

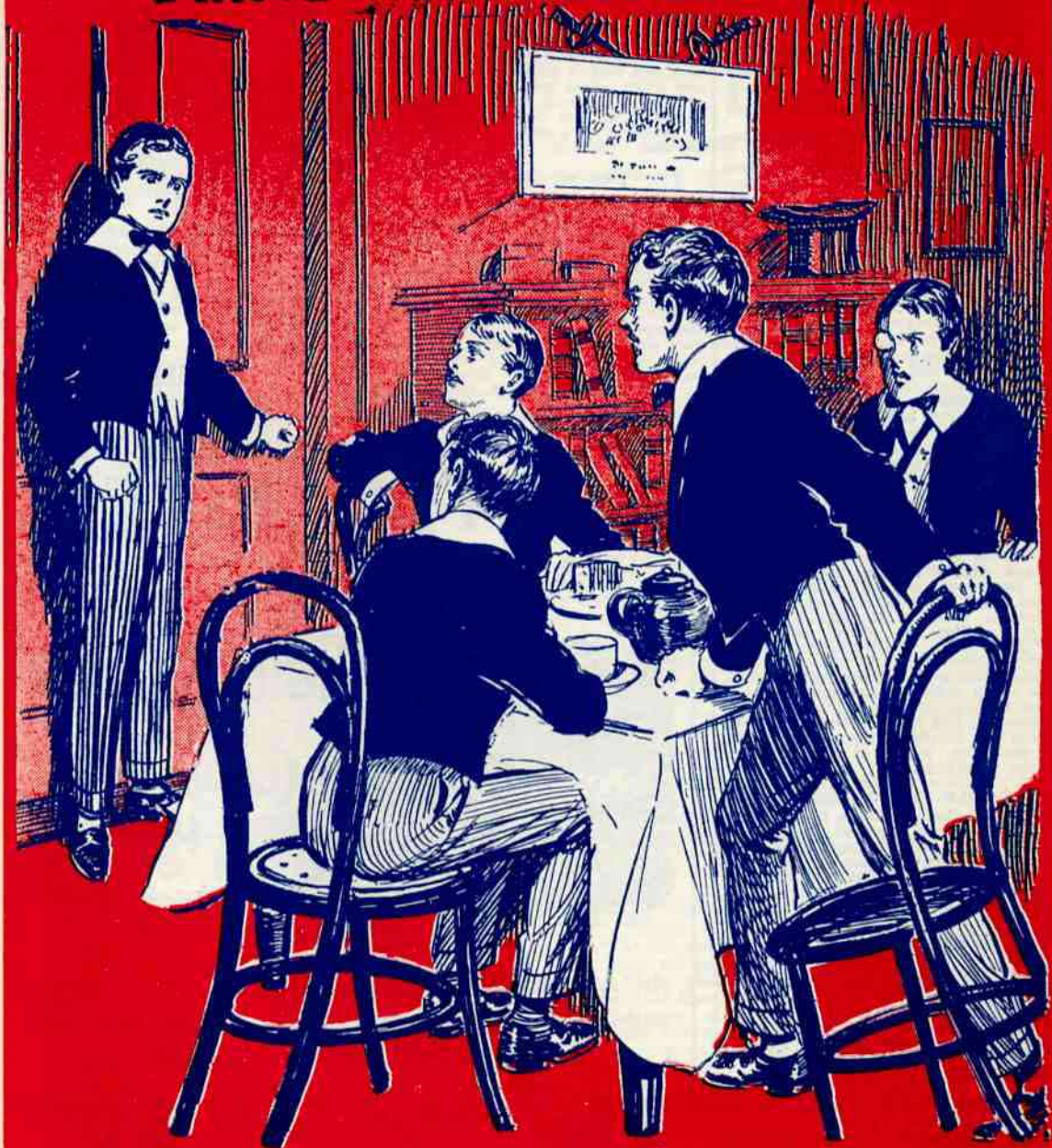
GREAT SCHOOL, FOOTBALL, AND TRAINING-SHIP STORIES INSIDE!

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

The GEM 2^D

No. 831.
Vol. XXV.
January 12th,
1924.

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SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES



FORCING A FIGHT!

"You're a liar, Tom Merry!" said Cardew deliberately. "Don't I speak plainly enough?" (A tense scene from "JUST LIKE CARDEW"—this week's great school story.)



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

OUR COMPANION PAPERS.

"THE BOYS' FRIEND" Every Monday
 "THE MAGNET" Every Monday
 "THE POPULAR" Every Tuesday
 "JUNGLE JIM" Every Thursday
 "THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL" Published Yearly.

My Dear Chums,—Next week's issue of the GEM is likely to be memorable. There is nothing new about that, since in a sense every number of the famous paper can lay claim to this distinction. But next Wednesday I have another of the extra long St. Jim's yarns which you all like. This tale is a real mystery one, and it brings that first favourite, Eric Kildare, well into the glare of the limelight.

"ERIC KILDARE'S SECRET!"

By Martin Clifford.

This grand extra long story of St. Jim's is our big star turn for next week. It shows Kildare faced with a dilemma of the trickiest sort—just the sort of thing which would have puzzled the cleverest detective. Immediately after bidding farewell to his cousin, who has come to St. Jim's to take leave of the skipper, Kildare comes into contact with a down-at-heel party of the most unattractive kind.

A SPORTSMAN'S ACTION!

Just what the unprepossessing personage confides to Kildare you will learn when the next issue of the GEM is in your hands. It is a tale which starts you wondering, and then keeps you on the tenterhooks of anxiety right away to the end. Kildare is not so much nonplussed as pained. He is a fellow who always sees where duty lies. There never was any shilly-shally nonsense about the school captain. He plays up to a very strange responsibility, which comes suddenly upon him—right out of the blue, as it were—and the resulting complications and tragic difficulties will be followed with breathless interest. A magnificent yarn, this, worthy of a series which has won world-wide fame.

OLD-TIME LURE!

A friendly letter reaches me from Toronto which in its main purport has, to my mind, a very curious bearing on next week's tale of St. Jim's. My Canadian correspondent speaks very frankly about the unfailing charm of the stories of St. Jim's, but, for all that, he is what I should term a barker back. He keeps on looking over his shoulder at the past. Some of the former tales struck him so keenly, and have left so vivid a remembrance that he is disposed to be hypercritical of what is happening now. He pleads for more and more of the real atmosphere of St. Jim's. I am sure he will see these few lines. Let me advise him to read the coming yarn very carefully. It is just precisely what he asks for, or I am much mistaken.

"THE WRONG FILM!"

By Sidney Drew.

This is a real scream, written in Sidney Drew's most amusing vein. You will roar with laughter at the manner in which Ching Lung and Gan Waga merrily turn the tables on Prout, Maddock, and O'Rooney. See it next week, and grow fat, for laughter has that effect.

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THE TUCK HAMPER.

Somebody told me the other day that there were no new jokes. I hesitate to believe it, though one may have to range the world to discover the scintillating novelty in the shape of a gulp. But sometimes the old joke with a new beard and side-whiskers is welcome. They get a cordial reception from me. Send them in—the brightest you can find. I read them all. Often enough some quaint wheeze, venerable enough, starts one on a new tack—I mean, some jokelet of the sort which caused Methuselah to tumble out of his rocking-chair, overcome with mirth. Anyway, the Tuck Hamper rolls merrily on its way. It is a distinguished feature of the GEM.

"TOM OF THE AJAX!"

By Roland Spencer.

Get your chums to read this fine serial. Be assured that next week's instalment is a bit thriller than ever. Tom Gale is still pursued by an enemy whom he cannot throw off. This foe in the green spectacles can be followed in his turn with interest, for round his sinister personality hangs a mystery of the most amazing kind. The yarn grips all along because of the knowledge of the presence of what may be termed the hidden hand. Something rather uncanny is at work behind, and the unseen

danger becomes more oppressive and realistic as the tale proceeds.

A GROWL!

Just a word must be dropped in here regarding a growl that reaches me from Australia. A staunch supporter of the Companion Papers says that there is not enough of my Chat. "Give us a whole page, as you used to do of old," says the writer. I am much obliged to him for the hint. But, as to a whole page, that wants finding. Who wishes to turn the printer's hair white before its time? Week in, week out, I am faced with the same genial old difficulty—namely, how to pack in all the good features which are prepared for the GEM. Then there may be readers who say, "Who wants Chat?" I am not saying there are. All experience goes to show that a little corner of Chat is welcome. Anyway, I shall not lose sight of the suggestion.

"FOOTBALLERS' NAMES" COMPETITION.

NOTE.—All those of our readers who took part in this great picture-puzzle competition will be glad to know that the time for sending entries was extended by three days after the closing date previously announced. Towards the last, so huge was the demand for the GEM that many readers were late in obtaining their copy, and to give all our friends an equal chance of entering the competition we accepted efforts up to the first post on Friday, December 21st. We are now grappling with the adjudication, and are making every effort to give you the result at an early date. Watch out for it!

TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN!

This concerns a vast number, as a matter of fact. It is a hint to all my numberless readers to drop me a line whenever they feel inclined to give me a leg up with a smart suggestion, or when they think my advice might be useful. I am always pleased to hear.

Your Editor.

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JUST LIKE CARDEW!



A Most Remarkable New Extra-Long Complete Story of the World-Renowned Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. By Famous MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER I.

Fed-Up with Cardew.

"LEAVE the talkin' to me, deah boys."

"Br-r-r-r!"

"I do not wegard that as an intelligible womark, Blake. You fellows had better leave the talkin' to me—"

"You've done enough talking for a dozen already," remarked Herries. "Take a rest."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

Bang!

Jack Blake knocked at the door of Study No. 10 in the Shell, in the School House at St. Jim's.

It was a forcible knock, and it sent Tom Merry's door whirling open.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Tom.

Tom Merry was kneeling before the study fire, making toast. Manners and Lowther were busy with the tea-table. Tom was giving his whole attention to the toast; but there was an air of expectation about his study-mates, and they had looked at one another, and at the door several times, before Blake of the Fourth hurried it open.

Tom Merry looked into the passage in surprise. It was crowded with juniors.

Blake and Herries, Digby and D'Arcy, were in the van. Behind them came Talbot of the Shell, and Kangaroo, and Dick Julian, and Wildrake, and a dozen more fellows.

Manners and Lowther did not seem surprised. In fact, they seemed to have been expecting this numerous visit.

"Oh, here you are!" said Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah, heah we are," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I was just mentionin' that the fellows had better leave the talkin' to me. I am goin' to put it vewy plain to Tom Mewwy."

"Ring off, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"We've come—" began Digby.

"It's a deputation," explained Blake. "A deputation to interview you, Tom Merry, in the name of the House."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh!" said Tom. "You haven't come to tea? I was just thinking that the toast wouldn't go round."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Tom Merry rose from the fireplace with a ruddy countenance. He looked rather regretfully at the tea-table. Having lately come in from a tramp in the snow, Tom was ready for tea—more than ready. But a House deputation was a House deputation, and Tom Merry politely gave the deputation his best attention.

"You see—" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah, you perceive, deah boy—"

"This is how it is—" began Julian.

"We—" commenced Kerruish.

Tom Merry raised his hand.

"One at a time!" he suggested. "It's easier to follow a solo than a chorus. What's the game?"

"Bai Jore!"

The deputation crowded into the study. Manners and Lowther took their places along with the deputation; evidently they were "in it," whatever the game was. There was not room for the whole deputation in Study No. 10, so fellows who could not squeeze in formed an overflow meeting in the passage outside.

"Pway leave the talkin' to me, you fellows," repeated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "As a fellow of tact and judgment I—"

"Dry up, Gussy!"

"I wefuse, in the cirms, to dwy up, Blake. I am goin' to point out to Tom Mewwy—"

"Order!"

"The fact is—" said Blake.

"Leave it to me," said Manners. "You see, Tom—"

"It's like this," explained Monty Lowther. "The long and the short of it is, Tom, that the House is fed-up with Cardew, and wants you back as junior captain."

"Hear, hear!" said the whole deputation.

"That's it!" said Blake.

"Just that!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh!" said Tom Merry, frowning a little.

"In the cirms, deah boy—"

"As matters stand—"

"With the school going to the dogs—"

"The football mucked up—"

"Order!" bawled Blake. "For goodness' sake let a fellow speak!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Better choose a spokesman," said Tom Merry, laughing. "At this rate you won't be finished by bed-time. And there's prep. not to mention tea."

Blake glared round at the deputation. Blake had constituted himself spokesman. Unfortunately, D'Arcy had done the same, and so had Julian and Kerruish. And all the other fellows appeared to think that the matter could not be properly elucidated without parenthetical remarks from themselves.

"Let a chap speak!" said Blake.

"Yes. I'm the chap!" remarked Lowther. "Now—"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"I'm the chairman of this deputation!" roared Blake. "Shut up, the lot of you. Now, here's the case in a nutshell, Tom Merry. Last term you were junior House captain, and junior captain of the school. Cardew managed to boost you out of the job."

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"Yaas, wathah! I considah—"

"Cardew was elected junior captain," said Tom Merry mildly. "I'm sorry if the fellows are not satisfied with their choice. But there it is. Cardew of the Fourth is junior captain."

"We're fed-up with Cardew."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What sort of a captain is he?" demanded Blake. "He goes wandering out of gates when there's a House match on. He forgets the dates of School matches. He shirks games practice. He's just a slacker."

"A fivightful slackah!"

"He was elected," continued Blake. "It was a pity, but there it was. Lots of us only voted for him to keep out the New House candidate. But I'm blessed if I don't almost think a New House man would have made a better captain. Piggins, for instance—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Of course, the junior captain ought really to be selected from the Fourth Form, and from Study No. 5," said Blake. "In our study we've agreed on that."

"But other studies seem to differ," grinned Kangaroo.

"But for the good of the school, and to save St. Jim's from going to the dogs," continued Blake, rather grandly, "we're putting aside all personal claims, and we're going to back you up, Tom Merry."

"Yaas, like anythin', old scout."

"That's what this deputation has come for," said Blake. "We want you to put up again for the captaincy, Tom Merry, and we promise you our hearty support."

"Hear, hear!"

"We want you to appeal to Kildare of the Sixth, as head of the games, to order a new election," went on Blake. "That's easy enough. And, if you put up as a candidate, you'll sweep the board."

"And then things will be as they used to be," said Julian. "We've had enough of Cardew."

"More than enough."

"Too much—too too much!" said Kernish. "I dare say he's all right in his way, but he's no good as captain."

"Rotten!" said Wilkins of the Shell. "Why, he leaves you out of the matches, Tom Merry!"

"I don't believe he ever wanted to be captain, seriously," said Monty Lowther. "It was one of his stunts. Anyhow, he doesn't want to do a captain's duties."

"He wanted to show what he could do if he liked," remarked Manners. "I really fancy that Cardew is as much fed-up with the captaincy as we are with him."

"Anyhow, we're fed-up with him, right up to the chin," said Blake. "We want you back, Tommy."

"Hear, hear!"

"Now, are you putting up?"

The deputation looked at Tom Merry, and waited for his answer. There was a silence.

Tom Merry's face was very thoughtful.

"I twast, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus, breaking the silence, "that you are not goin' to wefuse to wally wound at the request of your loyal followahs?"

"Play up, Tom!" said Talbot of the Shell, in his quiet way. "You know that we've got a rotten skipper, and we want you back. If you'd put up a fight for it, Cardew would never have got in."

"Well, he was elected," said Tom slowly.

"There was a feuhful lot of twickewy in the election, deah boy."

"I dare say there was; but fellows were not bound to vote for him if they didn't choose. They wanted a change, and they got a change," said Tom. "I know jolly well, of course, that Cardew isn't any good as skipper, especially in football. I think the House and the school want a new captain. But I—"

"Cut out the buts," said Herries.

"But," repeated Tom firmly, "I don't feel disposed to go in against him. If the House and the school wanted me—well, they had me, and they changed me for Cardew. I don't think I ought to try to turn him out—"

"As he did you!" grunted Herries.

"I'm not taking Cardew as an example to follow," said Tom, rather dryly.

"Yaas, but—"

"You say yourself that we want a new captain!" growled Blake.

"I agree to that. I suggest Talbot—"

"Rot!" said Manners and Lowther together, and Talbot of the Shell smiled.

"Well, that's not a bad suggestion," admitted Blake. "If you won't stand, Tom, we'll back up Talbot against Cardew."

"Hear, hear!" said the deputation.

"And I'll back him up!" said Tom heartily. "Let it go at that!"

"Very well. Talbot's the man!"

"Bravo, Talbot!"

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"Hold on!" broke in Talbot of the Shell quietly. "I'm not the man! I'm not standing! Tom Merry's the man we want; and, in any case, I shall not put up as a candidate."

"Now, look here—" said Tom persuasively.

"Bosh!" said Talbot. "You're the man, Tom, and sooner or later you'll have to come round. Make it sooner."

"Make it now!" urged Julian.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"If there's a new election, I'll agree to put up as a candidate," he said. "That's all I can say. I can't take any steps to turn Cardew out. It would be a bit too much like the way he treated me. Which, as I've said, is an example I don't care to follow. You'd better tell Cardew you're fed-up with him, and leave it at that."

"That would only make him bang on!" growled Blake. "You know what an obstinate mule he is."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Look here, Tom Merry! We jolly well want you, and if you don't take the lead, you'll take a ragging!" roared Herries.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bump him!"

"Yes, or 'No'?" demanded Blake.

"No!" said Tom.

"Bump him!"

"Here, hands off, you silly asses!" roared Tom Merry, as the deputation made a rush at him. "Hold on, you chumps! Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump!

Tom Merry smote his own study carpet forcibly with his person. It was a heavy smite, and he roared.

"There!" gasped Blake. "That's a warning. Now you'd better think it over, Tommy, or there's more in store!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The deputation crowded out of the study, leaving Tom Merry sitting on the carpet, gasping for breath. Manners and Lowther remained in Study No. 10, grinning.

"You silly asses!" gasped Tom. "Why didn't you back me up? Ow!"

"Serves you jolly well right!" said Manners.

"Jolly good mind to bump you again!" said Monty Lowther.

"Ow!"

Tom Merry picked himself up, and set his collar and tie straight. There was no doubt that the deputation of the Lower School had been in earnest; they wanted Tom Merry, and they had shown it forcibly. But Tom's determination was unchanged. Ralph Reckness Cardew, duly elected junior captain of St. Jim's, had no attack on his position to fear from the rival he had supplanted.

CHAPTER 2.

A Ragging in Study No. 9!

"NOW for Cardew!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The junior deputation, having finished with Tom Merry—for the present—proceeded along to the Fourth Form passage. They stopped at No. 9, the study that belonged to Cardew, Levison, and Clive. Blake thumped at the door and hurled it open.

Levison & Co. were at tea. Levison and Clive looked rather surprised when the crowd appeared in their doorway. Cardew smiled—perhaps guessing why they had come. Cardew could not have failed to be aware that his system was not popular with the School House fellows—or the New House, for that matter. Indeed, on a good many occasions the new junior captain seemed to have deliberately set out to make his followers fed-up with him.

The actual fact was that Cardew, having attained the goal of his idle ambition, had tired of it, as he tired of most things. He had set out to give Tom Merry a "fall," and in that he had succeeded completely. He had started the contest idly, in his whimsical humour, and it pleased him to show what he could do if he liked. But the duties and responsibilities of the post he had gained did not please him in the very least, and he coolly let them slide.

Bitterness had crept into the contest, on Cardew's side, at least; but for that, it was probable that Cardew would have thrown the thing up before now. He had been Tom Merry's rival—and he had become Tom Merry's enemy—and for a time his enmity had been black and bitter. But that, too, had changed, partly owing to circumstances, and partly to Cardew's own volatile and changeable nature.

