

The

GEM 2^d

LIBRARY

No. 1,053.
Vol. XXXIII.
April 21st, 1928.

EVERY
WEDNESDAY.



**"Ratty" Waxes Waxy
at the Waxworks!**

(A lively incident from this week's
grand extra-long story of Tom
Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.)

A ROLICKING EXTRA-LONG STORY OF ST. JIM'S—

CARDEW COMES



CHAPTER 1.

The Protest Meeting!

"GENTLEMEN of the New House—"

"Hurrah!"

"Go it, Figgy!"

"Gentlemen of the New House—"

"Hurrah!"

George Figgins paused. Really there was nothing else for him to do. The long-legged leader of the New House juniors at St. Jim's had a powerful voice, but addressing a meeting which persisted in applauding his opening words was a handicap which might have tested the powers of Stentor of old.

"Gentlemen of the New House—" bawled George Figgins desperately.

"We've heard that before!"

"Cut the cackle!"

"Get on with the washing!"

George Figgins changed his tactics.

He glared—a savage, ferocious glare that ought to have silenced that meeting on the spot. But it had no such effect. The assembled juniors broke out into a fresh tirade.

"Go it, Figgy!"

"Get it off your chest, old chap!"

"Hurrah!"

George Figgins looked as if he were on the point of indulging in an apoplectic fit.

"You silly idiots!" he roared wrathfully. "Shut up, and let a fellow speak!"

THE GEM LIBRARY:—No. 1,053

"Shut up and let someone else speak!" exclaimed Redfern.

And Owen and Lawrence, Redfern's chums and study-mates, loyally added:

"Hear, hear!"

"Order!" bawled George Francis Kerr.

"Order!" squeaked Fatty Wynn.

"Shut up, Kerr!"

"Ring off, Fatty!"

Really, it looked as if that meeting would never get under way, so to speak. It seemed to be the fixed idea of all the Shell and the Fourth Form juniors who had crowded into Figgins' study to talk at once.

"Gentlemen of the Fourth—"

"Hear, hear!"

"You fatheads!" George Figgins dropped his formal opening words for something more expressive. "You burbling idiots!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This meeting has been called—" roared Figgins with all the power of his lungs.

"We know that!"

"This meeting has been called as a protest against the appointment of a School House slacker to the highly important post of junior captain!"

George Figgins took a deep breath after that lengthy speech and his audience took advantage of the pause.

"Hurrah!"

"Down with the School House!"

"New House for ever!"

"Hurrah!"

IN WHICH RALPH CARDEW CAUSES A SENSATION!

A CROPPER *by* Martin Clifford

Ralph Reckness Cardew's activity in any venture lasts exactly as long as his interest in it does. Once he gets bored, Cardew's energy dies a sudden death. This peculiar characteristic of Cardew's is amply demonstrated in this week's extra-long school story of Tom Merry & Co. Get started on it now, boys!

"Order!" bawled Kerr.

George Figgins held up his hand commandingly.

"You fellows know that Cardew, the slackest slacker in the School House casual ward, has been elected captain!"

"Boo!"

"Chuck him out!"

"Are we going to stand it?" hooted Figgins.

"Are we going to put up with a rotten slacker bossing it over us—a School House worm at that?"

"No!"

"Never!"

The New House juniors had no two ideas about that. They felt that they had been unjustly treated. When Tom Merry, of the School House Shell, had resigned from the junior captaincy, the New House juniors had fully expected to see their own representative elected in his stead. But George Figgins had emerged a poor third in the election, and Ralph Reckness Cardew, the slacker of the Fourth, had polled the winning number of votes.

His election had caused something in the nature of a nine days' wonder at St. Jim's, for Cardew had held the reputation of being a born slacker and a fellow who was known to indulge in all manner of shady pursuits when the mood was upon him. That he could play football as well as any other member of the junior eleven when it suited him, was an acknowledged fact. That he could perform most feats that are dear to the heart of youth, and perform them well, was also acknowledged. But with Cardew one never knew just what he was going to do. His outlook on life could be summed up in three words: "What a bore!"

But Ralph Reckness Cardew had woke up with a vengeance. Certainly his election to the captaincy had not materialised because he was a slacker. In fact Cardew of late had been frightfully energetic. He had surprised the school and, doubtless, surprised himself. It was Cardew's great wheeze that had brought Gordon Gay & Co. of the Grammar School to their knees. Recently, under the regime of Tom Merry, the St Jim's juniors had suffered innumerable reverses at the hands of their old rivals. As a consequence, the remarks levelled at the head of the hapless junior captain had been painful and frequent and free. His resignation had been expected and Tom, upon whom the cares and worries of the captaincy sat heavy, had resigned.

