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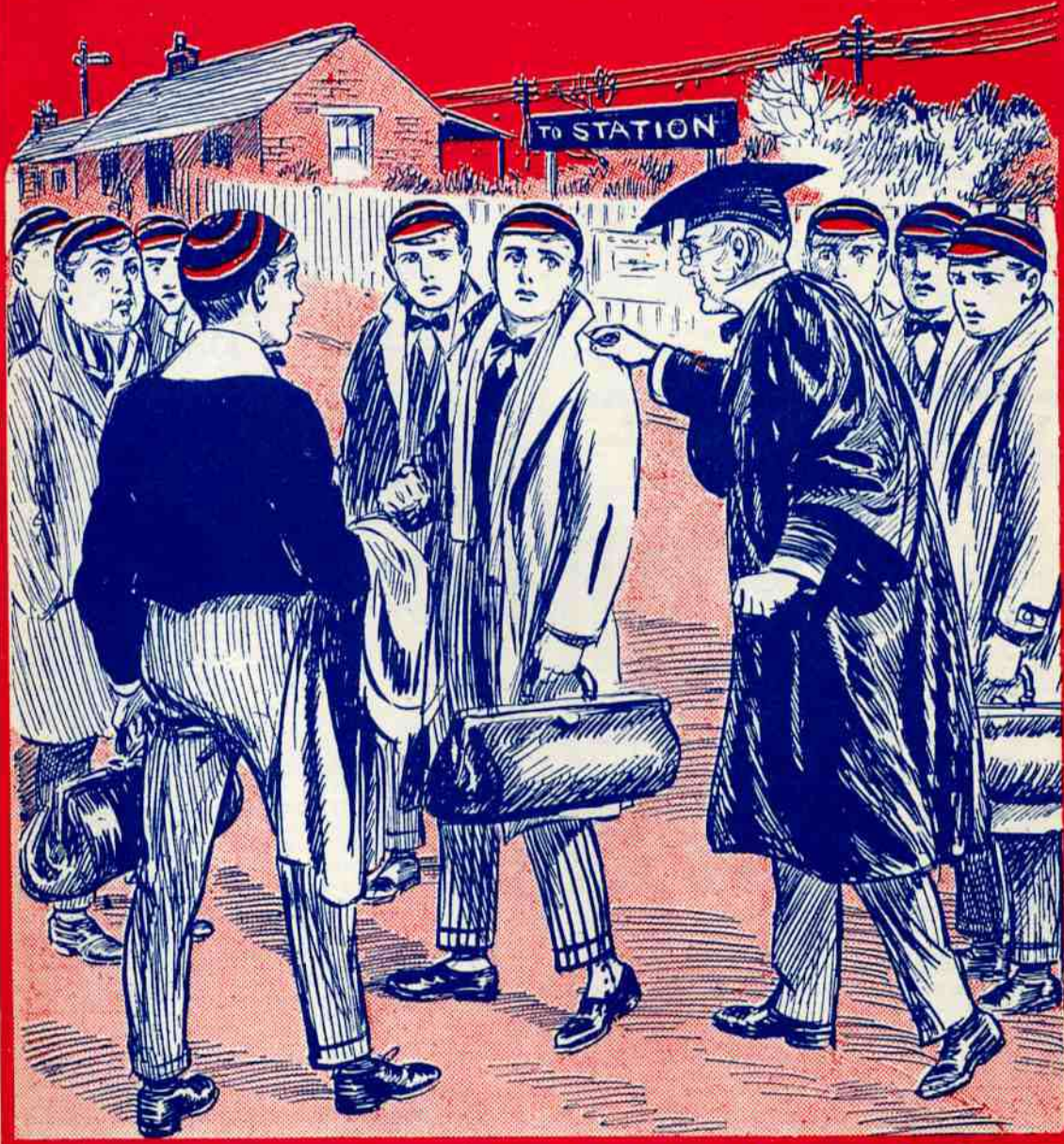
THE "HOLIDAY ANNUAL."--GET IT TO-DAY!

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

The GEM 2^D

No. 827.
Vol. XXIV.
December 15th.
1923.

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TURNED BACK FROM THE TEAM!

Ralph Reckness Cardew, the junior football skipper of St. Jim's, is ordered back to detention on the day of the Rookwood match! (A startling incident from the long complete school story of Tom Merry & Co., in this issue.)



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,—Our Grand Christmas Number of the "Gem" will be on sale next week. That is the leading item of intelligence I have to impart on this occasion. It seems to me that it is just one of the jolly things that really matter. I have had plenty of letters suggesting this thing and that for our Christmas "Special." When you have the issue in your hands next Wednesday I know one thing—you will admit that it is the finest, most seasonable, and varied number of the "Gem" ever put on the market. Christmas brings no end of cheery reminders, and new ideas come in with a rush at the end of December, when the old year starts packing up its bag ready for departure. You know how it is. You want to get busy about crowds of things—really important matters—and you want the old friends to remember the season in the usual manner. Well, the "Gem" can put in a claim for being a very old friend, a true friend, a chum who has stood the test of years. And it is not going to disappoint you. Not likely!

"D'ARCY'S CHRISTMAS PARTY!"

By Martin Clifford.

Our St. Jim's yarn is a natter. You will like it, boys. It shows how the feud between Cardew and Tom Merry is still at fever-heat. Of course, there can be no question of putting this fine story in a nutshell. It cannot be done. There is too much in it to grip the attention, with the brilliant scene at the mansion of Lord

Eastwood, where the festive season is being spent, and with Cardew nursing bad feelings, whatever Tom Merry does. There is a lot more to it. The tale has a sting in it; also the spirit of something which may be called life music, for there are other influences working for peace in the grand old home of D'Arcy. It is a real, proper sort of Christmas yarn, this—drama, wit, sparkle, and heaps of good cheer!

THE "HOLIDAY ANNUAL."

Enough has been said to show that no Christmas can be considered complete without the Special Number of the "Gem." But the "Holiday Annual" fits in here like a glove as well. It is the merriest and most fascinating book for the holidays, or any other old time, on the market.

THE "ST. JIM'S NEWS."

And now here's a positive treat! Circumstances have compelled our Supplement to go on short commons of late. Compensation for this fact will be found in the "Gem" Christmas Number. The "St. Jim's News" for next Wednesday will be found to be the brightest, smartest, and most captivating ever printed.

FREE TUCK!

Apply to the "Gem" for this. Our Tuck-Hamper Competition is ramping along in great style. If you like tuck, just enter our easy competition. Besides the substantial Tuck-Hamper, which finds its way to some reader's address each week, there are extra prizes of humble half-crowns.

"THE GHOST OF GREYMINSTER CASTLE!"

By Vincent Owen.

Do you ever have daydreams? They are immensely popular. It is enormously attractive to weave a genial little plot about how a fortune of the extra-large kind drops in unexpectedly, say, about Christmas-time. But, in this splendid Christmas story the chief character, Dick Baker, comes in for the glorious experience without dreaming about it. This is a wonderful story, with a legend thrown in concerning the mysterious disappearance of the heir to the grand old castle and the wealth of Sir John de Coverley. It is packed with thrills, for Greyminster's ghost is one calculated to strike terror into the pluckiest. Whatever you do, don't miss this splendid treat for next week.

WHAT'S TO COME?

That is always the question. It is reasonable enough. We all have to look forward and prepare for the future. On the other side of next week's superlatively excellent issue of the "Gem" there are plenty of big happenings. Just ahead of us we desecrate the lights of the New Year of 1924, and it will be all clear ahead for our favourite paper, with new triumphs for it on every hand. I have, as a beginning, made arrangements for a particularly powerful new serial. This story will soon be starting, so look out for further details next week.

THE WINNING "GEM"!

Of course, I get criticisms from loyal supporters. I must just mention a hint from the Potteries. "Potter" says there is too much D'Arcy, and too little Monty Lowther, Tom Merry, and Fatty Wynn. Well, wrinkles are ever as welcome as the flowers in May, but half a minute, please! What would be said to me if good old Dussy took a back seat I tremble to think. When the noble scion of Eastwood is left out there are grumbles. Still, for all that, no reason why Fatty Wynn and the others should not have their innings. Martin Clifford will attend to that part, safe as houses!

Your Editor.

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Even detention does not deter
Ralph Reckness Cardew from...

.... carrying out his great
campaign against Tom Merry!

SKIPPER AND SLACKER!



CHAPTER I. Bucking up Cardew!

"FINISHED?"

Levison of the Fourth asked the question, as he came into Study No. 9.

Ralph Reckness Cardew certainly looked like a fellow who had finished his occupation, whatever that might have been.

He was reclining in the study armchair, with his feet on the fender, and a cigarette in his mouth.

A blue spiral of smoke floated upward.

Levison stared at him. Sidney Clive, who had followed Levison in, frowned at him.

Cardew turned his head lazily.

"Oh! You fellows?" he said.

He yawned.

"I thought you were on the footer-ground," added Cardew.

"We've done footer practice," said Levison curtly. "And as you happen to be junior captain of St. Jim's now, Cardew, it would have been just as well if you had turned up."

"Just as well!" said Clive. "In fact, better!"

Cardew shook his head gravely.

"There are many responsibilities attached to the job of junior captain," he answered. "You fellows—the rank and file—only have to use brawn. Your skipper has to use brain as well."

"Is that how you use your brains—slacking before a fire and smoking like a frowsy fag?" asked Clive.

Cardew seemed to remember suddenly that he had a cigarette in his mouth. He removed it and tossed it into the glowing coal.

"My mistake," he said. "Old habits, you know."

"It was understood that you gave up that foolery when you were elected captain in Tom Merry's place," grunted Clive.

"Quite so. Merely an old bad habit," said Cardew gracefully.

"Well, have you finished?" asked Levison again.

"Finished what?"

"Weren't you going over the football list for the Rookwood match?"

"Eh! Oh, yes."

"As the match takes place to-morrow, it might be as well to give the matter a little thought, now you're captain," said Clive.

"Don't give me any sars, old chap!" urged Cardew. "I'm beginnin' to think that I made a mistake in buttin' in and hoggin' the junior captaincy. It isn't all beer and skitties, I can tell you. It was rather a jest downin' Tom Merry. But is the game worth the candle? Now that I've shown that I could do it, I feel that it wasn't worth while to do it at all. A captain's job is a bore, like everythin' else."

"Look here—"

"Comin' to think of it, I really believe that true happiness is found in the humble and happy state of a subordinate," said Cardew. "I suppose that's why so few men get on in life. They find it easier to keep in second or third place. Anythin' better than work."

A Grand New Extra - Long
Complete School Story of St.
Jim's, recording the amazing
exploits of Ralph Reckness
Cardew as junior skipper of
St. Jim's. A Sensational Yarn

By

Martin Clifford.

"It's a bit too late to think of that," said Levison quietly. "You've upset the whole show, and bagged the captaincy from Tom Merry. You did it against our advice."

"If you'd advised me to do it, old bean, I mightn't have done it," remarked Cardew. "Good advice always has these rotten results. Whatever a fellow does, he should never give good advice. Bad habit."

"Have you finished the list?"

"What list? Oh, the Rookwood bizney! Is there any hurry?"

"It's got to be posted on the board. All the fellows are keen to see it."

"Well, I started it," said Cardew. "Then my thoughts wandered, and I put on a cigarette to think it over. And then I began to think about the Christmas holidays."

"How the holidays!"

"But they're quite near at hand, old man. You don't want the school to break up and find us unprepared for the hols, do you? Be prepared, you know—that's a motto or somethin'—"

"Where's the list?"

"On the table."

Ernest Levison looked over the table. Cardew settled down at ease in the chair again.

For several weeks Cardew of the Fourth had been leading quite a strenuous life.

He had contested the junior captaincy with Tom Merry, and he had won. He had shown up brilliantly as a footballer. He had made his chums, Levison and Clive, hope and almost believe that a permanent change had taken place in him, and that his idle slacking was a thing of the past.

Now, however, the old Cardew was coming to the surface again.

He had triumphed, and for a time triumph had been sweet. But it seemed to have turned, at last, to dust and ashes in his mouth.

A junior captain had plenty of duties on his shoulders. Tom Merry had always performed his duties quietly, without ostentation, but very efficiently. He had not given satisfaction all round, because that was not within the bounds of possibility. But he had been unanimously acknowledged to be a good skipper, and, at all events, it was known that he did his best.

Cardew might have made as good a captain, with the same steady sense of loyalty to duty.

But that was where Cardew differed from Tom Merry. An exciting election, a brilliant football match, called forth all Cardew's powers. But for the steady, humdrum doing of plain duty he had no taste or inclination.

Having gained all that he had aspired to, he tired of it as he tired of everything else in the long run.

Among other duties of a junior captain, was the duty of seeing that slackers did not shirk games practice. And already Cardew had begun to shirk games practice himself.

The coming match with Rookwood School filled all the junior footballers at St. Jim's with excitement and anticipation—excepting Cardew. Ralph Reckness Cardew was beginning

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to find it difficult not to yawn when the Rookwood match was mentioned.

He stared at the fire, while Levison picked up a sheet of paper from the table and looked at it, and then held it up for Clive to look at.

On the paper were written three names in Cardew's elegant calligraphy. The names were Cardew, Levison, Clive.

"Is this the paper?" asked Levison.

Cardew made an effort and glanced round.

"Yes."

"You've got three names down."

"Have I?"

"Yes!" roared Levison.

"Right-ho!" said Cardew pacifically. "I've got three names down. That's a beginnin', isn't it?"

"You slackin' ass!"

"High-ho! I say, old chap, you know lots about football and footballers," said Cardew. "Help me."

"I'm willing to do that, of course."

"There's a pal! I think there's a pen on the table. Finish the list for me."

"What?"

"And then Clive will go and stick it on the board, like a good chap," said Cardew.

"You don't want to look at it first?" asked Levison sarcastically.

"Not at all. I'm relyin' on your judgment, old bean."

"And that's how you're going to carry on as junior captain of St. Jim's."

"That's it," assented Cardew lazily.

"Do you think it's good enough?"

"Quite!"

"Well, I don't," said Levison grimly. "You've got the job now, Cardew, and you've got to play up. You're not going to let this study down by playing the goat after you've turned Tom Merry out of his job and bagged it. You're going to get a move on."

"Dear me!" said Cardew.

"You're going to be ragged when you shirk your duty."

"Oh gad!"

"Collar him, Clive."

"You bet!" grinned Clive.

"Here, hold on!" yelled Cardew, losing his easy nonchalance all of a sudden, as the two juniors seized him over the back of the armchair.

"Bump him!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Cardew was yanked bodily over the back of the armchair. The chair rolled over, and Cardew sprawled on the study carpet with a roar.

"Bump!"

"I say—"

"Bump!"

"I-I-I—"

"There!" gasped Levison. "I hope that's woke you up! Now get on with your job, Cardew, or we'll come back and give you some more."

Levison and Clive walked out of the study. Cardew sat on the carpet, gasping, and staring after them blankly.

"Oh gad!" he gasped.

He rose rather slowly and painfully to his feet. The energetic measures of his study-mates had certainly awakened him effectually.

"Oh gad!" he murmured. "I'm beginnin' really to think that I made a bad break in baggin' the captaincy! Oh gad! Ow!"

CHAPTER 2.

Manners Is Satisfied!

TOM MERRY stopped and looked at the notice-board. Manners and Lowther stopped, too, and followed his glance. There were a good many notices on the board; but among them there was no paper in the hand of Ralph Reckness Cardew.

"Not up yet," remarked Tom.

"About time," said Manners.

"Possibly Cardew's forgotten that there's a football match with Rookwood to-morrow?" suggested Monty Lowther satirically.

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Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, he could hardly have forgotten it," he said, "but it's high time the list was up. Fellows want to know whether they're playing or not."

"Yaas, wathah!" observed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth, who had strolled elegantly along to look at the board. "I feah that Cardew is gettin' a little slack, you know."

"Oh, give him time!" said Tom good-naturedly.

"Yaas; but if I am not playin' Wookwood to-morrow, you kn w, I want to take a little wun out of 'gates," said Arthur Augustus. "A fellow is entitled to know. Of course, I suppose I can take it for gwanted that I am playin'. Cardew wants to win the match. Nevahtheless, a fellow wants to know."

The Terrible Three of the Shell chuckled.

"I see nothin' to cackle at in that wemurk, you fellows. I think I had bettah speak to Cardew! Anybody know where he is?"

"He, he, he!"

That unmusical cackinnation came from Baggy Trimble of the Fourth. Arthur Augustus adjusted his celebrated eyeglasses in his noble eye, and turned it inquiringly upon Baggy.

"I've just seen him," grinned Trimble. "Levison and

Clive have been ragging him in his study."

"Ragging Cardew?" said Tom Merry.

"He, he, he! Yes! He hasn't settled the eleven yet, and they bumped him for slackin'!"

Tom Merry looked grave.

"Cardew ought to have made up his mind by this time," he said. "I dare say he wants time to think it out, as he's new to the job. But—"

"But—" said Manners.

"He wants time to smoke a cigarette, you mean!" chuckled Trimble.

"Oh, dry up!" snapped Tom. "Cardew's given up that rot."

"He hadn't ten minutes ago," said Trimble, grinning.