That his followers were fed-up with his ways was no secret to him; and, if he had not known it, the looks of the deputation would have enlightened him. But he greeted Blake and his army with a polite nod and smile.

"Trickle in, old beans," he said. "So glad to see you! You ought to have told me you'd asked these fellows to tea,



THE DEPUTATION! Tom Merry rose from the fireplace as the swarm of juniors entered the study. "You haven't come to tea?" he asked. "The fact is," said Blake, "we are fed-up with Cardew as captain. We want you to put up again, Tom Merry, and we promise you our hearty support!" (See page 4.)

Levison. "I'd have given a more extensive order at the tuck-shop."

"But I didn't!" said Levison.

"Then you, Clive—"

"I didn't, either," said Sidney Clive, laughing.

"Dear me!" said Cardew. "Then they must have come unasked. I take this as a great compliment, my young friends—one more proof of the irresistible attractions of my society."

"We haven't come to tea!" bawled Herries.

"Wathah not!"

"Never mind. Stay to tea now you're here," said Cardew gracefully. "Sit down—there's some chairs—and a box or two—and the floor is clean and commodious."

"Wenly, Cardew—"

"We've come on business!" exclaimed Blake, planting himself in front of the dandy of the Fourth, with a grim brow.

"What a horrid word," said Cardew. "I never could give my attention to business matters. Call another time, if you don't mind."

"We do mind!" hooted Herries.

"It's about the football, and the captaincy!" said Blake.

"Dear me!"

"The Abbotsford match comes off on Saturday."

"Does it?"

"Have you forgotten the Abbotsford match?" howled Dig.

"Abbotsford!" said Cardew, in a reflective sort of way. "Bless my soul! Now I come to think of it, there is a cricket match with Abbotsford."

"Cricket!" shrieked Blake.

"Yes—no—football! Football, of course," said Cardew, with a cheery smile. "Right you are—football!"

The deputation glared at Cardew.

"Have you thought about the team yet?" asked Blake, breathing hard.

"Is there any hurry?"

"Have you thought about the matter at all?"

"Oh, yes! I was thinkin' only yesterday what a bore it is."

"Bai Jove!"

"It is, isn't it?" asked Cardew. "But the fact is, I've been havin' a little argument in committee. I'm goin' to think the matter out very seriously, of course."

"When?"

"Dear man, you mustn't fire questions at your skipper in this way. I may find a few minutes some time."

"I suppose that's meant to be funny?" asked Blake, after a pause.

"Not at all. I fully intend to find a few minutes, to think about the Abbotsford match," said Cardew blandly.

"Do you think that's good enough for us?"

"I think it will have to be."

"You weren't at games practice this afternoon," continued Blake.

"Games practice is a bore, like most other things."

"Do you intend to play in the Abbotsford match, or are you standing out, as you've done before?"

"Who knows?" said Cardew.

"Don't you know?" roared Blake.

"I least of all," said Cardew cheerily. "It depends largely on how the spirit moves me at the time."

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "I wedged that as sheeah check, Cardew."

"Go hon!"

Blake looked round at the deputation. They were all footballing fellows, who played for the House, or were eager

to do so. Cardew's nonchalant way had an exasperating effect on all of them.

"That's the sort of captain we've got," said Blake. "We could get a new election if Tom Merry took it up, and put it to Kildare. He won't. We seem to be landed with this rotten slacker. Well, if he's going to stick on to the job, he's going to do the job, or take the consequences."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Collar him!"

Cardew made a bound out of the armchair. His nonchalance vanished all of a sudden as the deputation reached for him.

A dozen hands grasped him.

"Put his head in the coal-box first," said Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cardew struggled desperately. What effect he had expected his 'cheek' to produce upon the juniors cannot be said; but, apparently, he had not expected this. This was what happened, however.

"Bear a hand," Cardew yelled to his chums, as he was dragged struggling to the coal-box.

Levison shrugged his shoulders, and Clive laughed. They had exhausted their eloquence on Cardew, without producing any perceptible effect on the slacker of the Fourth. Now the fellows were taking more drastic measures, and Levison and Clive had no sympathy to waste on the slacker.

"You've asked for that," said Sidney Clive. "I hope it will do you good, Cardew."

"You rotter!"

"If you don't want the job, chuck it up," suggested Clive. "Nobody asks you to keep it on."

"Yaas, wathah—wesign, and we'll let you off the waggin'," Cardew, said Arthur Augustus.

"Go and eat coke!"

"Bai Jove! Wag him, deah boys!"

Cardew, struggling furiously, had his well-brushed head jammed into the coal-box. Blake stirred up the coals with a poker, while the dandy of the Fourth's head was held there.

When Cardew's head was withdrawn, there was a yell of laughter in the study. He was as black as a sweep, and gurgling with rage.

"Hand us that ink, Levison," said Blake.

Levison shook his head. He would take no hand in the ragging of his chum, though he was not prepared to intervene in his behalf.

But Kerruish handed over the ink, and Blake proceeded to pour it on the thick coal-dust on Cardew's head.

Ink ran down in streams, streaking Cardew's face, and running inside his collar.

"Any jam in the cupboard?" asked Blake.

"Yaas, wathah."

Arthur Augustus handed out a pot of jam. Blake ladled it out over Cardew's coally and inky head.

Cardew had ceased to struggle now; he was held too firmly for resistance. Under coal dust and ink and jam, his face was white with rage.

"There, I think that will do," said Blake, surveying him. "He looks a ripping object, I must say."

"You rotters!" panted Cardew.

"This is a tip," explained Blake, "Just a warning of what you've got to expect, if you go on as you've started. The football list is to be out by Friday afternoon. See?"

"Hang you."

"If it isn't, look out for more squalls. And you've got to play in the match."

"I'll suit myself about that," gasped Cardew.

"You won't, if you stick on as skipper. You'll play up, and if you shirk it, you'll get a real ragging—this is a joke to it. Understand?"

"Get out of my study."

"I think we're finished here," said Blake. "Come on, you fellows."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The deputation crowded out of the study, laughing. Cardew stood in the middle of the room, almost unrecognisable under coal dust, ink, and jam. He gave his chums a glare, and then glared into the glass. Then he rushed from the study in search of a bath-room.

That evening there was much chuckling in the junior common-room over the ragging of Ralph Reckness Cardew. The fellows expressed the hope that it would do him good. But fellows who knew him well did not think that that hope was likely to be realised.

CHAPTER 3.

A Chance for Grundy!

GRUNDY of the Shell bestowed a lofty frown upon Cardew, the following day, as he came on him in the Form-room passage. Cardew greeted him with a pleasant nod—Grundy's frown was the grim response.

George Alfred Grundy, apparently, was not feeling kindly towards the dandy of the Fourth.

"Lookin' for you, old bean!" said Cardew.

"Look for somebody else, then," growled Grundy. "You're a slacking rotter, Cardew, and I'm done with you."

"Not really? Unsay those cruel words!" urged Cardew, and Wilkins and Gunn, who were with Grundy, chuckled. Grundy reduced them to gravity with a ferocious glare.

"I'm done with you," he repeated, waving a large hand at Cardew. "You ought to be sacked from your job. You got me to back you up in the election, making out that you'd give me a chance in the matches—a chance I've never had from that ass Merry. You promised me—"

"I don't remember makin' any promise," said Cardew meekly. "But—"

"Practically," said Grundy. "You said you'd give every good man a chance as soon as you had the football in your hands."

"But that doesn't apply to you, old bean."

"I don't want any cheek!" roared Grundy. "For two pins I'd dust up the passage with you, junior captain or not. You're no good. The election ought to be cancelled. Lot of silly rigmarole about elections at this school, in my opinion. I think—"

"But I want you—"

"No good wanting me," interrupted Grundy, "I refuse to have anything to do with you."

"But I was going to ask you—"

"The answer's 'No' before I know what you want," said George Alfred Grundy, "and I don't want to know."

"I want you—"

"Bosh!"

"To play—"

"Eh?"

"In the Abbotsford match."

"What?"

"Centre-half," said Cardew. "Are you on?"

Grundy & Co. gazed at Cardew in sheer astonishment. Grundy was astonished at having his claims recognised at last, after so many rebuffs and disappointments. Wilkins and Gunn were still more astonished. Grundy being the very worst footballer at St. Jim's, and indeed in the whole wide world, it was amazing to hear that he was selected to play in a school fixture.

"Is this a joke?" gasped Wilkins.

"Not at all," said Cardew blandly. "I'm making up my team for Abbotsford. Grundy's my man, if he'll play."

"But he can't play!" ejaculated Gunn.

"What's that?" roared Grundy.

"I—I mean—"

"I'm your man, Cardew," said Grundy cordially. "Let bygones be bygones. If you're able to see my form now I can excuse you for being a silly idiot before. I'm your man."

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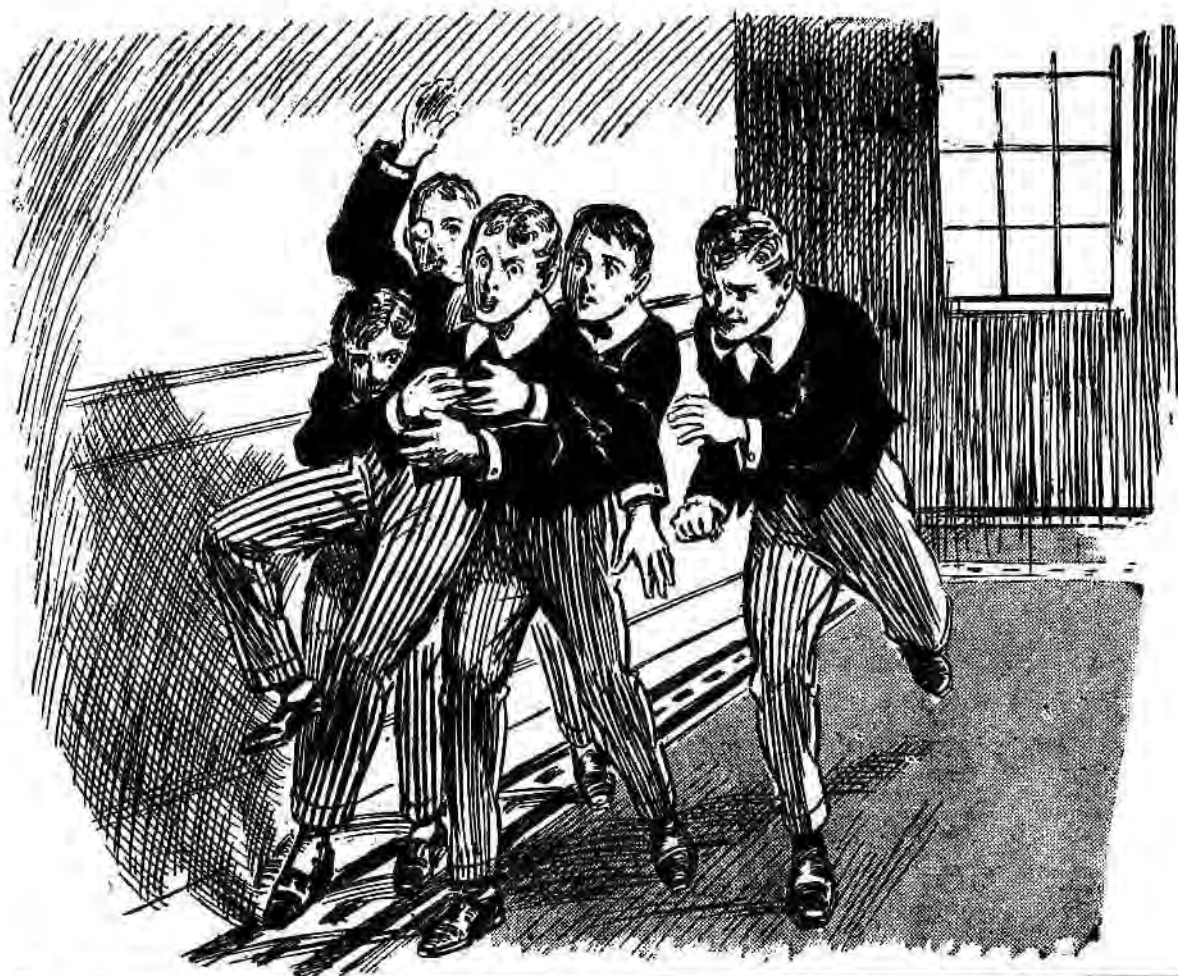
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MYSTERY NOW ON SALE! ADVENTURE



TAKEN PRISONER! Hardly had Ralph Reckness Cardew left his study than he was stopped by a sudden rush. Before he knew what was happening he was whirled off his feet, and rushed away. (See page 9.)

"Then you're down to play," said Cardew.
"Good."

Ralph Reckness Cardew strolled on smiling. Wilkins and Gunn wore an expression that could only be described as flabbergasted. George Alfred Grundy smiled genially.

"Not a bad skipper, Cardew," he remarked. "A bit of a slacker, but after all he's got an eye to a fellow's form. Tom Merry would never have played me for school or House either."

"I should jolly well think he wouldn't," gasped Wilkins.

"What?"

"I—I mean—"

"Cardew's the man for my money," said Grundy. "I can see now that I did right in backing him up in the election. Fellows are talking of a new election now."

"The sooner the better, I should think," murmured Gunn.

"I shall back Cardew up, of course—a really good skipper," said Grundy. "Of course, properly speaking, I ought to be junior captain of the school. But I must say we've got a good man in Cardew."

George Alfred Grundy strolled away in a state of great satisfaction. Naturally, he was not slow to impart the glad news to others.

It was the first time Grundy had been asked to play for school; and he was greatly elated. The fact that any side Grundy played for was doomed to defeat did not worry Grundy; he was unaware of the fact.

The news was received in the Common-room with a roar of laughter. Fellows did not seem to take it seriously.

That was natural enough. Grundy's style in football was uncommon—it was a style that could not be sufficiently uncommon. Charging his own forwards off the ball from behind, tripping up the halves in his own team, barging into the backs at critical moments, were among Grundy's minor sins as a footballer. He had been known to send the ball right into his own goal—he had been known to punch the referee

for a difference of opinion. The bare idea of Grundy in a school or house team made the St. Jim's fellows shriek.

"But it's true!" roared Grundy, indignant at this reception of the glorious news.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, you know, Gwunday will be the death of me," gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "My weal opinion is, Gwunday, that you are too funny to live."

"Cardew's told me—" howled Grundy.

"What a joker that fellow Cardew is!" chuckled Blake.

"It's too bad to pull Grundy's silly leg like this."

"Yaas, wathah! But Gwunday ought not to be ass enough to take it seriously."

"It's quite serious!" yelled Grundy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you're a set of puddenheads!" snorted Grundy. "You'll see my name up in the list."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There were no believers. Indeed, Grundy's great news was soon bandied about the house, as a screaming joke, under the title of "Cardew's Latest." Fellows roared over it in the studies. The cream of the joke was that Grundy took it seriously and really supposed that he was going to play for St. Jim's against Abbotsford.

But George Alfred's vindication was coming.

After tea Ralph Reckness Cardew was seen to post up a paper on the Common-room wall and walk airily away. There was a rush to read the paper, which contained the list of the team for the Abbotsford match on the morrow.

A crowd of fellows read the paper, and there was a gasp of stupefaction. For prominent among the names written there, in Cardew's elegant hand, was the astonishing name:

G. A. GRUNDY.

"Grundy!" shouted Kangaroo of the Shell. "Rot!"

"Trimble, too!" roared Blake.

"Twimble, bai Jove!"

"And Racke—"

"And Crooke—"

"And Mellish—"

"And Clampe, and Chowle! Great pip!"

The juniors could scarcely believe their eyes. Tom Merry, indeed, rubbed his eyes as he read. Grundy of the Shell—Baggy Trimble, the fat slacker of the Fourth—Racke and Crooke, the black sheep, who hated football—and the rest of the list almost on a par with them! Yet there it was—the official list of players selected for the match at Abbotsford. Ralph Reckness Cardew's own name was here—the only footballer's name in the list. Even his chums, Clive and Levison, were left out.

"This must be some sort of a silly joke!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Grundy of the Shell came into the Common-room. He glanced round with a grin on his rugged face.

"I hear the list's up," he said. "My name's there, I fancy, what?"

"Oh, yes—and a lot more to match!" said Blake sarcastically.

Grundy pushed through the crowd and looked at the list. The sight of his own name gave him satisfaction. But he started at the others.

"Trimble—Racke—Crooke—great Scott! Cardew can't really be thinking of playing that lot!" he ejaculated.

"Might as well play them as you," grunted Herries.

"It can't be serious," said Monty Lowther. "It's one of Cardew's idiotic jokes. Let's go and see him about it."

A dozen fellows rushed away to Study No. 9 in the Fourth to interview the junior captain and ask him what the thump he meant. Cardew was not there—and Levison and Clive knew nothing of the matter. In fact, they declined to believe in the existence of that remarkable football list until they had gone down to the Common-room and seen it with their own eyes.

Cardew, for reasons of his own, kept out of sight. There was deep discussion on the subject; and it was Blake who hit upon what was soon generally considered as the explanation.

"This is Cardew's answer to the ragging we gave him," he said. "He's going to chuck the Abbotsford match away just to show us that he can do as he likes."

"But are we going to let him?" demanded Manners.

"No fear!"

Cardew was not seen till nearly bed-time. Then he was surrounded by an angry and inquiring crowd. He assumed an expression of surprise.

"Not satisfied with the list?" he asked, elevating his eyebrows. "My dear man, I've given the matter a lot of thought, as I told Blake I would. The team's all right."

"All wrong, you mean?" hooted Herries.

"So glad to have your opinion," said Cardew politely. "I stick to my own, all the same."

"You're really thinking of taking that crew over to Abbotsford?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Cardew gave him a curious glance.

"Why not?" he asked.

"About a thousand reasons why not, I should think!" exclaimed the captain of the Shell. "It will be throwing the match away, and making us all look asses."

"You really think so?" asked Cardew.

"Certainly I do."

"What a pity your opinion isn't of any consequence, then!" smiled Cardew.

"Wha-a-at?"

"You ought to have remained junior captain," said Cardew, with a smile. "Then you'd have had the job on your hands. At present it's on mine. My idea is to try new blood, you know—give new fellows a chance."

"Such as Grundy!" hooted Blake.

"Such as Grundy," assented Cardew.

"You silly ass!"

"Dear man, and you voted for me in the election!" sighed Cardew.

"Only to keep out the New House man."

"I jolly well wish we had the New House man!" howled Kangaroo. "Figgins wouldn't play the fool like this."

"It's a bit too late to think of that, isn't it?" smiled Cardew.

"Look here—"

"You howling ass?"

"You cheeky chump!"

Cardew smiled, and walked away with his hands in his pockets. Bed-time came, and Kildare and Darrell, of the Sixth, came to shepherd off the Shell and the Fourth to their dormitories. But it was long before the juniors slept that night. Discussion raged long and fiercely on the subject of the Abbotsford match, especially in the Fourth Form dormitory. In that dormitory Cardew was subjected to a running

fire of objurcations, to which he did not pay the slightest heed. While the Fourth Form told him what they thought of him, Ralph Reckness Cardew slumbered peacefully.

CHAPTER 4.

Drasile Measures I

THERE was considerable excitement in the Lower School of St. Jim's the following morning.

Even yet the fellows could scarcely believe that Cardew was serious in intending to take that hopeless crowd over to Abbotsford for the match in the afternoon.

The members of Cardew's eleven found themselves extremely unpopular; but they did not seem to mind.

Grundy was satisfied with his own selection, and, though he was not satisfied with the rest, he felt that his own wonderful play would probably pull the game out of the fire. Racke and Crooke openly grinned at the exasperation of the juniors. They were looked down on as slackers and black sheep, and it was quite certain that they would not exert themselves in the match. The school record was nothing to them. Certainly, they liked to be able to say that they had played for the school; but their play certainly was not likely to reflect any credit on their school. Baggy Trimble was quite gleeful at the prospect, especially at the exasperation of all the fellows he liked.