Ralph Reckness Cardew had "got in" at the subsequent election with the narrow margin of one vote. Still, it was a majority and none waxed more wrathful about it than the aggrieved members of the New House.

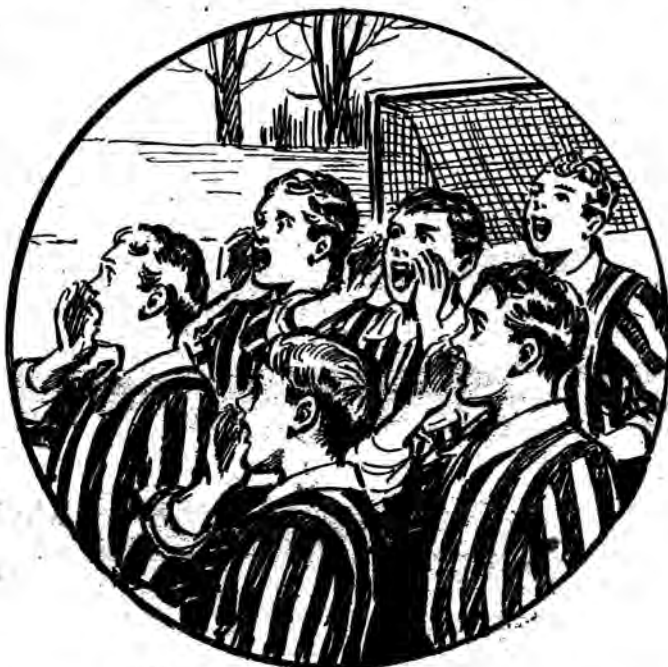
"When Tom Merry threw in his hand," said Figgins, resuming his address, "a New House man should have taken over the reins."

"Hear, hear!"

"Already that ass Cardew is chucking his weight about," went on Figgins, warming to his task.

That remark, however, was an over-statement of the fact. Cardew had not been "chucking his weight about." He had taken over the duties of junior captain seriously and, so far, had carried them out with marked success. Such duties, of course, necessitated contact with the juniors of the New House, especially in such matters as affected the junior football eleven. That Lawrence and Owen had been "dropped" from the team was an act which the New House juniors regarded as "awful cheek." Yet, for all that, the junior football team, without the distinguished presence of Lawrence and Owen, had emerged victorious from their match with Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood. Still, Figgins & Co. chose to regard that dropping of Lawrence and Owen in the light of Cardew chucking his weight about.

"Are we going to stand it?" demanded Figgins for the second time.



"NO!"

Figgins held up his hand.

"Gentlemen of the New House," he said earnestly, "It's time we took our proper place in the affairs of the school as—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurrah!"

"Gentlemen," went on Figgins, "this slacker Cardew has got to be taught a lesson."

"Hear, hear!"

"In fact, gentlemen," continued the leader of the New House, "all the lunatics in the casual ward over the way have got to be taught a lesson."

"Hear, hear!"

"Down with the School House!"

"New House for ever!"

Figgins lowered his voice.

"I happen to know, you fellows, that Cardew is standing a dorm. feed to the Fourth to-night."

Fatty Wynn's face lit up. Anything in the nature of grub, grub, glorious grub, interested him.

"Gentlemen," said Figgins dramatically, "I ask you, is there any reason why we shouldn't bag that feed, and give the Fourth Form asses a record licking into the bargain?"

Apparently, there was no reason judging by the demonstration that followed Figgins' words.

"Hurrah!"

Figgins beamed down upon his followers.

"I've found out that the feed is due to take place at ten o'clock," he remarked quietly. "At five minutes to ten, gentlemen, the New House will swoop down on the Fourth Form dormitory like wolves on the fold—"

"I seem to have heard that line before, somewhere," said Lawrence, with a grin.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up, Lawrence!" hooted Figgins.

"Shut up, yourself!"

"Order, please!" howled Kerr. "Order!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,053.

"Order yourself," returned Lawrence heatedly.

George Figgins glared.

"If that silly ass won't shut up, chuck him out!" he roared.

Lawrence pushed back his cuffs, and Redfern and Owen ranged up by his side.

"Try it on," said Lawrence darkly.

"Why, I'll spifficate you!" roared Figgins.

"Come on, then!" invited Lawrence temptingly.

With a roar that the celebrated bull of Bashan might have envied, George Figgins jumped down from the chair upon which he had been standing, and next moment he and Lawrence were going it hammer and tongs. On the instant George Francis Kerr engaged Redfern, and the latter's head was soon in Chancery. Not to be outdone, Fatty Wynn launched his excessive avoirdupois in the direction of Ower, and soon Figgins' study echoed to the tread of feet, freely intermingled with howls of wrath that proceeded from the contestants.