"Bai Jovel! This won't do, you fellows, you know," remarked Arthur Augustus, shaking his head seriously. "This won't do for St. Jim's."

"St. Jim's should have stuck to a good skipper when they had one," said Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, but—"

"Oh, rot!" said Tom.

"Anyhow, it's not for us to interfere with Cardew. Let's get on to prep!"

The Terrible Three walked away. But Tom Merry's face was very thoughtful. Since Cardew had captured the junior

captaincy Tom Merry had backed him up loyally, for the sake of the House and the School. But he knew the slacker of the Fourth too well to trust him, and he did not expect Cardew to make a good or efficient skipper.

And the Rookwood match was a serious matter. It was one of the big junior fixtures, and St. Jim's needed to put their best team into the field to beat Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood. Certainly it was not a time for the junior captain to be slacking.

On such occasions Tom Merry had always given a great deal of anxious thought to the selection of the eleven. That, apparently, was not Cardew's method.

It was not, however, for Tom Merry to intervene. The new captain had not asked assistance from the old captain, and certainly it could not be offered unasked.

But as it happened, the Terrible Three met Cardew on their way to Study No. 10 in the Shell. Cardew was looking a little flushed, and they wondered whether Trimble's story of the ragging was true.

"Hold on a minute, Cardew," said Manners.

Cardew politely stopped.

"You haven't posted up the list yet."

"No!" said Cardew, with great seriousness. "You see, I'm givin' that matter a lot of thinkin'."

"That's right," said Tom.

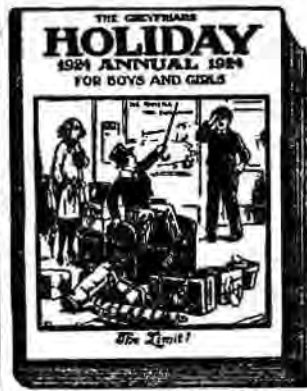
"I'm glad you approve, dear man. You see, there's the rival claims of the Fourth and the Shell to be considered,

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"If it wasn't for deserting the side," said Tom Merry, "I'd resign at once from the eleven." "Don't let that worry you," said Cardew, coolly, "I could fill your place quite easily." Tom Merry's eyes glinted. "Fill it, then!" he said, and he walked out of the study. Without replying, Cardew crossed out Tom Merry's name in the list. (See page 10.)

and then the proportion of New House men to School House men in the team, an' all that. I've nearly brought on a brain-storm, thinkin' it out."

Tom Merry looked at him rather suspiciously. He was not of a suspicious nature, but he could not help guessing that Cardew's seriousness of manner was assumed, and that the dandy of the Fourth was laughing in his sleeve.

"It's rather an important matter, Cardew," said Tom.

"I'm aware of that! In fact, its importance could scarcely be over-estimated, in my opinion."

Tom compressed his lips a little, and moved on.

"Hold on," said Cardew. "I'm puttin' your names down. Merry, Manners, Lowther—that's three."

Manners looked pleased. Manners was a better scholar and mathematician and photographer than footballer, and though he frequently figured in House matches, it was but seldom that he had a chance in a school match, where the captain had both Houses of St. Jim's to select his players from. Tom Merry was his best chum, but Tom had always placed football before friendship on such occasions, and Manners had cheerfully acquiesced.

But certainly he was pleased at being picked out by the new captain. Manners had always acquiesced in Tom's decision without thinking of grouching. Nevertheless, he had nourished a secret conviction that he was, for school matches, a really useful man.

Cardew appeared to hold the same opinion, and naturally Manners felt a little flattered. His estimation of Cardew as a captain rose considerably.

"Good man," he said. "I'll play up, you can depend on that."

"I'm sure you will," said Cardew.

The Terrible Three walked on to their study. Lowther was smiling, and Tom looking very grave. In the study, as they sorted out their books for prep, Manners gave his chum a quick look.

"You don't care for Cardew's selection, Tom?"

"It's not for me to criticise it, old chap."

"I think I shall do pretty well."

"I hope so."

"But you don't think so?" asked Manners, rather tartly.

"Why not?" asked Tom. "Let's pile in. We've left prep a bit late."

"I'd rather you gave me a direct answer," said Manners, with growing tartness.

Tom looked at him steadily.

"You wouldn't have played me if you'd still been captain?" said Manners.

"Not in the Rookwood match, old chap."

"Cardew seems to think I'm good enough."

"You're good enough, old fellow; but with both Houses to select from, you know—"

"So you think Cardew's made a mistake?"

"Yee."

"Well, we shall see," said Manners, with unaccustomed acerbity. "I never grouched when you left me out, did I? I don't see why you should grouse when I'm put in."

"But I haven't grouched. I answered your question," said Tom mildly.

Manners gave a grunt.

"I fancy Cardew's a pretty good captain," he said. "I think it's a good idea to try some new blood in School matches."

"I hope so. Don't let's argue about it."

"Well, I think you might be pleased to see me play for St. Jim's, though you never thought me good enough."

A sharp reply rose to Tom Merry's lips, but he suppressed it. Manners was being a little unreasonable, and at such times, among friends, silence is golden.

But there was rather a strained and uncomfortable atmosphere in Study No. 10 when the Terrible Three sat down to prep.

CHAPTER 3.

Pleasing all Parties!

CARDEW, deah boy!"

Ralph Reckness Cardew suppressed a groan and smiled politely as he met Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the passage.

"Yes, old bean?" he said.

"The footab list isn't up yet. Of course, I wouldn't think of hūwvin' you," said Arthur Augustus graciously. "If you wequiah any advice in makin' up the list I should be only too happy to assist, as a fellow of tact and judgment, you know."

"Thanks, no end!"

"Not at all, deah boy. Twot into my studey, and let's talk it ovah," said Arthur Augustus encouragingly.

"I've just got to see a fellow," explained Cardew. "Later. Of course, your name is goin' down."

"Good! I admit, deah boy, that I had some doubts at first, but I am weally glad to see you turnin' out a good and efficient skippah," said Arthur Augustus. "Are Blake and Hewwies and Dig playin', too?"

"Certainly!"

"May I tell them so?"

"Please, do!"

"Wight-ho!" said Arthur Augustus cheerfully, and he trotted away to Study No. 6, to impart the glad news to his chums.

But the news, when he imparted it to Blake & Co., did not have a whole gladdening effect.

"Us four are down for the Wookwood match," Arthur Augustus announced.

"Good!" said Digby.

"Then I suppose I'm keeping goal, instead of Fatty Wynn of the New House!" exclaimed Herries brightly.

"Yaas, I presume so, Hewwies."

"Jolly good!"

Jack Blake looked very grave.

"You fellows know that I like to see this study to the fore in footer," he said. "But, dash it all, if Wynn's in form he ought to be keeping goal against Rookwood to-morrow."

"Can't I keep goal?" demanded Herries warmly.

"Yes; but you're not Fatty's form."

"Rot! I think it's jolly sensible of Cardew to put a School House chap in goal instead of that New House boulder!"

"That's all very well," said Blake. "But Houses don't matter when it's a School match. We want to beat Rookwood."

Herries reddened.

"Do you think I'm going to let them win?" he asked.

"It's no good making out that you keep goal like Fatty Wynn, Herries, because you jolly well don't!" said Blake testily.

"That may be your opinion!" snapped Herries.

"I fancy it's the opinion of every fellow in St. Jim's. I can't make out what Cardew's driving at."

"Well, he's playing you," said Herries crossly. "That may show that he's a bit of an ass."

"Oh, don't be a chump, Herries!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

"What am I put down for, Gussy?" asked Dig, who was looking very pleased. "Forward, of course? I never knew Cardew had specially noticed my form. He sees more than a fellow supposes."

"Less, I should say!" growled Blake. "You're my pal, Dig, old man, and I'm glad to see you have a chance; but it's sheer rot to say that a better man couldn't be found for the front line. Cardew must be going off his rocker!"

Digby gave his study-mate a glare.

"Where's the better man?" he demanded, in a tone that could be heard at the end of the Fourth Form passage.

"Weally, you fellows, don't wag about it!" urged Arthur Augustus. "It's wathah wippin' for the whole etudey to show up in a big School match."

"That's so," said Blake. "But—"

"But Blake thinks he's the only fellow in this study who can play football!" sneered Dig.

"Weally, Dig—"

"What's the good of jaw?" said Blake. "A skipper who knew his business would find better men. I could name them. I fancy the school will soon be jolly sorry that Cardew was elected captain."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Swank!" said Dig.

"Cheek!" said Herries.

Blake grunted and sat down again to his prep. In Study No. 6, as with the Terrible Three, prep went on that evening in a rather electric atmosphere.

Meanwhile, Ralph Reckness Cardew, having got rid of Arthur Augustus by the simple process of granting all he asked, had turned into the Shell passage, and entered Study

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No. 7, which belonged to Racke and Crooke, the black sheep of the House.

Racke and Crooke were not at prep. They were smoking cigarettes, and they nodded and grinned to Cardew when he came in.

"You're rather late," observed Racke.

"Lot of borin' fellows would talk to me," said Cardew. "But better late than never."

"Oh, yes! Lock the door, Crooke."

Crooke locked the door, and Aubrey Racke produced a pack of cards from the table drawer. The three young rascals sat down round the table to play banker.

Three cigarettes thickened the atmosphere of the study. Racke burst into a sudden chuckle.

"I say, Cardew, what would the fellows say if they could see you now?" he asked.

Cardew winced.

To do him justice, he was not without shame for the slackness and self-indulgence which had followed his energetic campaign against Tom Merry. He did not choose to pull up, but he had the grace to be a little ashamed of himself.

"My hat! There would be a shindy!" said Crooke, with a whistle. "This isn't the way Tom Merry used to get ready for a football fixture. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Racke.

"You fellows must have your merry little jest," said Cardew, with a yawn. "Anybody got a match?"

"Hark!" whispered Crooke.

A voice was heard in the passage outside, the voice of Gore of the Shell.

"Anybody seen Cardew?"

"I haven't, for one," answered the voice of Grundy.

"Where's the blessed ass got to?" exclaimed Gore angrily.

"I want to know about the footer to-morrow."

"So do a lot of fellows!" snorted Grundy. "I fancy the list won't be up to-night."

"It's always posted over-night," shouted Gore, "and I jolly well want to know! Hi, Trimble! Seen Cardew?"

"He, he, he!"

"What are you he-he-heing about, you fat dummy?"

"He, he, he! He's in Racke's study."

"What the thump is he doing in Racke's study?" George Gore thumped at the door. "You here, Cardew?"

Gore turned the handle. The door did not open, and Gore of the Shell thumped again.

Cardew set his lips hard.

"Caught!" murmured Crooke. "Shall I open the door, Cardew?"

Racke chuckled.

"Are you here, Cardew?" roared Gore.

"Yes, dear man."

"Let me in, then!"

"Can't ask you into another fellow's study," said Cardew. "I'm helpin' Racke with his prep, and don't want to be interrupted."

"Oh gad!" murmured Racke.

"Am I down to play to-morrow?" shouted Gore. "That's what I want to know."

"Yes."

"Oh, good!" said Gore, modifying his voice considerably.

"Where have you got me down?"

"In the list."

"You ass! I mean on the field?"

"Oh, forward."

"Forward! You know I'm a back!"

"I mean back."

"Good! Left or right?"

"Whichever you like."

"What?" roared Gore.

"I mean left."

"Good!"

George Gore walked away feeling satisfied—one more fellow who came to the conclusion that Cardew was, after all, a pretty good captain. Cardew lighted a fresh cigarette, while Racke and Crooke stared at him.

"I say, is Gore up to the Rookwood match, Cardew?" asked Racke. "I shouldn't have thought so."

"Let's hope for the best," said Cardew.

"Oh, my hat! Is that how you look at it?"

"Just that."

"Phew! Some skipper!" grinned Racke.

And the interrupted game of banker was resumed in Racke's study. When Cardew left he strolled back to Study No. 9 in the Fourth with a rather thoughtful frown on his face.

"Now, how many dashed fellows have I given places in the eleven?" he murmured. "I jolly well wish I could remember, Oh gad!"

He stopped with an exclamation, as four juniors suddenly collared him in the passage. They were Julian, Hammond, Reilly, and Kerruish, of Study No. 5.

"Here he is!" grinned Julian.

"Anythin' wanted, old tops?" asked Cardew blandly.



Quietly and coolly, Cardew drew himself up to the window, and dropped on to the ground outside. A junior who was sauntering along the path stopped and stared at him. "Bai Jove! Cardew—" Cardew did not even look at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, but scudded away. (See page 13.)

"Don't rumple my collar! I'm rather particular about my collar!"

"Yes, places in the eleven-to-morrow," said Kerruish.

"Are you playing any of us? We want to know."

"Sure, we'll bump you if you say no!" added Reilly.

"Hard!" said Hammond, laughing. "You see, as you don't seem to have made up your mind yet, we're going to help you make it up."

"Bump him anyway!" said Kerruish.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Cardew. "You're all in the list! That's four more! I'm jolly glad to be able to please you fellows like this!"

"Hurrah!"

Cardew walked on—unbumped. He found Levison and Clive at work in Study No. 9 when he entered. They looked up at him rather grimly.

"Finished the list yet?" asked Levison.

"Quite."

"Oh, good!" said Clive. "You've done it at last!"

"I've done it!" assented Cardew. "Indeed, I'm rather beginnin' to think that I've overdone it!"

"What?"

"Oh, nothin'!" yawned Cardew, sinking into the arm-chair. "It's all serene—at least, I hope it is. I'm tryin' to please all parties, an' a fellow can't do more than that, can he?"

"Well, that depends," said Levison. "Aren't you going to do your prep, Cardew?"

"No! The fatiguin' duties of football captain leave me no time for prep on the eve of an important match," said Cardew gravely.

And Cardew did no prep that evening. He wondered a little how many fellows would be counting on places in the junior eleven on the morrow, and whether the number exceeded eleven. That was rather a problem for a football captain, and Cardew treated it as he did most problems that came his way—he gave it up, and turned his thoughts to something else.

CHAPTER 4.

Trouble in the Form-room!

FIGGINS of the Fourth gave Cardew an expressive look when they met in the Fourth Form room the following morning. Kerr and Wynn gave him expressive looks also. So did Redfern and Owen and Pratt and several more of the Fourth Form who belonged to the New House of St. Jim's. In fact, all the New House section of the Fourth seemed to look at Cardew that morning with strong disfavour. Cardew noticed it, and wondered why, though he was too lazy to think the matter out. Also, he did not think that it mattered.

Cardew had plenty of other things to think of that Wednesday morning. There was the journey over to Rookwood to play Jimmy Silver & Co. in the afternoon. There was the composition of his eleven, a matter not yet settled. There was the number of fellows to whom he had awarded places in the team—a number more than sufficient to make up a Rugger team. There was the fact that he had done no prep in the evening, and might be called upon by Mr. Lathom

to construe, in which case he was certain to make a hash of it and draw upon himself the vials of his Form master's wrath. For Mr. Lathom's wrath in itself Cardew did not care a pin. The fact that Mr. Lathom expected him to work only afforded him a mild amusement. But wrath might be followed by detention, which was a rather serious matter for a football captain on the day of a match. With all these matters to think about Cardew did not care whether Figgins & Co. looked glum or gay, whether they gave him smiles, or whether they gave him truculent scowls. He had troubles enough in the School House without worrying about the New House.

During first lesson George Figgins contrived to pass a note along to Cardew. Cardew looked at it idly. It ran;

"Who's in the eleven?"

Cardew smiled faintly. The eleven ought to have been posted the night before in both Houses. It had not been posted in either. The New House fellows were still quite in the dark.

Figgins looked across at Cardew and signed to him that he wanted an answer to his note. Cardew wrote an answer on the back of the fragment of paper.

"Goodness knows!"

That was Cardew's reply, which was passed along surreptitiously under the desks to Figgins.

Figgins blinked at it.

It was not a reply that Figgy could make anything of. That Cardew was simply being funny on so serious a subject as a School match was almost incredible to Figgins. He tried to catch Cardew's eye again, but failed. Cardew avoided his eye. Meanwhile Fatty Wynn of the New House had made a discovery. He was near Herries, and Herries had been unable to abstain from letting him know that he—George Herries—was to keep goal in the Rookwood game.

It was surprising news to Fatty Wynn. Even School House fellows admitted freely that St. Jim's had never boasted a junior goalkeeper who was a patch on David Llewellyn Wynn. Herries was good, quite good, and he was improving. He was a hard-working and painstaking fellow. But Fatty had a genius for keeping goal. He was one of those custodians who are born, not made. It was always understood that when a match was important Fatty Wynn kept goal, if Fatty was available. Sometimes—rarely—he was off colour, occasionally he was crooked, but when he was available he was the "goods," so to speak. That he should be set aside in the Rookwood match was a surprise for Wynn, and not a pleasant surprise.

"Gammon!" was his reply to Herries.

"Cardew says so!"

"Then Cardew's a fool!"

Herries shrugged his shoulders. So far from deeming Cardew a fool, his belief was that Cardew's selection, in this instance, showed something very like inspiration.

Fatty Wynn, like Figgins, tried to catch Cardew's eye. Like Figgins, he failed. Cardew wasn't catching an eye that morning if he could help it. Neither was he attending to the class work. He was wondering rather dully what was going to happen after class. He did not even hear Mr. Lathom when that gentleman called on him.