Levison and Clive were dismayed. But their remarks to Cardew on the subject were received only with airy persiflage, and they soon gave it up. It was clear that Cardew meant to go on his own wilful way. He was junior football captain, and he had the final voice in the selection of the team. He declared that he was trying "new blood"; quite a good idea in its way, but evidently only a pretext in this case.

But it was difficult to see what was to be done. Blake of the Fourth, and some other fellows, took the resolve of appealing to Kildare, as senior captain of the school and head of the games. Kildare heard them out with a thoughtful brow, and shook his head.

"You had a good skipper in Tom Merry," he said. "As a majority voted for Cardew, it appears that you wanted a change. Now you're asking me to interfere and over-rule the captain you elected yourselves. I can't do it."

"As head of the games you've got authority," said Blake.

"Quite so, and I shall exercise it if it's needed. But I don't feel called upon to interfere with Cardew."

"But—"

"That's all!" said Kildare.

And Blake & Co. went, furious.

"After all, we did elect Cardew," remarked Dig. "It was to keep the New House man out; but there it is. It's a bit thick to ask Kildare to drop down on the man we elected ourselves."

"Yaas, wathah! All the same—"

"Cardew's not going to turn St. Jim's junior football into a farce," said Blake, between his teeth. "If he won't chuck it, and if Kildare won't make him chuck it, somebody else will make him. We'll jaw this over, and find a way."

And Blake and a few choice spirits retired to Study No. 6, to jaw the matter over, after dinner, and find a solution. Meanwhile, Tom Merry was giving the matter some deep thought.

The outcome of Tom's cogitations was a visit to Cardew's study. He found that cheerful youth sprawling in the arm-chair, smoking a cigarette. Cardew nodded to him genially.

"Trot in, old bean! Glad to see you!" he said airily. Tom Merry came in.

"It will soon be time to start for Abbotsford," he said.

"Yes; I've asked Trimble to let me know when the brake appears in the offing. Trimble's my inside-left, you know."

"Are you serious about that, Cardew?"

"Quite."

"You think you've got a winning team?"

"Well, football is full of chances," said Cardew gravely.

"I think that I've mentioned that I'm trying new blood."

Tom Merry made an effort to keep his temper. He knew that it was of no use quarrelling with the airy dandy of the Fourth.

"I'm not asking to play myself," he said quietly. "You seem bent on keeping me out of the football this season; but let that go. But surely, Cardew, you don't want to muck up the school football?"

"Why not?"

There really was no reply to be made to that question, and Tom Merry did not attempt to answer it.

"I suppose it's no use my asking you to think better of it?" he said, after a pause.

"Well, no; though I'd like to oblige you," smiled Cardew. "You did me a good turn a week or two ago, you know."

"I know you're my enemy, though I never gave you any cause," said Tom. "We've had plenty of trouble, I know. But what have the other fellows done for you to serve them like this?"



**RALPH
RECKNESS
CARDEW**
who has held
the reins as
junior cap-
tain for the
past few
weeks.

"Haven't you heard of the raggin' in this study?"
"So that's your motive?"

"That and other things," Cardew laughed. "You wouldn't understand if I explained. But you're mistaken on one point. I'm not your enemy, Tom Merry."

"I'm glad to hear that, at least," said Tom dryly.

"I mean it," Cardew's face became earnest. "I'm not a fellow to forget an injury or a service. Cutts of the Fifth had me at his mercy in the wood the other day, and I was booked for a terrific hiding. You chipped in, and handled him."

Tom Merry passed his hand over his nose rather ruefully. That feature still bore signs of his terrific combat with Cutts of the Fifth—a combat which had been the talk of the St. Jim's juniors for days.

"I've treated you rottenly all along the line," went on Cardew calmly. "Naturally, when you saw me in Cutts' grip, I expected you to let him go ahead, and take it out of me. Instead of which, you stood up to a fellow twice your size and weight, and got me clear. I told you at the time you were a fool to do it, and that I'd like to be such another fool, instead of my esteemed self! I meant that. I suppose you thought I'd forgotten all about the matter by this time?"

"Well—" Tom hesitated.

"I hadn't," said Cardew. "I remember it. I dare say I shall make it up to you in the long run. Who knows?"

"If you feel under any obligation to me," said Tom, "you can wipe it out by playing square in the football. I don't ask you to play me or my friends. But don't take a rotten side into the field from sheer silly caprice."

Cardew smiled.

"That's all right," he said. "The fellows elected me, didn't they? Oughtn't they to have a lesson, after turning down a jolly good skipper and electing a jolly bad one?"

Cardew's tone was final.

"Then there's nothing more for me to say," said Tom, and he turned his back on Cardew and quitted the study with a gloomy brow.

Cardew smiled, and finished smoking his cigarette. Having finished it and thrown the stump into the ashes in the grate, he rose and stretched himself and strolled from the study.

He did not stroll very far.

Three paces from the doorway of Study No. 9 he was stopped by a sudden rush. Before he knew what was happening he was whirled off his feet and rushed away.

CHAPTER 5. Left in the Lurch.

"WHERE'S Cardew?"

A dozen fellows asked that question, but nobody seemed able to reply. The brake was waiting to take the footballers over to Abbotsford, and Cardew's remarkable team were ready to start. But Ralph Reckness Cardew did not seem ready to start with them.

Baggy Trimble had gone to his study to tell him that the brake was ready. But he had not found Cardew there.

"The silly ass!" exclaimed Grundy. "Keeping us waiting! We shall be late for the match at this rate!"

"Oh, never mind," yawned Racke. "What does it matter?"

Grundy snorted.

"Bai Jove, where's Cardew, you fellows?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, coming up to the waiting group.

"Goodness knows!" growled Grundy.

"What are you goin' to do if he doesn't turn up?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a smile on his face.

"Oh, I can captain the team, if it comes to that!" remarked Grundy. "I'll put another man in."

"Bai Jove!"

"Levison, seen Cardew?" shouted Chowle.

"No!" answered Levison curtly.

"He's got to be found!" growled Crooke. "The silly ass! Is this another of his silly tricks?"

A good many fellows were looking for Cardew. But the dandy of the Fourth was not to be found. It really looked as if Cardew, after arranging for that remarkable team to represent St. Jim's on the football field at Abbotsford, had deliberately absented himself. Some of the fellows remarked that it was not surprising. Nobody could really want to show up at football with players like Grundy and Trimble and Crooke. Quite an army of fellows gathered round the brake, discussing Cardew's strange absence.

Where was Cardew?

The question was asked on all sides without an answer being forthcoming.

It might have been noted that Study No. 6 Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy—smiled at one another and exchanged glances of intelligence. But most of the fellows were thinking of Cardew, not of Study No. 6.

Tom Merry was brought on the scene by the news that Cardew had disappeared, while the team was waiting to start. It was a puzzle to Tom. It was hard to believe that Cardew had deliberately gone out and left his team in the lurch; but if that was not the case, where was he? A score of fellows pointed out to Tom that Cardew, being off the scene, it was up to him to take the Abbotsford match in hand. Tom Merry shook his head very decidedly.

"Rot!" was his answer. "I'm not even a member of the eleven! It's up to Talbot."

"Talbot!" repeated Grundy.

"Talbot's vice-captain," said Tom Merry. "If the captain chooses to vanish just before the match, it's up to the vice-captain, isn't it?"

"Well, I suppose so," said Grundy slowly. "But Talbot isn't playing in this eleven at all, as it happens."

"He will be!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathlah!"

"Well, I've no objection to Talbot as captain," said George Alfred Grundy generously. "Let him come along!"

Study No. 6 grinned at one another. Half a dozen fellows rushed in search of Talbot of the Shell.

Tom Merry walked away. He had the interests of St. Jim's junior football at heart, but he was not disposed to butt in where he had no official concern.

It was agreed on all hands that, as Cardew evidently was not going to appear, it was "up" to Talbot. Even the remarkable eleven did not dissent from that.

Their dissent would have made no difference, had they

**TOM
MERRY**
from whom
the cap-
taincy has
been won
and whose
reinstatement is
imminent.



dissented. Cardew, in his official capacity, had to be regarded. Nobody was likely to regard Racke or Crooke or Trimble or Grundy.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther walked together to Big Side, to look on at a senior match. Kildare's eleven were playing the New House that afternoon. But the Terrible Three had been only a few minutes on Big Side when Wally of the Third came panting up to them.

"Pull up your socks, Tom Merry!" howled D'Arcy minor. "You're wanted!"

"How's that?" asked Tom, looking round.

"Talbot wants you!" grinned the fag. "He's making some changes in the team. Lowther's wanted, too!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Tom.

Monty Lowther chuckled.

"Looks as if Cardew's wonderful eleven is doing a fade-through," he remarked. "I suppose there isn't a man in it that Talbot would be willing to take over to Abbotsford."

The Terrible Three hurried away. In the quad Racke and Crooke passed them, scowling. Evidently the two black sheep had been dropped out of the team.

"Look here, Tom Merry!" It was Baggy Trimble's voice. "I jolly well object to your bagging my place in the eleven!"

"Your place!" exclaimed Tom.

"Talbot's turned me down!" said Trimble, with a deeply injured look. "Turned me down after I was specially selected to play!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Terrible Three.

"Look here, you know, I think—"

But the Shell fellows did not wait to hear what Baggy Trimble thought. They hurried on to the brake. Loud yells greeted them as they arrived. Clampe and Chowle, who were New House fellows, were arguing with Figgins & Co., also of the New House. It appeared that Talbot had called on Figgins and Wynn and Kerr for their services, and Clampe and Chowle raised objections to leaving the team. Figgins & Co. were overruling their objections by the simple process of knocking their heads against the side of the brake. The wild yells of Clampe and Chowle rang far and wide, amid howls of laughter.

Clampe and Chowle were soon convinced that they were no longer members of the St. Jim's junior eleven. They escaped from the grasp of Figgins & Co., and fled for their lives.

"I shall want you, Tom," said Talbot of the Shell, with a smile. "I'd rather you captained the team—"

"Bosh!" said Tom. "I'll play under you as skipper, if you like."

"Right-ho, then!"

"How many of Cardew's men have you got left?" asked Manners.

"None!" answered Talbot briefly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here—" Grundy of the Shell was roaring, with a voice like unto that of the Bull of Bashan. "Look here—"

"Dry up, Grundy!"

"I'm a member of this team, ain't I?" bellowed Grundy.

"Am I a member of this football eleven or not?"

"Not!"

"Cardew specially told me—"

"Blow Cardew!"

"My name's up in the list—"

"That list's cancelled."

"It isn't cancelled!" roared Grundy. "I don't consent to its being cancelled. I object strongly!"

"Well, you can go on objecting, while we get off to Abbotsford," said Blake. "Buck up, you fellows, or we'll be late."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Talbot's hastily recruited team was complete. They crowded into the brake—Talbot, Tom Merry, Lowther, Blake, D'Arcy, Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, Redfern, Kangaroo, and Levison. As many other fellows as the brake would hold crowded in to accompany them to Abbotsford. George Alfred Grundy, crimson with wrath and indignation, voiced his objections at the top of his voice, and made a rush to get a place in the brake. Grundy did not get into the brake—he found himself sitting on the hard, cold ground in a breathless state. The brake rolled off without him.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Grundy, as Wilkins and Gunn helped him to his feet. "Oh crumbs! The cheek of it!"

"Come away, old fellow," said Wilkins, trying not to grin.

"Come away!" repeated Grundy wrathfully. "I'm going to play at Abbotsford, you dummy."

He rushed after the brake.

"Oh crumbs!" said Gunn, staring after him.

Grundy flew down the road after the brake. There was a roar of laughter from the footballers in the vehicle.

"Here comes Grundy!"

"Bai Jove! Gwunday's aftah us."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stop!" roared Grundy.

The brake slowed on the rise in the lane, and Grundy overtook it, and grabbed hold. He was seized by half a dozen hands above, and held. His cap was jammed down his back, and Redfern squeezed an orange into his collar. Then he was dropped into the road, on the top of the rise, and the brake rolled on.

Grundy sat, breathless, in the road.

"Ow! Oh! Gug-gug-gug!" were his remarks, as he sat and blinked after the disappearing brake.

"Ha, ha, ha! Good-bye, Grundy!"

"Groooogh!"

The brake was out of sight when Grundy felt equal to staggering on. Pursuit was hopeless; moreover, Grundy did not want any more oranges squeezed down his neck. In great wrath and indignation, George Alfred gave it up, and he tramped back to St. Jim's a sadder if not a wiser Grundy.

CHAPTER 6.

In Durance Ville!

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW sat silent.

He was seated on an empty trunk, in the top box-room in the School House. A box-ropo fastened him to the trunk; it was wound and knotted about him with great security. And there was an ample reason for his silence—a large duster that was fastened over his mouth.

Fortunately, Cardew had the healthy habit of breathing through his nose. Otherwise, he might have been in danger of suffocation, for the duster was fastened very effectively.

His eyes were gleaming with rage as he sat.

There was another fellow in the box-room—George Herries of the Fourth. George Herries was standing at the little window, looking over a wide view of frosty roofs and frosty branches.

He took no notice of Cardew—save when he moved a little. Then Herries' eyes would dwell upon him for a watchful moment.

Cardew quivered with rage as he sat.

It had not even occurred to his mind, wary as he usually was, that drastic measures like this would be taken.

But they had been taken—and they had been completely successful. Study No. 6 had collared the junior football captain, and rushed him away, struggling, up the box-room stairs. In the little room they had secured him with the box-ropo and the duster, and left him with the door locked on him. Not till the brake had started for Abbotsford did George Herries arrive to keep him company.

Herries, at the little high window, had a view of the distant senior football-ground, and he was interested in Upper School football. He would have preferred to accompany the team to Abbotsford, but Study No. 6 had agreed that somebody should be left in charge of Cardew; and as Herries was not playing, he remained.

Cardew, sitting on the box, stared at him with furious eyes. He had heard three strike from the clock-tower, and he knew that St. Jim's junior footballers must have arrived at Abbotsford, and that the game would have started.

He knew why he had been kidnapped in this extraordinary manner. Study No. 6 had told him that much.

Cardew had carried matters with a high hand, and he realised now that other fellows could be high-handed, too—and still more so!

"Good man!" ejaculated Herries suddenly. Kildare of the Sixth had just scored against the New House.

Herries turned from the window. He grinned at the furious face of Ralph Reckness Cardew.

"Feel a bit cramped?" he asked.

Cardew did not answer—for good reasons. George Herries consulted his watch.

"It's half-past," he remarked. "I'm afraid you'll have to sit there till four, Cardew."

Cardew glared at him.

"You see, you're not to be depended on," explained Herries. "It would be just like you to scoot across to Abbotsford and butt in somehow. Blake thinks the match had better be over before you are let loose. What do you think?"

No reply came from the angry mouth under the duster.

"Talbot's taken over a winning team, if that's any comfort to you, old scout," added Herries. "I rather fancy we shall beat Abbotsford. Don't be sulky—you asked for this, you know."

ALL SPORTS

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IN DURANCE VILE! Quivering with rage, Ralph Reckness Cardew sat tied to an empty trunk in the box-room, a large duster fastened over his mouth, while Herries, standing by the window, kept a watchful eye on him. (See page 10.)

Herries turned to the window again and resumed watching the game on Big Side.

Cardew sat motionless, consumed with rage. He had already tried his strength on the box-rope, and found that there was nothing doing. He had to wait, with what patience he could muster, until George Herries chose to release him.

It was fortunate for Herries that he was able to watch the senior House match from the window. Otherwise, he certainly would have found his figil a tiresome one. Cardew found it tiresome enough. The minutes crawled by on leaden wings to the bound junior sitting dumb on the trunk.

It was not till the senior House match was finished that George Herries turned to the prisoner.

"You can cut now," he said.

And he started unfastening the box-rope. The duster was jerked off, and Cardew had the use of his voice.

"You rotter!" he gasped.

"Go it!" said Herries.

"I'll smash you when I get loose."

"You're welcome to all the smashing you can do. I sha'n't be sorry to give you a hiding," answered Herries cheerfully.

The rope was loose at last, and Cardew staggered from the trunk. He chafed his wrists, breathing hard. Herries opened the box-room door.

"Getting on with the smashing before we go down?" he asked.

Cardew's answer was a savage rush.

"Ready, old man!" chuckled Herries.

They were fighting fiercely in a moment more. Cardew's fury, so long pent up, found a vent in a fierce attack, and Herries was driven round the box-room. But Herries was a sturdy fellow, and he knew something about boxing. The dandy of the Fourth found himself stopped, and Herries

stood up to him, giving blow for blow, and certainly handing out as much punishment as he received.

For fully five minutes the combat raged, and then the two juniors, breathless, separated and glared at one another.

Both of them had streaming noses and other damages.

"Minute's rest?" suggested Herries, and he took out his handkerchief to dab his nose.

Cardew gave him a look, and walked out of the box-room. It was not much use fighting Herries; though the attack had solaced him a little when he was released. He went down the box-room stairs, and as he came into the Fourth Form passage there was a shout from Baggy Trimble.

"Here's Cardew!"

"He's turned up!" shouted Julian. "I say, where have you been all this time, Cardew?"

Cardew did not answer. He strode away to his own study, entered it, and slammed the door. But the news had spread that Ralph Reckness Cardew had reappeared after his mysterious absence; and a few minutes later the door was thumped open, and George Alfred Grundy strode into Study No. 9.

"So you've turned up?" bawled Grundy.

Cardew gave him a scowl.

"Where have you been?"

"Find out!" snapped Cardew.

"You left us in the lurch."

"Oh, get out!"

"Do you call that playing the game?" roared Grundy. "Do you know that I was dropped out of the team by that ass Talbot?"

"Don't worry, you silly ass."

"Worry?" roared Grundy. "I'll worry you! This is one

of your jokes, I suppose—pulling my leg, by Jove! I'll worry you."

He rushed at Cardew. That exasperated youth met him half-way, and Study No. 9 was the scene of a terrific combat. Grundy was a hefty fellow, and Cardew, good boxer as he was, was scarcely a match for the burly Shell fellow. The uproar in the study brought a crowd of fellows along the passage, and they stared into Study No. 9 and chortled.

"Cardew's getting it!" yelled Baggy Trimble. "Serve him jolly well right for letting us all down! Go it, Grundy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give him jip, Grundy!" howled Mellish.

Grundy had Cardew's head in chancery by this time. He was wrathful and indignant, as was natural, with his belief that Cardew, in his whimsical humour, had made a fool of him, and let him down at the last moment by way of a joke. Grundy wanted Cardew to understand exactly how he regarded a joke of that kind, and he certainly made his meaning clear.

"Here, don't slaughter him, Grundy!" exclaimed Wilkins at last. "Leave some of him, old chap."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll smash him!" roared Grundy.

Wilkins and Gunn ran into the study and dragged the excited Grundy away. Cardew staggered to the wall, and leaned on it breathlessly. Grundy gave him a glare.

"Perhaps he's had enough," he panted.

"Looks as if he has," grinned Wilkins. "Come on."

And the great Grundy suffered himself to be led away. Cardew kicked the door shut after him.

Then he sank into an armchair, gasping for breath. It was not Cardew's lucky day.

CHAPTER 7.

A Slight Mistake!

TOM MERRY & CO. returned in cheerful spirits from Abbotsford in the winter dusk.

Talbot had led his team to victory; Abbotsford School had been beaten by two goals to one; a result very different from that which would have been achieved but for the kidnapping scheme carried out in so masterly a manner by Study No. 6.

Herries met the returning footballers with a rather swollen nose, but a grin on his face.

"All serene?" he asked.

"Wight as wain," answered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We've beaten them, deah boy. How's Cardew?"

"What's happened to your nose?" asked Blake.

