh developments. The Head had not yet announced his decisions, and Cardew was still confined in the punishment-room. But naturally the affair had caused no little sensation, and to escape from unwelcome publicity, the five juniors had decided upon a stroll until teatime.

But though they had escaped from the questions and comments of others, the juniors could not escape from the topic themselves. Clive was just referring to the wounded keeper when the object of their talk had emerged on to the towpath through the little wicket-gate that gave admittance to the garden of the Green Man Inn.

DON'T FORGET NEXT WEEK IS "HOLIDAY ANNUAL" WEEK—

Clive recognised the fellow at once, though he had only seen him during that struggle in the darkness. But there was no mistaking the burly, slouching, gaitered figure. He went limping away along the towpath, and his unsteady gait suggested that his wounded leg was not entirely responsible for that unsteadiness.

"Looks the worse for drink," remarked Tom Merry, with a sniff. "So that's the man, is it? Can't have been badly hurt then."

"His gaiters saved him from worse, I expect," said Clive.

"I'll take his photograph!" grinned Manners. "It'll do for a memento of the affair. Clive—what?"

"Don't be an ass," said Tom, smiling. "Fancy wasting a plate on a beauty like him!"

Manners grunted and lowered his camera. Manners' camera was his inseparable companion in all his walks abroad, and he was never wanting an excuse to snap everyone and everything.

The juniors strolled on at a slackened pace. They had no wish to catch up with the keeper—especially if he was, as Tom had suggested, the worse for drink.

But they watched him slouching along with interest for all that. He was quite close to the stile now—the stile across the towpath. On the stile a boy was seated—a St. Jim's boy. It was Aubrey Racke. He was seated, staring before him with unseeing eyes, a harassed frown on his brow. His back was towards the juniors, and they could not see his face, or they would perhaps have wondered at his downcast looks.

Racke looked worried—and he was worried. So far his name had been kept out of the affair. But he did not feel safe—far from it. He knew he had nothing to fear from Cardew or his chums—they would never "split," they would never give him away. And no one except the keeper himself knew he had fired the shot.

It was the air-gun that worried Racke—his own gun which had fired the shot, and which Racke knew had his name scratched on the butt. And Racke wondered how long it would be before someone discovered that fact.

He looked up dully as a shadow fell across the ground before him, and the keeper clambered awkwardly over the stile. He dropped down from the stile, and, leaving the towpath, started to cross the grass towards the woods.

Then Racke recognised him. He stared after him for a moment, and then his eyes gleamed and he gave a cry and ran after him.

"Hallo! What's bitten Racke?" muttered Tom Merry, as the juniors came up to the stile. "Did—did you see that? I—I wonder— Just a minute, Lowther!"

Lowther, who was about to mount the stile, dropped back as Tom caught him by the arm.

Tom Merry's eyes were gleaming.

"There's something queer about this, you fellows!" he breathed. "Racke seems to know that brute. It's jolly curious considering—"

Tom Merry paused to peer cautiously round the end of the high hedge. He had no intention of spying—then. But the next moment he felt thankful they had stopped—and events justified his action.

Obviously Racke had not seen them coming along—he had caught the limping keeper up, and his clutch was on the man's coat. In the sunlit glade the two were standing together, less than half a dozen yards away.

"Hallo!" ejaculated the keeper, glancing round at the junior. "Well, if it ain't my young poaching pal o' last night! What a 'appy meeting! Jest the young gent I wants to see. You—"

"Not so loud!" hissed Racke, glancing quickly round. "Look here, I—I've been hoping to see you. It's about the gun—my gun. Do you know where it is now?"

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"Oh, you means that nobby little pop-gun you pipped me with—eh?" said the man with a thick chuckle. "What you want to know for?"

"Where is it?" muttered Racke, through his teeth. "It—it's got my name on—scratched on the butt. I was a fool to do it, but—but if anyone sees it—if they spot it, I'm done!"

The fellow grinned.

"Got the wind up—eh? Well, I don't wonder if you have. Your 'cadmaster's got the gun if you wants to know," he said, chuckling again as Racke's face went white. "You've no need to worry, though. I've 'anded the popgun, and I ain't seen no name, and I don't expect the old gent will."

Racke gave a groan.

"Could—couldn't you get it back somehow?" he muttered. "If they examine it—"

"I dunno about that. I might try—if it was made worth my while, o' course. You can't expect a man—"

"I—I paid you five quid last night!" hissed Racke.

"Oh, yes—to let you go!" grinned the rascal. "You ain't paid me nothin' to keep my mouth shut, though. Fact is, I bin thinkin' things over sin' last night. Five quid ain't good enough, Master Racke. This 'ere leg 'urts summat cruel, and I run a big risk lettin' you go, and lettin' another young gent get blamed for it. I wants another fiver, Master Racke!"

"You—you rotter!" breathed Racke.

He saw it now—he knew the rascal's game—blackmail! He eyed the grinning rascal with burning eyes. Too late he realised the type of man into whose hands he had fallen.

Behind the hedge Tom Merry and his friends were looking at each other blankly. They were astounded. After Cardew's confession they had not doubted for one moment that he was the culprit. They believed Cardew had done it—accidentally, perhaps, but he had done it. They knew differently now.

Racke gritted his teeth.

"You—you scoundrel!" he breathed. "I—I won't pay you another penny! You daren't—"

"Oh, well, perhaps better if you don't," said the man, shaking his head. "Arter all, I feel I ain't doin' right not doin' my dooty like this 'ere. I'd bister tell the truth arter all. I'll be sorry to get a young gent like you inter trouble, boy—"

"You—you'll be sacked, too, if it comes out!" panted Racke.

"It won't come out, my lad," said the man with a thick laugh. "I can jest say I made a mistake—like I did over them other young gents. Jest drop a hint gentle like as there might be a name on the gun. Oh, yes, I'll manage it all right, young 'un!"

Racke stifled a groan.

"I—I've not got five pounds on me," he muttered savagely. "You—you can't keep this up, you rotter! You can't—"

"And over what you got then?" grinned the keeper. "It'll square me until you gets the rest, o' course."

Racke, his eyes burning, took out his wallet. It was usually well filled; it wasn't now. That fiver had brought it down somewhat. There were two Treasury notes there, however, and he handed them over savagely. As he did so there came a curious click from the direction of the hedge.

But neither Racke nor the keeper heard it. If they did they did not heed it. The keeper placed the notes in his pocket. Racke returned his emptied wallet to his pocket, his brow dark.

And behind the hedge Manners, of the Shell, lowered his camera with a soft chuckle.

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"You—you brainy bounder!" breathed Tom Merry. "You—you've snapped the beggars, then?"

"Looked like it, didn't it?" whispered Manners grinning.

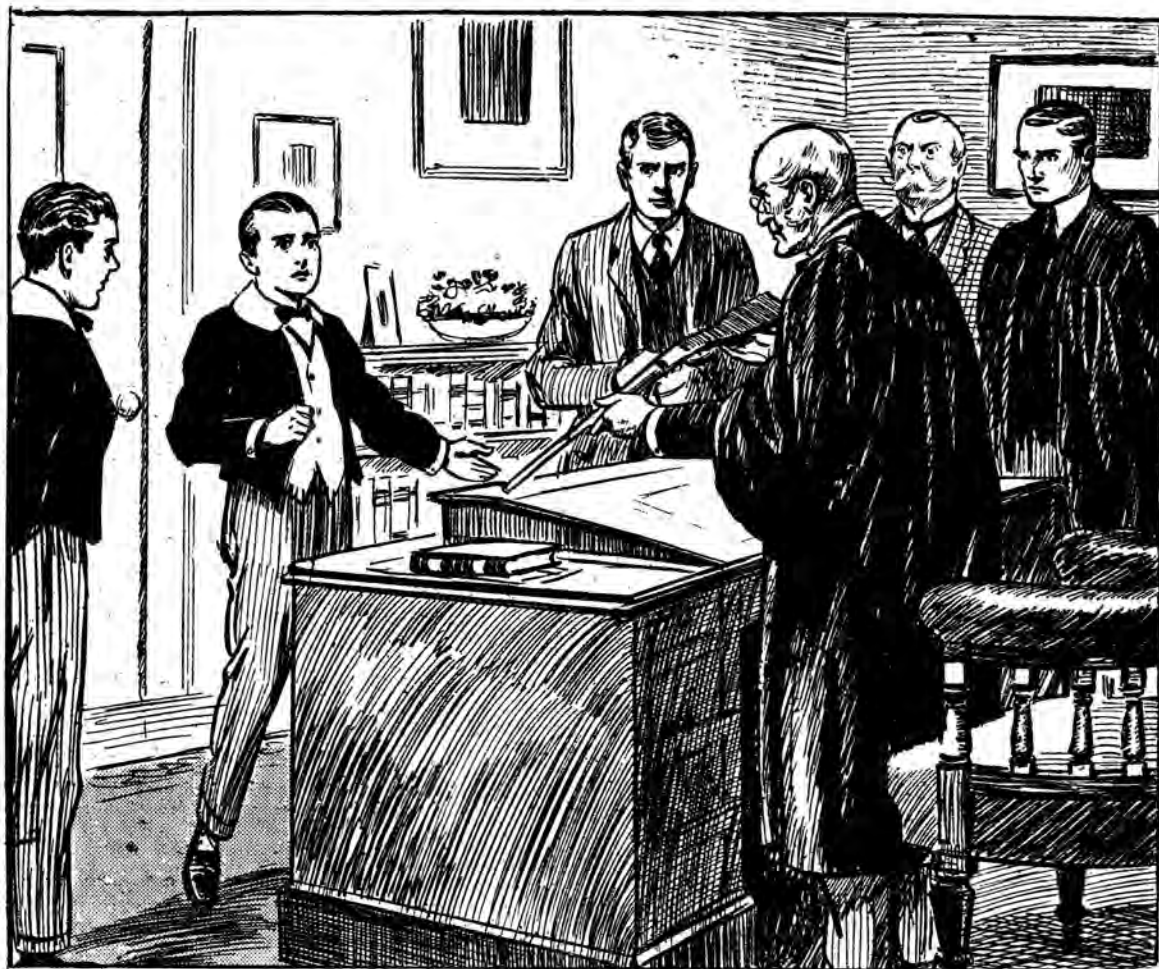
"You never know—a picture showing those beauties together might be useful—especially showing Racke handing over the hush money. Hallo! The keeper Johnny's off!"

He was. With a mocking farewell to the unfortunate Racke, the rascal limped away across the soft grass. Racke watched him vanish into the thick woods, and then he groaned and slowly retraced his steps to the stile. He reached it, and—then he saw the Terrible Three, with Levison and Clive.

There was a silence. Racke stood as if turned to stone, white to the lips.

"You—you saw?" he panted.

"And heard," admitted Lowther, nodding. "You're bowled out, Racke, my merry sportsman."