"Cardew!"

Levison nudged his chum on one side, Clive on the other. Cardew awoke to his surroundings.

"Cardew!" repeated Mr. Lathom, frowning.

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"You will go on where Blake left off."

Cardew, who had not been listening, had not the faintest idea where Blake had left off.

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"Well, go on, Cardew!"

"Certainly, sir!"

"Construe!" snapped Mr. Lathom.

Levison made a movement, and Mr. Lathom fixed his eyes on him at once.

"You need not show Cardew the place, Levison."

"Oh! No, sir!" stammered Levison.

"You do not know the place, Cardew?"

There was no help for it. Cardew had to admit the soft impeachment, as it were.

"Sorry, sir—no!"

"You will take a hundred lines, Cardew!"

"Thank you, sir!"

Mr. Lathom's eyes glinted behind his glasses. He was a patient and good-tempered gentleman; but Cardew had tried him severely of late. And the smiling impertinence of the dandy of the Fourth was too much for his patience and good temper now.

"Two hundred lines, Cardew!" he rapped out.

"You're very good, sir!" said Cardew imperturbably.

Some of the Fourth grinned. "Ragging" a Form master was considered amusement in all Form-rooms. And Cardew was a past-master in that art. But there was a limit to what even the kind-tempered Mr. Lathom would stand.

"You are impertinent, Cardew!" he rapped out.

"Oh, sir!"

"Take five hundred lines!"

Cardew did not thank Mr. Lathom this time, or tell him that he was very good. Even Cardew did not want the imposition to grow into a thousand lines.

"You may now show Cardew the place, Levison, and you will construe, Cardew!"

Levison pointed out the place, though he knew it was useless. Cardew had not even looked at the section of the "Æneid" which should have been prepared the previous evening. He had chanced being called on to construe, trusting to luck. He had chanced it once too often.

Cardew stared at the Latin without being able even to begin. Mr. Lathom's brow grew more thunderous as he waited.

"You have not prepared this lesson, Cardew," he said at last.

"Sorry, sir—no! You see, sir, as football captain I've had a lot to see to—there's a big match to-day. So I hope, sir, that you'll excuse me this once," said Cardew.

"If it were this once, Cardew, I should certainly excuse you," said Mr. Lathom grimly. "But it is not this once. You have been consistently slack at your lessons for several weeks, and to slackness and carelessness you have added impertinence. You will be detained the whole of this afternoon, and will write out a whole book of the 'Æneid.'"

"Oh gad!" murmured Cardew.

"You will now go on, Clive, where Blake left off."

Up rose Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"P'wy excuse me, sir—"

"You may sit down, D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir; but I should like to remark that the Wookwood match takes place this afternoon, and Cardew is football skippah. We cannot vewy well go ovah to Wookwood without our skippah, sir!"

"That will do, D'Arcy!"

"Certainly, sir! I do not defend Cardew, sir—he is a faithful slackah, and certainly deserves detention," said the swell of St. Jim's. "But I twust, sir, that you will be willin' to detain him next Satahdlay instead of to-day, so that he can come ovah to Wookwood."

"I shall do nothing of the kind, D'Arcy!"

"Oh, hai Jove!"

"I do not desire to be misunderstood," said Mr. Lathom. "I should accede to such a request in the ordinary way. But only a week or two ago Cardew was released from detention, on the occasion of a match, at the intercession of Tom Merry. I warned him then that such a concession would not be made again, and that he must be careful. He has not chosen to be careful, and so he must take the consequences!"

"But as football skippah, sir—"

"I recommend you to select a football captain who does

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not get detained on match days," said Mr. Lathom dryly. "Kindly say no more!"

"Yaas, sir; but—"

"If you say another word, D'Arcy, I shall detain you also."

"Oh, bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. He sat down promptly.

Cardew sat and stared at his desk. The thunderbolt had come down on him; he had risked it from sheer carelessness, and now it had fallen. He was detained; the Rookwood match would have to be played without him. He had started his captaincy well—with luck! Now his luck had failed him, and this was how he was carrying it on. And he knew perfectly well that he had only himself to thank—if that was any comfort. Probably it was not.

CHAPTER 5.

A Little Excitement!

TOM MERRY did not learn of Cardew's disaster till after dinner. The captain of the Shell—no longer junior captain of St. Jim's—had made his preparations for the train journey to Rookwood. He took it for granted that he was to play—no official notification having reached him yet. But he was quite prepared to be told at the last moment that he was not wanted. True, Cardew had told the Terrible Three the previous evening that they were to be in the eleven. But it had reached Tom's ears that he had told more than a dozen other fellows the same thing. Nobody could know for certain how the eleven was to be made up till the list was posted; and even yet Cardew had not posted it. Even the junior football committee, who had a voice in the matter, did not know what his intentions were. As a matter of fact,

"Blessed if I can make the fellow out," said Tom. "Is he pulling our legs all round?"

"The Rookwood match isn't exactly a subject for leg-pulling," remarked Lowther.

"Oh, give him a chance!" said Manners. "I dare say Cardew's got his reasons for what he does. I believe in new blood in the team, though I admit it's going too far to put Herries in goal instead of Wynn."

"Hallo, Talbot!" called out Tom, as Talbot of the Shell appeared in sight. "Have you heard whether you're playing this afternoon?"

Talbot halted.

"No, I'm not playing—at least, Cardew hasn't asked me."

Tom breathed hard. He was anxious, very anxious, not to interfere with the new captain. He was aware that such interference would be ascribed to pique—that it would look "rotten." Hitherto Tom had backed up the new captain, and kept his own opinions strictly to himself. But he felt that the limit was reached now.

"Gore's playing," added Talbot.

"Gore?" repeated Tom.

"Yes. He's told me Cardew told him."

"It's impossible!" exclaimed Tom. "There are a dozen backs better than Gore—heaps and miles better."

"I don't quite catch on," confessed Talbot. "Gore says that Cardew told him he could play forward if he liked."

"It's some sort of a jape, I should think," said Tom. "I think I'd better speak to Cardew. We must have this out. Where is he?"

"I hear he's detained this afternoon. Has he said anything to you about the captaincy?"

"I haven't even seen him."

"It's a queer business," said Talbot. "I'm afraid that Cardew isn't taking his new job very seriously. It's a pity."

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Cardew did not himself know what his intentions were. Slacking had landed him in a sort of morass from which there seemed no satisfactory way out. Now it seemed that he was barred from the match himself, and that was the climax.

"It's too thick!" exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly, when he heard the news. "The silly ass was detained on the Grammar School match day, and Lathom let him off. He won't do it a second time."

"Not likely!" agreed Manners.

"You'll have to skipper the team, Tom," said Monty Lowther. "All the better, if it comes to that."

Tom Merry frowned.

"It's not all the better," he said. "Cardew bagged my place; but I don't want to bag him! In fact, I won't! The fellows had better ask Talbot to captain the side."

"Talbot doesn't seem to be playing," said Kangaroo of the Shell.

"That's rot! Talbot couldn't be left out!"

"Well, the list isn't posted," said the Australian junior. "But Cardew seems to have told all the fellows who were wanted. He hasn't honoured me, and there doesn't seem to be a single New House fellow in the team at all."

"That will cause trouble between the Houses," said Tom. "There ought to be at least three New House men. He must be going to play Fatty Wynn in goal."

"No; I hear it's Herries for goal."

"Herries is a good man in House matches; but Fatty Wynn is wanted to keep goal for School."

"I fancy all St. Jim's knows that, excepting Cardew and Herries," grinned Kangaroo.

Tom Merry proceeded to look for Cardew, and his comrades went with him. They were irritated and anxious. The time was drawing near for catching the train to Rookwood, and apparently the junior captain had made no arrangements whatever. It was an unprecedented state of affairs in football matters at St. Jim's.

In the changing-room—a general meeting-place for the footballing fraternity—there was a hubbub of voices, and Tom Merry & Co. looked in. Cardew was not there, but a crowd of other fellows were, and many of them seemed excited. Levison and Clive were there, looking worried and anxious. Figgins & Co. had come in full of wrath.

"Not a single New House chap in the team!" Figgins was roaring. "I'll believe that when I see the list! Why isn't the list up?"

"Goodness knows!" said Blake.

"This is what comes of having a School House chap for skipper!" snorted Fatty Wynn.

"Well, Tom Merry was a good enough skipper," said Kerr, in his quiet, judicial way. "But I must say that Cardew is the limit."

"Yaas, wathah! It is all weally vevy quceeah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Fortunately, all my studay are down to play."

"Herries in goal!" roared Figgins. "What about Wynn?"

"I'm not keen on it," said Fatty Wynn. "Let him chuck me, if he likes. But I want to know why."

"What does Cardew mean by all this, Levison?" asked Tom Merry.

Ernest Levison shrugged his shoulders hopelessly.

"Better ask him. I don't know."

"Oh, give the man a chance!" said Kerruish. "It's the first time I've been asked to play for School, and I back up Cardew."

"You?" said Tom.

"Yes. All my study, too," said Kerruish.

"How the thump many players has Cardew picked, then?" demanded Tom Merry. "He told us three, and Study No. 5 are four—that makes seven; Kerruish and his lot make it up to eleven. Then there's Gore, and Levison and Clive, and Cardew himself—"

"That's fifteen," said Lowther. "Does Cardew think we're going over to Rookwood to play Rugged?"

"I think nobody had better take it for granted till he sees the list," remarked Talbot quietly. "I've heard from two or three other fellows that Cardew has told them they'll be playing."

"I know I'm going to play!" bawled Gore hotly. "My skipper's told me, and that's enough for me. I'm keeping him to it."

"Bai Jove! It is weally vewy wemarkable," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The sillay ass seems to have told at least fifteen School House chaps, and he knows that the New House can't be left entirely out of a School match."

"I should jolly well think not!" roared Figgins, in great wrath. "I know we shall all jolly well resign for good if it happens."

"Where's Cardew?" demanded Kangaroo.

"In the study," said Levison.

"Come on!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We'd better go and see him, all of us. We shall lose the train, at this rate, and there won't be any match at Rookwood at all."

It was quite an army of excited juniors that marched off to the Fourth Form passage to interview Ralph Reckness Cardew. That nonchalant youth's amazing methods as captain seemed to be bringing a hurricane about his ears.

CHAPTER 6.

The Eleven!

"CARDREW!"

"Cardew, you ass!"

"Cardew, you chump!"

"Trot in, dear mon," said Ralph Reckness Cardew. "I've been rather expectin' a call. Roll in in your jolly old thousands!"

The juniors crowded into Study No. 9. Study No. 9 would not hold them all, and there was an overflow meeting in the passage. A score of indignant voices called on Cardew to explain himself.

"You ass!"

"You slacking dummy!"

"Where's the list?"

"Who's playing at Rookwood this afternoon?"

Cardew smiled sweetly. He held up a sheet of impot paper with a list of names on it, scribbled in pencil.

"There's the list," he said.

"Why wasn't it posted up before?" demanded Figgins.

"You see, I've been giving this subject a lot of thought," said Cardew gravely. "With so many first-class footballers to choose from, it wasn't an easy matter."

"That's all very well!" snapped Lowther. "Tom Merry never used to leave it till the last minute like this."

"Wathah not."

"But there is only one Thomas," said Cardew. "I'm not claimin' to equal Thomas, though I'm really doin' my humble best to follow in my father's footsteps, as they say in the jolly old song."

"Well, let's see the list," said Blake.

"Fatty Wynn for goal—"

"Good!" said Figgins, mollified at once.

"Eh? What about me?" roared Herries, justly incensed.

"You? Nothin' about you, old bean."

"I understood that I was put in goal."

"Somethin' wrong with your understandin', then."

"Well, where am I put, then?" demanded Herries. "I'm best in goal, but I can play back all right, and half-back."

"You're not in the team, old man."

"Not?" bawled Herries.

"Not!" assented Cardew.

"You told D'Arcy all our study was wanted to play."

Cardew sighed.

"Did I?"

"You certainly did, Cardew!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly. "You told me I could tell these fellows."

"Mea culpa!" said Cardew. "But I appeal to all the fellows present—wouldn't a fellow say almost anything to stop Gussy when his chin begins to wag?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah wottah!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Then you were only pulling my leg!" gasped Herries, purple with wrath.

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"Gussy's leg!" corrected Cardew.

"You uttah wapscaillon!" howled Arthur Augustus. "I would wufuse to play at all, Cardew, only I cannot afford to wisk the match for St. Jim's."

"That's all right, you're not playin'."

"Not playin'!" stuttered Arthur Augustus, like a fellow in a dream. "Bai Jove!"

"No. Shall I get on with the list?" asked Cardew.

"Get on!" growled Blake.

"Backs—Kangaroo and Thompson, of the New House."

"Where do I come in?" howled Gore.

"You don't come in at all!"

"You told me—"

"Did I?"

"You did!" shrieked Gore.

"You were worryin' me when I was—was helpin' a chap with his maths," said Cardew. "You asked to have your leg pulled, old bean. Here, keep him off!"

Three or four fellows grasped Gore as he was hurling himself on Cardew. Gore was dragged back and ejected from the study. Certainly Gore had been badly treated, but the fellows were so relieved to hear that he was not playing in the Rookwood match that they forgot that circumstance. Gore went into the passage with a bump.

"Halves," went on Cardew imperturbably. "Redfern, Clive, and Kerr!"

"Good!"

"Front line, Talbot, Levison, little me, Figgins, and Tom Merry."

"What about me?" asked Blake, in a gasping voice.

"Nothin'!"

"And me?" gasped Digby.

"You don't play in school matches, you know."

"You—you told D'Arcy—"

"I've already explained that," said Cardew cheerily. "Nobody's responsible for what he says to Gussy."

"You cheekay wottah—"

"And I?" asked Manners very quietly.

Cardew started a little.

"By Jove! You! Sorry, but I can't make up an eleven of more than eleven men, can I?"

Manners gulped. He remembered his hasty words to Tom Merry the previous evening. With a very red face Manners left the study.

"You told me I should be wanted, too," said Lowther.

"Figure of speech, old chap."

"And what about my study?" began Kerruish.

"Your study can go and eat coke."

Tom Merry fixed his eyes on Cardew.

"You've acted rottenly all round, Cardew," he said. "I don't know why you've done it, but you have. You've treated my friends rottenly, and if I play in your team it's only because I don't think I ought to desert the side. Otherwise, I'd resign at once from the eleven."

"Don't let that worry you," said Cardew coolly. "I could fill your place quite easily."

Tom Merry's eyes glinted.

"Fill it, then," he said; and he walked out of the study.

"Stop, for goodness' sake!" exclaimed Talbot. "Cardew, you can't be ass enough to lose the best forward in the school."

Without replying, Cardew crossed out Tom Merry's name in the list. That proceeding was watched in silence by the crowd of fellows.

"I shall want you, Blake."

Blake gave him a grim look.

"You can want!" he said; and he walked out after Tom.

"Yaas, wathah, and I shall certainly wufuse to play if you ask me now, Cardew."

"Don't worry. I'm not goin' to ask you," said Cardew coolly. "I want a man rather useful than ornamental, Gussy."

"I weward you with contempt, Cardew." And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked away with his noble nose in the air.

"Figgins, will you tell Owen that he's wanted for the front line?" said Cardew.

"I'll tell him," said Figgins slowly. "Another New House chap will strengthen the team, but—"

"That's the lot," said Cardew.

"Not quite," said Talbot. "Have you forgotten that you're detained for the afternoon, Cardew?"

"Not at all."

"Well, you can't play football at Rookwood if you're detained at St. Jim's, I suppose."

"That is what I call an incontrovertible proposition," said Cardew, smiling. "It follows, then, that as I am goin' to play football at Rookwood I shan't be detained at St. Jim's. See?"

"Does that mean that you're going to try to break detention?"