"Cardew!" explained Herries. "But his nose is the same, only more so. He seemed annoyed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I hear that he's had a fight with Grundy since then. Grundy seemed to think that Cardew has let him down."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Study No. 6 went in to tea in great spirits. They felt that they had saved the situation, and that they deserved well of their country. Of the kidnapping scheme they had said no word to the other fellows—outside Study No. 6 nobody but Cardew knew why he had failed to turn up for Abbotsford.

"There'll be a wow about it, of course," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as the four sat down to tea. "But we don't mind a wow! I considah that we acted with gweat tact and judgment."

Blake looked thoughtful.

"If Cardew makes a fuss, we can stand it," he said. "But I think very likely he won't. The whole school will cackle at him if it comes out—and he don't like looking ridiculous. But I don't care a rap how he takes it, for one."

"Wathah not."

Tom Merry looked into Study No. 6 on his way to his study.

"You fellows heard anything of Cardew yet?" he asked.

"I believe he's in his study," grinned Herries.

"He had gone out this afternoon, I suppose?"

"No, I think he was in the School House all the time."

"It's jolly queer."

"Yes, isn't it?" said Blake blandly.

"Yaas, wathah."

And a smile went round Study No. 6. Tom Merry looked a little puzzled. But Lowther was calling him from the passage, and the captain of the Shell went on without asking further questions.

The Terrible Three were sitting down to tea when the door of Study No. 10 opened, and Ralph Reckness Cardew looked in. He stepped into the study, and fixed his eyes on Tom Merry with a bitter expression.

"So you're back," he said.

"Yes, here we are again," answered Tom cheerily.

"We've beaten Abbotsford," added Monty Lowther.

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politely. "I'm sure that news will please you, Cardew—you're so keen on football."

"And so concerned about the school record in games," remarked Manners satirically.

Cardew's eyes gleamed.

"And you think you can play a trick like this without being called to account, Tom Merry?" he asked.

Tom stared at him.

"Trick! A trick like what?"

"You are not making out, I suppose, that you don't know why I missed Abbotsford to-day," sneered Cardew.

"I haven't the faintest idea why you missed Abbotsford, and I don't care a rap," retorted Tom Merry. "I suppose you were slacking about as usual."

"Liar!"

"Wha-a-a-t?"

"Don't I speak plain enough?" sneered Cardew.

Tom Merry jumped up from the tea table.

"Quite plain enough to make me throw you out of the study," he exclaimed, and he rushed at the dandy of the Fourth.

Cardew faced him with his hands up, his look black and bitter. But he was no match for the captain of the Shell. He went through the study doorway whirling, and landed in the passage with a crash.

Tom stood in the doorway with flashing eyes.

"Now come back and repeat what you said," he panted.

"I'll repeat it fast enough—I'll shout it from the house-tops, if you like," exclaimed Cardew, staggering to his feet, crimson and breathless. "I'll have you turned out of the junior club for the trick you've played on me to-day."

"Bai Jove!"

The "row" in the Shell passage had brought most of the fellows out of their studies, among them Blake & Co.

"Bai Jove! You are labahin' undah a misapprehension, Cardew," Arthur Augustus tried to explain.

"I think the fellow's wandering in his mind," said Tom Merry contemptuously. "What trick does he think I've played him?"

"The dear man's put it down to you," grinned Blake.

"Put it down to Study No. 6, Cardew. It was a little stunt of our own."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Little us, and nobody else, and we're ready to answer for it," said Digby, "and we're ready to play the same game over again, every time you try to muck up the footer."

"You bet!" said Herries.

"But what—" exclaimed Tom Merry, mystified.

Blake waved his hand towards Cardew.

"He can tell you, if he likes. We don't mind. If he cares to take it before the head of the games, we're ready to walk to Kildare's study with him."

"Yaas, wathah! Weady and willin'!"

Cardew panted for breath. He had taken it for granted, without thinking of a doubt, that Tom Merry, his old rival, had been at the bottom of the kidnapping. But he realised his mistake now.

"You—you— Then you didn't know what had happened?" he stammered, quite taken aback.

"I don't know that anything happened!" snapped Tom.

"What the thump are you driving at? What's all this mystery about?"

"You—you didn't know I was kept away!"

"How the thump should I know?"

"I—I thought—"

"Were you kept away?" demanded Tom, something of a light breaking on his mind.

"Yes," panted Cardew.

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"And—and I thought—" stammered Cardew.

"You thought!" snapped Tom scornfully. "You thought! And you come to my study and call me a liar, because you thought!—I think you ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself!"

Cardew drew a deep breath.

"Perhaps you're right," he admitted. "In fact, I know you are. I—I—I'm sorry!"

And with that rather unexpected apology, Ralph Reckness Cardew turned and walked away, leaving the passage in a buzz behind him.

CHAPTER 8.

The Election!

ELECTION on Wednesday!

"Bai Jove!"

"Good news!"

It was good news to a good many fellows, and surprising news, too. But there it was, on the notice-board, signed by Kildare of the Sixth. On Wednesday at three o'clock, in the lecture-room, a new election was to take place for the selection of the junior captain of St. Jim's.

"Wippin' news!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and his view was shared by all Study No. 6.

"Ripping news!" said Monty Lowther, in Study No. 10, and Manners and Tom Merry heartily agreed.

"Ripping news!" said Figgins, in the New House. "We're going to have another chance for this House, you fellows." And Kerr and Fatty Wynn agreed that it was ripping.

There had been a good deal of excitement and speculation in the Lower School, after the incident of the Abbotsford match. The right story of what had happened that day was not generally known. Cardew having decided to keep his own counsel, Study No. 6 had done the same, in spite of many inquiries and much surmise.

But that most of the footballing fellows were thoroughly fed-up with Cardew was no secret, and it was known that

trouble must come, and Tom Merry was urged on all sides to take up the gage of battle and give his rival a fall. But Tom steadily declined to take the lead against the junior captain; and then, unexpectedly, it became known that Cardew himself had requested the head of the games to appoint a new election. Some airily explained to Kildare that they didn't seem satisfied with the present state of affairs; and, as a matter of fact, Kildare himself was very far from satisfied, and was glad to take the opening that Cardew's request gave him.

So now it was settled, and the notice was on the board, and the Lower School was in a ferment on the subject.

Why Cardew was taking the chance was a mystery, even to his own chums, Clive and Levison. But he was taking it, and of his own accord. At the last election the School House had rallied round him, to keep out the New House candidate; but crowds of fellows were heard to say now that they would prefer the New House man to Cardew. Which was a proof of how thoroughly fed-up they were with their present captain, for, generally, the whole School House would have agreed that there could not be a skipper chosen from the New House, without St. Jim's going rapidly to the dogs in consequence.

Cardew still had a party—not a party to be greatly proud of, however. Racke & Co., the slackers of the school, backed him up, chiefly from dislike of Tom Merry and his partisans. Some other fellows thought he might be given another chance. And a few, perhaps, had in view generous spreads in Study No. 9 and invitations to Reckness Towers. A good many fellows who had supported him on the last occasion, regarding it as "sporting" of him to put the matter to the test again, resolved not to vote at all. They did not care to help re-elect him, but did not feel disposed to take a hand in turning him out.

It was probable, therefore, that the poll would be a more limited one than was usual in such cases; a circumstance that inspired hope in Figgins & Co.

When the School House voted en bloc in school elections the New House was too powerfully outnumbered to have much chance for its candidate. But when the School House vote was split, there was a chance for the New House. And the fact that many voters were to abstain from voting at all, increased that chance—for there were not likely to be many abstentions in the New House ranks.

Figgins & Co. beat up voters on all sides, and rallied the juniors of their own House. In the School House a crowd

of fellows did electioneering business for Tom Merry. Electioneering was not in Tom's own line; he simply declined to have anything to do with it. He was there to be voted for if the fellows wanted him to be captain of the Lower School. And he left it at that. He declined to ask anybody for a vote. Indeed, he told Baggy Trimble that, if Baggy had the cheek to vote for him, he would kick Baggy.

But though Tom Merry went on his way and made no sign, his friends pushed his cause in both houses, and with great energy. Arthur Augustus went so far as to suggest that anybody who did not vote for Tom should be given a fearful thwashin'.

Cardew did not display the energy he had displayed earlier. There were no royal spreads in Study No. 9, no vague promises; in fact, there was no trickery. Apparently Cardew wanted to be elected fairly and squarely this time, if elected at all.

All the Lower School looked forward to Wednesday, and there was much counting and re-counting of possible votes. Three candidates were nominated—Tom Merry, Cardew, and George Figgins. All calculations showed that the voting was likely to be close.

In resigning his place as junior captain of the school,

Cardew had resigned also that of junior House captain. That was an affair that concerned the School House alone, and Kildare had appointed Tuesday evening for the House to choose a new captain. It was a small affair compared with Wednesday's election, but fellows attended it eagerly, regarding it as a straw which would show which way the wind was blowing. And there were loud cheers from Tom's partisans when he was declared junior House captain, with a majority of a dozen votes in his favour.

"It's going our way," Monty Lowther remarked, in Study No. 10 afterwards. "You'll be elected junior captain of the school to-morrow, Tom."

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Tom Merry nodded.
"It looks like it," he said. "But there's many a slip, you know. Still, let's hope for the best."

"Anyhow, you're junior House captain now, and it's the first step," said Manners. "That was how Cardew started when he began his campaign. He got in as House captain, and started giving you trouble. You can give him a Roland for his Oliver now, Tom."

"H'm!" said Tom.
"We'll jolly well make you!" declared Lowther warmly. "This study is up against Cardew all along the line. If he keeps the School captaincy, you're going to give him trouble as House captain, do you hear?"

Tom Merry shook his head.
"We've got to think of the school," he said. "Things would go to pot with House captain and School captain jibbing at one another. If Cardew remains junior captain of St. Jim's, I shall try to make the best of it—not the worst."

"Fathhead!"
Tom Merry laughed.
"I suppose you're right, Tom," said Monty Lowther, after a long pause. "But you're really a bit too good for this jolly old world, you know. If you play the game, Cardew won't."

"No reason why I shouldn't, if he doesn't."
"Oh, how-wow!"
"But we're going to win," said Manners. "The trouble is, so many fellows saying they're not going to vote. They backed up Cardew last time, and don't like to turn him down now. But I believe most of them hope you'll get in, Tom."

"Hoping isn't enough," growled Lowther. "They ought to vote."
"Well, so long as they don't vote for Cardew, it's something," said Manners. "I think we're going to pull it off."

Over in the New House there was something like equal confidence in Figgins' study.
"I fancy we're really going to pull it off this time," George Figgins declared to Kerr and Fatty Wynn. "It will be rather a catch for St. Jim's, having a New House junior skipper."

"No end of a catch," agreed Kerr.
"We'll celebrate it, if you get in, Figgy," said Fatty Wynn. "We'll stand the biggest spread that ever was stood at St. Jim's."

"Trust you to think of that!" chuckled Figgy.
In Study No. 9 in the Fourth it was difficult to tell whether Ralph Reckness Cardew was feeling confident or not. Whatever he thought on the subject he kept to himself, and even Levison could not guess his thoughts. Clive and Levison had not voted in the House captain election on Tuesday evening, and they did not intend to vote in the School captain election on the morrow. Cardew was their chum, but they wanted Tom Merry for their captain. Cardew's best friends could not say that he had been a success or a credit to the school in his new role. It was Cardew who gave them the news how Tuesday's election had gone, when he strolled into Study No. 9 afterwards.

"You've got a new House captain," he announced.
"Tom Merry?"
"Yes."

"Good!" said Clive frankly.
"Very good!" said Cardew with a laugh. "Some of the fellows are sayin' that it's an omen for to-morrow, and that Thomas will romp home, back into his old job."

"I think it's very likely," said Levison.
"So do I," agreed Cardew. "It will be a close thing, anyhow." He gave a deep yawn. "Frightful bore, these school elections, what?"

"No reason why you should go in for them, if you find them a bore," said Ernest Levison dryly.

"Is there ever any reason for anythin' I do?" yawned Cardew. "Hallo, here's jolly old Trimble! Roll away, Baggy!"

"I want to speak to you in private, Cardew," said Baggy Trimble mysteriously.

"Shout it out!"

"But it's private."

"Your mistake; it isn't. Say it and bunk, or, better still, bunk without sayin' it."

"Look here, you've been kicked out of the House captaincy," said Trimble warningly. "I offered to vote for you—"

"For half-a-crown," assented Cardew. "You did, old fat bean. I'm glad I kept the half-a-crown in my pocket."

"Of course, I was going to vote out of friendship," said Trimble. "You might have lent me half-a-crown. That would have nothing to do with it, of course. But about to-morrow?"

"Ring off, and roll."

"It's more important to-morrow," said Trimble, blinking at him. "If Tom Merry gets in as junior captain of the

school, where do you come in, Cardew? Now, I've got a lot of influence. You know how popular I am in both houses. Exerting my influence, I can turn the scale in favour of any candidate."

"Oh, my hat!"

"If I throw my weight into the scale, something's bound to happen," said Trimble impressively.

"If you throw your weight anywhere, something would happen, I fancy," agreed Cardew. "Somethin' like an earthquake."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass!" roared the fat junior. "Look here, I'm going to back you up to-morrow. I'm down on Merry, and we don't want Figgins, a New House cad, for captain. I'm your man, Cardew!"

"Thanks!"

"Pure friendship, you understand," said Trimble.

"I understand," grinned Cardew.

"Good! That's settled," said Trimble. "I—I suppose you could lend a fellow five bob?"

"Easily."

"Thanks, old man," Baggy Trimble held out a large, fat, and far from cleanly hand.

Cardew stared at it.

"Soap!" he said.

"Eh?"

"And hot water——"

"What?"

"And a scrubbin' brush, and a little Sanitas."

"You—you—you——" gasped Trimble. "You funny idiot!"

"Are you going to lend me five bob, or are you not going to lend me five bob?"

"I'm lendin' you nothin' but a boot, old bean, and here it is!"

"Yaroooh!"

Baggy Trimble departed hurriedly from the study. He put a fat and furious face into the doorway a minute later, and roared:

"Yah! I'm going to vote for Figgins! Yah!"

Then he disappeared, narrowly escaping a cushion that hurtled from Study No. 9.

"There's a vote gone," sighed Cardew, sinking into the armchair. "By the way, as the votin' to-morrow is sure to be close, do you fellows know whether the rules allow a candidate to vote?"

"It's allowed," said Levison, "but it's not the thing. I'm quite sure that neither Tom Merry nor Figgins will vote for himself."

"But it's permitted?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Then I think I shall vote."

"It's rotten bad form to do anything of the kind, Cardew," said Sidney Clive rather gruffly.

"Think so?"

"Don't you think so yourself?"

"That depends," yawned Cardew. "In my case, I don't think so. Anyhow, I fancy I shall vote. Now don't give me a sermon, old bean—give me the Latin dick, and let's have a dig at this rotten prep."

And prep proceeded in Study No. 9 in a rather grim silence.

CHAPTER 9.

Just Like Cardew!

"WALLY wound!" said Arthur Augustus impressively. It was Wednesday afternoon.

After dinner that day the electioneering was fast and furious. The three rival candidates presented an attitude of lofty confidence, or, at least, indifference. But their followers canvassed for votes on all sides, and there was keen enthusiasm, and many disputes and arguments, and some punching of noses.

But even as three o'clock, the hour of the election, drew near, nobody could make a good guess at the result. All that was certain was that the voting would be close.

It was a fine afternoon, and a half-holiday, and a good many fellows were tempted out of gates, which made the result more uncertain than ever. Nobody was bound to turn up for the election if he did not choose to do so, and fellows who were not keen on it gave it a miss. The immediate followers of the three candidates were keen enough, but there were a good many indifferent, especially among fellows who had backed up Cardew last time and did not care to back him up again, and yet hesitated to turn against the fellow they had once elected.

The lecture-hall was not at all crowded by three o'clock, and it became clear that the number of abstentions would be very considerable.

"Wally wound," repeated Arthur Augustus, as Study No. 6 made their way to the lecture-room. "I say, Gwunday, are you wallyin' wound?"

Grundy of the Shell gave a snort.

"I'm standing out," he snapped. "Catch me voting for



A TERRIFIC COMBAT! The uproar in the study brought a crowd of fellows along the passage, and they stared into Study No. 9 and chortled. "Cardew's getting it!" yelled Baggy Trimble. "Serve him jolly well right for letting us all down. Go it, Grundy!" (See page 12.)

Tom Merry. He's told me plainly that he'll never put me in the school eleven, or the House eleven either."

"But it would be wathah wotten if he agreed to play a dud, wouldn't it, old chap?" asked Arthur Augustus innocently.

"You silly ass!"

"Weally, Gwunday—"

"And I'm not voting for Cardew," said Grundy. "He's let me down once, and he'd do it again. And, of course, I wouldn't vote for Figgins, a New House bounder. So I'm standing out, and so are Wilkins and Gunn. I'd jolly well whop them if they voted when I stood out."

"Bai Jove!"

Grundy stalked away in lofty dignity. No candidate who refused to recognise his football claims was worthy of his support, in his opinion, and the great Grundy was determined to ignore the election. However, in spite of being ignored by the great Grundy, the election proceeded.

Kildare and Darrell of the Sixth came into the lecture-room on the stroke of three to conduct the proceedings. The captain of St. Jim's glanced over the gathering, rather surprised to note that there were so many absentees. However, that was no concern of his, and he directed the door to be closed and locked when the last stroke of three had died away.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his celebrated eyeglass into his eye and glanced round anxiously. Tom Merry, George Figgins, and Ralph Reckness Cardew were all present, and they were duly proposed and seconded, and the two prefects proceeded to the count.

"How many fellows do you make pwsent, Blake?" whispered Arthur Augustus, who had already counted the assembly thrice with three different results.

"A hundred," said Blake, "and nearly half of them New House chaps."

"Ninety-three," said Dig.

"You mean eighty-nine," said Herries.

"Bai jove—I make it a hundred and twenty—"

"Silence!"

"Ordah, there, you fellows—don't keep on talkin' while the count's goin' on. I feel suab, Blake, that there are ovah a hundwed—"

"Silence!"

"Weally, you know—"

"Shut up, D'Arcy!"

"Bai Jove!"

Kildare and Darrell completed their counting and compared notes. They were observed to shrug their shoulders, and the juniors gazed at them anxiously, keen to hear the result.

"Weally, you fellows, I feel quite on tentah-hooks, you know—"

"Silence!"

Kildare announced the result—a result that made the St. Jim's juniors stare.

"One hundred and twenty votes have been recorded. The voting is equally divided: Tom Merry, forty; Cardew, forty; Figgins, forty."

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, my hat!"

There was a buzz of surprised voices. Everyone had expected the voting to be very close; but nobody had looked for this outcome. The three candidates had tied.

"Well, that beats it!" murmured Figgins to his chums.

"Rotten!" muttered Monty Lowther in Tom Merry's ear, and Tom nodded and smiled.

Cardew gave the captain of the Shell a curious glance. He stepped towards Kildare.

"I ask for a re-count," he said.

"The counting is quite correct."

"Very likely; but I believe a candidate is entitled to claim a re-count," drawled Cardew; "I claim it!"

"Very well!" said Kildare quietly. "The votes will be counted over again, you fellows."

"I twust some silly ass will change his mind and vote for Tom Mewwy," murmured Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, rather."

"Hands up for Tom Merry!" called out Kildare.

Forty right hands went up. And then, slowly, but surely, a forty-first hand was raised.

There was a gasp throughout the meeting. For the last hand that went up was that of Ralph Reckness Cardew!

Every eye turned on Cardew.

He did not seem to observe it. He stood with his hand raised over his head, his face expressionless.

"Bai Jove! Do you see that, you fellows?" gasped Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry stared at his rival blankly.

Kildare fixed his eyes on Cardew grimly.