Aubrey Racke stood dumb for several seconds. His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, and he could not utter a sound. But there was no help for it, and at Dr. Holmes' third command, the wretched schoolboy blundered out his story falteringly and desperately. (See page 16.)

"You—you spies, you sneaks!" hissed the junior, his lips trembling.

"Spies or not," snapped Tom Merry, his face dark, "we've bowled you out, you toad, and I'm glad we have! So this is the truth. Cardew—"

"What are you going to—to do?" almost whispered Racke.

"You can't prove anything. I—I—"

"Your name on the gun is proof enough!" snapped Tom.

"But that isn't all. When you were handing that money over to that brute, Manners here, took a snapshot of the act. That tells its own story. When the Head's heard our story, seen your name on the gun, and this photo, I fancy he won't want further proof."

"I—I—I—"

"But we'll give you your chance—the chance to own up," said Tom grimly. "It'll be better for you if you do—you know that. You can either tell the Head yourself and throw yourself on his mercy, or leave the telling to us. Well?"

Racke licked his dry lips. But he did not hesitate long. The grim looks on the juniors' faces told him to expect no mercy. He nodded at last, his eyes on the ground.

"I—I'll do it!" he stammered. "I'll tell him to-night. It's all that cad Cardew's fault. He—"

"You can tell that to the Head if you like," said Tom Merry. "Anyway, I think you'd better see Railton first. And I'll come with you to see you play up all right. Come to our study at six o'clock, and we'll see Railton together. Understand?"

Racke did understand. He nodded, biting his lips with savage, hopeless rage. The juniors turned abruptly and left him and set off back along the towpath.

"That snap be all right, Manners?" asked Tom Merry.

"Right as rain, old top!"

"Good!" breathed Tom Merry. "Then it's up to you to get it developed before six. Now let's get back."

And the juniors went back at a trot, Manners hugging his precious camera, and looking very satisfied with himself.

CHAPTER 10.

Another Interview!

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW was a trifle pale, but he looked quite serene as he followed Mr. Railton into the Head's study that evening. The Head was seated at his desk, and Cardew gave him a quick look as he entered the room.

What he saw gave him little hope. Dr. Holmes' face was terribly stern. Mr. Railton's face was grave and clouded.

"Cardew," began the Head quietly, as Mr. Railton closed the door, "you are aware, of course, of my object in sending for you to-night? It is to hear sentence passed upon you for the grave misdeeds you have been proved guilty of."

Cardew was aware of that fact. The chopper was about to come down, and even Cardew's iron nerve failed him a little at that moment.

But, as it happened, Cardew was fated never to hear that sentence passed—not the sentence Dr. Holmes had intended to pass, at all events. Even as the Head opened his mouth to speak again, there came a knock at the door. It was Toby, the page-boy.

"Which as 'ow Colonel Blunt wishes to see you, sir," he announced.

The Head frowned.

"Show him in, please, Marsh!"

Toby Marsh "showed" the colonel in. He was not alone. A keeper was with him—not the head keeper this time. It was the young keeper whose life Cardew had saved on that eventful night.

Cardew gave a slight start as he recognised the man.

"Really, my dear colonel," exclaimed Dr. Holmes, in surprise. "I had hardly expected you again this evening."

"And I had not expected to come this evening, Dr. Holmes," retorted Colonel Blunt grimly. "But one of my keepers—Johnson here—has made a statement to me—"

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statement of great importance. I felt it my duty to acquaint you with the story without delay. Huh!"

"If it has any bearing on the case—" murmured the Head.

"It has—begad it has!" said the colonel, with a peculiar look at Cardew. "Johnson, you will tell Dr. Holmes what you have already told me."

"Oh, yessir!"

The young keeper stepped forward, looking extremely self-conscious.

"It—it's like this, sir!" he stammered. "When—when I heard this afternoon as this young gentleman, Master Cardew, was supposed to have shot my mate last night, I knewed it couldn't be true, and so I—"

"Confound it, man! Begin at the beginning!" rapped out the colonel.

"Oh, yessir—certainly, sir!" gasped Johnson, with a jump.

And he began at the beginning, telling how he and his fellow-keepers had pounced on the juniors the night before, of how the latter had scattered, and of his chase of Cardew through the dark woods. But when he proceeded to tell of Cardew's plunge into the river, and how the junior had returned to rescue him, Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton were astounded.

"So you see, sirs," ended the man earnestly, "Master Cardew couldn't have done it. He'd already thrown his gun away, and he was in the river with me when the shot must have bin fired. And I heard Mason whistling for help just afterwards. It's all a mistake, sir."

There was a silence as he finished. Dr. Holmes broke it.

"Cardew," he said, eyeing the dandy of the Fourth curiously, "can—can this be true? Is this man's story correct?"

"Ahem!"

"Answer me, sir!" thundered the Head.

"Ahem!" You—you see, sir, he—he must be mistaken—naturally."

"You—you know it's true, young gent!" gasped Johnson, eyeing Cardew's flushed face wonderingly. "Here's your cap, sir—as'll prove it."

"Oh, gad!"

Cardew ejaculated that remark involuntarily as the keeper, anxious to do—as he imagined—all he could to save the fellow who had rescued him, pulled from his pocket a school cap. Dr. Holmes almost snatched it from him, and glanced at the name in the lining. Then he looked at Cardew, and his expression was extraordinary.

"Cardew," he gasped, "this—is this your cap! Then—then this man's story is quite correct. What, boy, do you mean by stating this morning that you had wounded that man? What is your explanation?"

For once Cardew had no answer ready. He was stumped.

"I fancy I can guess that," remarked Mr. Railton grimly. "Clive, who was charged with the offence, is Cardew's chum. Undoubtedly Cardew took the blame upon his own shoulders in order to save Clive."

"And, by George, I am not surprised!" ejaculated Colonel Blunt, with bluff heartiness. "A fellow who would risk capture—and his life—to save the life of an enemy, would naturally put self last—could be expected to sacrifice himself for a friend. Huh! The boy may be a young rascal, an impudent cub; but, by George, there's fine stuff in him, begad there is. Carbury—Cardew—whatever your name is, I'd like to shake hands with you—begad I would!"

"Pleased, I'm sure, sir!" murmured Cardew gravely.

And he did. The two shook hands gravely, and both the Head and Mr. Railton smiled involuntarily.

"Bless my soul!" murmured the Head. "I—I hardly know what to say to you, Cardew! You have undoubtedly acted very wrongly—you have deceived us all. But—but—"

"But his motive was fine—splendid, by George!" interrupted the colonel warmly. "I can forgive the young rascal poaching—I do, freely. Huh! He'd better not attempt it again, though begad! Huh! I hope, doctor, that you also will forgive—"

"Really, colonel," protested the Head tartly, "that is out of the question. I will, however, remember the facts, you may be sure. But there is one point we appear to be forgetting. If Cardew did not commit the offence—and that seems clear now—who is the culprit? I am not—"

He was interrupted. There came a knock at the door, and a moment later, Tom Merry, followed by Aubrey Racke, entered the study. Not finding the Housemaster in his room, Tom had decided to visit the Head. Racke's face was pallid, and there was a hunted, hopeless look in his eyes.

"Well, Merry," snapped the Head, "what do you wish to see me about? If it is not important—"

Tom Merry lost no time in coming to the point. In a few

crisp sentences he introduced his errand—and Racke. Then, after laying the proof of the "snap" Manners had taken before the astounded doctor, he stood to one side, and left the rest to Racke.

Racke stood dumb for several seconds. His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, and he could not utter a sound. But there was no help for it, and at Dr. Holmes' third command, he blundered out his story, falteringly, desperately. Several times the Head, his face set, his eyes like steel, interrupted him. But at last he finished, and waited tremblingly for the storm to break.

But, strangely enough, the Head was quite calm. Perhaps he had had so many shocks that day that he had become impervious to them. He picked up the air-gun which reposed on his desk, and glanced at the butt closely. Then he nodded grimly.

"A. Racke" is the name scratched on the butt," he said quietly. "This wretched boy's confession is undoubtedly true. Colonel, will you kindly identify the man in the photograph?"

The colonel took the proof and blinked at it; then he gave a roar.

"You are satisfied he is the man—the keeper who was injured, Colonel Blunt?" asked Dr. Holmes grimly.

"Satisfied!" spluttered the angry colonel. "By George, I am! The—th scoundrel, the villain! Bribery, begad! I'll give him bribery! I've suspected the fellow for some time of treachery. This settles him. By George! I—"

The angry old soldier fairly "went off at the deep end," as Tom Merry afterwards expressed it. The Head listened patiently until he had finished. Then he spoke.

"Very well; this completes the case!" he said grimly. "I am exceedingly glad, colonel, that we have got to the bottom of this wretched affair at last."

"And so am I, by George—so am I!" spluttered Colonel Blunt. "Bribery, eh? I'll give the scoundrel bribery! I won't have the fellow about the place another second, begad!"

And, jumping to his feet, the colonel proceeded to take his departure—apparently in a hurry to "give the scoundrel bribery." When the door had closed upon the colonel and his amazed keeper, the Head turned to Racke, with a slight gesture of weariness.

"I will not deal with you now, Racke," he said quietly. "Nor will I say anything with regard to your abominable conduct in this matter. You have richly merited expulsion, and I am not sure whether that will be my final decision or not. Mr. Railton will you kindly see that the three boys Cardew, Racke, and Crooke—are brought before me at nine to-morrow morning? The other boys, whose wrongdoing has been of a minor nature, I will leave for you to deal with. You boys may go now."

The juniors left the room—astonished.

They were still more astonished when the decisions were known. For Racke was not "sacked." And—though he never knew it—it was largely owing to Cardew that he escaped that. For Cardew insisted that the main fault was his—that he had led Racke and Crooke into the trouble against their wills. But for all that, Racke got the worst. He was flogged in the Head's study that morning. Cardew was severely caned, as was Crooke, whom Racke had not hesitated to "give away."

Tom Merry and the others got a licking from Mr. Railton; but they didn't mind that—certainly not Levison and Clive. For the short-lived sporting companionship between Racke & Co. and Cardew was ended, and the affair proved to have cemented more firmly than ever the close friendship of the chums of Study No. 9.

THE END.

(Look out for a rattling fine holiday yarn next week, boys, entitled "CHUMS OF THE RIVER!" By Martin Clifford. You will vote this one of the finest yarns you have ever read.)

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EXTRACT FROM "THE ST. JIM'S NEWS."

ERECTING an AERIAL!

By Jack Blake.



AS soon as the Head had given permission for the erection of a wireless aerial at St. Jim's, Bernard Glyn came along to Study No. 6, and asked for assistance in putting it up.

He came to the right place. Though I say it myself, I have a reputation as a carpenter that is well known throughout St. Jim's, and I'm just the chap for this kind of thing.