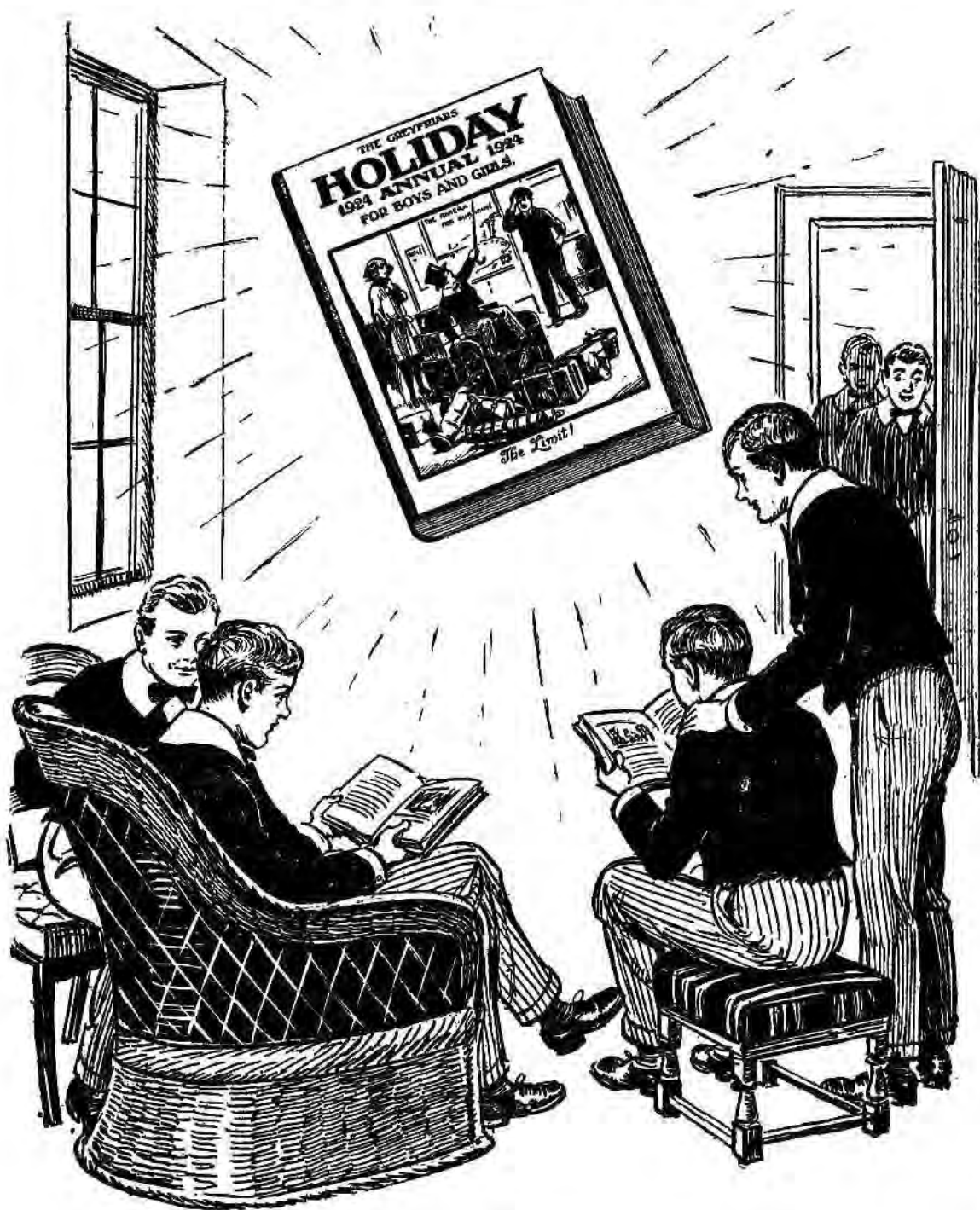
"Probably."

"And suppose you don't get clear?"

"What's the good of supposin'?" Ralph Reckness Cardew looked at his watch. "Two o'clock, and we're catchin' the

(Continued on page 12.)

THE CHRISTMAS FIRESIDE COMPANION!



The "Holiday Annual," with its coloured plates, its magnificent photogravure pictures of famous schools, its immense budget of school stories, helpful articles, and jolly drawings, is unquestionably THE Christmas book for GEM readers. Its popularity has grown year by year, and the volume for 1924 which is now in evidence everywhere is better than ever. All "Gemites" should make sure of getting this famous book for Christmas. Price only six shillings.



two twenty-five! I must go an' pack my little bag now that I've settled these matters to the general satisfaction."

Cardew left the study.

There was no more time to be lost, that was certain. The footballers prepared hurriedly for their departure. But throughout the Lower School of St. Jim's reigned dissatisfaction, resentment, and wrath. Cardew had eliminated the second-class players from the team, and that was all to the good from a football point of view, but his treatment of those players had roused their fiercest wrath. To tell a fellow he was wanted to play, and to let him down at the last moment was a kind of procedure never known under Tom Merry's captaincy, and it was a kind of thing that no fellow could be expected to forgive. Cardew, indeed, had not acted from malice or ill-feeling—simply and sheerly from utter carelessness and want of thought; but that did not make the matter any better. An important football fixture was not an affair to be treated in that nonchalant way.

More serious still, the best junior footballer at St. Jim's had been left out, in the person of Tom Merry. And many of the fellows suspected that Tom Merry's hot words, due to his natural resentment at the treatment of his friends, had been seized upon by Cardew as a pretext for dropping the former captain from the eleven. It weakened the team. Nobody—not even Owen himself—supposed that Owen of the Fourth was anything like Tom's form in the front line, or Blake's, for that matter. It was with unusual misgivings that the St. Jim's footballers prepared to start for Rookwood, and of the fellows who remained behind, to judge by their talk, many were feeling disposed to lynch Ralph Reckness Cardew.

CHAPTER 7.

Tom Merry Joins Up!

"CARDEW!"

Mr. Lathom gasped out the name.

Cardew & Co. were hurrying to the station. The eleven, and four or five fellows who were going over to Rookwood with them, were going down the lane at a trot towards Rylcombe. And after them, with his gown fluttering in the breeze, came Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth.

Cardew had coolly left the school with the rest, utterly ignoring his Form master's order to repair to the Form-room for detention at two o'clock. Probably he hoped that the sheer "cheek" and audacity of that proceeding would render it successful. As for the punishment that would follow, Cardew did not give it a thought; the Rookwood match would be over, and that was all he cared about. Not that Cardew was really keen even on the Rookwood match. But he was very keen indeed on retrieving the false position in which he had placed himself, and on disappointing the numerous fellows who were looking for his fall.

But as it happened, Mr. Lathom was not so easily eluded. Before the footballers had been five minutes gone, the Fourth Form master discovered Cardew's absence. Without even stopping to remove his gown, Mr. Lathom hurried after the fugitive. He was breathless with exertion and wrath when he overtook the juniors in Rylcombe Lane.

"Cardew!" he gasped.

Cardew set his lips.

"Put it on, you chaps," he muttered. "We can race Lathom."

Cardew was the only fellow there who felt disposed to "race" Lathom. Defiance of authority to that extent did not appeal to less reckless fellows. Nobody quickened his pace.

Mr. Lathom came up panting, and halted. The juniors stopped also, with glum looks.

Cardew's eyes glittered. He was in a mood for any reckless defiance; but he had no support or sympathy to expect from his companions. His own careless folly had caused the trouble, and they were fed-up with his methods—fed right up to the chin, and even Levison and Clive shared the feelings of the rest. They had hoped, certainly, that in the circumstances, he would elude Mr. Lathom. But now that he was caught, their annoyance was directed towards Cardew himself, not towards the Form master.

"Cardew, return to the school at once!"

Cardew glanced round at the footballers.

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"Get back!" muttered Levison. "Don't be a fool, Cardew!"

"If you fellows back me up—"

"Go back, and don't talk rot!" growled Clive.

"Back you up!" repeated Figgins. "Back up a slacking duffer against our Form master! What did you get detention for?"

"We've got to play Rookwood," said Cardew moodily. "I tell you, I'm comin' to Rookwood with the team."

Mr. Lathom came nearer, and dropped his hand on Cardew's shoulder.

"Come with me," he said.

Cardew breathed hard. It was in his mind to strike the Form master's hand aside, and send for it. If he refrained, it was not because he cared for the consequences, but because he could see that such a wild act would be futile. Figgins, reading his thoughts in his face, drew closer and clenched his fists. Mr. Lathom was Figgins's Form master as well as Cardew's, and Figgins was prepared to knock Cardew spinning if he raised his hand against the old gentleman.

The wild thought passed—Cardew's face set in cold calmness.

"Very well, sir," he said.

"I am sorry, my boys," said Mr. Lathom kindly, "but I cannot possibly allow a defiance of authority like this to pass unchecked. You must select someone else to play in Cardew's place."

"Yes, sir," said Talbot of the Shell.

Mr. Lathom walked back towards the school with Cardew. With grim faces, the footballers hurried on to the station. They had little time left to catch their train, and if that train was lost, the Rookwood match could not be played that day. Cardew, with a set face, walked back with Mr. Lathom.

That gentleman walked slowly and breathlessly by his side. Mr. Lathom had reached an age when hurried exertion told upon him, and he was panting rather painfully all the way back to St. Jim's. But he was very watchful, prepared for a desperate attempt to bolt on the part of the junior in his charge.

Near the gates of the school three Shell fellows were mounting their bicycles when the Form master and Cardew came up. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther looked grimly at Cardew and Mr. Lathom.

Lowther and Manners, feeling extremely sore at the way Cardew had treated them over the Rookwood match, were rather inclined to be pleased at seeing Cardew marched home with a hand on his shoulder. Tom Merry could scarcely feel sorry.

Tom was in a deeply troubled frame of mind.

So far as Cardew was concerned, he was glad to be done with him; but he felt that he ought to have played up for the school that day, even at the cost of submitting to Cardew's insolence. He was no longer captain, but he was as keen as ever on seeing St. Jim's send out a winning team. Yet to play under Cardew's lead, after the way Cardew had treated his best friends, would have been bitter enough to Tom. Exactly what he ought to have done, in the circumstances, was rather a puzzle to him; but he was feeling troubled and dissatisfied. The Terrible Three were going out for a cycle spin, to fill up the afternoon which they had expected to spend at Rookwood. Their black looks, as Cardew passed, drew a mocking smile to the face of the dandy of the Fourth.

Tom Merry stepped towards him quickly.

"You're not going to Rookwood after all, then, Cardew?"

"Mr. Lathom says not," smiled Cardew.

"It is impossible, Merry," said Mr. Lathom. "Come, Cardew!"

He drew the junior on.

Tom Merry looked after them as they went in at the gates. Manners and Lowther exchanged glances.

"Some skipper!" said Manners bitterly.

"The fool!" said Lowther. "The dummy! That's how he manages football affairs—slacking and fooling, and then sending off the team without a captain."

Tom Merry put his leg over his bicycle.

"Come on!" he called out.

"What—"

"Quick!"

Tom Merry pedalled away rapidly in the direction of Rylcombe. His chums, not quite understanding, followed him fast.

The Terrible Three fairly raced up the lane towards the village. They reached Rylcombe Station just as the football party were going in. Talbot of the Shell looked round, and called out joyously.

"Tom! Just the man we want."

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Levison, his gloomy face brightening. "Tom Merry! Cardew's been taken back—"

"I know," said Tom. "I came on to ask you fellows if you'd like me to come after all!"

"Oh, good!" said Lowther. "Hello! There's the train! Give me your bike, Tom! Get a move on!"

Every face in the football crowd brightened. Their skipper was gone—detained by his own folly. They were glad enough to have their old captain back.

Talbot caught Tom Merry's arm, and ran him into the station. The train was in, and the footballers crowded into it with Tom Merry. Manners and Lowther waved goodbye.

"What ripping luck!" exclaimed Talbot, as the train rolled out of Rylcombe Station. "Tom, old man, you've saved the situation!"

"Hear, hear!" said Figgins heartily.

"Good man!" said Redfern.

Tom glanced round the crowded carriage, his handsome face colouring.

"I saw Mr. Lathom taking Cardew back, and came on," he said. "I thought, in the circumstances, I ought to join up."

"Right as rain!" said Kangaroo.

"Of course, I don't want to butt in," said Tom, his colour deepening. "Cardew is captain! But as he isn't here—"

"As our captain has chosen to get himself marched off like a silly tag, we've got to find another man to fill his place," growled Kangaroo. "I fancy, if we put it to the vote, all the men here will say 'Tom Merry.'"

"Yes, rather!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Of course, it's for this time only," said Tom. "Cardew's out of it, and in any case you'd have to fill his place. If you want me, I'm here. But I'm willing to play under any captain you select."

"You're captain," said Talbot.

"As the matter stands, old man, I'd rather you took it on," said Tom.

Talbot shook his head.

"Rot!" said Figgins decisively. "We're going to play this

quadrangle—two or three prefects of the Sixth were in sight. Among them Cardew noticed Rushden of the Sixth, wheeling his motor-bike down to the side gate.

His eyes gleamed.

Quietly and coolly Cardew drew himself up to the window, and dropped out to the ground outside. A junior who was sauntering along the path stopped and stared at him.

"Bai Jove! Cardew!"

Cardew did not even look at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He scudded away, and a couple of minutes later was dropping from the school wall, behind the elms, into the road. A dozen fellows had sighted him, and he left them in a buzz of excitement.

Outside the school precincts, Cardew did not head for the station. He knew that that was useless. There was no train to take him to Rookwood in time for the match. He had had a vague idea of getting somehow to Wayland and hiring a fast car—he had plenty of money. But the sight of Rushden and his motor-bike had put a new thought into his mind.

A fast car might have done the journey in time, but it was miles to Wayland. Cardew would have tried it as a last resource. But Rushden's motor-bike was a better resource—it was a certainty, if the dandy of the Fourth could get possession of it. And Cardew was absolutely regardless of consequences now.

Rushden was starting up the bike in the road, giving it all his attention. He glanced at Cardew without heeding him; he was not even aware that Cardew was under detention that afternoon.

Cardew stopped, breathing hard, but cool and calm. At any moment, he knew, there might be pursuit. At least a dozen fellows had seen his escape—among them Kildare of the Sixth—and he thought he had seen Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, in the quad, as he ran. But it was at moments of tense excitement that Cardew's brain was clear and cool and decisive.

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match under our old skipper, and that's you, Tom Merry. And I jolly well think there ought to be a new election, with the order of the boot for that slacking chump Cardew!"

"Hear, hear!"

The train rolled on; the footballers changed into the express at Wayland Junction, and rushed on towards Rookwood School.

CHAPTER 8.

Cardew's Way!

MR. LATHOM led Cardew into the Form-room in the School House. The dandy of the Fourth went meekly to his desk.

Outwardly, he was all submission. Inwardly, he was as determined as ever that he would not submit to detention that afternoon, and that he would play in this match at Rookwood. But Mr. Lathom certainly could not guess that from his looks.

"You will remain here until five o'clock, Cardew," said the master of the Fourth.

"Yes, sir!"

"You have an imposition of five hundred lines to write. I shall expect them to be written by five o'clock."

"Very well, sir."

"And as I cannot trust you, Cardew, I shall lock the door and take away the key," said Mr. Lathom sternly.

Cardew breathed hard.

Mr. Lathom left the Form-room, and the key clicked in the lock. Cardew did not sit down at his desk.

He stood leaning on the desk, thinking hard, his hands in his pockets. The problem before him was a difficult one, but Cardew was not beaten yet. The door was locked, but there was the window, and then—Already the train must be gone. Cardew looked at his watch. In those very moments the football party would be changing at Wayland Junction. The express was starting.

Cardew gritted his teeth.

He climbed to the high window of the Form-room and looked out. Mr. Lathom, nothing doubting that the detained junior was secure, locked in the Form-room, had gone back to his study. But there were a good many fellows in the

"Rushden!" he called out.

"Well?"

"You're wanted—Head's study."

Cardew sauntered on unconcernedly, leaving Rushden staring. The Sixth-Former muttered something below his breath.

Not for an instant did it cross his mind that a junior of the Fourth Form would venture to give him a "spoof" message. Neither could he have imagined any reason why Cardew should do so.

A message from the Head could not be disregarded. If Dr. Holmes had sent for him Rushden of the Sixth had to go.

He secured the motor-bike, and strode—or rather stamped—away to the gate, leaving the machine by the roadside.

Cardew glanced back at a little distance.

He saw Rushden disappear at the gate, and came scudding back. A minute more, and the motor-bike was throbbing again.

"Dear man!" murmured Cardew. "Innocent old duck! I fancy he got a false impression from what I said. I wonder whether a strict moralist would call it an untruth? He's wanted in the Head's study—wanted bad—only he's wanted by me, not by the Head! I dare say he will find that out when he sees the jolly old Head, though."

Cardew mounted Rushden's machine.

He was moving when Kildare of the Sixth came out at the school gates, and stared along the road.

"Cardew!" he shouted.

Cardew smiled, but did not look back. Head prefect and captain of the school mattered nothing to the reckless junior now.

Kildare broke into a run after the motor-bike.

"Cardew!" he roared.

Cardew put on speed. Kildare was a good man on the cinder-path, but he had, of course, no chance of overtaking Cardew unless the latter chose to stop. And he did not choose.

The captain of St. Jim's ran savagely for fifty yards or so, and then halted, setting his lips with anger. Cardew was vanishing round a corner far ahead on the road.

Kildare turned back. Rushden of the Sixth met him at the gates. Rushden was red with wrath.

"Seen that young villain Cardew?" he exclaimed. "He sent me to the Head's study with a spoof message."

"He's gone—on your bike!"

"On my motor-bike?" yelled Rushden.

"Yes."

"Why, I—I—I—I—" Rushden spluttered. Words failed him.

Kildare went in.

"You have found the boy, Kildare?" called out Mr. Railton.

"No, sir; he's got hold of Rushden's motor-bike and cleared off," answered Kildare.

"Upon my word!"

A few minutes later Mr. Railton, Mr. Lathom, and the Head were in solemn conclave together on the subject of Ralph Reckness Cardew. The decision of the three gentlemen was, that when Cardew returned to St. Jim's, his punishment should be so exemplary that it could scarcely fail to act as a warning to him.

In the meantime Cardew was going strong.

Rushden's motor-bike was a good machine, and in good foin. Cardew got the very best out of it.

By road and lane he whizzed on, his face set, staring straight before him, thinking of nothing but of getting to Rookwood in time to captain the St. Jim's side in the football match. Trees and hedges and villages flew by him.