"What does this mean?" he snapped.

"Candidates are allowed to vote, I understand," yawned Cardew.

"You're voting for Tom Merry?" exclaimed Kildare.

"Why not? He's a better man for the job than I am."

"Wha-a-t?"

"You're bound to count in my vote, dear man! Get on with it!"

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

In the midst of an excited buzz and some laughter the counting was completed. The result was known in advance now, but the juniors listened while the captain of the school announced it.

"Tom Merry, forty-one votes. Cardew and Figgins, forty each. Tom Merry is duly elected junior captain of St. Jim's."

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Tom Merry!"

"Well, it's all right, so long as it's not Cardew," remarked Figgins philosophically.

"Hurrah!"

Tom Merry's supporters closed round him and bore him out of the lecture-room shoulder-high in triumph amid laughter and cheers. Figgins & Co. cheerily joined in the cheering. Ralph Reckness Cardew sauntered away with his hands in his pockets, nonchalant as ever, having once more demonstrated that the only thing that was to be expected of him was the unexpected!

Tom Merry was back in his old place—junior captain of St. Jim's, and there were few fellows who were not, after all, satisfied with that result of the prolonged contest. The contest was over now—Cardew of the Fourth was no longer his rival, and evidently no longer his enemy. Cardew's amazing action had surprised all the school—Tom Merry as much as the rest; but on reflection the fellows agreed that it was just like Cardew!

THE END.

(There will be another magnificent story of Tom Merry & Co. in next week's GEM. Note the title, chums: "ERIC KILDARE'S SECRET!" By Martin Clifford.)



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THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER.

FULLY EXPLAINED!

A negro met an acquaintance, also coloured, and was surprised to see that his friend was wearing a new suit, new hat, and new shoes. "Hey, boy," he said, "how come you dressed up this way? Is you got a job?" "I'se got somethin' better'n any job," replied the other. "I'se got a profession." "What is it?" "I'se a orator." "What's a orator?" "Don't you know?" replied the resplendent one, in surprise. "Well, I'll tell you what a orator is. If you was to walk up to a ordinary man, and arsk him how much was two and two, he'd say 'four,' but if you was to ask a orator, he'd say: 'When in de course of human events it becomes necessary to take the numeral of de second denomination and add it to de figger two, I says unto you, and I says it without fear of successful contradiction, dat de result will invariably be four.' Dat's a orator."—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious tuck has been awarded to Edward B. McManus, 47, Oxford Road, Waterloo, near Liverpool, Lancs.

NOT SO SIMPLE.

A schoolmaster one day asked a dunce of the class some simple questions in arithmetic. He was surprised to find that he got the correct answers, and when he had finished questioning, he turned smilingly on the boy and said: "Correct! Sit down!" The youngster did. "Now," resumed the master, addressing the same boy, "let's see if you have enough sense to ask me some questions." The boy thought for a minute, and then asked: "Please, sir, what would four yards of calico cost if cotton was twopence a reel?" "I think you take me for a fool!" angrily retorted the master. "Correct!" meekly returned the boy. "Sit down!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to C. W. Chapman, 80, Haylings Road, Leiston, Suffolk.

HIS VERDICT!

Smith, who had been entertained by a South African magnate, in his gorgeous house, at a very poor and insufficient dinner, was asked by his host: "What do you think of my dining-room?" "Well," said Smith, surveying the auriferous deposits on the ceiling, "I should have preferred less gilding and more carvings!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to M. Curtis, 12, Upper Conduit Street, Leicester.

MUSICIANS ALL!

"Father," said the bad boy of the family, "is an adept at blowing his own

trumpet, while mother is equally expert at harping on one string; mother-in-law has to play second fiddle, and Aunt Kate leads a humdrum existence; grandpa gives every night a solo on his nasal organ, without the stops; uncle spends his time wetting his whistle; John is fond of his pipe, and Emily is for ringing the changes on her lovers—and I'm a bit of a lyre myself."—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Cecil A. Hiscock, 440, Garratt Lane, Earlsfield, S.W. 18.

ONE TO JOHN BULL!

"Gee, that's a cute little church!" said the American, as he viewed St. Paul's. "Yes," was the reply, "that's St. Paul's!" "Very cute; but a mere cruet beside some of ours." Then they travelled to Trafalgar Square. "Gosh, what's that?" said the American, pointing to Nelson's Column. "That? Oh, that's the pepper-box to fit your cruet!" was the calm reply.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Ernest C. Higgs, Globe Works, Clapton Park, E. 5.

A GOOD RETORT!

A woebegone tramp called at a house to ask for aid. The door was opened by a woman of angular proportions, severe in demeanour and uncertain age and temper. Having heard the object of his visit, she observed in raspy tones. "I shall not give you anything. If you had been wise you would not have come here. Do you know who I am?" The tramp replied he had not the pleasure of knowing her. "Well, I am a policeman's wife, and if he was here he would take you, and very quickly, too!" The tramp looked at her for a moment, and then said: "I believe you, ma'am. If he took you, he'd take anybody!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Furlong, 11, Bradstone Avenue, Phibsboro, Dublin, Ireland.

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You will always remember
"Hat-Trick" Guy—

—after you have read
this topping tale.



“HAT-TRICK GUY!”

A Sensational Soccer Story

BY

ERNEST JAMES.

CHAPTER 1.

Found—A Centre-Forward!

JOHN MANNINGS, manager of Norwood Celtic Football Club, paused on his way to his office beneath the grand-stand to watch the practice taking place upon the playing-pitch.

Jeffrey Willis, Celtic's inside-left, had secured the ball which the goalkeeper had just punted down the field, and now, as John Mannings watched from behind the goal-mouth, the youngster sent in a first-time shot, guaranteed unstoppable. With a sudden herculean spring, Billy Brown endeavoured to keep his charge intact, but it was to no avail, for the spinning leather whizzed like a thing of life past his outstretched fingers, and the next moment was twirling at the back of the net.

"Good shot, Willis!" cried John Mannings, smiling pleasantly. "That's the kind to give 'em on Saturday, lad!"

Jeff Willis returned the encouraging smile, and then he was after the ball again with Charlie Bates, the outside-left, hot upon his track.

Norwood Celtic were in their first season of League football. Previously, they had figured only in amateur circles; but, with Haversham United dropping out of the League at the end of the previous campaign, the Celtic, having greater ambitions than playing friendly games for the rest of their existence, had sought, with other clubs, election to the vacant position. And the Celtic had gained their ambition, for at the League committee meeting they had been elected with thirty-five votes.

To say that such a grand old sportsman as John Mannings was delighted at the success of his club, is to put the matter mildly. He was positively jubilant, and he straightway set himself the task of strengthening the team in readiness for the opening match. Up and down the country did the manager go, but, to his consternation, he only managed to secure the services of one player of any note.

Almost at his wits' end, John Mannings sat himself down to think upon returning from a fruitless journey to Bolton. What about the boys who had been playing for the Celtic during the preceding season?

He had quite forgotten their existence in the moment of his jubilation when Celtic had gained election to the League, and had thought only of footballers with

big names. That had hardly been playing fair with the fellows who had been so keen on the Celtic winning their matches when they had been mere amateurs. Success to a certain degree had now descended upon Norwood Celtic, so why not ask the old team if they would be willing to play for the club now that it had turned professional? Yes, that was the thing to do without a doubt.

Accordingly, the manager had called them together, and to a man the boys had agreed to continue being members of the club. Several, of course, found it impossible to turn professionals, but they signed amateur forms nevertheless, and decided to turn out whenever they were free, if the club wanted them.

Time drew on, and with but a few days to go to the opening match of the season the Celtic experienced a bad piece of luck. Billy Thomas, their centre-forward, met with an accident whilst out on his motor-bike, and when picked up was found to have broken his leg. And so bad was the injury that the doctor had told John Mannings that it was doubtful whether Thomas would again be able to play football.

The question of who was to fill Thomas' place in the side was a hard one, and within three days of the game with Leamington Rovers it had not been settled. Thomas, it had definitely been stated, would not be able to play again for at least a year. Of the three reserves Celtic boasted, one was a goalkeeper, and the other two half-backs. In their respective positions all three were good and capable players. But as centre-forward not good enough. Each had had a trial, but had proved not worth persevering with.

However, such was the unhappy state of affairs that it seemed that one of the three would have to be included in the side to meet the Rovers. Who that one would be had yet to be settled, and the committee had decided to leave the selection of the team until the morning of the match. Not that they held out hopes that John Mannings would, in the meantime, be successful in securing a centre-forward elsewhere. As a matter of fact, that possibility did not even enter their minds.

As Billy Brown hung himself full length across the goalmouth and turned a shot from Charlie Bates neatly round the post, John Mannings came out of a deep reverie, and, with a helpless shrug

of his shoulders, proceeded on his way. John had been thinking of the centre-forward berth again. Who was to fill it? That question was continually recurring in his brain.

Reaching the aperture beneath the grand-stand, the manager almost collided with Sam Jackson, the trainer, who was just coming out to the ground.

"Good-morning, Mr. Mannings!" said Sam respectfully. "There was a phone call for you about a couple of minutes ago. Your son, I—"

"My son!" exclaimed John Mannings. "Ah, yes, of course!"

For the moment the manager had quite forgotten that his son, Guy, was due home that day.

Guy was the elder of John Mannings' two boys, and his school career at Claremont was now finished. He had, however, several reasons for not wishing to leave Claremont, the chief being that Philip, his younger brother, remained behind. Between Guy and Phil there had existed at school a strong brotherly love, and it was therefore only natural that they did not wish to part. But part they had to, nevertheless.

"Did he say where he was ringing up from, Sam?" asked the manager, breaking a short silence.

An eager look had come into John Mannings' steel-grey eyes as he asked the question. And the manager's change of visage was brought about by a great inspiration which had suddenly come to him.

"Yes, Mr. Mannings," replied Sam Jackson. "He said—"

"Yes, yes! Where, man—where?" interrupted the manager excitedly.

"From home and—"

But John Mannings was gone. Without waiting to hear what else the trainer had to say, he had darted through the door beneath the grand-stand. And as, after tapping his forehead significantly, Sam Jackson strolled across the pitch to where the players were still at practice, the manager was already in his office, with the telephone receiver jammed to his ear.

Impatiently John Mannings waited for the operator to put him through to his home. The proposition, brought about by the sudden happy thought which had struck him, that he wished to put to his son, Guy, could not be delayed a minute. Therefore, it can easily be understood that, after several seconds had elapsed

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and he had not got through to his number, he began to stamp his foot quite angrily upon the floor.

A voice came suddenly over the wire. John Mannings recognised it immediately as belonging to George Wright, his manservant.

"Mr. Mannings speaking," he said into the transmitter. "Is Master Guy there? No! Then where the dickens is—"

"Hallo, dad!"

John Mannings let go of the telephone receiver as if it had suddenly become red-hot, and, springing to his feet, he dashed across the room. Standing just inside the door, which had opened noiselessly, was his son Guy, an expansive smile upon his handsome, clean-cut features.

In his excitement at seeing the youngster again, John Mannings almost knocked him over as he rushed up to him.

"Steady, dad!" said Guy, laughing, catching hold of his father's arm to save him from falling. "Anybody would think you hadn't seen me for years. Why, I was only home on holiday a couple of months ago."

Gasping for breath, and, consequently, unable to speak coherently for a while, the manager of Norwood Celtic Football Club led his son over to his desk, and, to Guy's surprise, forced him into the saddlebag armchair.

"What's the game, dad?" asked Guy, thinking that his father had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

By this time John Mannings had sufficiently recovered his breath to speak clearly.

"The game, my boy," he replied, opening a drawer and taking out a printed form, "is this. You sign here!"

He placed the form in front of Guy, and jabbed a finger on a blank space which had obviously been left for a signature.

Wondering, Guy Mannings glanced down at the sheet of paper before him, and as he read the words thereon his bright blue eyes opened wide in amazement. Quickly he looked up into his father's smiling face.

"Dad, what—what—what are you getting at?" he stuttered.

"I'm getting at nothing, my lad," returned his father. "What I am trying to get, however, is your signature to that form."

"But—but—"

"Now don't start arguing, Guy!" said John Mannings severely. "Time's precious. Probably it would be best for me to explain to you what I am after."

"Perhaps so," murmured Guy faintly.

"It's like this, son," continued the manager of Norwood Celtic, "we play a League match, as no doubt you are aware, on Saturday. The team will consist of all last season's players, with the exception of an outside-left named Charlie Bates. Bates, by the way, was secured from Burbridge Albion. But—and here is the trouble—we haven't a centre-forward—"

"And you want me to fill the breach?" interrupted Guy eagerly, now that he was beginning to understand what his father was driving at.

"Precisely," said his father, with a smile. "Billy Thomas would have led the side on Saturday, but for the fact that he broke a leg a few weeks ago and left us stranded. Not one of our reserves is a centre-forward, although we should have been compelled to have included one against Leamington Rovers, if we did not find a man to take Thomas' place in the meantime. Now, you see how things stand, and I hope you will sign as an

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amateur and play for the club. It will mean hustling to get your papers through in time for you to play on Saturday, so get a move on, Master 'Hat Trick' Guy!"

Guy smiled at mention of his nickname. At Claremont he had been football captain and centre-forward of the first eleven. And he had earned himself the nickname "Hat Trick" Guy, and this on account of the happy knack he had of scoring three or more goals in a match. Without a doubt, it had been Guy's prolific goal-scoring that had won for Claremont the Public Schools' Championship three years in succession.

Guy picked up a pen from his father's desk and dipped it in the inkwell.

"I'm on if you think me good enough, dad," he said cheerily.

"Good enough!" retorted John Mannings. "I should think you are! It's certain that I would not have wasted my time in explaining to you all the club's trouble if I thought otherwise. I don't believe in favouritism, son or no son. You can play footer with the best of 'em, and I expect you to have a lot to do in realising my ambition. That ambition, my lad, is to see the Celtic finish well up in this its first season in the League. And there's something else. We have got to win next Saturday's match, so see that you are in fine trim, and have your shooting boots with you. Now sign, Guy, please!"

With a flourish Guy applied his signature to the form. He handed it to his father, who folded it and carefully stowed it in an inside pocket.

"And now, Guy," said the manager of Norwood Celtic, clasping the youngster's hand, "you ask Sam Jackson, the trainer, to rig you out with some togs, and get in some practice with the boys at once. You'll find them out on the pitch. Meanwhile, I'm off to get your papers through so that you will be able to show Leamington what you are made of on Saturday."

Thus it came about that Norwood Celtic discovered a centre-forward at the eleventh hour. And with the signing on of "Hat Trick" Guy it seemed that the club's troubles were at an end.

CHAPTER 2.

Blackmail!

"THE beastly cad!"

Guy Mannings' face flushed angrily, and, clenching his teeth, he crushed the letter which he had been reading tightly in his hand.

It was the eve of the big match, and Guy, when he had come down to breakfast, had heard from his father that his papers had come through from the League. Besides the news that he was now eligible to play for Norwood Celtic, John Mannings told his son that already the newspapers were remarking upon the great capture the club had made in obtaining his services.

Guy had read a copy of "Town Sport" himself, and had been amused by the glowing account given therein of his prowess when at Claremont. Reference was also made to his nickname and how he had earned it.

After a hearty meal, Guy, as happy as the proverbial sandboy, had proceeded to the library in his home, and, taking up a book, had settled himself in a comfortable armchair to read. But he had not been there for more than five minutes when his peace of mind was disturbed. George Wright, his father's manservant, entered with a letter addressed to him. Wondering, the youngster opened the

envelope and glanced hurriedly at the message contained therein, and immediately his high spirits vanished, leaving him perfectly wretched. The note, of a distressing nature to Guy, came from Kebble, a village near Claremont, the youngster's old school, and ran:

"Dear Sir,—I should like to see you on business at twelve o'clock to-day. Meet me outside of the post-office in East Norwood. Of course, I have no need to mention the steps I shall take if you do not come along."

"Yours faithfully,
"MIKE HUNT."

Guy groaned as he realised all that the letter meant, and for the moment he felt that if he had his brother Phil within distance he would kick him hard for having been such a silly young ass when he had first come to Claremont.

Guy well remembered how Phil had got into the scrape which had involved him as well. He remembered, too, the man Mike Hunt, a bookmaker of disrepute, who did business with Percy Cavendish & Co., the "smart set" at the school. Unfortunately, Phil had been taken up by Cavendish and his cronies directly he had set foot within the precincts of Claremont, and before Guy could step in the damage was done.

Cavendish had put Phil wise to a way of making money easily, and that way was to wager on horse-racing. The youngster received the tip to put "all he had" on Rocky Tops in the Dishem Stakes, and when he protested against gambling he was told he wasn't a sport.

Now, Phil rather prided himself on being a sportsman, and had then informed Cavendish & Co. that he only had a shilling to his name. Immediately the difficulty was got over. The young rascals had said that their bookmaker only ran credit accounts, and so it came about that Phil had written out a wager putting five pounds on Rocky Tops.

The sequel had followed quickly. Rocky Tops lost its race, and when Mike Hunt, who was the bookmaker, applied for his money, Phil hadn't got it to pay up. Several weeks passed, and Hunt threatened to expose Phil to his headmaster if he didn't pay in a few days. Scared, and at his wits' ends, the youngster had approached Cavendish & Co. and asked them to lend him the money. But the "smart set," laughing gleefully at Phil's awkward predicament, had refused. Phil then told his wretched story to his brother; and Guy, after giving him a lecture, went all haste to Mike Hunt's house in the village. By promising to pay within three months, Guy, by giving the bookmaker an I O U for the amount owing to him by his brother, managed to extract from the man the slip on which Phil had made his wager on Rocky Tops.

It was a splendid piece of self-sacrifice that Guy had made, for he had taken the burden off his brother's shoulders and had placed it upon his own instead.

Yes, Guy remembered it all. And the three months' grace which he had succeeded in obtaining from Hunt was up to-day.

Where was he to get the money from to pay the man?

Guy had only ten shillings in his possession. He knew that it was useless to approach his father and inform him that he was in the debt of a bookmaker. Being somewhat of a martinet, and having such a great affection for his sons, Guy knew that the old sportsman would be broken-hearted if he learned that he had incurred a racing debt. Neither could Guy explain to his father that the

debt was in reality his brother's. No, he decided to keep the whole affair a secret, if he could, for he realised that if he did tell his father, as likely as not he would disown him for having disgraced the family name.

What could he do? Guy sat and thought the matter out, but he could not get any nearer to solving the problem.

Suddenly he started. The clock on the mantelpiece was striking the hour of eleven. He had been sitting in the library ever since ten minutes past nine, and at twelve o'clock he was due to meet Mike Hunt.

Wretchedly Guy got to his feet, and, passing out of the room, made his way downstairs to the hall. Reaching for his cap, he opened the front door, and, banging it after him, he quickly gained the

"But you can't!" cried Guy, clenching his fists. "He doesn't owe you a penny. It is I who am in your debt, and you know it, you rascal!"

Mike Hunt grinned. "That may be," he said. "But you can't deny the fact that you have taken the debt off your brother's shoulders."

Guy was silent. True he could not deny that fact. If he were asked whether the debt were his or really his younger brother's, he could only admit that it was Phil's.

"So you have nothing to say to that, eh?" grinned Hunt. "Still, what I want to know is whether you have my money?"

Guy shook his head.

"Then," said the bookmaker in bullying tones, "I shall report your brother

Without a word, Guy followed the man until at length he passed into the park and sat down on a seat. There was no one in sight, and Mike Hunt was satisfied. He rolled himself a cigarette and lighted it, and then turned to Guy, who had seated himself next to him.

"Now, Mister Mannings," he said, in an oily tone, "I have heard that you are playing for Norwood Celtic on Saturday."

Guy started. The proposition had something to do with the Norwood Celtic—Leamster Rovers match. He had half suspected as much.