We decided to suspend the aerial from the roof to a pole that was to be erected between the School House and Little Side.

Glyn and I went down to Rylcombe and bought the pole. It was a flagstaff, about fifty feet long, and the merchant who sold it to us arranged to send it up to the school on the following day.

Herries and Digby promised to give a hand in the work, and, of course, Gussy offered to take charge. As a matter of fact we didn't want him there at all, because I could foresee about twenty different kinds of trouble that were likely to occur if Gussy had a hand in the business; but after a long argument we promised him that he should come and hold the nails for us. We calculated that if he'd got his hands full of nails he couldn't very well get into mischief, which only goes to prove that we don't know Gussy as well as we think we do.

The first thing to do, obviously, was to dig a hole and plant the flagstaff. It sounds easy. It probably is easy if you happen to have the strength of Samson and the patience of Job, and the use of a steam-crane and a gang of navvies. We hadn't any of these. We only had a gardener's spade and a couple of hammers, and half a pound of nails—and Gussy.

We dug the hole all right. It was a jolly good hole, too, about six feet deep and a few feet round. Cardew came up to inspect it, and murmured some rot about "Tis neither as deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door, but 'tis enough, 'twill serve." As if any ass wanted it to be as deep as a well. Then those grinning idiots, Tom Merry & Co., came up, and Lowther took out his handkerchief and sobbed into it, and pretended to think that we'd dug it to bury Gussy.

Of course, Gussy got the breeze up, and wanted to "thwack" Lowther, and in the struggle he fell into the hole and dropped all the nails. He had to go back to the house to change his collar.

But it was when we started to get the flagstaff into position that the trouble commenced. We yanked it along from the school gates without much difficulty, but when we tried to get it upright—oh, goldfish! A fifty foot pole takes some handling, I can tell you!

After we'd poked out three windows, and given Knox, who was coming up to see what we were doing, a cough in the ear, and dropped the heavy end on to Herries' toe, and got splinters in all our fingers, we managed to get it perpendicular. But Digby fell over his foot or something, and it started to wobble, and finally came down to the ground again, nearly knocking out what bit of brains Lowther really has got.

Then Gussy turned up again, just as we were recommending the struggle, and interrupted the proceedings.

"Half a minute, dear boys!" he said. "I've got a wippin' idea!"

Of course, we didn't believe him. Gussy has plenty of ideas, but none of them are ripping. They're generally about as useful as giving a pot of hair pomade to a bald-headed man. But anything was better than wrestling with the pole, and so we dropped it and stood to listen to him, more for the sake of a few minutes' rest than from the hope of hearing anything worth while.

"What's your idea, Gussy?" asked Digby.

"A little twee!" beamed Gussy brightly.

"A little what?"

"A little twee! We could go into Wylcombe Woods and dig up a small twee, about a foot high, and then we could plant it beah without much trouble, and watah it every day, and take gweat care of it, and then it would gwino into a big twee, and we could use it instead of the pole!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was all very well for Tom Merry & Co. to laugh. They aren't responsible for Gussy. We are, and it makes a lot of difference.

We took our pet lunatic, and bumped him till there was another hole nearly as big as the one we had dug. Then we went back to the job.

We pulled and pushed and heaved until we'd managed to get the pole upright in the hole again, then Tom Merry & Co. shovelled the earth back round the base of it. Next we trampled it down and the job was complete.

"Thank goodness that's done!" panted Digby. "One job of that kind is enough in a lifetime."

We stood back and surveyed the towering mast with a sense of pride in our achievement. Then it suddenly dawned on me that we'd forgotten to attach the end of the aerial to the top of it. As it stood, the thing was no blessed use at all. There was only one thing to do—or, at any rate, two. Either we should have to pull it down again, or else somebody would have to climb up and attach the pulley and rope with which to hoist the aerial.

We looked at each other with sickly grins. Herries suggested that as Gussy had done mighty little towards the job, so far, beyond making idiotic suggestions, he ought to be the one to do the climbing.

Arthur Augustus protested that he didn't think he could do it.

"Rot!" said Digby rudely. "If you were where you ought to be you'd be spending all your time doing that sort of thing while visitors fed you with nuts."

That caused some unpleasantness. When it was over, and Herries and I had separated them, I told Gussy that he'd jolly well got to go up the pole.



Cutts and Knox were just in time to form a reception committee for D'Arcy and the pole.

"He'll be quite at home there, anyway!" growled Herries.

More trouble! I do wish people would be careful what they say in front of Gussy. I know it's true and all that, but you can think these things without putting them into words. It wastes so much time.

Finally I sorted out the tackle and pushed it into Gussy's hand, and told him to get on with the job. Of course, he wanted to go back into the house and change his clobber. As we knew perfectly well, that would mean a three hours' wait, I didn't argue the point. We grabbed Gussy, and pushed him as far up as we could reach, and then dared him to come down again. Off he started, giving an impersonation of the frog in the well who climbed on one foot and slipped down two. In due course he arrived back at the foot of the pole. Monty Lowther suggested that he should climb down the pole, and then he might slip to the top. Anyway, we gave him another start, and he did better this time. Half way up he stopped to take breath, and unfortunately overheard Digby saying how natural he looked up there, and that he only needed a tail to look the complete article. And he wanted to come down and argue it out. I roared to him to carry on, and he did, "undah protest," and got to the top all right.

I noticed the pole swaying during the last few feet of his ascent, and I watched it rather anxiously. Sure enough, as soon as Gussy reached the top it commenced to lean over. Farther and farther it went, with Gussy clinging to it and yelling blue murder. Down came the hammer, then the pulley block. Herries rushed forward to steady the pole, and stopped the pulley with his ear. I told him he was jolly lucky it wasn't the hammer, but he didn't see where the luck came in. Some people never know when they are well off. I kept well out of the road. I could see that Gussy was due to follow any old second, and I wasn't keen on being there to meet him when he arrived.

Then Knox came on to the scene with Cutts. I suppose he was thirsting for revenge, and had been to call up reinforcements. Anyway, they were both armed with ashplants, and were looking for trouble.

No doubt they had started out with the idea of being a punitive expedition, but they were just in time to form a reception-committee for Gussy and the pole. Cutts welcomed Gussy, while Knox—well, that pole seemed to have an affectionate regard for Knox. For the second time within a few minutes it favoured him with its attentions. It gave him a hearty slap on the shoulders, and bowled him head over heels. When he got to his feet again, some time afterwards, he staggered off into the House in a dazed condition. Meanwhile, we had picked Cutts up, thanked him politely for saving Gussy's life, promised to recommend him to the Royal Humane Society, and left Tom Merry and Manners to escort him in the wake of Knox. Wild horses wouldn't have dragged Monty Lowther from the scene, but he took jolly good care to keep outside the fifty-foot range of the operations after that.

Well, we fixed that pole! We got tent-pegs and guy-ropes and stayed if it fit to last for ever. Then we went on to the roof to see about the other end of the aerial. After some deliberation we decided to attach it to the chimney-stack. We didn't know that one of the chimneys was Kildare's, and that he'd been having some trouble with it. We weren't concerned with other people's troubles just then. We'd got enough of our own. I suppose we always shall have while Gussy is with us. But certainly if we'd known that the sweep was at that moment in Kildare's study we should have given that particular chimney a wide berth.

Gussy was standing near to it, showing us exactly where the pulley-block for the rope was to be fixed—that's the sort of thing in which Gussy excels, showing other people how to do the job—when the sweep got going.

The first indications of his activity that I received was a wall of agony from Gussy. I couldn't see him as he was on the other side of the stack, so I called out to Herries.

(Continued on page 28.)

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THE MOST AMUSING YARN EVER WRITTEN!

SOMETHING QUITE NEW!

Mike Makes a Motor Car



by
ELMER K.
ARTER

A Screamingly Funny Story of the trials and tribulations of Michael McAndrews and Billy Burton—motor mechanics.

CHAPTER 1.

Exciting Moments!

MICHAEL McANDREWS' father kept a garage, and, like all old-established businesses of that nature, it had a scrap-heap in the backyard, where lay the remains of dead and departed vehicles of all ages and types awaiting the arrival of a scrap-metal merchant's cart.

Michael, known to all his friends as Mike, was on his holidays and had nothing to do, so, seeing the many interesting things on the scrap-heap, he decided to build a motor-car.

Making a motor-car to Mike seemed a simple job. On the scrap-heap he was sure there was sufficient material to construct several Fords, a dozen motor-cycles, one or two sidecars, and about half the Forth Bridge.

Mike's father had heard the old saying about Satan finding occupation for idle hands, and was very glad that his son had not decided to make the fowls run three-legged races, or little things like that. So he gave Mike every help and advice, not to mention an old car that only wanted reassembling.

Billy Burton, Mike's special chum, was not at all in love with the idea at first. He had ambitions to try his hand at stuffing wild animals and birds. However, when he saw the frame, engine, gear-box, and wheels laid out in Mike's garden he gave decent burial to a poor little sparrow upon which he had been experimenting, and came over the garden wall to help.

Many details of the building of Mike's car are too painful to dwell upon. Mike pinched his fingers, Billy hit his thumb-nail, and little Marmaduke, Mike's four-year-old brother, fell into the tin of paraffin in which the boys had been bathing parts of the rusty engine.

Marmaduke found several things to interest him. Mike and his chum did not know that during their labours on the finishing touches little Marmaduke was occupying his time, hands, and mind filling the exhaust-pipe with stones.

At last came the fateful day when everything was ready to start it up. For some time the two budding engineers stood admiring the results of their labour, and while Mike was very enthusiastic, and compared his car, not unfavourably, with a Rolls-Royce, Billy was not so certain that it possessed all the attributes of beauty claimed by his chum. In Mike's eyes, the fact that all the wheels

were of different sizes did not detract from its general appearance—that the steering-column was almost vertical was not considered too much out of date. Mike also said that he liked a short car that was wide and high, but refrained from mentioning that he preferred a car that had the appearance of a performing elephant about to go down on one knee.

It was a proud moment for Mike when he turned on the tap, adjusted the carburettor, and commenced to wind the starting-handle. At first he just gave the handle a sharp pull up, the same as he had seen his father's mechanics start up the customers' cars. Then he gave the engine what he called a "swing over." This failing, he started turning the handle like an organ-grinder.

"Be careful the car doesn't fly off the handle!" Billy warned him.

"You—have—a—go!" gasped Mike, sinking on to a packing-case, exhausted. "Have you tickled the carburettor?" asked Billy, eager to air his knowledge.

"I've—tickled—it—to—death—and—stroked—it—and—whispered—loving—words to it," said Mike between breaths.

Billy took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves, then went round the taps and levers, had an argument with Mike as to which position was on and which was off, and finally started to operate the handle.

So vigorous were his efforts that the little car—if car it could be called—danced up and down on its front springs.