Latham! He had to slow down in the streets of the town, but on the other side he let the machine out again, and hummed on to Coombe. By the church clock at Coombe he knew that the train was long in. The St. Jim's footballers had already left the station—they were at the school, or near it, by that time. Up the lane from Coombe to Rookwood School Cardew went tearing.

At the gates of Rookwood he halted. One glance at his watch—he was just in time!

CHAPTER 9.

Rival Captains!

JIMMY SILVER & CO., of Rookwood, greeted the footballers from St. Jim's cheerily. Tom Merry & Co. were shown into their dressing-room, and proceeded to change for the match.

Tom, in the hurry of his departure, had not, of course, had time to get his football outfit. But that did not matter, as Levison had Cardew's things in his bag. Cardew's elegant outfit was a size small for Tom, but an exact fit was not wanted on the football field. He changed with the rest, and the St. Jim's team came out.

That Ralph Reckness Cardew could, by any chance, arrive at Rookwood for the match had not crossed Tom's mind; or the mind of any fellow in the team. He was detained at St. Jim's, and the train was lost, anyhow. Cardew's arrival was too impossible to be thought of.

But it was the impossible that happened.

"Levison, old bean!"

Ernest Levison gave a jump.

He spun round, to see Cardew of the Fourth, dusty, but cheerful, with the Rookwood fellows regarding him curiously. Cardew nodded coolly to his amazed chum.

"You brought my things along, of course?" asked Cardew.

"Eh—what—yes!" stammered Levison.

"You here!" ejaculated Clive.

Cardew raised his eyebrows.

"Where should I be? This is Rookwood, isn't it? And we're due here for football."

"But—but—" gasped Levison.

"You've cut detention!" exclaimed Talbot.

"Guilty!"

"How on earth did you get here?" exclaimed Levison.

"There was no train—"

"Rushden lent me his motor-bike."

"Oh!"

"Without meaning to," added Cardew. "I borrowed it without asking. It's at the porter's lodge here now. I'm glad I'm in time."

A grim silence followed. Cardew's eyes, roving over the footballers, lighted on Tom Merry, and he started.

"Merry here?" he said.

Tom's face was crimson.

The arrival of Cardew placed him in an utterly false position. He was in Cardew's place, in Cardew's clothes, because it had seemed impossible for Cardew to come. And Cardew had come!

Cardew's eyes glittered like steel.

"Have you been makin' some changes in the team?" he asked very quietly. "Tom Merry does not belong to this eleven."

"You left us in the lurch," said Figgins hotly. "We were jolly glad to get Tom Merry to take your place."

"I told you I should be here."

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"I know that. But—"

"Tom played up when you had practically deserted us," said Talbot of the Shell quietly. "I vote that Tom Merry captains the side in this match."

"Hear, hear!"

"Tom's the man," said Kangaroo decidedly. "Your motor-bike stunts are a bit superfluous, Cardew! You're not wanted now."

Jimmy Silver & Co., exchanging glances, drew away, politely appearing oblivious of this strange dispute among the visiting team. It was time for kick-off, and the referee was ready; but the Rookwooders were content to wait a little.

Cardew's face hardened grimly.

"I am captain of this side," he said. "I refuse to allow anybody to take my place."

"You won't be asked," said Kerr. "A football captain isn't supposed to get detained, and to bolt against orders, and to borrow a motor-bike without permission, and turn up on the field, like a character in a film play, at the last moment. It may be dramatic, but it isn't footer."

"Let's get on," said Fatty Wynn. "You can stand around and cheer, Cardew."

Levison and Clive did not speak. They wanted to back up their chum, but it was difficult for them to support Cardew, in the circumstances.

Cardew's teeth came together hard.

The previous day he had displayed an utter disregard of the Rookwood fixture. But circumstances had changed now. All his obstinate determination was roused at the sight of his old rival in his place.

"Tom Merry will stand out of this game," he said.

"He won't!" snapped Talbot.

"I refuse to play him."

"You won't be played yourself. Get on, you fellows!"

"Hold on," said Cardew quietly, with gleaming eyes. "I am your captain, properly elected and appointed. You can't rebel like this on the football field."

"We can—and shall!" said Figgins.

"Then I shall speak to the referee and the Rookwood skipper, and claim a postponement of the match."

"You cheeky cad—" burst out Figgins.

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry.

So far, Tom had not spoken. In the strange state of affairs, he hardly knew what to do. He had been thinking it out while the other fellows were speaking.

"You've got to play up, Tom," exclaimed Talbot quickly.

Tom shook his head.

"Cardew's captain," he said. "I came because he couldn't come. But he's got here. I'm bound to stand out."

He walked back to the dressing-room. Cardew cast a vaunting look at the gloomy, lowering faces of his team.

Then he followed Tom into the dressing-room.

He came out in a few minutes, clad for football. In grim silence the St. Jim's team went into the field.

The whistle went.

The game had started when Tom Merry came out, dressed in his ordinary clothes, his face a little pale.

He did not stay to watch the game.

While the footballers were busy Tom Merry walked to the station, and took the train home for St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 10.

Nothing Succeeds Like Success!

ONE UP! growled Kangaroo at half-time.

Rookwood were one up.

The St. Jim's footballers had gone into the game in a mood very different from their usual mood on the football field. It was not surprising that they had failed to score, and that Rookwood had penetrated their defence.

The team was not the best St. Jim's could have sent out. All the members of it were disturbed by the happenings just before the game. And even Cardew was not at his best—the long and fast run on the motor-bike had told on him. And a captain who had forced himself upon a reluctant team did not seem likely to be a winning captain.

In the interval no man in the team spoke to Cardew, but all of them gave him grim looks.

"We're out for a licking," said Figgins glumly. "For goodness' sake, Fatty, do your best to keep the margin down."

Fatty Wynn nodded gloomily.

"Dear men," said Cardew lightly, "a game isn't lost till it's won—and Rookwood hasn't won yet."

Nobody answered him.

"As your captain," continued Cardew in the same tone, "it's up to me to give you a word of advice. If you go into a football match as if you were going to a funeral, you're asking for a licking. Keep your pecker up."

Grim silence.

Cardew coloured a little.



The ball came in from Levison, and Rawson caught it and drove it out. It came back, and the Rookwood goalie stopped it with his ready hand. At the same moment, Ralph Reckness Cardew came pounding down upon him, and goalkeeper and ball went charging in the net together. "Goal!" It was the winning goal for St. Jim's. (See this page.)

"What a jolly crew!" he said, glancing round him. "At any rate, Rookwood will beat us by about a dozen goals, I should say. I'm afraid I shall have to bunk most of you out of the eleven."

Fortunately, the call to play came then, or hot words would have followed.

The sides lined up again.

Jimmy Silver & Co. attacked hotly, and the Rookwooders were soon swarming round the visitors' goal. But Fatty Wynn, between the posts, was a tower of strength. St. Jim's were fortunate in their goalkeeper, if not in their skipper.

The attack did not materialise. Kangaroo cleared to mid-field, and the St. Jim's forwards got going at last. And then Cardew was on the ball.

Luck favoured him, that was undoubted; but equally undoubtedly he put in some very fine play. It seemed like magic to the Rookwood crowd, looking on, to see him threading his way through the defence, and they could scarcely believe their eyes when the ball went in.

But it went in, and there was a gasping shout:

"Goal!"

St. Jim's had equalised.

"By Jove!" Jimmy Silver murmured to Arthur Edward Lovell. "They've got a good man there—regular lightning."

The St. Jim's faces were brighter as the sides formed up. There were no more black looks for Cardew, at all events.

As if inspired by Cardew's success, the St. Jim's ballplayers bore down on the home goal, and after a tough struggle Figgins put the ball in.

With twenty minutes to play, St. Jim's were a goal ahead; and Jimmy Silver & Co. were fighting hard now. For ten minutes the game was ding-dong, and then there was an irresistible attack on the visitors' goal. Fatty Wynn played up magnificently; but even Fatty was only human, and in spite of his defence, the ball found the net.

"Two all!" gasped Kangaroo. "How long to go now?"

"Five minutes."

"Play up, men!" said Cardew. "We'll beat them yet!"

"We'll try jolly hard!" said Levison cheerfully.

"Yes, rather," said Talbot.

Cardew smiled. Success had brought a change of sentiment in the team. Instead of the defeat almost every fellow had expected, the St. Jim's side had done well. Victory was still on the knees of the gods, but certainly their chance was as good as the enemy's now. The fellows seemed to have forgotten all Cardew's offences, for the time at least. The game had atoned for them.

The whistle shrilled, and there was a desperate struggle for victory. Jimmy Silver & Co. came down hotly on the visitors' goal, but the backs cleared, and St. Jim's got away again. In the last few minutes of the match the fight was in front of the home goal, with Rawson of Rookwood between the posts, watchful as a cat. The ball came in from Levison, and Rawson caught and drove it out. It came back, and the Rookwood goalkeeper, stepping out of the goal, stopped it with his ready hands. And at the same instant Ralph Reckness Cardew charged him in, and goalkeeper and ball went headlong into the net together.

"Goal!"

Pheep! went the whistle.

"Goal!"

Rawson staggered up.

It was a goal, and St. Jim's had won! Cardew stood rather unsteadily, gasping for breath. Levison caught his arm.

"Good man! Good man! Goal!"

"Good old man!" gasped Clive, smacking Cardew on the shoulder. "You've done it! Ob, ripping!"

"Hurrah!" panted Figgins.

"That was splendid, Cardew!" said Talbot, in a quiet way.

"Well, we seem to have won," yawned Cardew, and he walked cheerfully off the field with the St. Jim's crowd.

It was quite a cheerful party that crowded into the train for St. Jim's later, with Rushden's motor-bike in the guard's van.
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van. Cardew was as cheerful as any, though he could scarcely have forgotten what awaited him at St. Jim's.

He had not counted the cost, but the cost had to be paid. But at least he had reinstated himself with the footballers. The winning goal counted for a very great deal.

"You'll have trouble with Rushden when you get in, Cardew," Levison said, when they changed at Wayland.

"I expect so. Sixth Form chaps can't possibly be pleased when a junior bags their motor-bike without permission," assented Cardew, with a cool nod.

"What about Lathom?" asked Figgins.

Cardew laughed.

"I fancy Lathom will be tearing his hair with wrath. I shall have to go before the Head. What a life!"

"All your own fault!" remarked Kangaroo.

"Quite so. That's a comfort, isn't it?"

"It will mean a flogging," said Clive uneasily.

"If that's all, old bean, I shan't worry. But if the jolly old Head bunks me from the school you'll lose your captain. Fancy that! If you have tears, prepare to shed them now!"

"Well, you're taking it coolly, anyhow," remarked Fatty Wynn.

"What's the good of gettin' into a fluster?" said Cardew lightly.

The returning footballers arrived at St. Jim's. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther met them at the gates.

"How did it go?" asked Tom, addressing Talbot of the Shell, and taking no notice of Cardew.

"We beat them—three to two."

"Oh, good!"

"Happy news, what?" smiled Cardew. "We've actually beaten Rookwood without any help from Thomas. Quite a record."

"Cheese that, Cardew!" muttered Levison.

"Cardew kicked the winning goal, Tom," said Talbot hastily. "He played up really well."

"I'm afraid that won't please Thomas," murmured Cardew.

Tom fixed his eyes on the dandy of the Fourth. There was a scorn in his look that brought the colour to Cardew's cheeks.

"I'm glad St. Jim's has won," he said. "I never expected it, but I'm jolly glad. But that doesn't alter the fact, Cardew, that you are a rotten bad captain, that you have neglected all your duties, and that you have acted like a slacker and a cad all round."

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I endorse every word uttered by Tom Merry."

"Dear me!" said Cardew lightly. "I am condemned by Thomas and condemned by Gussy, the one and only. Take me away somewhere where I can hide my diminished head."

Some of the fellows laughed.

Cardew walked on to the School House. Rushden of the Sixth met him in the doorway, with a grim face.

"Where's my motor-bike?"

"At the station. It's being sent on," said Cardew. "Thanks so much for lending it to me!"

Rushden gave him a look.

"I'd give you the licking of your life," he said. "But you're going to get enough from the Head, I fancy."

"I agree," said Cardew.

"You're to go in to the Head at once, Cardew!" called out Kildare.

"Certainly!"

Cardew walked away airily to Dr. Holmes' study. Mr. Lathom followed him there, and a few minutes later it was noted that Taggles, the porter, was sent for.

"It's a flogging!" said Levison.

"It might have been the sack!" said Clive, with a breath of relief. "I fancy it was touch and go."

Levison nodded.

"After all, he won the match for us," remarked Kangaroo. "He's a queer fish, but he's a footballer. We beat Rookwood."

"Yaas," said Arthur Augustus. "But—"

"Well, we beat Rookwood," said several fellows. It was evident that, in Cardew's case, a winning goal covered a multitude of sins.

Quite a little army of fellows had gathered at the corner of the Head's corridor. They were all anxious to see Cardew.

No sound of a voice came from the Head's study, no sound of a cry. Cardew was as hard as steel. If he was going through it, he was going through it in grim silence. Trimble, venturing nearer the Head's door, brought back the news that he had heard the steady swishing of the birch.

"The Head's laying it on!" grinned Trimble.

But nobody else grinned.

It seemed an age to the juniors before the Head's door opened, and Ralph Reckness Cardew came out. His face was pale, almost white, as he came slowly up the passage.

But he was still cool. He nodded to the crowd of juniors.

"Had it bad?" asked Talbot.

"Well, a little. The Head is really a hefty athlete for a gent of his years," said Cardew. "I never thought he had so much beef in him. My belief is that he's been doing physical jerks this afternoon to get his muscle up for the job."

Levison quietly took Cardew's arm and led him away, and the crowd broke up, some of them grinning. Cardew, whatever his faults and failings—and their name was legion—was game to the backbone, that was certain.

Tom Merry did not speak to Cardew again when they met. But with most of the fellows he seemed to have jumped into popularity. He had captained a winning side, after all, and he had reached the football-field by a daring defiance of authority that few fellows would have been capable of, and he had taken his punishment afterwards without a murmur. Pluck and determination, at least, he had in plenty, and they were qualities that put his faults into the shade. He had regained the position he had almost lost. His luck had held good. And before he was put to the test again St. Jim's broke up for the Christmas holidays. But, as it happened, the feud between Cardew and Tom Merry was not destined to sleep during the Christmas tide. The end was not yet.

THE END.

(Another splendid story of Tom Merry & Co. will appear in next week's Bumper Christmas Number of the GEM. Make a note of the title, chums: "D'ARCY'S CHRISTMAS PARTY!" by Martin Clifford. You cannot afford to miss this topping yarn.)



Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes Awarded for Interesting Paragraphs.

BRISTOL BAGS THE TUCK HAMPER! NO FEAR!

Jones entered the office one morning, looking very pale and drawn. "Hallo, you, look ill, old chap!" said his friend. "What's the matter?" "Tooth-ache!" groaned Jones. "I haven't had a wink of sleep all night." "Ah!" replied his friend confidently. "You should try the faith cure. Just repeat to yourself fifty times a day, 'Get behind me, pain!'" "Not likely!" snapped Jones angrily. "Do you think I want lumbago!"—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious Tuck has been awarded to Ivor Cox, 80, Aubrey Road, Chessels, Bedminster, Bristol.

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HE WAS SURE HONEST.

The waiter coughed apologetically. "If you please, sir—" he began. "Well, Benskin," inquired the amiable diner, "what can I do for you?" "Well, sir, I'm going to leave this restaurant, and the boss won't give me a character. I thought perhaps you would say as I was honest. I've always served you here, sir." "But I don't know anything about your honesty," said the diner. "Oh, but I'm awfully honest, sir, really!" "All right, then," said the diner. "I'll say you're honest. Give me a pen and paper!" The deed was soon done. "Oh, thank you, sir!" said Benskin, firmly clutching his character in his hand. Then he bent low, and whispered to his customer's ear: "Come here to-morrow, and I'll wangle you a meal for nothing, sir!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to D. Finlayson, 4, Wilder Place, Galashiels.

NEW ANTIQUES!

It was in a country cottage, and after the antique dealer was gone it was observed that the old man who owned the cottage was chuckling to himself. "What ever he up with then, granddad?" asked his granddaughter. "Why, I sold the old kitchen chair to that chap from Lunnon as a genuine antique, and I can remember me old grandfeyther tellin' me he made it himself!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. T. Willmott, 9, North Street, Wellington, Somerset.

(Continued on page 27.)

River-Wise Ned and his
staunch chums meet—

—thrilling adventure
in every quarter

THE COINERS!

by Roland Spencer



A Thrilling
Story of Amazing
Adventure
aboard the
Thames Barge,
Estuary Belle.

CHAPTER 1.

Up Against It.

THE Estuary Belle, London sailing-barge, commanded and owned by Ned Derry, the ever-cheerful youth who had earned the name of River-wise Ned, owing to his surprisingly extensive knowledge of the great Thames Estuary, was in disgrace.

Owing to the wind having fluked at a critical moment, the barge had stove in the side of a smart eight-ton cutter yacht in the River Medway, and the yachtsmen had had a lot to say about it.