"Well," continued Mike Hunt, in the same oily strain, "you have got to play the worst game of your life. You've got to do your best to let the side down. None of the 'bat-trick' business—



Endeavouring to avoid collision with the Rovers' left-back, Guy tripped over a piece of turf and pitched headlong to the ground. As he fell his fist met the ball and sent it goalwards. "Hands!" roared the crowd.

road. With dragging footsteps the youngster made off in the direction of the post-office. In ordinary circumstances he could have done the distance well inside forty minutes, but when at last he did reach his destination it wanted but a few minutes to twelve.

Mike Hunt was awaiting him already, and the bookmaker grinned evilly when he saw Guy approaching with downcast face.

"So you've come, young feller-melad," he said, as Guy came level with him.

Guy gave a start, for as yet he had not seen the man.

"Yes," he said quietly, looking up into the man's coarse features.

"Well, you know what I'm after," said Mike Hunt, with a sneer. "Suppose you thought you could get away with it when you left the school. Not so, my young buck. I am here to collect the dibs, otherwise I'm going to see the headmaster of Claremont and inform him that your brother is the one really in my debt—"

to Dr. Dennis unless you agree to a proposition I am going to put to you."

Guy looked sharply at Mike Hunt. That the man was an unscrupulous rascal and always ready to do anything to gain his own ends, he knew. At Claremont, Guy had heard of several underhand schemes which Hunt had participated in and which, had they come to the notice of the police, would have landed him in gaol. And the youngster was quite sure that the proposition which the bookmaker was now going to put to him, was of a shady nature.

Guy was on the alert. But he decided to hear what it was all about, for he knew that Hunt's threat to expose his brother was no idle one.

"And what is the proposition, Mr. Hunt?" asked Guy quietly.

Mike Hunt looked about him. The post-office was situated in a side street in the town, but for all that, quite a good number of people passed to and fro.

"We'll walk along the road a bit," said the bookmaker meaningly. "Better to discuss business in a nice quiet spot."

savvy? If the Celtic win, I go straight to Dr. Dennis. If they lose, I'll give you back your I O U and cry quits. Is it a deal?"

For a moment Guy felt as though he would rush straight at the rascal and hit out right and left. The rascally proposal made the youngster see red, and his fist clenched tightly. But it was only for the fraction of a second that the bookmaker was in any danger from the boy. Suddenly the colour ebbed from Guy Mannings' face, leaving him pale to the lips. He shrugged his shoulders helplessly. His position was all the more awkward by reason of the fact that his father expected him to play the game of his life against Leamster Rovers. Yet, how could he do his best for the side when his brother was in danger of being disgraced if the Celtic should win? He must save Phil whatever the cost.

Probably he could get out of playing in the match on Saturday. But that, he realised, was impossible, for his father would want to know what was wrong.

and to plead that he was ill was an absurd excuse to make.

"Is it a deal?" repeated Mike Hunt, as he impatiently watched the working of Guy's face.

Guy's mind was made up in an instant then. He had again determined to make a sacrifice for his brother's sake.

"I'll do as you wish," muttered the youngster, between dry lips.

Mike Hunt grinned with evil satisfaction.

"Thought you would, my lad," he said lightly.

"And about the I O U?" asked Guy eagerly.

"I'll send it to you directly the Celtic have lost," replied the bookmaker.

And without another word he rose to his feet and strode away in the best of spirits. By offering long odds against Norwood Celtic winning their match with Leaminster Rovers, the rascally bookmaker had hopes of receiving quite a number of wagers backing the home club—wagers which would be losing ones now that he had bribed "Hat-Trick" Guy to play it low. Guy watched Mike Hunt out of sight. Sick at heart, the youngster surveyed his unenviable position. To save his brother, he would be letting his father down. But then he would be saving his father's son. Guy smiled faintly as he thought of that. But his mind was made up. On Saturday against Leaminster Rovers he would play the worst game of his career—muff passes, put in weak shots at goal, and do everything he could which would have a lot to do with the letting down of his side. And all this for his brother's sake.

CHAPTER 3.

The Match!

"AND now for a really ripping game of footer—I don't think!"

Guy Mannings flung his football rig into his gladstone bag, and, with a grunt, crossed over to his bed-room window.

Gazing out across the fields, he could just see the well-appointed football ground of the Norwood Celtic Club, and the crowds of Soccer enthusiasts flocking in at the different turnstiles to witness the match with Leaminster Rovers.

It wanted but half an hour to kick-off, and Guy was apparently in no great hurry to get up to the ground for the game. As a matter of fact, he didn't really wish to go at all.

After his father had departed earlier in the morning, the youngster had retired to his bed-room and had been there ever since, thinking of the hopeless position in which he was placed. But although he would have liked to have been able to do his best to help the Celtic win the game against Leaminster and thus realise his father's ambition, Guy felt that at all costs he must save his brother Phil from disgrace. His decision was made up. He had agreed with Mike Hunt to play the worst game of his career against the Rovers, and he was going to do so for his brother's sake.

At last Guy turned from the window, and, picking up his bag, he went downstairs to the hall. Reaching for his cap, he quickly left the house and made his way towards the football ground.

Down one street, then along another he strode, but without noticing the passers-by. Once a friend hailed him, but he proceeded on his way without heeding the cheery greeting.

"Hallo, Guy!"

The youngster had reached the players' entrance to the football ground.

and was about to pass through the gate when a hand was laid upon his shoulder. With a start he swung round and faced the beautiful girl who had accosted him.

"Er—good-morning, Miss Summers!"

Guy flushed to the roots of his hair, and raised his cap awkwardly. The girl looked surprised, but gave him a pleasant smile nevertheless.

Miss Summers, daughter of the chairman of the Norwood Celtic Football Club, took a big interest in the great winter game, and, whenever she found it possible, she attended the matches played on Manor Field. And, of course, it was natural that she always looked forward to seeing Norwood Celtic emerge from their games victorious.

"So you are playing for the club, Guy?" said the young lady, with a touch of satisfaction in her voice.

"Yes," answered Guy quietly.

"Then we shall win this afternoon, for sure," continued Miss Summers lightly.

"And I shall expect you to have a lot to do with the victory, Guy. Don't forget that nickname of yours. Live up to it, won't you?"

"If I—I—I can," said Guy, with a wry smile.

Sylvia Summers looked eagerly at her friend. She had known Guy for years, and he had always appeared to her to be a light-hearted boy, with not a care in the world. But now, it seemed to Sylvia, that there was something radically wrong with the youngster—that he had a heavy burden upon his shoulders.

"Is there anything the matter with you, Guy?" she asked, with concern.

Guy Mannings flushed again.

"Oh, no!" he said hastily. "Nothing at all. I'm feeling a bit nervous. Most young chaps suffer from nerves when they are going to play in their first big football match, you know."

Miss Summers smiled. Guy's reply satisfied her, for she had heard that nearly every footballer is a victim to "stage-fright" in his initial game with a big club.

"Well, you'll soon get over the nerve trouble, Guy, once you get going," said Miss Summers. "And then, don't forget that I shall expect to see you scoring goals every other minute. Cheerio!"

And, without giving Guy time to answer, she proceeded on her way.

With a deep sigh, Guy Mannings passed into the ground on route for the dressing-rooms beneath the grand-stand. To deliberately play a bad game and let his side down was all the more revolting to him now that Miss Summers expected him to help Norwood Celtic to victory against Leaminster Rovers. Still, he mused, as he changed into his football rig some minutes later, he must save Phil from the hands of Mike Hunt if he could, and the only way he could do that was by letting the Celtic down. That he—

"Ready, boys?" asked Reg Parsons, the captain of Norwood Celtic, picking up a practice ball and glancing round the dressing-room.

There was a chorus of assent from the players, and as they followed Reg Parsons through the door leading out on to the playing pitch, Guy Mannings came out of his reverie and quickly brought up the rear.

"Here they are!"

"Come along, my bonnie boys!"

"Where's 'Hat-Trick' Guy?"

Norwood Celtic's ground was packed to its fullest capacity, and as the crowd caught sight of the home team's colours emerging from the aperture beneath the grand-stand, a terrific roar split the heavens. Then, to add to the hideous din, came a salvo from bells and rattles.

Drowned by the cataclysm of noise, the band out in the centre of the playing pitch ceased abruptly, and the musicians beat a hasty retreat.

With long, springy strides, Billy Brown made tracks for one of the goals, and no sooner did he place himself between the sticks than Charlie Bates sent in a long ground shot which beat him all ends up.

"That's the idea, boy!"

"Where did that one go to, Billy?"

The crowd voiced its appreciation of Bates' magnificent shot in no uncertain fashion. As yet the football "Fans" were not sure who was who of the two new members of the Celtic team, but whether the ball had been put into the goal by Bates, the new outside-left, or by "Hat-Trick" Guy did not matter overmuch to them, anyway. What they did care, however, was that it had been put there by one of the new recruits, and it was obvious that he could shoot with effect.

Meanwhile, Billy Brown had picked the ball out of the net, and there was a comical expression upon his handsome clean-cut features as he sent it out to where Guy Mannings, spick and span in his trim, black-and-white striped jersey and white knickers, was standing eager for a chance to have a pot at goal.

As the leather came to him Guy trapped it neatly, and pushing it forward a yard or so he let fly.

Boomph!

The ball whizzed through the air with the speed of an express train, and it made straight for the left-hand-top corner of the net. Billy Brown, with a "do or die" expression upon his face, made a strenuous leap sideways, but his outstretched fingers touched nothing more solid than air.

"Goal!"

"Ware the sharpshooters!"

The terrific yell announced to the bewildered Billy Brown that he had been beaten for the second time that afternoon, and the youngster felt like kicking himself for his sorry display. But although he had had his charge penetrated so easily on each occasion, Billy Brown quickly realised that no matter who the goalie, those two shots would have taken a bit of stopping.

"Here come the Rovers!"

"Hurrah!"

In spite of the fact that the Rovers' supporters were outnumbered by at least three to one, the roar which greeted the visitors as they trotted out on to the pitch was no half-hearted one. The vocal explosion and the terrific din of bells and rattles must have been heard for miles around, but no sooner did the referee and linesmen put in an appearance than the sound ceased with startling abruptness, and every pair of eyes was turned upon the centre of the playing pitch to witness the toss for choice of ends.

In answer to the referee's summons upon his whistle, the rival skippers trotted to the middle of the pitch. The trio gripped palms, and then up went the coin. John Smith, the visiting captain, guessed correctly, and he set Reg Parsons and his men to face what little wind was blowing across the ground. This necessitated a change of ends, but Mr. Jennings, the referee, did not waste any further time once the players were in position.

Phoop!

Guy Mannings touched the ball to Jeff Wilson on his left, and Jeff, in his turn, transferred the leather to Charlie Bates on the wing.

"Now then, the Celtic, let's have one for a start!"

"Set 'em alight, my bonnie boys!"

A frenzied yell went up on all sides as Charlie Bates, with the leather literally glued to his toe, dodged first one and then another of his opponents on his dash to the corner flag. But the fleet little winger did not like the look of the Rovers' giant of a right-back who suddenly took an interest in things, and came thundering across the turf to intercept him. With a quick glance to his right, Bates saw that Guy Mannings was well positioned to receive the ball, and, as the opposing back bore down upon him, he sent in his centre as straight as a die to where the young centre-forward was standing.

As Guy trapped the leather and set off for goal, the Rovers' centre-half-back dashed after him with a determined expression upon his rugged features. But Guy could move when he liked, and he had little difficulty in shaking off his pursuer. He was in the penalty area now, and it looked as though it was any odds on him scoring a goal when, in endeavouring to avoid collision with the Rovers' left-back who suddenly made his appearance, he tripped over a piece of turf and pitched headlong to the ground. As he fell the youngster's arm shot out straight before him and his fist came in contact with the ball, sending it hurtling goalwards.

"Hands!" roared the crowd, and the referee's whistle shrilled.

"Hard luck, 'Hat-Trick'!"

The visitors' goalkeeper grinned as the ball trickled into the net from Guy Mannings' fist. Bill Turner had not troubled to keep the leather out once the whistle had gone for hands, for he did not mind allowing the ball to pass him when it didn't mean a goal for the opposing side.

A trifle dazed, Guy staggered to his feet, and as he retreated down the field for the free kick against him he determined that next time there would be a different tale to tell.

With a hefty kick, Peter Fleming sent the ball hurtling into the home side's territory, where the Rovers' inside-right fastened on it like lightning and made a dash for goal. But Arthur Cummings was not destined to cover much ground on this occasion. He suddenly found himself confronted by Celtic's left-half who, with almost comparative ease, took the ball from his toe and sent it across to "Tiny" Phelps, the home side's outside-right.

To the accompaniment of a terrific yell from the Celtic's supporters, "Tiny" Phelps, with the leather under perfect control, made off down the touch-line with a speed worthy of a sprint champion. Reaching the corner flag without being tackled, he steadied himself for a centre. Then, describing an arc, the ball came whizzing into the Rovers' goal-mouth, where half a dozen players made a concerted leap to get their heads to it.

"In with it, 'Hat-trick'!"

"Now then, my bonnie boys!"

"Goal!"

Jumping higher than the rest, "Hat-trick" Guy managed to bring his touselled head into contact with the ball and to turn it into the net well out of the reach of Bill Turner's outstretched fingers.

As he trotted back to the centre of the pitch Guy smiled with satisfaction as he heard his name shouted on all sides. But the youngster did not forget to realise that he owed "Tiny" Phelps a great deal for that, his initial goal for Norwood Celtic.

From the moment of the resumption of the game Leamington Rovers attacked hotly, to get on level terms; but they might as well have been up against a brick wall as to endeavour to get through the rock-like defence put up by



The ball came whizzing into the Rovers' goalmouth where half a dozen players made a concerted leap to get their heads to it. Jumping higher than the rest, "Hat-Trick" Guy met the ball with his touselled head and directed it into the net, well out of the goalie's reach.

Billy Brown and the Celtic's two brilliant backs. Anyhow, the interval arrived with Norwood Celtic still holding on to their one-goal lead.

But after the few minutes' intermission, so determined was the Rovers' attack that the Celtic defence wavered, and Arthur Cummings, seizing a grand opportunity, equalised with a rasping ground-shot which beat Billy Brown all the way.

Heartened by their goal and the encouraging shouts from their supporters, the Rovers were quickly into the picture again. Straight from the kick-off Arthur Cummings secured possession, and with a delightful solo run he got the ball to within a dozen yards of the Celtic's goal-mouth. Without hesitation the inside-right sent in a scorcher, and Billy Brown did well to tip the flying leather over the bar.

From the corner-kick the game took a sudden change in favour of the home side. As the leather soared into the goal-mouth Billy Brown made a determined spring. His fists caught the ball a resounding thwack, and away it went up the field to where Guy Mannings was standing on the alert. Unmarked, and with only the Rovers' two backs between him and the goal, Guy was off like a flash, and so fast was he that he was through them before they realised what was happening.

Boomph!

As straight as a die Guy sent the ball for the left-hand side of the net, and although Bill Turner flung himself full length across his charge, he was beaten hopelessly. As a matter of fact, he was a second too late, and before he had made his herculean effort the leather was already in the net.

"Played, my lad!"

"We want the hat-trick now! What about it!"

And the hat-trick the enthusiastic "fans" had, for shortly afterwards Bill Turner found himself suddenly called upon to intercept a centre from Charlie Bates. The ball came flashing in towards the goal-mouth, and, at the same time as Turner leaped, Guy Mannings did the same.

Crash!

The two collided, and the next moment they found themselves on all fours at the back of the net, with the ball twirling dizzily beside them.

"Well played, Mannings!"

"Good old 'Hat-trick'!"

The thunderous cheer which rent the air as the referee pointed to the middle of the pitch was the loudest ever heard upon the Celtic's ground. Pandemonium seemed suddenly to have been let loose, and the barbaric sound did not cease right up to the final whistle, when the home side retired victorious by three goals to one. The hero of the hour was, of course, Guy Mannings, who had lived up to his nickname. But once in the dressing-room the youngster felt a sudden icy chill creep over him.

Instead of letting his side down, he had from the first whistle entered into the game heart and soul, and had been responsible for his side's victory. He had quite forgotten Mike Hunt's proposition and his brother's awkward predicament in his excitement, and now he knew that Phil was in grave danger of being expelled from Claremont.

Sick at heart, Guy finished changing, and then went along to his father's office,

(Continued on page 28.)

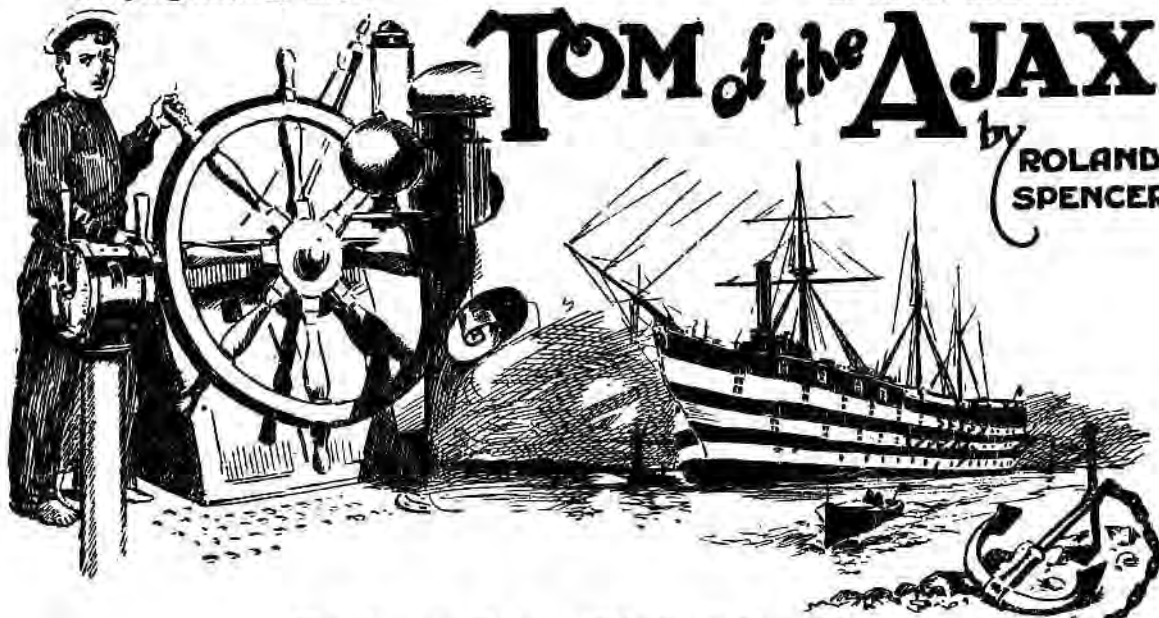
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Although driven to the wall by the
bullying Stoniky Burr—

—Tom Gale stands up for himself
as stoutly as ever.

TOM of the AJAX

by
ROLAND
SPENCER



The Greatest Training-Ship Story Ever Told.

Gale's Ajax.

THE usual first early morning sounds on the decks of the Ajax the hurrying feet of the bugler on duty—broke the stillness of the dark morning, and terminated with the blaring call to all that it was time to get up.

The boys tumbled out of their hammocks promptly, for the Ajax was a strict ship, and often an officer followed up the bugle-call pretty closely.

Dicky West was out of his hammock like a sackful of coals tumbling into a cellar. The red-headed young Hood jerked at Tom's hammock.

"Show a leg, Tom! Up you get, if you don't want to be tipped out!"

Tom rolled sideways, capsizing his hammock, and was soon dressing with the rest.

"How goes it this merry morn, Tom?" asked Dicky. "Not like you to stick asleep with the bugle bellowing in your ears. Been dreaming of those chaps who attacked you in Black Dell Lane yesterday, or what?"