"Don't break it!" called Mike, jumping on to the chassis to add his weight to help keep it to the ground.

The servant, coming out to shake the crumbs off the breakfast tablecloth, stopped to look at them.

"Play 'Tippy Canoe,' please, Billy," she said.

"W-r-r-r-h!" growled Billy.

Just then one of Mr. McAndrews' mechanics paused in passing to request the supply of a drop of petrol for his flint lighter. There was a twinkle in his eyes which suggested that he knew why the engine would not start.

"Get it out of the tank," said Mike, taking the exhausted Billy's place at the starting-handle.

Refreshed by his rest, Mike set to work with vigour, and made the queer little car dance again.

"This is not petrol," broke in the mechanic's voice. "It's water!"

"What!" screamed Mike.

"It's water," repeated the mechanic.

"Of course it's water in there," said Billy. "You'll find the petrol in its proper place in the radiator!"

The mechanic laughed heartily, and Mike cast glances of disgust towards his friend.

"You don't mean to say you've put the petrol in the radiator?" he demanded.

"Of course," answered Billy. "Aren't those little tubes for filtering it?"

Mike grunted.

"The radiator's for cooling water——" he said.

"Our radiator at home is for heating the room!" interrupted Billy; and Mike grunted again.

Two empty petrol-cans were procured, and while Mike emptied the water into one of them, Billy drained the petrol into the other. Then they went to the garden wall to watch a dog-fight, which gave young Marmaduke an opportunity to change the positions of the two cans.

The dog-fight over, the boys returned to their labours and proceeded to fill the radiator and fuel-tank.

It was not until the whole afternoon had been spent winding at the starting-handle that they discovered that by some means the petrol was still in the radiator and the water in the petrol-tank.

This discovery caused a slight argument between the amateur engineers which lasted until bed-time.

By next morning, however, differences of opinion had been forgotten.

Having emptied the radiator and the tank, they made certain that the proper liquids were poured into their respective receptacles, and restarted their operations on the starting-handle.

Marmaduke was very interested. He had placed a few more stones in the exhaust pipe, and wondered what would happen when the engine started.

When the engine did start, Marmaduke's curiosity was satisfied, or would have been, had he time to think. He happened to be turning round to find more stones on the gravel path, but he need not have troubled, for the engine, with a noise like a cannon, started, and out flew the pebbles in a volley straight for the seat of little Marmaduke's trousers.

With a howl like a scalping Red Indian, he bounded forward as if propelled by a rocket, and landed head-first in the paraffin bath.

But it was not only the engine that started. One can say that the starting of the engine started various things happening. At the front end of the car the handle was whizzing round like a Katherine-wheel, and Mike's arm was going round with it. He seemed so surprised that he forgot to let go. It

was not Mike who was turning the engine now; the engine was turning Mike!

When he did let go he fell backwards into the cucumber-frame and the handle flew off the car and sailed into the air, over the garden wall and out of sight, but not out of mind, for the boys heard it crash through the greenhouse of Billy's house next door. Mike did not know it, but his old engine was running backwards.

The engine vibrated so much that the car dithered all over like a jelly carried in a wheelbarrow over a piece of corrugated-iron, and it jumped about at the same time. The steering-wheel became a misty impression of several steering-wheels—quite a lot of them, in fact, and Billy thought it was time to catch them all. He made a grab at the dithering wheel; it knocked his knuckles, it hit him across the nose, tickled him under the chin, and only came to rest when Billy fell upon it and held it tight.

While Billy was doing battle with the steering-wheel and Mike was gathering himself together, the car was emitting clouds of suffocating smoke, and soon that corner of the McAndrews' garden appeared to be the centre of a serious fire. The gentleman next door, not knowing about the boys' engineering experiments, concluded that the McAndrews' establishment was on fire, and acted accordingly.

He telephoned to the fire-station. "Can't you stop it?" yelled Billy.

"I can't find the lever!" stuttered Mike, half choked by the smoke.

"H-o-o-oh!" howled Marmaduke from somewhere in the blue mist.

"Michael!" called a shrill voice from the house. "Come and put your books away!"

"Where's that throttle lever?" choked Billy.

"Get off my fingers!" screamed Mike. "I've swallowed a ball-bearing!"

whimpered Marmaduke.

"Michael, come and put your books away!" called Mike's mother again.

"Jumping snakes!" howled Mike. "It'll shake itself to bits!"

"And suffocate us!" groaned Billy. "I've swallowed a ball-bearing!"

cried Marmaduke, his voice rising to a shrill howl when Mike, hastily scrambling round the car, fell over his brother's crawling form in the depths of the smoke fog.

Just then the fire-engine arrived, and men in shining helmets were charging into the midst of the smoke, falling over the paraffin bath, then the dithering chassis, and finally the fallen boys.

Mrs. McAndrews and the maid had now discovered that something untoward was happening, and rushed out into the garden. High-pitched voices sounded above the bang, bang! of the engine, which suddenly stopped its bark.

"Where is the fire?" someone cried.

"Michael!" shrieked the voice of another. "Where's Marmaduke?"

"I'm here, ma!" Marmaduke groaned, emerging from the mists, black in the face and his new linen suit ruined. "Oh, ma, I've swallowed a ball-bearing!"

"You should have chewed it, you naughty boy!" fumed Mrs. McAndrews. "Go to cook, and get some milk to swallow it down!"

"It's preposterous!" said the captain of the fire brigade.

"It's a car," Mike explained, appearing from out of the fog with ruffled hair and discoloured face.

"Then there's no fire?" the fireman asked.

"No."

"Did you think there was a fire?" asked Billy innocently.

The smoke cleared away and revealed the source of the trouble.

"Do you call that a car?" said the indignant fireman. "It's more like a baked potato-car!"

CHAPTER 2.

A Series of Calamities!

"WELL," said Mike later that day, when Billy returned to the fray after dinner, "we've got it to go, so that's all right. We'll now fit the body and take it out."

"Shouldn't it have some numbers?" queried Billy.

"Of course! I'd forgotten that," answered Mike. "We'll soon fix that. Two pieces of cardboard will do."

And so with cardboard, brush, and paint, the two chums made number-plates, taking the number from a car of one of Mr. McAndrews' customers. Then they placed the body on the chassis. They called it a body, but no one else would have been so generous, for it was merely a big box. However, it served their purpose.

The garden path sloped to the road, so it was not necessary to start the engine. Mike clambered aboard, Marmaduke being already there. Billy gave it a push, and away they started.

Mike grasped the steering-wheel, and craned his neck forward like a racing driver. The path was not quite straight; it curved to the left, so Mike gently turned the wheel to the left, but the car swerved to the right. Fiercely grasping the wheel, he now yanked it at right-angles, and the car climbed the garden bed.

"Who-a!" yelled Billy. "Where are you taking the car?"

"It's where the car's taking me," replied the young engineer, as they came to rest among the geraniums.

"Pa will be cross!" squeaked Marmaduke.

They pushed the car back on to the path, and sat down to examine it. They could scarcely believe their eyes when, by experiment they again proved that turning the steering-wheel to the left made the wheels turn to the right.

By argument and demonstration they eventually decided that they had coupled up the connecting lever to the wrong side of the inter-connected front wheels.

Another day of the holidays had gone by before this little oversight was remedied.

"I suppose the gear-box is all right?" murmured Billy, when they were about to make a second start in the early hours of the next morning.

The engine started up without trouble, for they had retimed it with a mechanic's assistance.

"Of course, it's all right," replied Mike. "It's got three forward speeds and a reverse."

"We may want them all," suggested Billy.

"If you don't, Michael, please give me one!" piped Marmaduke.

"Not me, you might swallow it!" growled his brother.

"Is the differentiation oiled?" asked Billy.

"Yes; so are the tyres," replied Mike.

disgusted that his chum was not familiar with automobile terms.

This time they pushed the car down the path to the road, and proceeded to start up. They had the road to themselves, with the exception of a solitary milkcart, which had pulled up immediately behind them.

The milkman's horse did not really like the smell of the "Rolled-Rice's" smoke, but it was tired, and did nothing more than twitch its ears.

The boys stepped aboard. Mike did a little thinking before compressing the clutch-lever, then placed the gear-lever in the position marked "1."

"Hold tight!" he cried.

Marmaduke and Billy, both with their caps on back to front, gripped the edge of the box. The whole Rolled-Rice and the intrepid trio aboard it bounced up and down under the influence of the engine's spasmodic motion. Billy's teeth chattered so much that he bit his tongue; Marmaduke bounced up and down like a rubber ball, and Mike fumbled with the steering-wheel.

"Hold tight!" he said again, and, trembling with excitement, he took his foot off the clutch-lever. There was a noise like a bicycle falling downstairs, and the car leaped into motion—backwards!

The back of the Rolled-Rice caught one of the shafts of the milkcart, which, with its milkcans and its tired horse, spun round, turned over, emptying the milk all over the pavement, and giving the horse an excuse to lie down.

"You've put in the wrong speed!" shouted Billy.

"Pa will be cross," crooned Marmaduke.

Pa was not the only man who was cross. The milkman, who came running down the path from Billy's house, also had a few words to say, and he said them. But Mike was too busy to pay attention. He placed the lever into slot No. 2, and the car gave another and faster jump—still backwards. This time the angry milkman was behind the Rolled-Rice, and down he went to roll in his spilt milk. Then Mike tried slot No. 3, and again the car jumped backwards, this time into Mr. McAndrews' front gate.

There was only one more slot which by rights belonged to the reverse speed; but as all the others had been reverse speeds Mike tried it, and at last the car moved forward, but not the body. With a leap, the four wheels, engine, and frame charged into the road, with Mike clinging to the wheel, leaving Billy and Marmaduke in the box body on the pavement.

To be dropped three feet in a wooden box is not a very pleasant experience, and this Mike's two passengers discovered as they bounced out of the body to join the milkman wallowing in the milk. But what of Mike? He was careering down the road with nothing for his feet or his body to rest upon.

He clung to the steering-wheel manfully, but his feet were touching the ground, yet he had not sufficient room to use his legs to run.

It was a battle between Michael and his car, and the result was a dead-heat. Hanging on to the steering-wheel, his feet dragging along the road, his legs imprisoned between the frame and the propeller-shaft, it is not surprising that Mike had not full control. The front wheels were locked right over, so the course of the Rolled-Rice was a circular one, a circle just too large to be taken in the width of the road. For

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this reason the car charged up on to the pavement and bumped down again, crossed the road, mounted the other footpath, and down again.

Round and round went Mike and his car, and the milkman, Billy, and Marmaduke, not to mention a postman, a stray dog, and the milkman's tired horse, watched the circus with interest and apprehension.

Of course, Mike could not stop his car. He could not reach the little throttle-lever or the clutch. He could do nothing but hang on bravely until the end. He was afraid to let go. Had he done so, the back wheels of his Rolled-Rice might have gone over him.