The owner of the yacht, Stockton Burr by name, and his companion, a young fellow called Sanderley had abused Ned and his mates, Tony Parr and Jim Cartwright, in right nautical fashion, and the chums had borne it all quite patiently.

Stockton Burr had suggested twenty pounds as a just compensation for the damage. But Ned would not pay until he had been allowed to go into the yacht's cabin to judge the extent of the damage to interior fittings. This, for some reason, Burr would not agree to.

Names and addresses had been exchanged, and both parties had retired in high dudgeon, the Belle to set off for Harwich, and the yachtsmen to see to repairs to their boat.

"You'll hear from my insurers before long," had been Stockton Burr's parting shot, as the Belle swung down the Medway on the ebb.

It was a few days after the event, and Ned was sorting out the mail.

"Well, here are our letters, you lazy beggars! Nothing from the two nice yachtsmen with whom we scraped such a pleasant acquaintance in the Medway."

The Estuary Belle was at Harwich, having delivered her cargo of linsed-cake to that port from the Medway. Ned had just been ashore on business at the post-office and at the custom-house.

"Wish those Burnham bounders would get on with it," said Tony Parr. "We'll have to pay through the nose, of course. Still, it won't leave us exactly like broken reeds. We've still a bob apiece for the pictures to-night."

"Yes," cut in Ned; "and there's a ripping sea film on that I'd just like to see. It's about a girl who works a square-rigger singlehanded, with dead men all round her or something. It

sounds thrilling. Get your greasy old caps on, chumps, and let's be off!"

The young barges were soon ashore. They went straight up to the Magnificent Picture Palace, and took their seats in the shilling rows.

"Dolly Farnie is starring in the big picture this evening," said Ned, before the lights went out. "Won't it be great when we can see the picture we and the Belle acted in?"

The lads enjoyed the whole programme thoroughly, and when the show was over, walked silently and thoughtfully back to where the barge-boat was moored. The Belle herself was lying some distance below Parkeston Quay.

The chums had just reached the alleyway from which they could get a view of the place where their boat was tied up when Ned suddenly threw up his head and snorted indignantly, like a war-horse scenting battle.

"Look at those youngsters messing about with our boat, chums!" he cried, pointing ahead. "Let's catch 'em and give 'em a good fright!"

The three chums dashed with more speed than wisdom down the narrow alleyway, and hardly had they reached the bottom than they cannoned into two yachtsmen struggling along a lane at right angles, carrying a heavy box of fish between them.

The heavy fish box fell with a thud, the yachtsmen went flying, and Ned and his chums sprawled flat on the ground, Tony Parr ploughing up the dust in the gutter with his chin.

The urbins, who had left the barge-boat, already in flight, stopped and shrieked with laughter. Then they scudded off as Ned and the others picked themselves up.

Some money had been spilt in that little collision. The loose coins in Ned's pockets had clinked and clattered on to the cobbles. When Ned had collected his wits and his cap, he saw one of the yachtsmen already rearranging the fish in the box. The other yachtsman was grabbing at the loose money on the cobbles.

"I beg your pardon," said Ned, as he stooped to pick up some of the money.

There was a lot of it there, but Ned only took what he had had in his pocket—three half-crowns and a few odd pence.

"Gosh!" ejaculated Long Jim. "Mr. Burr and Mr. Sanderley! Fancy meeting you like this! We seem doomed to crash up against you at every turn."

It was a surprising coincidence that they should have again fallen foul of the yachtsmen whose yacht they had damaged in the Medway. Stockton Burr had stepped back in alarmed surprise as he recognised Ned and his chums. Sanderley had collected all the money now, and he turned on Ned.

"I say—" he began. Then: "What, you again? Look here, hand back that money! I dropped it!"

"When a man shoots forward with some force, loose money in his pockets is apt to come out," said Ned. "That's precisely what has happened in my case, sir. I've got my little lot back—seven-and-pence. All the rest is yours."

"I'm three half-crowns short!" protested Sanderley.

"Then they'll be on the ground," said Ned, peering about. "Must be."

"They're not! Hand 'em out! This ten-shilling note was yours, perhaps?"

"Not at all. I had no note," replied Ned. "That must be yours. I'm sorry for the accident—"

"Burr, that young rat's trying to steal seven-and-six from me!"

"Here, hold on!" barked Ned, clenching his fists. "Don't call me a thief, for all the trouble my chums and I have been of late to you two. I've only got the money I had before the accident."

"Your fish isn't damaged," broke in Long Jim, anxious to preserve the peace. "We're sorry we were so careless. Shall we give you a hand with the fish-box?"

"Oh, it's all right, thanks!" replied Burr. "We've been out fishing in the Eileen, and we're taking this box of fish to a friend. Like to buy some?"

Ned and his pals looked at the fish. They were very fresh and tempting.

"Have five bob's worth," said the yachtsman, looking at Ned. "We'll give you a pile of 'em for five shillings."

River-wise Ned shook his head. "We'd like some, but as a matter of fact we can't afford to pay for fish when we can catch all we want."

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ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY...PRICE 2:

After further talk, when the matter of the accident in the Medway and a sum of seven shillings were discussed, the chums went out to the Belle. When in the cabin, they discussed the yachtman further.

"Jolly decent of those chaps not to charge us anything for that smash," said Long Jim. "You ought to have given them that seven shillings towing fee, Ned."

"I said I'd send it on, didn't I? We need all the hard cash we've got at the moment."

"You might have given them the money there and then, though," said Tony Parr. "They wanted it, you could see. For all their prosperous-looking rig-outs they may be pretty low as regards ready-money. Their wanting to sell us fish would bear that out. Didn't sound gracious to me, saying you'd send on a miserable seven shillings. However, the business is over, anyway, and a good job for us. That smash in the Medway was worrying me."

"Well, worry it out a bit more in your bunk, chum," replied Ned. "Your turn to take in the riding light and make tea in the morning, Jim. If you go on jawing here much longer you won't feel like getting up in the morning, and if I have come to rouse you—well—"

Jim Cartright grunted as he drew his trousers off his long legs.

"Last one undressed blows out the light," continued Ned, a few minutes later, after he had performed operations with his toothbrush. Then: "Good-night! Don't be a month turning in, and don't talk!"

Five minutes later the Estuary Belle was wrapped in slumber.

CHAPTER 2

On the Track of Adventure!

THE next morning Ned and his mates went ashore to do a bit of shopping.

"We want some bacon, a quarter of tea, and another pound of sugar, for a kick-off," said Long Jim, as the three walked into Harwich. "Now, what about meat? I vote we have some stewing steak. That won't cost a lot."

"Wish we could afford something special," put in Tony Parr. "But we'll have to be content with a plain diet for a bit, I suppose?"

The lads pushed on, talking about their passage back to Gravesend. They would have to be under way the next day. They had no freight waiting for them, but Ned's opinion was that, with the barge all ready and available at Gravesend, he'd be able to secure a job he had had his eye on for some time—the shifting of a mass of old building materials near the water-front.

They entered the first grocer's shop they saw.

"A quarter of two-and-eightpenny tea, please," said Ned. "Pound of sugar and a pound of bacon—nice streaky stuff."

The grocer busied himself about, preparing the order. When the things were ready Ned paid him with two half-crowns. The grocer chinked the coins on the counter as he opened the till drawer. Then he chinked them again and examined them closely.

At last he looked up.

"Bad!" he said. "Both these half-crowns are bad!"

Ned held out his hand for them, tested

them, and came to the conclusion that they were bad. The young bargee looked meaningly at his pals.

"Remember the mix-up of money with those two beauties last night?" he said.

"Yes, the blighters! And their great efforts to get the half-crowns you had pocketed back, by jingo! It seemed a bit funny at the time—first threatening us, then wanting us to buy fish, then to pay seven shillings towing fee. Gee, it looks suspicious!"

"It does," said Ned. Then, to the grocer, after examining his other half-crown. "I'm sorry, but I have only a few coppers of good money and one good half-crown. Will you give me two-and-fourpenny tea and take away a quarter of the bacon? Then I can do it."

The grocer eyed the chums suspiciously.

"Oi reckon you'll have to account for them bad coins to the police," he said.

The lads became alarmed. That would mean great delay for them. Ned took the bull by the horns and told the grocer the whole story. When he had finished, the portly old Essex tradesman, who had a habit of standing with his hands on his stomach, under his apron, said:

"So you're River-woyse Ned? Oi've read all about you in the papers. Gum, you're on to another adventure, then, looks loike. Well, get to it now, lads, an' tell me the whole yarn now toime you're at Harwich, will 'e? I won't say nothing to the police this toime. The papers of the past few weeks have said lots about bad coins bein' circulated in inland towns. That makes me careful."

The chums thanked the old grocer and hurried back to the Belle. In the cabin Ned called a conference.



Unable to check their mad rush Ned and his chums cannoned into the two yachtmen, sending them toppling backwards. There was a thud as their heavy fish box fell to the ground, followed by a jingling sound as a number of loose coins clinked and clattered on the rough cobbles.

"Look here, you two chumps," he said, "let's put two and two together. We bashed that yacht, the Eileen. The owner, Stockton Burr, generously, wouldn't let us pay."

"Bur-r-r-r!" said Long Jim.

"He rated us for peering into the hole we made in the yacht, and wouldn't let us go into the cabin. We thought it funny at the time. I'll bet those bounders—Burr and Sanderley—are distributors of bad money for some coiners."

"Yes, and that fish episode. There was bad money under the fish, I'll bet my shirt," said Tony Parr excitedly. "The blighters were afraid you'd get hold of a bad coin or two when you picked up the half-crowns, Ned, so tried to get them back, knowing that the discovery of their badness would result in suspicions being directed towards them."

"We're on another rattling mystery, lads!"

Ned suddenly made a leap for the cabin steps as a new thought flashed on his mind.

"Ay!" he called down when his head was above the companionway, "and there's the Eileen hull down on the horizon, just to the south'ard of Land-guard Point. Clear decks for action! Shorten in the chain, Tony. Jim, bass line off the mains'l. I'll lower the lee-boards."

"Getting after her, Ned?"

"Sure thing. We'll dog her if she goes to the North Pole!"

"Hurrah! Look slippery!" cried Tony Parr, as he sprang forward to the windlass.

"If the Eileen can outsail a London sailing barge she'll be a smart yacht," cried Long Jim, as he tugged at the knot of the grass rope tied round the brailed mainsail.

"We'll find out if those brutes are circulating bad money or not," said Ned, lowering a leeboard in a series of jerks. "Chain short, Tony? Right-ho! I'll stand by the wheel. Draw out the topsail and let go mainsail brail, Jim. Trip anchor, Tony. Freights can wait when the Belle scents an adventure. What-ho!"

By nightfall the Estuary Belle was well to sea, Yarmouth a-beam, the Eileen ahead, leading them north-west along the Woud—that is, the deep-water channel past Cromer. The yacht was either desirous of not getting too far to sea, or was bound for the Wash. Otherwise she would have pointed up for the Outer Dowsing Bank.

The yacht, evidently unsuspecting that the barge was dogging her, pointed over the Docking Shoal for Lynn Deep. The chums could follow her by the light from her cabin door. The Belle herself carried no lights, merely keeping a combination-lamp handy in case any craft should get near them.

Throughout the dark hours the Eileen drew the Belle into what the lads found from the chart was Walbeach Channel, a deep, narrow gut leading up through the Fens. The Eileen had entered, there was no other way out, so the Belle pointed over to Walbeach Channel, found a reedy, deep creek there, secured the barge, and got the mast down flat on the deck just before the grey in the eastward heralded the approach of day.

The light showed the Eileen in her berth, as, apparently the sole occupant of the extensive, barren, and treacherous Walbeach Marshes. But Ned and his mates were watching, and soon they were again hot on the scent, shadowing Burr and Sanderley, again carrying a fish box, over the marsh land towards Long Sutton.

The two men suddenly disappeared from sight, so, stepping warily and

silently, Ned and his chums followed up the tracks in the coarse grasses of the marsh, and saw a hole in the ground where the tracks ended.

A stairway led down into the dark hole. It was like a war-time dugout. On the marsh hard by was the "lid" of the hole—a wooden covering with about eighteen inches of turf on top of it.

Ned and his chums realised, as they watched silently and in wonder, that this "lid," when put in place, would completely hide the fact that there was dug-out below.

"Going in?" whispered Tony Parr.

"To get a crack on the head?" asked Ned sarcastically. "Not on your life. We'll lie flat here, watch, and wait. The beggars won't be long, I expect."

Ned surmised correctly, for very soon voices sounded from the dug-out.

convict them. We'll walk the boundaries into Long Sutton."

The two men were out of the dugout now, so with a sudden spring, the chums of the Belle leapt at them, and a desperate struggle was soon in progress.

CHAPTER 3.

Bad Luck for the Chums!

THE three young bargees thought they had a soft nut to crack in downing Burr and Sanderley. So they would have had if Long Jim hadn't been knocked out by a terrific blow from Burr, delivered from behind.



With Ned and Long Jim at the wheel the barge breasted the roaring black seas much easier. Burr and Sanderley crouched back in fear as the seething waters washed half over the lee hatch covers.

"Put the letter to Denborough under the weight on the shelf, Sanderley. That's right. Now they'll get their instructions."

"I think you were right, old man," then said Sanderley. "We've used Manchester long enough, and Liverpool's too close to Manchester to do that town yet. A spell with small market towns would be best now. A lot of small money changes hands at cattle markets, and farmers and country tradespeople are not so cute as town folk."

"That's so. If there's much more yap in the papers we'd better clear out in a week or so. Think those young bargees rats were suspicious?"

"Pooh, no! They'll pass the two coins they had somewhere, even if they discover they're bad. Two like that will soon get lost. Come on up, now! Mustn't leave the trapdoor open too long. You never know who'll spot it."

"No, you never know!" breathed Ned, grinning, as he squeezed his chums' arms. "At 'em when they come up. That letter of instructions will

They were thus left two to two, and Ned felt confident of victory even now, for the rogues, evidently, were not armed.

Ned took on Burr, and Tony Parr tackled Sanderley. Burr was a scientific boxer, as Ned soon found out, and, under less dramatic circumstances, Ned would have gloried in the struggle for mastery.

Tony was well matched with Sanderley, who was a quick man on his feet. Tony, however, fought warily, without firing himself too much.

Long Jim had received a complete knockout. He had not stirred since he went down, so Ned and Tony could hardly hope to receive help from him for some time to come.

Sanderley danced about in front of Tony, stopping now and again, a smashing blow that made him gasp. Ned had lowered his head, and was beginning slogging tactics, for he realised that his man was becoming winded. Sanderley, out of the corner of his eye, realised

this, too, so resolved on cunning to win the fight for himself and Burr. The man danced about in front of the dugout hole, then suddenly leapt backwards.

Tony followed up with a heavy lunge forward, put one foot in the hole, overbalanced, and received a stinging blow on the ear from Sanderley's right. He fell sideways, and Sanderley grabbed him by the neck and sent him sprawling, face forwards, into the dugout. Then the man, with a yell, leapt to the aid of his confederate.

In an instant Ned was badly bashed about. Then, he, too, was sent down the dugout steps on top of Tony. Long Jim was dragged over and bundled, doubled up, into the hole, thus preventing Tony and Ned from scrambling out again.

A mocking laugh rang out from above, and the "lid" was lifted and then lowered into place, plunging the dugout into darkness. Ned and Tony soon began to sort themselves out.

They brought Jim round after a bit of trouble and much rubbing of hands and chest. Then they paid attention to the trapdoor of their prison. It was impossible to raise it.

A catch, or something, is holding it," said Ned. "Well, at the worst, we can dig ourselves out. Let's look for a crowbar or tools of some sort."

An examination of the dugout at the foot of half a box of matches revealed a bare apartment, save for the box the two men had taken down. This box was full of bad half-crowns and florins. There was a shelf at the end of the apartment, and on this a letter under a stone, the latter used as a paper-weight.

Ned read the letter. There was no name, but it was written in someone's handwriting, so would be sufficient to convict the writer. The letter stated:

"Leave Liverpool. Work market towns Derby, Warwick, and Oxford. Circulate amongst country tradesmen and at farm and market auction sales, avoiding big establishments or branches of big establishments. Good luck."

Ned put the letter back in place, and Long Jim struck another match.

"These matches are damp," he said. "Not burning well at all."

"Jingo, no! And I'm not breathing well at all. Golly, chums, this blithering

hole is airtight. We'll suffocate, with the trap closed. Crumbs, we must get out quickly!"

Greatly alarmed, the lads searched round frantically.

"There must be some device for opening the trap!" gasped Ned at last. "It stands to reason that a place like this, made by thorough villains like Burr and Sanderley, is a refuge as well as a depot. Search up the stairway."

The matches burned even less readily on the stairway, but after twenty minutes' search, with only two matches left, Ned found a string. He pulled it gingerly, half fearing a booby-trap, while Tony Parr and Long Jim pressed with their shoulders at the wooden trapdoor above.

The trapdoor yielded, and, once open, the chums thankfully drinking in the pure, fresh, marshland air, they saw that the string operated a spring catch that held the trapdoor down. They also saw that the Belle's mast was raised, and that Burr and Sanderley were struggling towards the barge with a box of something, presumably taken from the yacht.

"After them, chums! But put the trapdoor back into place first. We'll be the ones to report the dugout's existence!" cried Ned. "They're going to put to sea in the Belle, but not if we know it!"