"P'r'aps so," admitted Tom. "I wish I knew a bit more about that rum business. But I feel as fit as a fiddle, anyway, for my two days' holiday. Wish I was still on the Breadwinner!"

"Well, buck up, old chap, or you'll be last dressed. Nice thing for a chief P.O., that!"

As the training-ship boys dressed they threw off their sleepiness. The chatter became louder, until the orlop deck sounded like a monkey-house. Boys began to lark about as they waited for chums to get ready to go up to the upper deck to the wash-house.

Before long, over two hundred bright and shining faces were waiting impatiently at the mess-tables on the lower deck for the Hot Dick and toke—porridge and bread in training-ship slang—to be served out.

Breakfast over, Tom Gale, Dicky West, and a few other mowers of the Hoods, ran off to prepare for their

attendance in the class-room of the navigation class. Mr. Cosine was the officer-instructor of navigation, and the navigation class was the only school work which Tom and his class-mates attended. Having passed successfully through the standards, and having chosen the Mercantile Marine as a career, they were being versed in the use of ships' instruments, logarithms, the heavenly bodies, and the hundred-and-one other things necessary in the training of a merchant ship's mate.

Though Tom was keen on the work, the officer-instructors were well aware that there was a bit of reckless devilry in the youngster. No one was more aware of this than Mr. Cosine. Though Tom never stooped to anything underhand in the way of japes, he seldom lost an opportunity of raising a laugh in class.

"Remember all that stuff about Mercator's charts!" asked Dicky, as the two chums walked along the corridor towards the class-room. "Old Cosine will be hot

on it to-day. He's going to fire questions at us, and we've got to answer 'em, you'll remember."

"Gee-whiz—yes!" exclaimed Tom. "I'd forgotten that. What with falling out of that hole in the orlop deck when we were rammed, and having a nice, comfy night on a gas-buoy—well, I've not been able to think of things like charts!"

The chums clattered into the class-room, where a chattering babel of voices heralded the fact that work was due to begin. Tom and Dicky took their seats, and entered with gusto into the paper-pellet battle that spread to their corner on their arrival. Stoniky Burr, who was also a member of the class, was on "snags" duty at the door—that is, he was keeping cave.

Mr. Cosine was late, and Tom, always ready for a lark, left his seat, and walked over to the blackboard that was let into the bulkhead opposite the boys' desks.

"Chaps," he began, bowing to the class, "the lightning artist will now portray the noble figurehead of our ship—Ajax, the warrior."

With that, young Gale, who was clever with the pencil, chalked a very clever likeness of Ajax, with javelin upraised. The youngster, encouraged by the yells of delight from his class-mates, dashed a huge pipe between the thick lips of the figure, substituted a rakish-looking, though rather battered "topper" for the helmet, and finally added a few straight lines radiating from the noble Grecian nose of the hero. Altogether, it looked as though Ajax had not yet recovered from the effects of a night ashore. The nose Tom had given him was obviously a fiery red, apparently the effects of rather more drink than was good for the ancient Greek.

Under this work of art Tom scrawled:

"AJAX ON THE STREE!"

The boys rolled in their seats, yelling with delight. But suddenly the class-room was plunged into silence by Stoniky Burr at the doorway. The bully of the Ajax hissed out "Snags!" and scuttled to his seat, where he bowed his head over his exercise-book like the rest.

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE!

TOM GALE, a sturdily-built youth and chief petty officer of the starboard watch aboard the famous old training-ship Ajax, which is moored near the southern bank of the River Thames a quarter of a mile down the river from Fleetville, falls foul of

STONIKY BURR, C.P.O. of the port watch, a bully of the first water.

DICKY WEST is a cheerful ginger-headed youth and a staunch chum of Gale's. Trouble arises when Tom Gale is detailed, together with Stoniky Burr, as a hare in a cross-country hare-and-hounds that is to take place. Hot words and a fight follow, and Burr is thrashed and left. It is then that a mysterious, sinister man in green spectacles approaches Burr. He gives his name as KALCHE, and he enlists the aid of Burr in a plot against Tom Gale, without, however, giving any reason for this.

Later, when on the yardarm, sixty feet above the water, Burr tries to force Tom off, but he himself is precipitated into the water and is rescued by Tom, although the latter realises that Burr's attempt was deliberate.

Tom is pushing the whole thing out in his hammock at night, when he is startled by a rending crash, and he feels the Ajax quiver from stem to stern. The next moment he utters a startled cry as a jagged hole appears in the ship's side, torn like paper by the stem of a huge red-rusty steamer which crashes into the Ajax. In the ensuing melee a pair of hands grip at Tom's throat, and he recognises the face of Burr. Before Tom can recover he is sent hurtling off the ship into the water. He escapes, however, and is returning to the ship when he is waylaid by Kalche. His cries for help are answered, and a crowd of the Ajax boys rush to the rescue.

Tom then resolves to keep his eyes wide open for any further trouble from Kalche.

(Now read on.)

Tom seized the duster, but, to his horror and surprise, Mr. Cosine stepped into the room before he could apply the cloth to the board. Burr must have waited till the master was close to the doorway before giving his warning. Tom was caught red-handed!

The Challenge!

MR. COSINE gazed at the black-board as though he had seen a ghost. Then he turned a frigid stare on Tom.

"Gale!" rasped the tall, severe-looking navigation master, his keen, steely eyes flashing from the youngster to the board. "Gale, I needn't ask if this work of genius is yours. You may think it extremely funny, but to my mind it is a joke that is in the worst of taste. That noble figurehead of the bows of this ship, scarred with the shot of Trafalgar as it is, is something of which you should be proud. You evidently regard it simply as a butt for low jokes. You will write out for me five hundred times, 'Ajax defended the ships.' Bring the lines to me to-morrow. Now erase every trace of your—er—art, and get back to your place!"

Tom rubbed away lustily at the black-board, and returned to his seat by Dicky West. There was a low chuckle from Burr. He and his chum Hemming were grinning hard.

The questions regarding charts on Mercator's projections were then fired at the class. The boys did well, and Mr.

Cosine became almost genial. He expanded like a flower in spring as he talked of hemispheres, true and magnetic charts, the meaning of the numbers dotted over the faces of the charts. He touched on the "station painter," and a description of this simple instrument for finding the ship's position from three visible points of land in coastwise navigation. When at last he came to an end he was almost purring.

Once free of the class-room, Tom laid a heavy hand on Stoniky Burr's shoulder as the big, loose-limbed fellow tried to slip away to the orlop deck ahead of the rest.

Tom swung the bully round to face him.

"What's the game, Stoniky?" cried Tom. "What was the idea—eh?—waiting till Mr. Cosine was close before saying 'snags'? It was to land me in for it, of course. You're no better than a peach, you rotter!"

"I didn't see him!" snarled Burr. "I—I was watching your drawing."

"Now you're coal-bunking!" snapped Tom. "A chap on snags duty can't see and hear if an officer enters the corridor a long way down. If you'd not been a cad, you'd have warned me in time to rub out that drawing. As it is, you've landed me for lines, and I've a thumping good mind to have you out for it. But you're hardly worth it, Stoniky."

"Have me out if you like!" snarled Burr. "I'm not afraid of you, Gale! It's a bodge-up saying I knew Cosine was coming. You're saying it to turn the other chaps against me. You're always doing that!"

"Oh, rot!" cut in Dicky West. "Think

the chaps don't know well enough that you knew old Cosine was near? Still, it's the sort of thing we expect from you. Even the chaps in your own division know the rotter you are!"

"They don't say so, anyway!" cried Burr, clenching his fists, and glancing with angry eyes at the group of Blakes that stood near by. They were all smaller boys, and they dropped their eyes. Burr glared triumphantly at Dick and Tom.

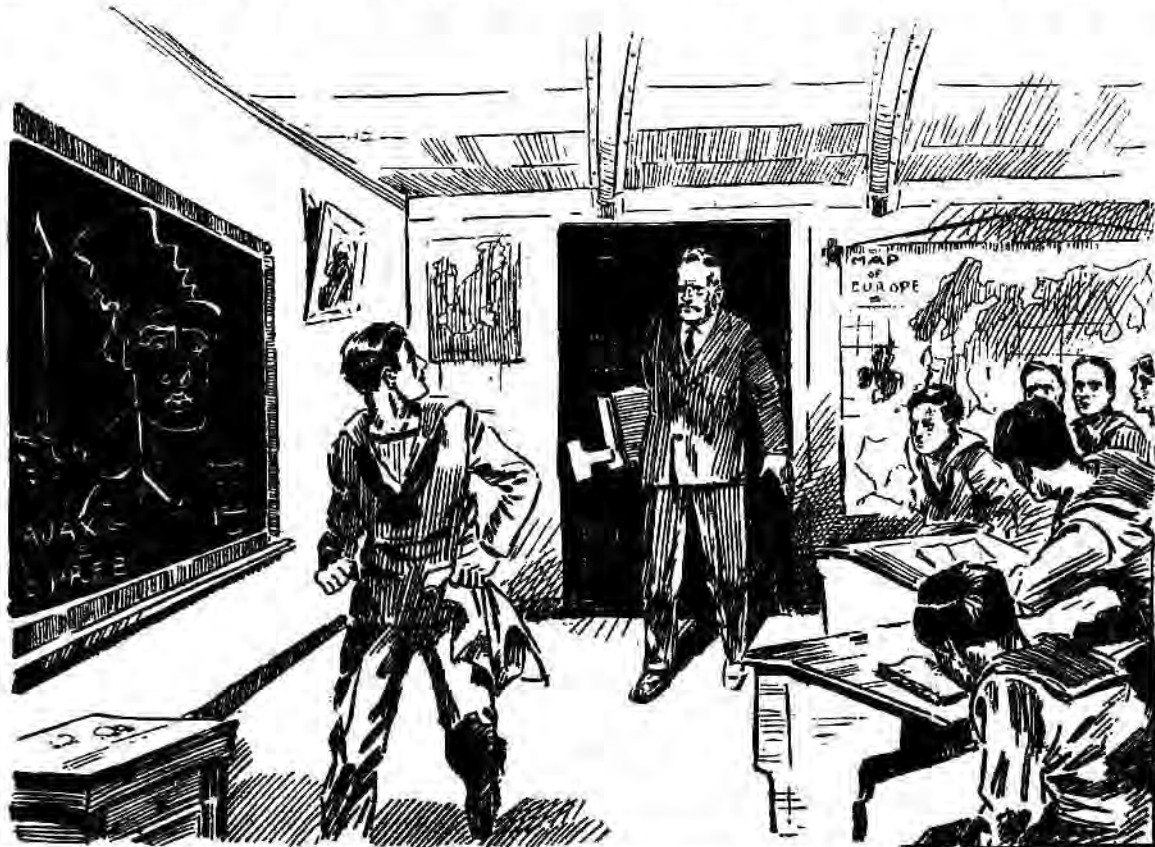
"No, they don't say so!" agreed Tom, with a dry laugh. "More shame to them for thinking what they won't say out loud!"

Tom swung on his heel, and he and Dicky strode off, leaving the Blakes round their bullying leader. But boys of other divisions still carried on with the good work of slating Burr.

After dinner, the mowers, who had finished with the ordinary school work of the ship, and were attending either the navigation or the advanced Navy class, had training of a practical kind to carry out. Sometimes this was rope-work, gun-practice with the guns on the main-deck, or sail-making.

But this afternoon, the fire-buckets of the ship having become worn and dingy, they were set to work at repainting them. The officer-instructor of practical seamanship, who mixed the paint, explained the proportions of white lead, pigment, driers, and linseed oil as he worked. Then the youngsters got busy with the brushes.

"Jingo, hanged if this don't remind me of old Ajax's nose—the one you drew on the board this morning!" chuckled Dicky



"Snags!" cried Stoniky Burr. The warning cry came too late, however, for before Tom Gale could apply the cloth to the board, Mr. Cosine stepped into the room. Tom was caught red-handed!

West, as he applied his bright red paint carefully.

A laugh went round, though Stoniky Burr, a member of the group in which Tom and Dicky were working, simply scowled. But suddenly a queer gleam came into his eyes, and he glanced furtively round to see if the instructor were out of earshot. An idea had flashed into Burr's brain.

"You're pretty smart at japing," he sneered suddenly, turning to Tom. "I'll dare you to slip over the fore-castle one night and paint the old figurehead's nose red—not just do it on the board! Suppose you'd funk a thing like that?"

"Well, you'd better go on supposing," replied Tom. "Think I'm going to carry out a jape just because you dare me to do it, Burr?"

"What a caper it would be!" chuckled another fellow of the group. "Why doesn't Stoniky do it himself?"

Burr glanced across at Hemming. His crony looked up.

"Gale never minds a jape he can't get landed too heavily over," grinned Hemming nastily. "But he funks anything really worth while!"

"Hemming's right!" put in Burr unpleasantly. "Gale carries through his reputation for daring japes by swank. He'd funk doing a thing like painting the nose of the figurehead. 'Sides, he's too much of a wet to be able to carry through the joke properly!"

Tom said nothing. It didn't seem worth while. But a tall boy near the outskirts of the group chipped in:

"I believe Gale really is funking it! Going to do it, Tom?"

Tom flushed.

"Why on earth should I?" he exclaimed, looking up from his pail. "I don't funk it, of course, but I'm hanged if I'm going to do a thing just because I'm dared to do it, anyway, not by a navy-neck like Burr!"

The bully of the Ajax scowled. But he brightened up as another fellow chimed in:

"I really believe Tom does funk it! Own up, Tom! You're windy, aren't you?"

"I'll punch your scumyum knob, shipmate, if you say that again! Shut up, and stop skulking!" cried Tom.

But he coloured as glances were thrown in his direction. Those glances, and the half-suppressed chuckles, told him well enough what his shipmates were really thinking.

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In the Storm!

JUST after dark that night the figure of a boy stole forward, under the shadow of the life-net beneath the yards of the foremast, past the cat-heads of the ship, from which hung the anchors used for demonstration purposes, and right up into the eyes of the Ajax.

A coil of stout rope hung on a belaying-pin here in the foremost point of the vessel. Tom Gale—for it was he—unhooked the coil, and softly carried it further aft, along the starboard side. He belayed the rope to the life-rail on the rigging at that part, and threw the coil into the blackness below, where the water gurgled round the training-ship.

"There," he breathed, "that'll fall alongside the port near my hammock. I'll show 'em if I'm afraid to paint old Ajax's nose red! I can shin up this rope and do the trick to-night. It'll mean being up here first thing in the morning to shove the rope back in the eyes, where it belongs, but I can easily do that."

He turned to make his way softly back. Then he paused as his eyes surveyed the sky doubtfully.

"Whew! It looks as if it's going to be a dirty night, though. Still, I'll chance that. What a lark it'll be! Crumbs, the ship'll be in an uproar!"

Chuckling at the thought of the sensation the jape would cause, Tom descended to the ladder-way from the deck. As he left the upper air a sighing gust of wind whisked round the companion and followed him down the ladder-way.

"Gee, it's going to blow some to-night!" he muttered. "There'll be some 'jowlers' slapping against the sides at the orlop deck level, so if I do make a noise, it won't be heard."

With that, Tom joined Dicky, who was waiting for his chum on the main deck. They had a job on hand. Tom was skipper of the football team that was to play for the Starboard Watch against the Port, and the eleven still had some vacant places to fill.

But it was soon time to turn in. Tom undressed with the rest, but he did not let himself fall asleep. He had not even mentioned his daring jape to Dicky, who was soon snoring in his hammock as though nothing short of a thunderbolt and a couple of earthquakes would wake him.

Tom waited till all was quiet on the orlop deck, save for snores and the sounds of the buffeting gusts of wind from outside, and the slam-slam of the lumpy seas, or "jowlers," as they dashed against the steel sides of the ship.

The Ajax was, in outer shape, exactly like the wooden warship of old whose name she bore. Indeed, the training-ship had been started on that old vessel, which had sailed in Nelson's fleet in its day. But as the old ship became too foul for a training-ship, a new vessel was built of steel and fitted for training-ship requirements. The original figurehead of the old Ajax had been built into the stem-head of the new ship. This mighty carved figure of teak, fifteen feet from top to bottom, now hung out over the waters of the historic Thames, as if thinking of bygone days, when the water creamed and hissed under it as the stout old heart of oak was sailed into the battles that made Britain mightier than ever.

But Tom did not think of all this as he squirmed out of the port near his hammock late that night, feeling the wind wet with spray on his face, the squalls filling his lungs till he gasped with the pressure.

The daring lad gripped the rope that swayed about near the small square

imitation gun-port, then dragged himself out into the windy blackness of the night.

Up, up the shaking rope went the youngster, hand over hand, occasionally forced to stop as a fresh squall crushed him against the deathly-cold, painted steel plates of the ship. Distant thunder was rumbling continuously, and the waves lashed mournfully against the bluff bows of the ship, far below him.

A streak of lightning flashed out suddenly, lighting up the wild scene of the river in the storm. The white-topped, bulky waves were savage and snarling, running with the tide as they were. After the flash of brilliant lightning the night seemed blacker than ever, and the lash of the waves and the moan of the wind more eerie than before. Still Tom swarmed upwards, laughing recklessly, his nightshirt and trousers wet through with the flung spray.

"Once let me get alongside old Ajax and I'll soon have the job done!" he chuckled. "I'll make the old buffer pay for those lines!"

At last he gripped the rounded, smooth rail of the bulwark of the fore-castle deck. There he rested, peering cautiously over to make sure that the officer of the watch was nowhere near. The ship's searchlight was sweeping up and down the shore-line. The beams could not light up the figurehead, at any rate on the riverward side, so once in position with his paint-brush he could work unseen by anyone on the deck of the ship.

Softly and slowly Tom slipped forward, taking cover in the flashes of lightning, more frequent now. He found the paint-brush and small pot of red paint where he had concealed it. Taking the handle of the pot in his teeth, Tom slithered over the side of the ship near the butts, or stops for the butt of the bowsprit.

He gripped a bobstay, and worked his way hand over hand along the stout steel rope till he was in a position from which he could begin operations with the paint-brush.

Another streak of blinding lightning from directly overhead lit up the strange scene, and by its light Tom was able to shift his perilous position slightly—to get his right foot in the mouth of the towering figurehead, resting his weight on the thick lower lip. In that flash he saw the great helmeted head, nearly five feet from helmet-tip to chin, the big blind eyes staring out across the river, the great, straight-bridged nose, almost a foot in length, all ready, simply begging to be painted red.

In an instant darkness closed in on him again, and the thunder crashed out. Tom chuckled again as he got his paint-brush ready, forced his toe further into the mouth of the figure-head, and gripped harder on the bob-stay with his left knee. It was a perilous position, for foothold was insecure, and Tom had to have his hands free for painting.

The squalls were buffeting him savagely, and jerking at his body as if anxious to wrest him from his precarious position and dash him down into the depths below, where he would most assuredly be forced under the Ajax's bluff bows by the racing ebb tide.

The thought made Tom shiver slightly, but he gripped the harder with the crook of his knee and waited for the next streak of lightning. It came, and by its light Tom meant to make a dab at the nose of the figurehead, thus finding the right place from which he could work by the feel of the shape of the nose.

The streak came, but Tom suddenly stiffened. Something seemed to crack in his brain, and the paint-brush was



Tom Gale stared down in horror at the white upturned face of the officer of the watch. Then, at a sudden sound from behind, he turned swiftly round, to see three figures that fought and swayed in the broken moonlight.

arrested in its journey towards the wooden nose of the figure. In the blackness that followed Tom felt himself in another generation. He could hear the wash of the water under the bows, imagined the creaking of straining spars, the rumbling of bellying canvas, and the twang of taut bowlines.

He fancied he could feel the lift of a great ship under wind pressure. He imagined this noble carved figure—great lumps of teak spliced together as it was—at the head of the line-of-battle ships, right in the van of the fleet.