Except for the bang, bang! of the engine, a silence reigned over the impending tragedy. Even the birds paused their morning chorus to peep down at the strange performance going on below.

Then Billy jumped to action. Like a toreador in the Spanish bullfight he leapt into the fray, intending to grab the steering-wheel and the tiny lever that controlled the carburettor. We say he jumped into the fray. He jumped out again as quickly. The car seemed to resent his interference, and for a moment changed its circular course in order to charge at Billy. Billy took a flying leap and gained the branches of a tree, and the infuriated car passed under him.

Still Mike went on, turning round until he was facing the back of the car, and his expression, as viewed from behind, was like that of a boy compelled to take medicine he did not like.

The postman now took a hand in the game. Not that he deliberately planned to do so, the Rolled-Rice having described a figure eight, attacked the postman from the rear. He was an old man and slow in his motion. Until that morning he had done no high stepping for many years. He now showed the milkman and the boys how he climbed gates.

The milkman, who more than once had stopped a runaway horse, adopted similar tactics to stop the runaway motor. He dashed out in front of it, and waved his arms as he danced about like a Red Indian. He was not so

quick as the postman in getting out of the way of the circling car, however, and it caught him in a leather pouch where he kept his small change. He would have been knocked down and rolled over had he not grasped the hot radiator and swung his legs round the bonnet.

The extra weight of the milkman made no difference to the performance of the Rolled-Rice; it continued its circus, while the postman on the gate, Billy and Marmaduke on the pavement, and the tired horse, still lying down, looked on.

Billy let go finally, and slipped through the chassis on to the hard ground. The car seemed to realise that it had won, for it straightened up and charged towards Mr. McAndrews' gate, on which the postman still clung. He shouted in alarm when he saw the car coming towards him, with the milkman hanging on to it like grim death. The next moment, milkman, car, postman, and gate met with a crash.

"Oh-er!" gulped the milkman.
"Who-er!" came from the postman.
Even this collision was not sufficient to stop the mad career of the Rolled-Rice. It now carried the milkman, the postman, and the gate. Up the path it dashed straight for the front door, and then, as if to say, "I've brought the coals," gave a cough and dropped the lot on the doorstep.

CHAPTER 3.

Up Hill and Down Dale.

MR. McANDREWS believed in encouraging his son's mechanical aspiration, so he was not too cross about having to pay for the spill milk and the damaged gate. He also explained to Michael why he had three speeds reverse and one forward, although he could not suggest a means of altering this characteristic without fitting a different gear-box or a different back axle; so Mike had to be content.

"Anyway," he thought, "if we want to go faster we can go backwards."

This was the peculiar characteristic of the Rolled-Rice, according to its gears, its slowest speed was forward, and all its three reverse speeds were faster.

The boys having satisfied themselves

that the car would go, began to paint it—or, rather, they began to argue about the colour. They had the choice of green, white, and yellow. The first two colours was the forgotten surplus of the decorators who had been recently painting the house. The last colour was discovered by Mike in the stores over his father's garage.

Billy preferred green. Mike liked yellow. Marmaduke, apparently, liked the white, since he daubed it over everything within his reach, including his own person and the seat of Mike's trousers.

They set to work in earnest, but when they knocked off for dinner they discovered that each had been painting his side the colour of their choice.

"You silly ass!" cried Mike furiously. "Yellow's the colour, not green. Anyway, it's got to be all one colour, whichever we use."

After dinner they resumed their labours; and, as there seemed to be more of the green paint than of the yellow, Mike reluctantly changed his mind and went over the part he had yellowed with the green paint. Billy, on the other hand, took the yellow, and mournfully obliterated his green, until from a garden green it became a streaky yellowy-green that made him bilious to look at it.

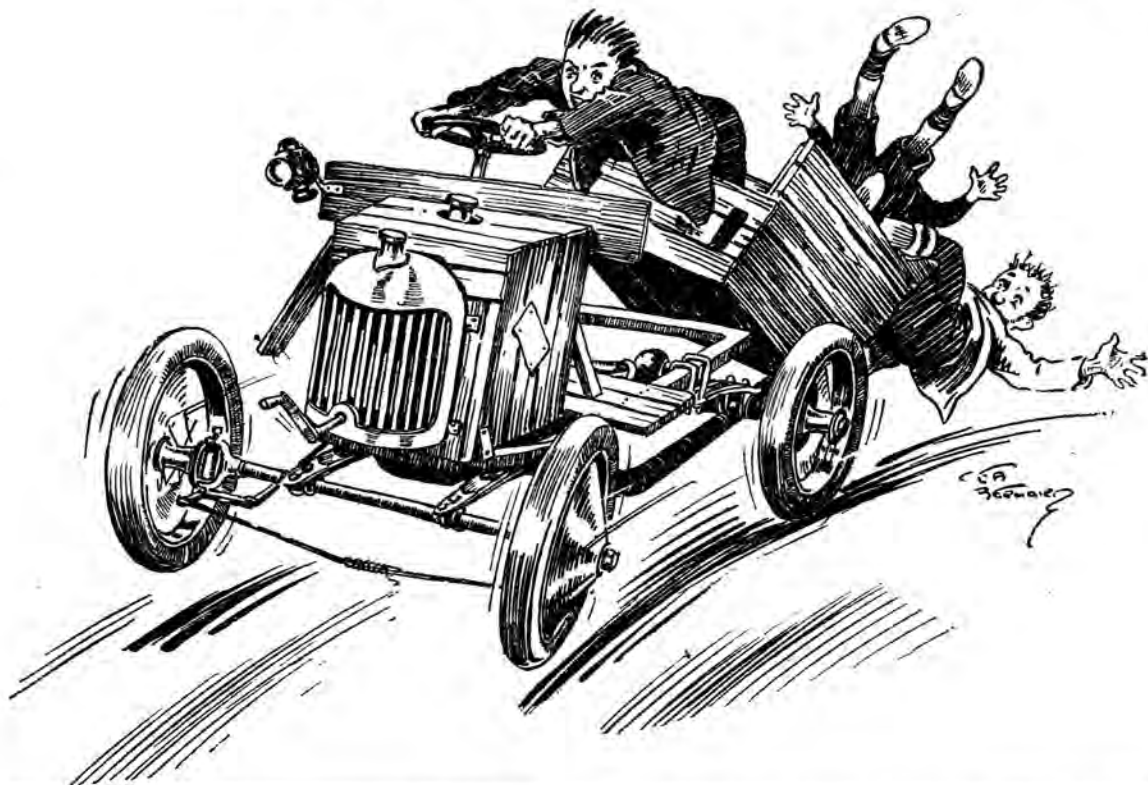
At teatime they were where they were at dinner-time, and when they strolled round to see how the others had progressed, their joint dismay may be better imagined than described. One side of the car was half painted a greeny-yellow, and the other side was a yellowy-green.

Mike and Billy were excellent chums, but their tempers were sorely tried, and it is sad to relate that they came to blows over it. Mike dabbed his green brush into Billy's face, and, in retaliation, Billy slapped Mike with a well-laden brush of yellow. Then they started in real earnest; but Mrs. McAndrews' maid cleverly separated them with a broom, and sent Billy home in disgrace.

It almost seemed that the end of the partnership had been reached; but as everyone, from Billy's father to Mike's mother, treated the matter as a joke, it seemed silly to upset a lifelong friendship over such a trifling misunderstanding, especially as Billy's father had got a



With a noise like a cannon the engine started, then out from the exhaust flew a volley of pebbles. They caught little Marmaduke in the seat of his trousers and sent him bounding forward head first in the paraffin bath.



At last the car moved forward, but not the body. With a leap the four wheels, engines, and frame charged into the road, with Mike clinging to the wheel, leaving Billy and Marmaduke in the box-body to fall on the pavement behind.

wireless set, and Mike was keeping some of Billy's rabbits in his shed.

Next morning it was decided by two votes to none that the painting operations would be suspended.

In the meantime the Rolled-Rice was daily getting more and more like a performing elephant about to go down on bended knee. Neither of the boys had noticed that the weight was having its effect upon the flimsy front axle, which had started to sag, and now the wheels, instead of sloping outwards, began to lean towards each other.

All day was spent preparing the car for the morrow. It was oiled, petroled, watered, and inflated. Marmaduke polished the steering-wheel and the radiator. Billy, as an outcome of experience, stuffed a sack with hay to act as a cushion.

The chums were up very early the next morning, and when they reached the road not even their friend the milkman was in sight.

Marmaduke had not been awakened, but he heard the voices of Mike and Billy, and, without waiting to dress, ran downstairs in his nightie, his clothes under his arm. He reached the car just as Mike had started the engine, and tumbled into the box-body in a heap.

Both Mike and Billy had borrowed goggles, and Mike wore leather gauntlets, which came up well above his elbows.

The start was made in good style—so good, in fact, that the recent improvements in fixing the body to the frame were well tested. Billy went head-over-heels, and might have hurt himself had not Marmaduke been there to act as a cushion. The sudden start almost unseated the gallant Mike also; in fact, it jerked him backwards until he was sitting on the back edge of his seat-box. For a moment only he poised in this

position, then the box tilted, and dropped him on the floorboard with his box-seat gripped between his legs.

Now, Mike would have been quite comfortable steering from this position, but he could not find the pedals for his feet, nor could he see over the dashboard, except by momentary glances as he bounced up and down.

"Stop!" shrieked Marmaduke suddenly. "I have dropped my breeches!"

Mike gave a gulp, which meant that he had either swallowed a fly, or his unnatural position was giving him the stitch.

"I have dropped my breeches!" cried Marmaduke plaintively.

Billy seemed to be trying to sit on his own head, for he had not yet recovered from the turn the car had given him by its violent start.

"Stop, Mike!" wailed Marmaduke again. "I've dropped my breeches!"

But Mike had other things to think about just now. His goggles had slipped, and he could neither see through them, under them, nor over them. Then he remembered that there was a magneto cut out in the steering-wheel. He felt for it; the bang, bang! of the engine ceased, and the Rolled-Rice came to rest with its wobbly front wheels against the hind-quarters of a horse that had strayed from its field in search of adventure.

Probably he thought that the Rolled-Rice was it; anyway, the horse did not like motor-cars; they had robbed many of his brothers of their employment. Here was an opportunity for revenge, it thought. It threw back its ears, looked back at the car, and then took careful aim. Its rear hoofs let fly at the Rolled-Rice as Marmaduke dropped overboard to run down the road to retrieve his nether garments.

The horse was out of practice, though,

and its aim was poor; all it hit was the tyre. Mike, peeping over the dashboard, was relieved to see the animal trot off, with its head and tail erect as if proud of its achievement.

"What's up?" asked Billy, sitting upright, and rubbing his head.