The lads ran rapidly over the marshland towards the Belle. Burr and Sanderley saw them coming, hurried in their work, and were poling the barge down the gut, with, unluckily, just enough water left in it to float the old raft by the time Ned, Tony, and Jim arrived at the point.

Realising that desperate measures alone would now win them through, the lads plunged into the water, and, with heads down, and a powerful trudgeon-stroke, they swam out across the narrow channel and intercepted the barge, just as the topsail was sheeted home, and the old ship gathered good way.

Scrambling aboard, Ned led a rush at the two rascally counterfeiters, only to be brought up, gasping, with two blue-glinting automatic pistols pointing at them. Behind the pistols a pair of evilly grinning faces looked at them.

"Hands up!" ordered Burr grimly. Then, as the chums complied, having read correctly the expression in Burr's eyes. "So far, so good, my lads! Thanks muchly for delivering yourselves to us! We saw you put the trapdoor over, and thanks again for that! Wish we'd taken these shooters from the yacht when we went to the dugout with the box. However, all's well that ends well—what? While I steer and keep them covered, Sanderley, just go through their pockets and extract that little note we left in the dugout."

The chums were powerless to do anything but keep their hands high above their heads while Sanderley gingerly searched in their wet pockets.

"Lump of marine glue," he said, grinning, when he had taken everything from the lads, "about a fathom of spungium, some tarred serving twine, old shackle, our two pretty half-crowns—art productions as they are—various papers not concerning us, three jack-knives, a pocket compass, and three handkerchiefs. Pretty little collection."

"So they've left the letter in the dugout?" said Burr. "All the better! D. will get his instructions all right next week when he calls there. Not that that matters much to us now. Down below into the fo'c'sle with these rats! We'll live in the cabin. We're going deen-water sailing in the famous Estuary Belle, my lads! We'll scuttle her off some foreign shore, you with her, and you'll be washed up as poor, unfortunate

shipwrecks. All our coining plant is below in the cabin. That can go, too. You three have made us clear out of England only about a fortnight before we meant to, so we bear you no grudge now we've got such a topping old barge to make a safe crossing in. We meant to risk it in the Eileen before. Down below with 'em now, Sanderley, and let go the brail-rope. This nor'-wester will put us well out to sea very quickly."

CHAPTER 4.

The Belle Takes a Hand!

"WELL, Ned, you blithering chump, this is a bit of all right, isn't it?" cried Tony, as the three chums imprisoned in the Belle's cabin, exchanged glances.

"We've been locked up below here before now, haven't we, and we've got out!"

"Yes; but only because we've been carried out. What's going to save us this time?"

"Rough weather, and the old Belle," replied Ned. "She's a beast in heavy weather, as is every chine-built barge. If it blows up, and on such a long passage as dead across the North Sea, we're bound to run into dirty weather, those swabs above will miss their self-draining cockpit and a comfortable few hours every now and again have to. There's no comfort on a barge in bad weather, and the flat type like the Belle won't heave to. Oh, there's going to be some weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth before this pleasure jaunt is out, and we'll be in great demand to save the barge and her distinguished company from a watery grave. You mark my words. I, who know the Belle so well, have had some. 'It ain't no hobby's job in the North Sea,' as the poet said, and the poet was right."

"Crumbs, yes!" replied Long Jim. "Gosh, I never thought of that! A buster from the nor'-east, or any other quarter for that matter, might be our salvation."

"Then let's have a sleep to be ready for it," put in Tony. "They'll get no sleep above—only two of 'em—as we well know. We're not licked yet."

It was even as Ned had predicted. It piped up from the north-east, and a very heavy sea was running by the evening. The two men above stuck it till midnight, smashing the barge into the teeth of it. But they were used to a deep-keel boat and the washing decks of the Belle, her yawning and lunging frightened them very considerably. The chums chuckled as they felt the fo'c'sle reeling and the smashing and banging of the seas and the booming of the foresail as the holmsmen nervously luffed to each comber.

At last they were released. They swamped down the weather waterway to the wheel, where two white faces greeted them.

Ned grinned cheerily. "The Belle's lovely in a seaway, isn't she, Burr?" he inquired, shouting above the roar of the wind.

"Curse her; she's a pig-headed brute! You've got to sail her."

"Then we must run for home!" shouted Ned. "You're a couple of crack-brained mugs for forcing a flat-bottomed barge to face heavy weather like this! I'm not so sure now that we'll be able to bear away with safety. Running is the only way to save the barge in weather like this."

Burr swore savagely, but he was very frightened, and his pistol shook as he held it.

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"Can you save the barge?"
 "Dunno, but we'll do our best. Best place for you and your mate is below in the cabin. You brought some bottled courage with you, I noticed."

"Well, stand clear for a minute," quavered Burr. "I'll leave the wheel, Sanderley, and cover them. For Heaven's sake, don't let this brute of a barge come broadside on! Those young hounds will take over the deck, and we'll get below."

Ned gripped the wheel, and nodded curtly to Sanderley.

"You can let go now!" he shouted.

The two men crouched near the sliding hatch of the cabin. The barge was smashing and plunging about like a van-horse bogged, but at the feel of the hands of Ned and Long Jim on the wheel she became easier. She now breasted the roaring black seas more tractably, for Ned and Jim were more bold than Burr and Sanderley in their sailing. The latter two crouched together in fear as they saw seething water washing half over the lee hatch-covers.

"Stand by the fores'l halliard and mains'l brail, Tony!" ordered Ned. "When you see us spin the wheel, brail up hard, and put a jerk into it at the brail winch! Let go the fores'l halliard if we breach to."

The two crouching men were quivering with fear and gasping every time a sea swept over them. They saw, with repudiation, Ned and Jim lash themselves to the mizzen mast, and Tony take a turn of the fall of the topsail halliard round himself and the sprit.

"Get into the cabin companion-way, you!" shouted Ned to the cowering men. "We'll be swept fore 'n aft at best. Now then, Jim, that was a big one! Stand by for a 'smooth!'"

What is known as a "smooth" in rough weather is the slight lull between the extra big billows; generally each ninth wave is the biggest, the cause being cross waves in the water mingling themselves with the straight-flowing ones.

Ned judged his time.
 "Hellum up!" he roared at last.

Jim strained hard at the spokes, a wave suddenly caught the rudder, and the wheel spun round like a flywheel. When the helm was full over, Ned and Jim threw their weight on the iron circle and held it hard. The Belle roared, spinning round on the crest of a wave, and the next snarling comber caught her on the quarter. She lunged, the water flowed waist high round the chums, and Tony was tugging and jerking at the brail winch.

Another sea burst over the barge's transom, and all but pooped the stout old ship. The foresail, however, tore the gallant old barge forward, and the stern was not forced down sideways into the trough, the danger Ned so feared.

The helm was put amidships, and the old craft swung on rapidly and more easily, pointing back for England.

"It's all right now!" bawled Ned to the heads of Burr and Sanderley. "You can get below! We'll get to some anchorage, with a bit of luck."

They did, the next day, but it was due to a good big slice of luck and the superb seamanship of Ned, Tony, and Jim. Haggard, reeling, hands bleeding, and eyes bloodshot, the chums shot up the Belle, nose into the wind, inside the shell beach at Orford Haven.

Burr himself let go the anchor, then, holding back the chums with their pistols, the two villains made the lads descend to the cabin. The hatch was slid over and secured, and, the barge-

boat having been smashed and washed overboard, Burr and Sanderley sprang into the water and swam ashore.

The barge was visited later in the day, and the exhausted chums released. The comers' complete plant was found in the cabin, and the lads were marshalled up to the nearest police-station. There, they told the inspector their story. He at once phoned to the north to have the dugout watched. Ned had said that the villains would be sure to make for there, posthaste, to destroy the evidence.

The police were too late, however. The dugout was deserted. The coup was made not far away, however, Burr and Sanderley being captured in King's Lynn, trying to hire a motor-car. The incriminating letter was found on Burr, and a confession was forced, revealing the whole roving organisation.

The bad money was made aboard the yacht Eileen, and sent to various secret depots for distribution, many miles from the east coast. Needless to say, the villainous schemes were stopped, and Ned, Tony, and Jim greatly praised for their smart work.

"Another honour for the Belle, lads," River-wise Ned said, when the whole matter was closed. "Crumbs, the old ship will be all dolled up with thousands of winners flags before she's finished!"

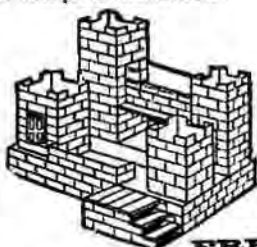
Tony and Jim heartily agreed. It was characteristic of the chums to lay all the credit at the feet of their lady-love, the old barge that had borne them through many adventures to fame and favour.

THE END.

(There's a real treat of a story in next week's grand Christmas Number of the GEM. Note the title: "THE GHOST OF GREYMINSTER CASTLE!" On no account must you miss it.)

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THE TRIERS

BY JACK CRICHTON



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Light at Last!

THE game started again. It was a ragged exhibition indeed on Boltwich's part. There was no life, and even Ronnie Stevens and Steve Logan seemed to have lost heart. Harry Turner had not been able to turn out to keep goal, and the newcomer was not a success. Things went from bad to worse.

The referee gave a decision against Boltwich which, to the unprejudiced mind even, seemed very open to question. The temper of the crowd grew nasty indeed, and when at the finish Boltwich had taken a severe beating from an inferior team at home there was no telling what would happen.

The crowd surged towards the stands, and then suddenly, for the first time, George Clifton realised how foolish he had been not to have taken Laurie Robson's advice.

Someone saw him.

"There he is!" came a cry.

Clifton turned and faced them. It was a bad moment. The crowd was yelling and jeering, surging ever towards the stands, and the police were evidently in the mood to get a bit of their own back for the previous Saturday's work at Crewbridge. At all events, they were not displaying their usual gentle methods, and already here and there a free fight had commenced.

"Come on, boys!" someone shouted. "Let's duck George Clifton! Let's show him what we think of him and his dirty ways!"

And at that moment the crowd broke loose. There was a sharp tussle with the police, and when it was too late.

Like maddened men they swarmed towards Clifton.

Realising the little chance of escape he had, he darted along the top of the stands; but his retreat was cut off everywhere. Again and again he darted here and there, but the crowd gave him never a chance. And then suddenly he turned and faced them, more of a man than people had known him to be.

"Come on, you curs!" he cried, squaring up. "I'll face the lot of you—one at a time!"

But they were not coming one at a time; they were coming in their hundreds.

Things certainly looked very bad for George Clifton at the moment, and it would have been a clever man who could have seen how he was to get out of it.

The crowd was surging towards him, and the crowd was in a very nasty mood indeed. It wasn't as though he had been popular to start with. Ever since he had had anything to do with Boltwich he had been overbearing and a bully, and people hated him. And now he had made matters infinitely worse by ruining the team and getting young Jack Morton, their hero, into trouble.

Indeed, it must have gone ill for

Clifton at that moment had it not been for Laurie Robson.

That young man had turned away in disgust when Clifton had refused to take his advice and get away from the ground while there was still time. It served the fellow right if he did get half-killed; if they took him, as once they had taken a full back who was seriously suspected of having kicked into his own goal on purpose, and flung him into the River Bolt.

But as Laurie now turned and saw the man's danger, and realised that he was but one against hundreds, his chivalrous nature revolted.

He bolted up towards Clifton, and a moment later was facing the ring-leaders of the crowd, his monocle firmly fixed in his eye, and a look of disgust on his face.

He was well known. People were already saying that he had had something to do with the rejuvenation of the Boltwich team, and folks also said that he had been a good pal to Jack Morton. So now the crowd hesitated.

"Stand back, you chaps!" Laurie shouted at the top of his rather high-pitched voice. "It's not sporting to attack him in a mob like this!"

"He's asked for it!" one of the crowd roared.

"I dare say he has," said Laurie, standing himself in front of the angry mob. "But he's not going to get it here on Boltwich Football Ground. It isn't the game, and I'm not going to allow it. You are too many for him!"

"Who are you?" demanded another.

Laurie twisted his monocle in his eye and regarded the speaker with cold contempt.

"If any fighting is necessary," he said, "I am prepared to come and have five rounds."

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE!

For the sake of his invalid mother, Jack Morton, a lad of seventeen, calls upon his grandfather, Sir Jasper Clifton, for aid. It was by no means a pleasant undertaking for Jack, for his mother, much against her father's wishes, had married a worker in Sir Jasper's mill, who was now dead. Sir Jasper, however, is taken up with the lad straight away, saying that he will alter his will and make him co-heir with George Clifton, another grandson, and Jack's cousin, and whose great interest in life is the Boltwich Football Club. In high spirits, Jack gives up his old job to take up work at Clifton's. But Sir Jasper dies that night. Thinking only of his mother, Jack goes to George Clifton, but his appeal proves futile, Clifton telling him that the will is unaltered, and that he is not wanted. Jack's anger is aroused, and, meeting Ronnie Stevens, whom George

Clifton had deemed it wise to sack, the two lads, former players of Boltwich F.C., determine to fight Clifton.

"We'll get a team that won't be beat," said Stevens, "and call them the Triers."

The team shows great promise, much to the annoyance of Clifton, who, scheming to get Morton hounded out of Boltwich, makes a spoof appointment with the lad. Unsuspectingly Jack falls into the trap when calling upon Clifton, who denies knowledge of the letter. Later, to Jack's surprise, he is arrested and accused of the theft of fifty pounds. However, through Laurie Robson, holder of the bulk of the Boltwich F.C. shares, Jack is able to effect an escape, and plays in the great match with Crewbridge. He is absent from the next game, however, and the crowd, greatly annoyed, advances threateningly upon Clifton, who ignores Robson's warning to clear.

with you, sir, whoever you may be; but I am going to see Mr. Clifton off the field!"

Laurie had saved the situation, for the police were now clearing the crowd away, and he was able to turn to George Clifton, an angry gleam in his eye.

"A nice state of things!" muttered Clifton, as soon as the danger began to grow a bit less.

Laurie gave him a look of contempt.

"Oh, clear out while you can, Clifton!" he said. "Another time I might not be able to help you. And don't think you are out of the wood yet by any means!"

"Eh!" snarled Clifton.

Laurie bent close to him.

"Jack Morton and I are going to be even with you yet, old son, and don't you forget it! That is all I have got to say to you! Now, slip along while the going's good!"

And George Clifton slipped along, muttering to himself and swearing awful vengeance; but, probably, deep down in his heart realising that the end of his tether was in sight.

Laurie felt very pleased with the way things had gone, and when he reached home that evening he had reason to feel more pleased. He was just on the point of sitting down to write a line to Jack Morton—to whom he wrote under a different name, of course—when someone was announced.

"Mr. Graves wishes to see you, sir," said his old butler.

Laurie looked up in surprise.

"I don't know any Mr. Graves," he said.

The butler cleared his throat.

"I think it is the butler from Mr. George Clifton's, sir."

Laurie started; this was very strange. He was on the point of saying that he would not have anything to do with anyone who had seemingly come from George Clifton, when he reflected that this was not perhaps the best way in which to repay Jack, and he said nothing.

"He says it is a personal matter and important, sir."

"Oh, all right, bring him in!"

A few moments later old Graves, Clifton's butler, came into the room.

He was obviously in a very excited state of mind, and he could scarcely hold his words back until they were alone together. Then it all came out with a rush.

"Mr. Robson, sir," he exclaimed, "I've come to see you about young Jack Morton! I didn't know who else to see. I had to come to you. I've got to see him, and at once!"

Laurie fixed his eyeglass firmly in his eye.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Graves?"

"Thank you, sir—thank you!"

He sat down.

"Now, pull your socks up—er—I mean take your time and tell me what it is all about. I may as well inform you that I don't like you!"

The old man started and grinned sheepishly.

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"On principle!"

"Yes, sir?"

"You see, Mr. Graves, you are butler to Mr. George Clifton; and as I take it you come from him I suspect you and dislike you, for I do not like Mr. George Clifton—"

"Quite, sir, but—"

"And at the same time," the young man continued, "I have it upon the excellent authority of my friend young Stevens, who used to be one of your footmen, and of Jack Morton himself that you are not at all nice to know. So where am I?"

It was not a very pleasing start for the old fellow, but he managed to grin his way through it.

"Well, sir," he said, "the fact of the matter is I—I have not come from Mr. Clifton at all. In fact, I've come with the best intentions."

"Ah!" said Laurie, taking his eyeglass out and polishing it. "You will recall, Mr. Graves, that good intentions are popularly supposed to pave the way to an exceedingly hot quarter of the universe. However, proceed. What can I do for you?"

The old man gave him a quick glance.

"Tell me where I can find Mr. Jack Morton."

Laurie started.

It was surprising to hear the "Mr." He didn't understand it for a moment.

"I—I wouldn't tell you if I knew, Graves," he said.

Graves looked desperate.

"Listen to me, sir," he said, "and then perhaps you will meet me. Jack Morton was close to this town, Boltwich, last night."

Laurie started.

"The deuce he was!"

"Yes, sir, he was. He had come to try and see his old mother."

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George Clifton had taken the oath, and was about to speak when Jack Morton suddenly leant forward from the dock. "One moment, Clifton," he said. "I accuse you of asking a certain person to destroy my grandfather's will!"