Mr. Cosine had told them the story—the enclosing of the ships of the enemy, Nelson's immortal signal, the opening of fire, with the roar of cannon and the hiss of ball and grape-shot. The Ajax was one of the ships to the fore to lead the attack! Then the further signal, "Engage the enemy more closely!"

The Ajax, with the tremendous pressure of wind in her mighty expanse of canvas, was steered towards the tall ships of the enemy. The blind eyes of the big carven image were turned unflinchingly towards the peril—right into the teeth of the hissing grape and chain shot and the shattering cannon-ball.

Fearlessly, steered by fearless men, the great oaken fabric crashed into close fighting, led by this same carven image, all scarred and torn already by the enemy guns. So the ship was locked in the deadly conflict.

Tom felt sick. Had he, Tom Gale, really thought of painting the nose of this glorious mass of spliced teak a bright red, just to raise howls of laughter from unthinking minds, and a general rumpus on the ship—just for a joke? The lad began to climb back along the

bobstay, feeling a trifle cowed and very much ashamed of himself.

"What a cad I've been!" he gritted through his teeth. "I could kick myself to think I meant to do it. The chaps can think me all the cowards in the world, but I'll not touch that old figurehead except to honour it! Anyway, I've learnt something to-night the other chaps 'll never experience—old Ajax and I are pale!"

The lad gained the fore-castle deck, hid the paint-pot, scouted down the bulwarks to where the rope leading down to the orlop deck ports still swung, and snaked down into the blackness and slipped overside. He slid down the rope and was soon beside his hammock. He listened intently. There was no sound save the heavy breathing of his shipmates, and the now gentler slapping of the waves against the ship's side.

The lightning had stopped. The short blow was dying down. It almost seemed that the gods were calming down now that the attempted outrage had not been committed. And Tom Gale turned into his hammock in his wet nightshirt.

What had made Tom so suddenly alter his mind about the jape? What had been the cause of light streaming in on his careless mind? It was what he saw in that last glaring streak of lightning—a jagged and zig-zag scar across the huge wooden face of the figurehead, the place where a round of chain-shot had hit it 'way back in Nelson's day, at the great naval action of Trafalgar!

Tom went to sleep a sadder but a wiser boy. He woke in the morning feeling little refreshed by his broken night's sleep. He was first above, intending to haul in the rope that he had used to shin up the night before, and

then to go to the wash-house to plunge his head under the cold water and try to cool his throbbing brow.

The decks seemed deserted. At the fore rigging Tom climbed up on the rail to see the figurehead again before securing the rope—to bid the wooden statue a mute good morning, and to thank his stars that he had at the last moment drawn back from carrying out his rather low-down jape.

He raised himself to his full height on the rail—only to reel back with a swift cry of sheer amazement.

The nose of the figurehead was gleaming in the weak morning sunlight a bright, glaring red!

Downfall!

"CRUMBS!"

Tom felt like rubbing his eyes. He leaned over the bulwarks again, looking along the black curve of the ship's side towards the great wooden figurehead that reared itself majestically beneath the raked bowsprit. His lips were wide with mute amazement.

There it was, gleaming and brilliant—a nose as fiery-red as any pillar-box. Tom could scarcely believe his senses. Had he dreamed that he had refrained at the last moment? Had he actually carried his scheme through, after all?

"Am I going balmy—or what is it?" muttered Tom slowly. "Hang it, I know I didn't do it! But—"

He climbed down from the bulwark and went forward to get a closer view.

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But there was no doubt about it; the nose of Ajax was the colour of a ripe tomato.

Tom whistled softly.

"Great elephants! I didn't do it, but someone jolly well has! Who on earth—"

"What's the matter, Gale?"

Tom swung round. An officer had come along the deck behind him. It was Mr. Cosine.

"I—I was just looking," stammered Tom, "at—at—"

Mr. Cosine's steely-grey eyes fixed the youngster with a penetrating gaze. It was evident that his suspicions were aroused, and Tom longed for the deck to open and drop him to the safety of the main deck. He knew that there was going to be a row, and by bad luck it seemed that he would be playing a star part in it.

Mr. Cosine walked to the bulwark and leaned over, looking forward. Tom watched his face with trepidation. He saw Mr. Cosine's eyes search for a moment along the length of the ship; and then suddenly the master's lower jaw seemed to drop from its socket. His eyes bulged. His face seemed to turn a queer watery green. Altogether, Mr. Cosine rendered a very passable imitation of a stranded codfish.

Tom stopped back. But the next moment the master's eyes were on him. Tom no longer bulged—they seemed to bore holes through Tom, sharp as gimlets.

For a minute the master struggled to express his feelings. Then he rasped out:

"So you were not content with your performance on the blackboard yesterday, Gale! Your artistic abilities required a wider scope!"

Tom shuffled awkwardly. He was innocent, but he knew that he would have difficulty in persuading the angry navigation master of that fact. There was no doubt about it, he was well in the soup!

"No, sir, I didn't do that!" he managed at last.

The gimlet-eyes surveyed Tom doubtfully. Mr. Cosine, though hard and severe, was not a bad sort at heart, and he did not believe that Tom would lie to him. But then his eyes suddenly contracted. His glance had fallen to Tom's hands, and something there had leapt out to his sharp eyes instantly. His lips tightened.

"Gale, let me look at that hand!"

Tom glanced down at his right hand, and a startled look leapt into the youngster's eyes. Slowly he raised it. There in the nails was a lingering trace of scarlet which had not been washed out—mute evidence against him.

"Paint—red paint! What have you to say?" Mr. Cosine's eyes were hard.

"Gale, you have been lying to me!"

Tom shook his head, but his eyes dropped.

"I—I didn't paint the figurehead, sir!" he repeated doggedly. "This paint—we were painting the fire-buckets yesterday—"

He broke off, stammering. He knew that he had not got paint on his hands then; it must have been last night.

"Did you get that paint on your hands when painting the fire-buckets?"

Tom did not reply. His chin was set doggedly. Mr. Cosine was frowning heavily; he could only believe now, though half against his will, that Tom had been lying to him.

"You have nothing to say, Gale? Really, I think you had better have

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owned up in the first place." He turned to the bulwarks again, and his eyes fell on the rope below. "That rope—did you put that rope there?"

"Yes, sir," answered Tom quietly. He might as well admit what he could not deny. "But all the same I didn't paint the figurehead—on my honour!"

There was contempt in the master's face as he turned again to Tom. Then he swung on his heel.

"I will leave this matter to Mr. Landfar, who, no doubt, will carry it to the commander," he said quietly.

Tom watched the tall, spare figure disappear down the ladder-way into the main deck. His cheeks were flaming. He had given his word of honour, and had still been disbelieved. The commander would be told that he had done this low-down act—Anything might happen now.

Then hope revived in him. Someone had done it; and, unless the fellow was an utter outsider, he could not stand by and allow an innocent party to suffer. The chap would own up—for certain he would own up!

But there was a shadow still in the youngster's eyes as he turned away. Then he came to a sudden standstill. A burly figure had appeared from the door of the wash-house, an unpleasant grin on his face. Tom realised in a moment that Burr, the bully of the Ajax, had been listening to all that had passed between himself and Mr. Cosine.

"So you're going to get it in the neck for your little jape!" chuckled Burr. "Serve you jolly well right!"

Tom's eyes flashed.

"Suppose you're bucked, anyway!" he said hotly. "As a matter of fact, I didn't do it, I tell you. It was a rotten trick to do, and I chucked the whole idea, although I got out to do it, I admit. Someone else—"

He broke off. He had noticed a queer look in Burr's eyes. Tom's teeth came together with a click. It had come over him in a flash. Was this the fellow who had painted the figurehead?

"Someone else did it," Tom repeated slowly, his eyes fixed on Burr's. "Suppose you couldn't name him for me?"

"What do you mean?" cried Burr angrily. "Me? What should I know about it? You did it yourself, and you know it; and now you're trying to shift the blame on me!" He looked round quickly. "Suppose you hope there's an officer about to hear you! Well, there isn't, and you'll have to pay for your own jape! It's no good trying to shift the blame to me; you funk!"

"Funk—eh?" Tom's voice was quite cool, but there was a look in his eyes that Burr did not quite like. He stepped back in alarm. "That's a word I don't like, Stoniky Burr, and I'm hanged if I don't make you eat it!"

They were alone there, out of sight behind the wash-house, and Tom was in no mood to stand much from Stoniky Burr. Though Burr was bigger than Tom, he secretly feared the young chief petty officer of the Hood division ever since his licking by the Fleet during the last paper-chase. But there was no avoiding a scrap now, and Burr put up his hands.

It was a brief scrap, but what there was of it was pretty hot. It was interrupted by the bugle for breakfast, but by that time Burr had a black eye and a nose that was nearly as scarlet as that of the figurehead of the training-ship. Tom, too, had honourable wounds to show, but he had given far more than he had received.

"I think that'll do for the present, Stoniky!" he observed calmly, turning away for a quick wash before answering the bugle's summons. "Just a little reminder that your manners need improving!"

Tom did not enjoy his breakfast. If, as he firmly believed, Burr was the one who had painted the nose of Ajax, he could not hope for a confession from that quarter.

Things looked black for the Hood youngster. By this time the whole training-ship was buzzing with the news, and a murmur of continual chuckling buzzed throughout the mess-deck. Tom was the object of most eyes. It was evident that the youngsters of the training-ship, like Mr. Cosine, believed him to be the midnight painter.

"I tell you I know nothing about it, Dicky!" Tom confided to his chum. "I climbed out, and then changed my mind. It wasn't that I funked the consequences, as you know well enough, but it suddenly struck me what a rotten thing it was to do to that fine old figurehead. Why, that Ajax has fought with Nelson! I wouldn't touch it for anything—not now!"

Dicky nodded.

"I believe you, of course, old man. But I'm afraid you'll have a job to persuade the commander."

"You're right, Dicky," said Tom gloomily. "Hallo! What do you want?"

His last words were addressed to an excited youngster of the Raleigh division who had come running up.

"The commander wants you in his quarters!" puffed the other breathlessly. "You're in for it hot, Gale!" he added by way of encouragement.

Without a word Tom strode off. Dicky West watched the retreating figure with a worried look in his usually laughing eyes.

The quarter of an hour that followed seemed interminable to Dicky West. He wandered aimlessly round the orlop deck, waiting. Then at last a quick exclamation escaped him as he saw Tom's figure appear at the foot of the ladder-way.

Dicky raced towards him. His heart fell at the sight of his chum's face—a face strangely white and lined. Tom's eyes were almost tragic.

"What's happened?" muttered Dicky in a low voice.

Tom glanced down at his arm, where his chief petty officer's badge had been but twenty minutes ago. There was a gasp from Dicky when he saw that that badge was no longer there.

"You—you—" he stammered.

Tom nodded, the ghost of a tragic smile twisting one corner of his lips.

"Disrated," he said simply.

A Fight in the Dark!

IT was a bad blow for the Hood division when they heard the news. Tom had been a popular officer, and only a few of the meaner spirits among them took advantage of the youngster's downfall. But the Blakes, led by Stoniky Burr, did not let Tom forget his troubles that day.

Dicky West had been sent for, and returned with the news that he had been promoted to the rank of chief P.O. of the division in Tom's place, whilst a

youngster named Brown—a rather quiet, thoughtful fellow, who seemed to be in a perpetual day-dream, and in consequence had been nick-named Jemima—was made petty officer in Dicky's stead.

"The question is, since you say you didn't do it, who did do it?" said Dicky to Tom, as they turned in that night. "Some low-down swab, anyway, not owning up."

"I believe Burr's the chap," said Tom. "Though I must say I hadn't thought before that he would have had the pluck. He probably thought he would be able to land me with it somehow; if necessary, I dare say he would have sneaked about what I'd said last night about doing it. For some reason, Stoniky's got a down on me. Shouldn't wonder if he even hopes to make things too hot to hold me on board the ship—to get me to make a bolt for it."

"Well, if it is Burr, we'll land him with it sooner or later," muttered Dicky West fiercely. "Tom, I hate being chief P.O. like this, when you've no right to have been disrated. But it can't be helped, and I'll do all I can, of course, to find out who the chap is who actually did do the painting of old Ajax's nose. We'll find him sooner or later—Burr, or whoever it is."

Tom dropped at last into a troubled sleep. Everything seemed to have gone wrong during the last few days—it was as though some malignant fate was dogging his footsteps. His dreams were haunted by the face of Burr.

And then suddenly Tom found himself awake and alert. What was it that had broken in upon his restless sleep? Some sound—he seemed to be conscious of soft footsteps, stealing with cat-like stealth past the hammocks of the sleeping boys.

Without making a sound himself he turned his head. Bright moonlight was streaming in through the windows fitted into the imitation gun-ports. And suddenly a dark figure moved across one of those bright shafts of light on the port side of the deck. Tom drew his breath sharply. It was the figure of his dreams—the figure of Stoniky Burr.

He could not mistake that clumsy, heavily-built frame. Already it had been swallowed up again in the black shadows, but a moment later the silent figure had passed, a black shape, through another stream of moonlight. Where was Burr going? Tom raised himself softly on to one elbow, peering through the darkness, his ears straining for every faint whisper of sound.

"What the dickens—" he muttered to himself.

It might be, of course, that Burr was simply off to play some practical joke on someone. It was a favourite trick of his to let a sleeper's hammock down, in spite of the strict orders against this dangerous so-called joke. But something in Stoniky's manner told Tom that Burr was on more serious business to-night.

He heard the ghostly footfalls that still came to his ears from the darkness turn towards the ladderway leading up into the lower deck. Tom frowned, puzzled. But the next instant he was slipping softly from his hammock, a sudden idea burning in his mind.

What if Burr had remembered some clue that might lead to the discovery of his guilt—if it was he who was guilty—in connection with the painted figure-head? Even now, perhaps, he was on his way to the upper deck to destroy some clue, to keep the blame fixed on Tom for good.

It was the work of an instant for Tom to slip to the foot of the ladderway and up into the lower-deck in silent pursuit. He followed Burr up the second ladderway into the main deck—it was obvious

that the bully of the Ajax was on his way to the upper deck.

Tom was breathing quickly, excitedly. He had lost sight of Burr now in the all-enveloping darkness, but without waiting, the Hood youngster slipped up on to the upper deck. The cold night air fanned his face as he stood looking round in the bright moonlight.

All was very still. He could hear every gurgling ripple that chuckled beneath the training-ship, could make out the distant engine-throb of a tug whose starboard light could be seen drifting down-river in the darkness. Then suddenly his attention was riveted. It seemed to Tom that he had seen a shadow move in the gloom at the break of the poop.

Keeping in the shadow of the high port bulwark, the youngster started to make his way swiftly aft. He had already glanced round to make sure that there was no sign of the officer of the watch. His bare feet made no sound on the smooth deck-boards, and then suddenly a startled cry broke from him as he felt his feet caught under him.

He sprawled headlong, to crash heavily on to a dark form that was lying in the shadow, ominous and still. For an instant Tom's heart seemed to miss a beat.

Dim in the gloom, as he struggled up, he made out the white face, with its closed eyes, of the officer of the watch.

The officer was lying in a huddled heap, terribly still. Something seemed to grip Tom's nerves with icy fingers as he stared down in horror at that white, upturned face. He had forgotten Burr. And then an abrupt sound behind him made him swing round swiftly.

His lips opened in dumb, startled amazement. For three figures had suddenly leapt to life in the black shadows at the break of the poop—three figures that fought and swayed in the broken moonlight.

Tom saw a fist flash through the air, heard the sickening jolt as it crashed home. One of the three staggered and almost fell as the blow struck. Then the fight was over as soon as it had begun, and two of those dark figures turned in panic to race away.

But the other man was after them with swift, silent strides. It was like a shadow-show of phantoms. The two turned at bay against the starboard bulwark, the third man standing there in the moonlight, cornering them. Tom saw the black outline of his head—a fine head, with its strong jaw and straight nose—heard the sudden laugh of sheer dare-devil delight that broke from that dark figure, a laugh that somehow thrilled Tom through and through.

What could it all mean? It was like the weird imaginings of a dream. And then Tom saw something that sent him racing over the deck towards the shadowy three, to the help of the man who, single-handed, had cornered two. For what he had seen decided in a flash for Tom which side he meant to take.

In the moonlight, gleaming like cat's eyes from the dimly white face of the man crouching back against the bulwark, had come flashing out to him two glistening circles of green.

It was the man with green spectacles!

(There will be another grand long instalment of this powerful serial next week, chums. You will be held spell-bound by the fearless "Avenger" Hanne, Gules man acquaintance, who is on the track of the man with the green spectacles. A word about next week's GEM—now make a point of ordering it well in advance, otherwise you may be disappointed.)

"MY READERS' OWN CORNER."

(Continued from page 16.)

SO IT SEEMED!

The telephone operators had commandeered the line, and were busily engaged in the all-absorbing topic—dress. Meantime, the irate subscriber was unable to get a word in edgeways. "Hallo, hallo, hallo! Are you there?" he shouted. "Are you there? What! Who is that speaking?" Across the wire came a female voice: "What line do you think you're on?" "What line!" said the irate one. "What line! Why, from all accounts, it's a clothes-line!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. McWhirter, Bank Buildings, Partick Cross, Glasgow.

OBVIOUS!

A traveller had occasion to spend the night in a rural inn. The landlord, on showing him his bed, remarked that it was the same bed that the Duke of Wellington had once slept in. The traveller found the bed very hard, and spent a restless night. Next morning he said to the landlord: "Did you say that the Duke of Wellington slept in that bed?" "Yes, sir," answered the landlord. "Well," said the traveller, "no wonder he was called the 'Iron Duke'!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Rogers, Penshurst, Wick Road, Brislington, Bristol.

PROFESSIONAL INTEREST!

The class listened with breathless interest to the teacher's account of her encounter with a tramp. With a dramatic gesture she reached the climax of her story, and then concluded by saying: "And then I fainted!" Little Bobbie, a boxing enthusiast, gazed with awe and admiration at his teacher, and was the first to break the silence. "With yer left, or with yer right, miss?" he asked.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to H. Palmer, 93, Savage Gardens, New Beckton, London, E. 6.

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"HAT-TRICK GUY!"

(Continued from page 21.)

intending to inform him of his debt to Mike Hunt.

"Just the chap I want to see," said John Mannings, grasping his son's hand. "You were splendid, my boy, and here's a present for you, to show my appreciation of what you've done for the club to-day! Don't spend it recklessly, though!"

John Mannings handed Guy a slip of paper which the boy recognised instantly to be a cheque. And it was for five pounds—the exact sum owing to the rascally bookmaker, Mike Hunt!

Muttering his thanks, Guy almost ran from the room and out of the club-house. But he did not wind his footsteps towards his home. Instead, he set off for the railway station, and there he had little difficulty in getting the booking clerk, who he knew fairly well, to change the cheque. Then, with the five one-pound notes securely stowed away in his breast-pocket and a railway ticket for Keble, he raced up on to the platform. Five minutes later he was off to find the rascally bookmaker.

Mike Hunt received the surprise of his life when he opened his door to find Guy Mannings standing on the doorstep.

Guy quickly explained his presence, and, showing the man the five pounds, he demanded the incriminating I O U.

At first Mike Hunt refused to make the exchange; but when Guy threatened to inform the police of his underhand schemes the rascal parted without another murmur.

Happy with the success of his visit to Hunt, Guy went along to Clarendon and saw his brother. And the two brothers sat down to a right royal feast to celebrate not only their escape from the hands of the blackmailer, but also to commemorate the Celtic-Rovers match, in which Guy had lived up to his nickname, "Hat-trick" Guy!

THE END.

(Look out for another topping yarn of the amusing *Gan Waga* and *Rupert Thurston & Co.* in next week's *GEM* entitled "*THE WRONG FILM!*" By *Sidney Drew*. Don't miss it.)

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