"Marmaduke has dropped his trousers," said Mike loftily, as if he had merely stopped in order to accommodate his brother, who could now be seen in the deserted road, tucking his nightshirt into his breeches.

"Did you hit that horse?" asked Billy, in an awed voice.

"No fear!" said Mike, refixing his goggles. "The beastly quadruped tried to torpedo us, but missed!"

"All aboard!" piped Marmaduke, trotting up to the car again, and clambering in.

This time Mike made sure that his box-seat was secure, and they restarted, awakening the countryside with the bark of the engine and the rattle of the old machinery.

Soon they came to a hill.

"Now see us get a move on," said Mike, settling down in a racing attitude.

The Rolled-Rice gathered speed as it dipped down the long, straight hill. If petrol could not drive that old engine at a decent pace, gravity via the wheels and gear-box could—and did! The car shook like an elephant with the ague. The boys' teeth chattered. Billy and Marmaduke gripped the sides of the box, and Mike went white. The pace was getting too hot, and Mike was not able to maintain a straight course. To be perfectly candid, the car was first on one side of the road and then the other. At times two wheels were off the ground, at others the opposite wheels took an airing.

"Put the brake on!" said Billy.

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"We haven't got any!" shrieked Mike, realising the fact for the first time.

Down the hill they sped at express speed. The gear-box screaming like a saw-mill. It is doubtful whether the whole box of tricks had ever moved so fast. More by good luck than judgment, Mike managed to keep it on the road, and to steer it over the narrow bridge at the bottom.

So fast had their descent been that they went half-way up the hill that faced them; but gravity levels all things, and finally the Rolled-Rice came to a halt.

"Phew!" murmured the white-faced Mike.

"Golly!" whispered Billy.

"I bumped my nose!" cried Marmaduke. "And I've got a splinter in my leg."

Before the boys realised it, the car started to run backwards, the gear slipped, and away it went, with Mike steering a snaky course towards the bridge.

Steering backwards is a thing that requires practice, and that hill gave Billy opportunities he may not have had otherwise.

Again Fate was kind. They cleared the bridge at express speed, and they sped backwards up the hill they had descended.

Then the Rolled-Rice came to a standstill; but not for long. It started to descend towards the river bridge again.

Mike strained his eyes forward, and steered for the gap, which to him appeared like the eye of a needle, through which he had to thread the car.

This time he was not so lucky, and as they swung through the parapets the box-body, shaken loose from its foundations, struck the stonework with a mighty thwack! Marmaduke sailed into the air, and landed on his hands and knees in the mud on the river-bank.

Billy did not go so far, but went through a bramble-bush. Mike went on with the car, with its body now swinging from side to side so much that Mike was first on one side of the steering-wheel and then on the other.

Relieved of some of its weight at the right moment, the car sped up the hill again. On this trip an inspiration came to Mike, and he acted upon it. When the car came to rest he turned the wheel, so that when it ran backwards it backed

into the bank and stayed there, its radiator facing the opposite hedge.

Mike got out, wiped the perspiration from his face, and stood arms on hips surveying the thing he had re-created.

"You—you—you—" he said, shaking his fist at the steaming radiator.

Billy, emerging from the bramble-bush, signalled from the bridge that he was still alive. Mike likewise signalled to the effect that he desired his chum's presence. Marmaduke signalled by a wall that he was still in the mud.

When the trio again joined forces they stood around the Rolled-Rice, and discussed ways and means of getting it home again.

They decided that the run down to the bridge would not be unduly dangerous, since they had made the descent backwards without harm. Billy and Marmaduke were quite sure about this, but they thought they would walk down, "so as to give Mike a better chance."

"You two hold on to it," said Mike, "and prevent it running away."

Mike's two assistants grasped the back of the Rolled-Rice, and the trio got it out of the bank, with its head turned down the hill.

Without waiting for its driver, the Rolled-Rice gathered way, forcing Mike to run to catch it up. Instead of holding it back, Billy and Marmaduke stood watching it go, with Mike standing at its wheel like a gallant seaman in a stormy sea.

Once more Mike steered the car safely across the narrow bridge and several yards up the hill on the other side. But Mike was learning fast. When the car came to a halt he steered it backwards into the bank, and frantically signalled the others his success.

All he had to do now was to start the engine and, when the car started, to turn suddenly up the hill and then away to home and breakfast.

"Now," he said to the others, when they joined him, "you two push behind if the engine stops; we don't want to go down the hill again."

But the engine required no assistance, and instead of being assisted by the two boys, it dragged them to the top, panting like a traction-engine and making as much noise.

The return journey to the house was without incident, except that one of the tyres burst. A little thing like that made no difference to the running of the car,

which finally arrived in its accustomed place in the McAndrews' garden, overwarm with its exertions. Steam was rising from the radiator, and Billy, curious to learn the reason of this, unscrewed the cap.

Then he had the surprise of his life. A column of steam and water shot into the air, and came down again in the form of a hot shower-bath.

"It's a geyser!" cried Marmaduke excitedly. "Do it again, Billy!"

"You've been starving its water supply," said Mr. McAndrews' mechanic.

"Starving! My hat!" ejaculated Mike. "Starving means freezing. That's not freezing, that's boiling!"

CHAPTER 4.

At The Show!

BY the time brakes were added to the Rolled-Rice the holidays were nearly over. The boys particularly wanted to go to the flower show in their own car, because the flower show was one of the chief social functions of the town, and included an exhibition of rabbits, pigeons, and fowls.

The flower show was held in a number of marquees arranged in a field just outside the town, and was attended by all the notabilities in the district, including the mayor in his chains of office and the local M.P. complete with monocle.

The Rolled-Rice arrived just behind the mayor's Ford. Mike had difficulty in preventing his over-eager car from climbing into the back seats, where the mayoress was enthroned.

A long, thin gentleman in frock-coat and buttonhole, whom the boys recognised as Mr. Shanks, the undertaker, came forward as secretary of the Horticultural and Fur and Feather Society to welcome his worship. But his words of official welcome, which he had so carefully prepared, were drowned by the bang, bang! of the Rolled-Rice. The Lady Mayoress was trying to smile graciously at Mr. Shanks while she pressed her bejewelled fingers in her ears.

"I hope they get inside quick," said Mike aside to Billy. "My knee is beginning to tremble. I can't hold the clutch out much longer."

(Continued on page 23.)

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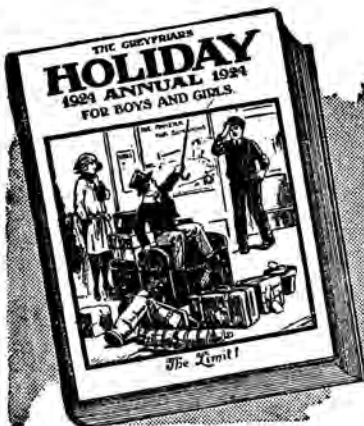
So many competitors qualified for the third grade of prizes that division among them of the prizes offered was impracticable. The second prize of £2 10s., and the ten prizes of 5s. each have therefore been added together, and divided among the thirty-one competitors whose solutions contained one error each. The names and addresses of these prizewinners can be obtained on application at this office.

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Fortunately the mayor and the mayoress descended from the Ford, which, driven by the mayor's foreman, now moved on, and so allowed the Rolled-Rice to enter the field.

Smoking like a furnace, and barking like a quick-firing gun, the Rolled-Rice bumped over the uneven ground towards the tents.

“To the car enclosure!” read a notice to direct car owners to that corner of the field where vehicles could be left. There were several other cars waiting to enter this enclosure, and once again Mike's knee was called upon to tremble while he held out the clutch. This time it trembled more than before. He hoped against hope that the car in front would move more quickly. But it did not, and Mike was seriously thinking of stopping the engine when he discovered that the throttle-wire was adrift.

The only way to give his foot a rest was to place the gear-lever in neutral. This he did—or, rather, thought he did—but when he released the pressure on the clutch the car jumped backwards with such violence that all three boys fell in a heap in the box, and the car was free to roam where it liked to go.

The Rolled-Rice apparently liked running backwards. Certainly it went faster than it had ever gone before under its own power.

The tall secretary, walking like a stork by the side of the mayoress, saw the weird car charging at them, and did his best to drag the stout mayoress aside. Her expression of surprise suddenly changed to one of horror when she realised the reason. She promptly fainted, and fell on Mr. Shanks, and pinned him to the ground. Mr. Mayor, as usual, strutting with an important air in front of his wife, did not see the runaway, which narrowly missed the fallen pair, and caught him in the coat-tails, tipping him into the box among the boys.

The fifteen stone of civic dignity made no difference to the speed of the Rolled-Rice, which seemed to shake itself before changing its direction to make a bee-line for the refreshment-tent.

The caterers were all ready for a busy day. Large glass bowls containing lemonades of different colours, names, and prices, but all having the same taste, were placed on the long trestles, with piles of sandwiches and plates of buns. Men in aprons and shirt-sleeves were polishing glasses and plates ready for the mayor's inspection. His worship arrived a little before the scheduled time. The chief caterer and all the assistant caterers did not recognise the two trousered legs that were waving above the Rolled-Rice's box.

Like a tank in action, the Rolled-Rice charged backwards into the tent, gathered up the guy-ropes, and swept past. Where the refreshment-tent once stood, with its gaily-coloured flags, only a moving mass of canvas now remained. The muffled cries of distress from the imprisoned caterers mingled with the screams of the mayor and the surprised outburst of the visitors.

Mike, Billy, and Marmaduke were pinned to the floor by the struggling form of the mayor, who pulled himself into a sitting position in time to see the Rolled-Rice charge into the tent containing the feathered section.

This time the car missed all the ropes and cut a hole clean through the tent-side, crashed through the exhibits, and went out at the other side, dragging with it a pen containing several surprised bantams. In a few minutes prize fowls, ducks, rabbits, and dogs were running wild about the field.

It seemed that the Rolled-Rice was



As the car approached the mayoress, she fainted and fell on Mr. Shanks, pinning him to the ground. Mr. Mayor, who was following behind, did not see the runaway car until it was too late.

thoroughly enjoying itself. Had it continued its straight path it would have finished up in a hedge. But the car decided to visit the vegetable section, so changed its course accordingly, and when the mayor again struggled into an upright position he found another tent within a few yards of his nose.

At full speed the car arrived in the entrance, collided with a trestle containing an assortment of cauliflowers and cabbages, uprooted one of the central poles of the tent, then took a dive sideways through another trestle where turnips and parsnips were on view, and out through the side of the tent. People scattered in all directions.

Mr. Mayor was down again among the boys, who were powerless beneath such a mountain of flesh. Mike was trying to grasp the gear-lever, Billy was reaching for the brake, whilst Marmaduke was jammed in a corner with the mayor to keep him company.

There were several brave people at the flower show, and they now started to chase the runaway car. They took care not to get in front of it, but ran behind its always receding radiator, awaiting a favourable opportunity to jump aboard via the step at the side. The car seemed to know that they were after it, and turned and twisted over the bumpy field as it sought for other tents to conquer.