"Ah, yes!" said Laurie, beginning to sit up and take interest.

"He didn't, because—as perhaps you know, Mr. Robson—the old lady has moved to friends since all this trouble with her son started. He had a narrow squeak of being taken by detectives, who were waiting for him in his home and—"

"How do you know this, Graves?" asked Laurie suspiciously.

Graves bent his head. "I'm coming to that, sir," he said—"I'm coming to that! My dear daughter—"

"Now, look here, Graves, what has your dear daughter to do with it?"

"Everything, sir!"

"What!"

"I worship that girl, Mr. Robson, sir—"

"Oh, come, man, out with it!"

"Well, you see, sir, it was like this. I bought a two-seater for my daughter Grace not long ago, and she has been a perfect terror for driving it about by herself. Scared me to death. But you couldn't do anything with the girl. And last night quite late she was coming home, when suddenly, at the little wooden bridge outside the town on the London road—you know it, sir—"

"Yes, yes!"

"Well, sir, the bridge broke, or the car skidded, or something went wrong somewhere, because before my poor girl knew where she was she had been flung headlong, with the car, over the bridge into the Bolt; and she would certainly have been drowned if it had not been for Jack Morton, who was close by, and most gallantly saved her!"

"Good for Jack!" said Laurie, in excitement.

The old man nodded quickly.

"Yes, sir!" he exclaimed. "That is what I say! Good for Jack Morton! The one thing I love in this world is that girl; and if anything had happened to her I would have had nothing to live for. And—well—well, sir, I can

do Jack Morton a real good turn, and I am out to do it!"

Laurie started. "Tell me!" he said.

"But here the old chap shook his head quite firmly.

"No, sir; I'll tell Jack Morton, and no one else!"

"But how do I know," said Laurie Robson gravely, "if I take you to Jack Morton—and I am not sure that I can—but how do I know, if I do, that this is not all a trick of George Clifton's, and that my poor young pal will find himself in the lock-up five minutes after I have kindly taken you to him?"

Graves gave a cry.

"I'm not as bad as that, sir," he said.

"You must be pretty bad, Graves,"

Laurie said, "if you have had much to do with George Clifton all these years."

The old fellow blinked.

"I promise you, by a father's love, Mr. Robson, that the only desire I have got in this world is to help that young man and put right some of the wrong that has been done to him. I swear to you it is true! He saved the life of my girl, and I am going to pay him back as well as I can!"

For a long time Laurie looked the old fellow in the eye, and then he suddenly took a resolution.

"All right!" he said. "Are you

game for a long drive?"

"I'm game for anything if I can

repay that brave lad!" said Graves.

"That's the spirit, I must say! All

right, I'll join you in a minute."

He got his coat, ordered his car, and made sure as far as he could that old Graves had not got a squad of people outside; and a few minutes later he had rejoined the old butler.

"Come along, you old sinner, I'll risk it!"

He got Graves into the car, and started off. He drove so fast that the old man hung on to the side of the car breathlessly and wondering when his end was coming, and he went in such a

round-about way that it would have been almost impossible for Graves to have the slightest idea where he was going.

They stopped at last on the edge of a big town, almost fifty miles from Boltwich, and Laurie left the car at a small garage.

"Come on, my friend," he said

"we'll soon be with Jack now."

They hurried along up a side street or two, and then at last Laurie diverged into a narrow doorway and knocked three times.

In a few moments a man came to the doorway, and when he saw Laurie he touched his forelock at once.

"Upstairs, sir!"

The old man followed him, and they went up the rickety stairs at once. Laurie seemed to know his way, and did not even knock on the door at the top of the stairs.

Jack was writing at a table, but he jumped up with a cry as the door was opened.

"Laurie!" he cried.

"Jack, old man!"

The two chums shook hands, and then suddenly Jack caught sight of the pale face of old Graves behind his pal.

"What on earth—" he began.

But old Graves came forward.

"Mr. Jack," he said, "I—I have come to repay you for saving my daughter's life!"

There was a moment's silence, during which Laurie curiously watched his friend's face, and then he knew that old Graves had not lied.

Jack smiled.

"Oh, it was nothing!" he said. "I just did what I could. I am afraid the car was finished, though!"

"The car!" cried the old butler. "Oh, I don't care about that! Besides, it was well insured!" he grinned. "But I have come to thank you, Mr. Jack. That girl was all the world to me; and, thank Heaven, I have got it in my power to repay you for what you did for me!"

Jack stared.
"That's all right, Graves—" he began.
"Nothing is all right," Graves replied, "until I have undone the great wrong which I did. Mr. Jack, do you mind Mr. Robson hearing your private business?"
Jack laughed.

"Well, I guess there is not much of my private business that Mr. Robson does not know already, Graves," he said.
"But what, in the name of goodness, are you getting at?"
Graves drew a deep breath, and then leaned forward mysteriously between the two lads.

"Sir," he said, "that George Clifton is a deep-dyed villain!"

Laurie laughed.
"Look here, Graves, my friend," he said, "if you have brought me all this way to tell me that, you are barking up a wrong tree. I want more for the petrol I have used than that!"

"Wait a minute, sir!" exclaimed the old man. "All in good time! I say that George Clifton is a bad egg, sir, and I can prove it! I can help you to send him to prison, and—I can bring you into your rights, Mr. Jack!"

Jack was pale with excitement.
"Well," he said, "get ahead with it!"

"And I am going to do all this because you saved my girl's life, Mr. Jack. Don't forget that! Whatever you may think of me after you have heard all, don't forget that!"

Jack sighed. He was getting impatient.
"All right, I won't!" he said. "But get on with it!"
"I will!"

"Mr. Graves," said Laurie, "get on with it, or I shall explode, and then you will have to walk back to Boltwich! It is a long way!"

The old fellow nodded.
"That was the wrong will!" he said.
"Ah!" cried Jack. "I knew it!"
Graves started.

"That night when you came to see Sir Jasper—I remember it well, Mr. Jack. I remember you going in to him, and I remember you coming out; and I remember the old gentleman saying that he had made a new will, in which you had been left half. I—I knew, because young Stevens witnessed it, though he didn't know what it was he witnessed; and I had further reason to know all about it soon enough."

He paused, and both of the lads were content now to wait for him to go on, for this was the real thing, and they were getting down to bed-rock.

"The next day he died!"
"Yes?"

"Well," the old man said in little more than a whisper, "poor old Sir Jasper had scarcely breathed his last than Mr. George came to me—"

"Ah!"

"Why?" asked Jack quickly.

"About the second will!"

"Oh!"

"You see, he had been robbed, as he put it, of half, and the reason he came to me was twofold. In the first will I had been left a thousand pounds; and in the second, Sir Jasper had been in too much of a hurry to think of me, I suppose. But, at any rate, I'd been done out of my thousand, and got nothing; and so Mr. George wanted me to help him find the first, which he could not, and destroy the second."

Jack and Laurie stared at the old butler in surprise.
"What happened?" asked Jack in a low tone.

"Mr. George found the first," said old Graves, "and we couldn't ever find the second—at least, we never seemed to find it, because I had it all the time!"

The boy gave a cry.

"Great Scott, Graves, man!" exclaimed Laurie. "What did you do with it? Where is it?"

Graves smiled rather sadly.

"I am afraid, young gentlemen," he said, "that I was rather a bad lot in those days, and I—I was thinking that the time might come when that second will—the real will—would be rather a useful document with which to put the screw on Mr. George. You see that even in those days I didn't trust him, and I didn't believe that I should get all he promised as my share of the dirty work. So when I found the second will I said nothing. And here it is!"

He put the document down on the table in front of Jack.

Eagerly the two boys bent over it. And there, in clear writing, it was stated that Jack Morton was to come into half of everything that Sir Jasper, his grandfather, left.

In a little Laurie looked up.

"Well, Graves," he held out a hand—"I beg your pardon for doubting you when you turned up earlier. You have done a good thing to-night! And you can take it from me that as far as your share in this bad business is

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concerned, I will move heaven and earth to save you!"

"Yes!" said Jack in a low voice, but he was so excited he could scarcely speak.

"He saved my girl," said the old man. "That is all I care about!"

"Shall we be able to prove this will?" asked Jack.

Laurie laughed.

"You bet your sweet life we shall! I happen to know that George Clifton has never been able to get the other will finally ready for probate, as they call it. Besides, with that and old Graves here to testify, the brute will soon make everything over to you, Jack. Give us your hand, lad! You are a rich man now, and no one is more glad than I!"

Jack was smiling queerly.

"Do you know what I am going to do now?" he said.

"No."

"I am going back to Boltwich, and I am going to give myself up to the police, and risk that fifty pounds business; because now I have got Mr. George Clifton, and I rather fancy he will be sorry he ever did all this dirty work. Here, Laurie, you keep that for me."

And he handed Laurie the will.

***** § The Beginning of the End! § *****

IT was in the middle of the next day that Jack Morton suddenly walked out of the railway-station at Boltwich.

So far he hadn't been seen; but suddenly, as he came into the square, a football fan espied him and set up the shout:

"Good old Jack!"

In a moment a crowd had surrounded him.

"What cheer, Jack! Where are you going? How's your luck?"

He faced them all.

"It's all right, boys!" he said. "I'll play for you next week, see if I don't! I'm just going round to give myself up!"

And so the cheering crowd went along to the police-station with him, and when they reached there and a sergeant came out to see what all the trouble was about he had the surprise of his life as Jack Morton, the lad they had been looking for for such a time, marched up the steps himself and said:

"I have come to give myself up."

The sergeant gave a grunt and jerked his head towards the station.

"All right!" he said. "In you go! We have had enough trouble about you, young man; and now we have got you we'll keep you!"

Jack was taken inside at once and charged, and a few minutes later he was under lock and key in the cells, and this time there was no question of him escaping.

But he was happy now.

He had no fear whatever as to the future. He was going to be cleared; and, what was more, he was going to be able to keep his old mother in all the comfort that was necessary.

Still, there was the trouble with regard to the fifty pounds which he was supposed to have stolen from George Clifton, and that was rather worrying.

Nor was George Clifton enjoying himself.

He had settled down to read the *THE GEM LIBRARY*.—No. 827.

newspaper after lunch that day, when he was informed that he was wanted on the telephone, and he thought that there was rather a curious glint in the eye of old Graves, the butler.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Police-station, sir!"

The man went pale; then pulled himself together.

"Suppose they have got young Morton," he muttered, and picked up the receiver.

"Hallo!"

"Is that you, sir?" came the voice of the inspector at the other end of the line.

"Yes. What is it? Got young Morton yet?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Ah! Good! Splendid! How did you catch the young brute?"

"He came and gave himself up, sir."

"What?"

Clifton had turned very pale, and he almost dropped the receiver as he heard the words. Jack Morton had given himself up! Why? Well, he pulled himself together. Perhaps it was because he could not keep in hiding any longer. One could not tell.

"I see!" he said into the telephone while these thoughts were racing through his mind. "Suppose he had had enough of it!"

But in answer the police-inspector laughed at the other end.

"Well, no, sir, not exactly. He came here of his own accord. Seems very pleased with himself, and not a bit down in the mouth. And a crowd brought him here. Well, sir, we shall see what we shall to-morrow. You will turn up at the court, sir?"

"Sure!"

"Thank you, sir!"

"And, inspector—"

"Sir?"

"Keep him safe this time!"

The other laughed at this.

"I've got a constable in with him. I don't trust him," came the answer.

"And even if I trusted him, I would not trust the town. There is a mob outside the station now, yelling like mad for him. By the way, Mr. Clifton, I don't think that I should go down into the town to-day if I were you, sir!"

"Eh?"

"Might be rather dangerous for you!"

Clifton scowled.

"Oh, all right, inspector!" he said. "I'm not afraid."

But he was very white as he looked up, after putting the receiver back, and found old Graves watching him.

"What do you want, you old fool?" he hissed.

The butler bowed.

"Nothing, sir—nothing!"

"Well, then, don't stand there staring at me as though I were some form of strange beast! Here, Graves," he cried, as the old man started to turn away, "you—you don't ever think of trying to let me down about the thing we are in together, do you?"

Graves raised his thin brows.

"No, sir; of course not!"

Clifton nodded.

"Well, that is just as well for you, Graves, because, don't forget, if you are ever so tempted, that we are in this thing together, and that you would swing just as much as I!"

Graves smiled to himself. Outwardly he was like ice.

"Yes, sir. I am sure that I don't want any trouble."

"That is right."

But Clifton was worried.

He went back to his study and sat down, and tried to think. He could not see any way in which things could have gone wrong. He was a fool to have any fear at all. To-morrow young Morton would be sent for trial, and a jolly good job. He would be out of the way.

But he was nervous, nevertheless.

He could not understand why the young brute seemed happy in prison. And why—why had he given himself up? That was the chief thing that worried his guilty conscience now. Jack had seemed well away by this time. True there had been the meeting with the detective in his mother's house, but he had got away, and nothing had been heard of the lad since then.

And here he had come and given himself up, and the mob were yelling for him.

He grinned savagely to himself. It would be very sweet when Jack was in prison. He had had much too much of his own way had that young man so far.

Suddenly he started and listened.

He heard a shout.

"We want George Clifton!"

His blood turned cold within him, and he jumped to his feet. There was a revolver in his desk, and he found it at once. Then he ran quickly upstairs and went to a front window, from which he could look out on to the broad drive leading up to the house.

The crowd had come for him.

His heart almost stopped beating, for he realised what sort of a time he would have if they got him.

He stood shivering there for some moments, not knowing what to do, and then he saw old Graves go out to them.

Why, Graves was speaking to them and they were listening!

If only he could hear. But he couldn't. The window was closed, and he did not dare to open it, for fear of drawing attention to himself.

Yes, and, by Jove, the old fellow seemed to be holding them!

What could he be saying?

Then suddenly they started to move away, the whole surly mob of them, and old Graves came quickly back into the house.

When he was quite sure that the crowd had gone, George Clifton went down into his hall, where he found Graves wiping his brow.

"Great heavens, man!" Clifton cried.

"What was that all about?"

"A very nasty crowd, sir!"

"Yes, I saw the fools. The police ought to do their job better. What did they want?"

"You, sir!" said the butler, and seemed to take a delight in saying it.

"I know—I know. But what did you say to send them away, Graves? You were quite successful. What, man?"

Graves gave a grin, and there was something in that grin which, for the first time, told George Clifton that things were going wrong for him.

"I just told them that they ought to wait till to-morrow, sir, and see what happened in the police-court."

"Yes, yes—quite," started George Clifton and then suddenly turned away.

There was something in Graves' eyes that made him wonder.

(Look out for a great surprise in next week's grand long instalment of this powerful serial, *chama*.)

"MY READERS' OWN CORNER."

(Continued from page 16.)

NO COMPLAINTS!

"Say, landlord!" a guest shouted. "I want a clean towel. This one is awful!" "Well, that's strange!" said the landlord. "Nearly a hundred men have used that towel, and you're the first to complain!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to James Dunlop, 11, North Square, Gartsherrie, Coatbridge, Lanarkshire.

AND SO IT APPEARED!

The omnibus, travelling at a good pace, gave a sudden jerk, and the old gentleman having momentarily loosed his hold on the strap-hanger, was flung unceremoniously into the lap of a lady near by. "I beg your pardon, madam—" he began, when the irate spinster cut him short. "How dare you, sir! I warrant you're no Englishman!" "No, madam," he replied. "Unfortunately, I appear to be a Laplander!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Horace Whorton, 12, Ivanhoe Street, Scotts Green, Dudley.

NASTY!

The fair visitor had called upon her artist acquaintance. "Yours were the only pictures I could look at at the Academy to-day!" she exclaimed. "Believe me, I appreciate the honour," replied the artist. "Honour!" she echoed in tones of perplexity. "The others, you know, were so surrounded by the crowd!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Ernest C. Higgs, Globe Works, Clapton Park, E. 5.

PUTTING MATTERS RIGHT!

A Scottish farmer sold some eggs to the local laird. He discovered later that he had included one egg too many in the consignment and went at once to the laird. "You may be right," said the laird laughingly. "But anyway, have a drink and call it square. What will you take?" "Egg-and-milk!" snapped the Scotsman.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Jeanne Drover, Brighthelm, Mill Hill, Cotes, I. of W.

HIS SUPERIOR KNOWLEDGE!

Two Highlanders, in London for the first time, were greatly amazed at the heavy street traffic. While they were standing, awestruck, on the pavement, a water-cart passed, spraying the dusty streets. "Hey, mon!" yelled Donald, running after the cart. "Ye're losin' a' yer water!" "Come back, ye old fule," called his companion after him. "Dae ye no' ken that's to keep the bairns frae sittin' on the back o' the cart?"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Donald Macfarlane, 48, Second Avenue, Clyde Bank, Scotland.

INEXPERIENCED!

A labourer was walking along the road and met a friend who looked down in the "dumps." "Allo, 'Enry!" he said. "Are you out of work again?" "Yes," came the reply. "I had to resign. They set me to push a wheelbarrow, and what do I know about machinery!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Edgar Vincent Barwood, Melita, Thames Ditton, Surrey.

(If You Do Not Win a Prize This Week—You May Next!)

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