The mayor's would-be rescuers had nearly caught the Rolled-Rice when Mike found the gear-lever. He had his face against the floor-boards with the mayor to keep him down, so he was not in a position to place the lever in the neutral position. He just pulled, and, with a crashing of gears, the car came to a stand, but only for a moment, though; then it leaped in the opposite direction, scattering the avengers like ninepins.

The sudden reverse had one good effect. It shot the mayor out of the body, landing him on the grass.

As the boys gathered themselves together there was a rending of wood,

and the car tore through the side of an exhibition summer-house. The Rolled-Rice was getting tired, apparently, for it could not get both in and out of the rustic garden ornament. It was not too tired to lift the structure, however, and the visitors were dumbfounded to see the miniature chalet careering across the field towards the pond.

With bated breath they waited. They saw one small boy—Billy—drop off the car from the rear, then they saw another small form tumble out and land on the grass. This was Marmaduke.

Mike stuck to his guns. He could not help himself, his head was through the rustic work of the summer-house.

Careering madly on, the Rolled-Rice struck the water.

Boom! There was an explosion, and cries of relief and consternation followed.

When Mike eventually crawled ashore he saw Billy and Marmaduke running away from a policeman, who had by now appeared on the scene. Mike took a near cut across the fields in a bee-line for home.

He reached it safely, Billy and Marmaduke, puffing and blowing, arrived soon after. They had outdistanced the policeman.

For several hours the three adventurers hid themselves in the garden.

It was getting dark when they ventured forth.

“Pa will be cross,” murmured Marmaduke nervously.

Mike turned to Billy.

“No more motoring for me,” he said dismally. “I think we’ll try stuffing birds in future.”

Billy, needless to say, fully agreed with his chum.

THE END.

(Another Splendid Story of the Six Statecraft Chums of Thunder Creek next week, entitled: “PUTTING MATTERS RIGHT!” Don’t miss it.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No 811.

A GRAND STORY OF INDIAN ADVENTURE!



CHAPTER 1.

An Interrupted Bag!

THE aeroplane ran for a short distance along the tract of flat turf, swooped gracefully upwards, and just cleared a big belt of tall jungle-grass ere humming away into the blue.

"The best job of the lot," remarked Frank Denby enviously, nodding his head after the soaring machine. "The only job that spoils activity out here."

"Yes—at the moment," agreed his companion. "But you never know, you know. If his high and duskiness wasn't a shady chap, they'd scarcely have sent this crowd to keep him quiet."

Denby shrugged his shoulders, and tilted his pith helmet farther over his eyes.

"Oh, we're keepin' him quiet, all right," he said, with some sarcasm. "Too darned quiet for my liking."

Tom Hendricks grinned.

"Pon my soul, Frank, you should have lived in '57," he observed. "You'd have been in your element servin' out cow's fat and hog's lard, or whatever the greasy stuff was that rubbed the natives up the wrong way. I almost believe you'd like another Mutiny to break out."

"I'd rather have that than these confounded blisters breakin' out all over my face," growled the other, making a savage swipe at a rather too-busy fly which came buzzing round his nose. "Ah, swat the beast! They raise lumps as big as Everest on a fellow."

Denby and Hendricks were junior wireless-operators attached to the 1st Battalion Northshires, which had been quartered close to the borders of Naipur for some little time past. The Rajah of that rather over-heated locality had acted with sufficient suspicion in several recent matters to warn the powers that be that it was about time to keep him under somewhat stricter surveillance than formerly. But, so far, no tangible evidence of the potentate's direct connection with certain seditious proceedings had been obtained, hence there was nothing for it save to let doggo and watch the course of events. Sedition was rife in many parts of the Indian

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Empire, though it was sometimes difficult to nail the ringleaders. Yet it was certainly wise to be ready on the spot.

And, as Denby had truthfully remarked, the single plane attached to the force seemed the only thing which ever got a move on, although the results of its many observations were invariably fruitless. But it moved, and that was what the rest of the battalion never appeared to think of doing.

Another week dragged by in this uneventful manner, when Denby, the discontented, vowed he'd stand no more of it. It was no jolly game, he declared, sitting there and getting fly-bitten, and, inwardly Hendricks felt inclined to agree with him. Both were British, not so long left a go-ahead school. Both were young, and had all the young Britisher's love for action and excitement.

"Look here!" said Frank one day, suddenly springing from his deck-chair. "We've rusted too long, no matter what the bosses at home may think, and if we sit about much more we'll develop a perpetual curve. There's plenty of game round here—look at all that jungle and stuff—so I vote we liven things up a bit. We needn't stay away too long, in case they should need our indispensable talents at a moment's notice."

Hendricks nodded.

"Right you are! Anything to shift that fiddle-face off you. It annoys me. I'll get permission from 'Old Bones.' I don't suppose he'll refuse, as things stand."

"Old Bones," as the C.O. was called, because his surname happened to be Bowness, merely nodded wearily, and requested that the two operators shouldn't wander too far into the suspect's domains on the far side of the jungle-belt. Truth to tell, Bowness was feeling a trifle fed-up himself with the enforced inactivity, and, good-natured soul that he was, he couldn't grudge a couple of his inferiors a brief taste of variety.

Half an hour later they had entered the jungle, and another hour saw a pretty fair bag lying at their feet when they stopped for a hasty snack. The sun was almost directly overhead, pouring down like molten copper, and threatening to peel their already mahogany-coloured faces. 'Way back at the base there was shelter of some kind, but here,

despite the height of the waving jungle-grass, there was none.

"Phew!" Hendricks gasped, taking a long pull at his water-bottle. "This is out of the frying-pan with a vengeance. Dunno that I wouldn't prefer a deck-chair and laziness to—"

"Hist! Shut up!" Denby suddenly seized his rifle, his eyes fixed upon something at the far side of the tiny clearing where they had halted. "Look over there!"

Tom turned, and his nostrils dilated like those of a war-horse scenting battle. Framed in the greenery not many yards off was the head of a magnificent tiger—a huge brute, judging by what little could be seen of him—but next moment it had vanished from sight.

"Come on!" Denby, always imperious, was practically half-way across the intervening ground. "Leave the other things there, an' hustle. We'll never get a chance like this again."

Now, as most people know who have travelled in, or read much about India, tiger-hunting is not a pastime to be lightly embarked upon—certainly not by a pair of badly-equipped sportsmen, on foot and unattended. It is generally carried out by an army of beaters, several elephants, and a good deal of preparation. But when two adventure-loving beings—scarcely more than boys—get suddenly bitten with excitement through seeing "Mister Stripes" almost beckoning to them, what can you expect? Not cool forethought, or calculation of the probable risk, anyway.

In half a dozen strides Hendricks was level with his chum, in another dozen they were pushing their way through the tangled vegetation where the tiger's head had disappeared.

The passage of the beast was easily discernable even to the most inexperienced tracker, for the beaten-down grass and smashed twigs were plain signs for all to read. Yet it was not for some time that they spotted him again—away over towards the left, where the jungle thinned and commenced to give place to more open ground. He was standing sniffing the air on the borders of a partially dried-up pool. Then he turned, evidently startled, and emitted a low, threatening rumble from his massive throat.

Crack!

Denby fired once—and missed. Hendricks followed with a swift shot, which also apparently went wide of the mark. There is no use shooting at even a big target if you are all on the jump through excitement.

But the third cartridge, loosed off by Frank—who had by now somewhat steadied himself—evidently found its mark somewhere, for the big striped body seemed to shiver, and an almost human cry sounded on the hot air. Then the tiger bounded awkwardly sideways, and loped, limping, towards some thicker growth in the distance.

"Good egg!" gasped Denby. "Let's follow him now, and give him no time to— Great Scott! What's that?"

"That" was a loud chorus of voices which had suddenly become audible not very far away, accompanied by a kind of "thrashing" of the undergrowth, and next instant a full score of natives broke from cover, practically surrounding the two youths. Some yards in advance, a tall, swarthy man—whose face seemed, to them, the face of either a devil or a dangerous lunatic—pulled up in his stride, glowering at them with eyes that burned like hot coals. He was dressed in a rich robe, flowing to his feet, whilst his head supported a white turban in which a single stone gleamed in the strong sunlight.

For perhaps half a minute he stood there, glaring; then he turned towards where another dozen or so were slowly approaching, dragging something along with evident difficulty, and both youths fairly gasped in astonishment as they realised what it was—the tiger!

Yes; enmeshed by a great net, they were tugging the wounded brute forward, spitting and snarling like some huge striped cat!

"What in the name of—"

Denby got no further, for, a slight foam showing on his lips, the tall man strode up to them, pausing only a foot or so away. His speech was thick, presumably from passion, but his English easily understandable as that of an educated native, when he spoke:

"So, feringhees, you would have your Jay's sport? You would shoot for your pleasure, yet never question whose bird or beast you made your prey?"

"The tiger was a wild one—at least we thought it was," ventured Denby. "And who are you, anyway?"

"I?" The native smiled slightly; but his smile seemed even more deadly than his anger. "I am he whom your accursed soldiers watch day and night! You thought I did not know it, perhaps? I am the Rajah of Naipur!"

Denby gulped something; Hendricks could not even do that. They had evidently blundered on forbidden ground, owing to their over-zealous pursuit of their quarry, and the shock was a severe one.

"Ay, I am the Rajah of Naipur," continued the other, almost without a pause. "The man whose people you blew from your accursed gun-muzzle when your so-called 'Great White Queen' reigned over India. Fools! Did you imagine such an act as that would ever be forgotten, though you have kept our people in subjection to this day? But the time will come—is coming quickly—when—"

"One moment!" Denby pulled himself together with an effort. "All that's ancient history, and in any case we'd nothing to do with the gun-muzzle stunt. As a matter of fact, I always thought it a bit too barbarous for white men—"

"White men! Ay, white in skin, but black in soul!" The rajah was steadily working himself into an uncontrollable fury, if he were not in one already. "For

that we—we, who are the rightful rulers of this land—hate your race, though forced to submit by circumstance. Mockery—mockery in every action, word, and thought! And now you have dared to wound Siva—the best beast in my collection! 'Twas not his fault that he wandered your way; he escaped, and—"

"As I've already told you, it's not our fault, either! We took the brute for a wild one, and naturally fired at it. If you want compensation—payment—"

The native's expression changed, an evil grin overspreading his visage.

"Ay, I shall want payment—but not in the feringhees' coin! No! Yet payment shall be full, nevertheless!" He made a sign to the rest, who had been standing motionless in the background; then his tone became a purr, like that of a pleased cat. "Ay, since the young feringhees have such a preference for tiger-shooting, I shall satisfy their desires. I vow they will find it interesting!"

He turned and strode swiftly ahead, the ring closing round the mystified pair, who perforce were obliged to move forward also, whilst the others dragged the snarling, spitting tiger in the rear.

CHAPTER 2.

The Madness of the Rajah!

IMAGINE, if you can, a large, circular space sunk somewhat below the surrounding ground-level, with tiers of seats ranged round after the fashion of an amphitheatre in Ancient Rome. Imagine, also, those seats packed with a motley collection of dusky figures—some bareheaded, some adorned with gaudy turbans—forming a rough semi-

circle about a raised dais, upon which sits a tall, strongly-built man attired in a flowing robe of rich material. His shoulders are bent forward, his chin resting in his cupped palm, as he stares into the pit below, which also contains two human forms. But these are not sufficiently dark-skinned to be mistaken for natives, nor are they clad like those above, for they are dressed in smart khaki tunics, and wear broad-peaked sun-helmets. Each is standing with his back against the staked wall of the enclosure, a rifle ready in his grasp, and each has his eyes fixed in an almost magnetic stare upon a line of cages let into the wall immediately opposite. Imagine these things, and you will get some inkling of what followed after Denby and Hendricks had been led away through the jungle by their apparently-demented captor.

They had not been left long in doubt about his intentions. A night spent in a reeking, slimy cell somewhere beneath the foundations of the neighbouring palace; the next morning—this! Only too plainly was the meaning of his words now brought home to them: "Since the young feringhees have such a preference for tiger-shooting, I shall satisfy their desires!"

This insane rajah, still uncivilised in many ways despite his education, kept a private menagerie, and, like the Romans of old, had a passion for pitting beast against beast whilst he and his retinue watched the combats in safety from above. But now the duel was to be even more interesting to their savage temperaments—this time it was to be beast versus man!

Fully ten minutes dragged by—minutes that seemed like years to the pair in the arena below. Then came a sudden stir among the eager crowd above—a kind of



As the ferocious-looking tiger was about to spring upon the two Britishers, a small round object, dropped from an aeroplane overhead, hit the arena. There was a crash, followed by a flying avalanche of earth and twigs, and an acrid smoke-fog blotted out the arena.

shuffling as each leaned forward to get a better view. The sun beat down mercilessly on the parched ground beneath, making the barrels of the rifles held by Denby and his chum almost impossible to touch, whilst beads of perspiration formed on their foreheads, rolling down their faces in tiny rivulets. But the heat was not altogether the cause of it.

Ah! A sliding door at the far side slowly opened, and a massive head blocked the aperture; then a lithe, striped body appeared, followed by another, and yet another, until eight or nine great male tigers stood there, blinking dazedly in the strong sunlight, which was such a direct contrast to the dark dens they came from. But presently, evidently getting accustomed to the glare, they crouched down contentedly—some resting their heads on their forepaws; others sniffing the air in anticipation, as though they scented something unusual.

But their inactivity was not destined to last. A burning torch, flung from above, fell right amongst them, where it lay fizzing and spluttering like a schoolboy's "nine-cracker." The beasts sprang apart, loping out into the centre of the arena, where another torch set them moving again. Evidently the object was to work them up until they turned to attack the two whites, whose presence up to this had seemingly passed unnoticed.

"Great Heaven!" breathed Denby. "We can't tackle that lot. I'm—I'm sorry, old man; it was my fault for suggesting—"

"We've got to tackle them—and tackle them now!" Hendricks rapped back. "And cut out the apologies; we're both to blame—"

His words were drowned by the sharp crack of his rifle as he pressed the trigger, for at that self-same moment he noticed the nearest beast fix its yellow eyes upon them. The range was short, and by a good stroke of fortune the bullet took the brute fairly in the open mouth, cutting short the savage snarl it was about to utter. A bound of a striped body into the air, a frenzied lashing of unsheathed paws, and the great "cat" thudded to earth in an inert mass.

But the fall of their leader, far from deterring the others, only seemed to rouse them to the fact that their tempting prey was within easy reach.

Stealthily, after the manner of their kind, they crept forward, crouching almost flat with their tails swishing slowly to and fro—each one plainly judging the distance and preparing to spring.

The pair poured in shot after shot, the majority of which took effect, for it was difficult to miss at such short range; but none seemed to strike a vital spot after that first lucky ball of Hendricks. That several of the brutes were hit could easily be told by the sharp snarls of pain as the bullets plugged home; but the whole affair was plainly a one-sided battle from the first.

Five of the animals remained where they crouched, licking their wounds and growling wickedly; but three, practically

the tall palisade—and both its occupants had evidently seen what was going on—probably attracted to the spot by the rifle-fire. Then the observer's hand suddenly shot out over the fuselage, and a warning cry came floating down.

"Bunk!" Frank's gasped, realising what was coming; but there was no need for the warning, since Tom had also taken in the situation in a flash. Like a pair of hares they dashed to the right, a fraction of a second before the largest tiger sprang, and dropped flat on their faces, lying as still as logs.

Something small and round hit the arena plumb centre; then came a crash, a flying avalanche of earth and twigs, and an acrid smoke-fog that smarted the eyes, making sight useless for some minutes. But when the haze cleared, the place where the three huge brutes had crouched was marked by a deep pit in the earth and a heap of debris, whilst the rest of the animals had retreated as best they could to the utmost limits of the enclosure, where they shivered, whimpering with terror, against the shaken palisade.

The plane still circled overhead, higher now, but its work was done. The majority of the spectators had fled in panic from the scene, but some dozen or so yet remained, congregated round the dais. That something had happened in that quarter was quite apparent, and as the pair below staggered to their feet and gazed stupidly upwards, ere preparing to essay climbing out of the arena, they speedily realised the truth. A flying fragment of the bomb had struck the Rajah of Naipur full in the temple, and his body was even then being borne away by the remnants of his retinue.

Denby again glanced up at the circling plane, waving his helmet, and the machine dropped gracefully towards the earth with the intention of making a landing close by.

"Well thank Heaven," he muttered, half aloud, "that 'Old Bones' kept you pretty active, even though the rest of us rusted!"

THE END.

(Look out for the splendid adventure and dramatic story, "REG O' THE RAILROAD!" in next week's bumper issue of the GEM.)

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unhurt, were now but a few yards away, lying almost flat on the earth like so many great cats teasing a couple of mice which they knew could not elude them.

It was surely only a matter of seconds now. Frank's rifle-magazine was empty, and there was no time to reload; Tom had still one shot left. But of what earthly use was one cartridge against a trio of such huge brutes? Then, above the muttering growls and the buzz of excited comments on the tiers overhead, a new sound predominated—the loud hum of an aeroplane engine.

Denby glanced up hurriedly, his heart for a moment bounding with hope, then sinking again. It was too late!

But was it? The plane was flying low—scarcely more than a few yards above

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THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER.

LION-HEARTED!

Two Americans had met in Glasgow after being separated for a number of years. "Hallo, Pete!" said Sam. "I'm so pleased to see you! How's the world been using you?" "Guess I'm all right. Got a good job here, you know," replied Pete. "I'm in a hotel. All I have to do is to show people to their rooms, and I draw ten pounds a week for it." "Why, that's a good job right enough, but I've got a better one," said Sam. "I'm what they call lion-tamer. All I have to do is to get up in the morning and make up the lions' beds, and we all have breakfast together. Then I'm free till dinner-time, when I serve the lions' dinner, which I also join them in. The same applies to tea, after which I make their beds ready for us to retire together for the night. For this I get fifteen pounds a week." "What did you say you were?" asked Pete. "Why, a lion-tamer," replied Sam. "Well, I don't want to hurt your feelings," said Pete. "but I think you are a lyn' beggar!"—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious Tuck has been awarded to John R. Troup, 39, Brown's Place, Hope Street, Motherwell.

HENCE THE AWKWARDNESS!

A well-dressed man stood for several minutes watching a brawny drayman tugging at a heavily-laden box almost as wide as the doorway through which he was trying to move it. Presently the onlooker approached, and asked: "Would you like a bit of help?" "Thanks, I would," the drayman replied, and for the next five minutes the two men on the opposite sides of the box worked, lifted, puffed, struggled and wheezed, but the object of their attentions did not move an inch. Finally the well-dressed man straightened up, and said, between puffs: "I don't believe we can ever get it out." "Get it out!" the drayman roared. "Why, you confounded idiot, I'm trying to get it in!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Ellery, 1, Church Lane, Dinnington, nr. Rotherham.

A "TOOTHsome" TRAGEDY!

With a sigh of relief he sank into the luxurious cushions of an empty compartment of a London-bound express train. Now to enjoy a smoke. He drew from his pocket a pipe and some tobacco, but alas, no matches. He gazed feverishly out of the window, but no bookstall was at hand, and the train was about to start. Ah, the very thing, an automatic machine! With a bound he was out of the compartment and searching his pockets for a penny. His fingers closed on a half-crown. Well, it was worth it. He thrust the coin into the machine and drew forth the prize. Another second, and he was safely aboard the now moving train. Having filled his pipe, he produced his packet of—matches? Alas, no. 'Twas butter-scotch!—Half-a-crown has been awarded to John Matthew, Williamsfield, Kilwinning, N.B.

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(Continued from page 17.)

"What's the matter with that ass now?" I said.

There was some coughing and spluttering, but no answer, so I yelled out again.

"Herries! Herries!" Then I poked my head round the corner of the stack, and found that I was talking to a nigger.

At least, I thought it was a nigger, but it wasn't. It was only Herries and some of the top. I couldn't see Gussy; he was still on top of the stack. But I could hear him. He was howling like a banshee. As far as that goes, nobody could see Gussy. There was a lot of soot to be seen, and somewhere underneath the thickest of it was Gussy, invisible, but audible.

He was clinging to a chimney-pot, and by-

and-by, when he'd cleared his throat, he made a telephone of the chimney, and if the sweep had only heard half of what was said to him, he'd have come up and slung the whole lot of us off the roof. Fortunately he didn't appear to hear it. There were clouds of soot everywhere, but I was determined to get the job finished, in spite of everything.

We fastened the pulley to the stack, and ran the end of the rope through it. I was busy hauling on to the rope when there came a startled yell from Digby.

"Look out!"

"I did look out, and there was Gussy to-bogganing down the steep slope of the roof en route for the quad three or four storeys

below. I dropped the rope and grabbed him. I got one hand on his collar, and the other in his hair, and I hung on till Digby got round and helped me to yank him back. He yelled like grief, but we didn't worry.

Of course, the rope had slipped off the roof by now, and we had to let twine down, and go to no end of trouble to get it up again. In the meantime we took Gussy through the trap-door, and locked him up in the box-room till we finished the job outright.

That aerial is up now, and I jolly well hope it stays up. Anyway, if it doesn't, somebody else can have the job of re-erecting it, unless we can hire a nurse to look after Gussy while we do it.

THE END.

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