The other juniors looked on interestedly. Ever since Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence had come to St. Jim's rows with Figgins & Co. had been almost as frequent as rows with the School House juniors. The chums of Study No. 5, who had styled themselves the "New Firm," were a constant thorn in the side of Figgins & Co. True, it was a good-natured rivalry, but Figgins had been quick to see that if he were to retain his title of leader of the New House, the New Firm would have to be treated with a firm hand.

Up and down the study tramped the six juniors, the onlookers crowding back against the wall in order to give them more room.

"Shove that table out of the way!" roared Figgins.

Three juniors rushed to the table and jerked it towards the door. In the general excitement and commotion no one observed the crouching figure of a fat junior underneath the table. The folds of the table cover nearly concealed that fat junior, but as a heavy foot crashed up against his shin he let out a howl of pain.

"Yaroooooh!"

That yell, however, mingled quite harmoniously with a roar of pain that came from Kerr as Redfern's knuckles came into painful contact with the Scots junior's nose.

Certainly no one recognised the dulcet tones of Baggy Trimble of the School House Fourth. Yet that sudden yelp had come from him. What he was doing in Figgins' study was known only to Baggy Trimble. That he had scuttled under the table to escape the notice of Figgins & Co. was obvious. The fat junior trembled as he thought of the dreadful consequences that would follow should his presence become known. It is said of old that danger sharpens the wits. Certainly the present danger sharpened Baggy Trimble's wits. For as the table was shoved towards the door, the fat Fourth-Former moved with it.

Shaking like a jelly, Trimble crouched underneath it. Then, plucking up his courage, he drew the folds of the table cover aside and cautiously peered out. There was not much need for caution, for every junior in that study was following the scrap between Figgins & Co. and the New Firm. Certainly no one suspected an enemy in their midst.

Trimble debated in his mind whether he should make a bolt for it. The table was in line with the open door. In the general excitement his rapid exit might not be observed. Trimble decided to try, anyway.

"Yarooooop!" roared Figgins, as Lawrence's fist connected with his chin. "Wow! I'll slaughter you!"

"Go it, Figg!"

"Good man, Lawrence!"

Tramp, tramp!

Trimble, crouching under the table, thought the time was ripe for him to essay an escape. The study was ringing with the cheers and groans of the onlookers and the contestants.

Trimble emerged from cover, like a fat snail from its shell.

A second later he was in the passage, congratulating himself on his escape.

"He, he, he!" he cackled. "The beasts didn't spot me! They're going to raid our feed to-night, are they? We'll see! He, he, he!"

And, cackling in his usual unpleasant fashion, the fat Fourth-Former rolled away to the School House, for once in a way the bearer of news that would be eagerly listened to by the juniors of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 2.

"What a Life!"

"I SAY, Cardew, old chap—"

Baggy Trimble poked his head round the door of Study No. 9 in the Fourth Form passage.

"I say, Cardew, old chap—"

Baggy Trimble was bubbling over with excitement. Unfortunately for the fat junior, the excitement was not THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,053.

catching. Cardew, who was talking with Ernest Levison and Clive, looked upon the intrusion with an unfavourable eye.

"Get out!" he rapped curtly.

But Baggy Trimble did not get out. He advanced further into the study, his little piggy eyes fairly glowing with excitement.

"Oh, really, Cardew—"

Ralph Rockness made a movement towards the poker, but even the significance of that did not deter Baggy Trimble.

"Those New House rotters—" he began breathlessly.

"Eh?"

"What?"

Levison and Clive looked up at that. Cardew seized hold of the poker with a business-like grip.

"Would you mind removin' your fascinatin' presence?" he remarked, with a drawl.

"Oh, really, Cardew," burst out Trimble, "I've got some news, you know!"

Cardew yawned.

"You usually have, old bean!" he observed languidly. "But we're rather fed-up with your stories of an expected remittance an' all the glories of Trimble Hall!"

Baggy Trimble snorted.

"I haven't come to talk to you about a remittance!" he explained indignantly.

"Ye gods!" drawled Cardew. "Wonders will never cease!"

"Oh, really, Cardew—"

"Then if it isn't a remittance you're expectin', it must be a detailed account of the wonders of Trimble Hall!" yawned Cardew. "Give it a rest, old lard barrel!"

Baggy Trimble glared.

"I've just been in Figgins' study!" he snorted.

Cardew looked at him fixedly.

"So I observe!" he said languidly. "There's a smear of Figgins' jam on your mouth; there's a trail of cake-crumbs down your waistcoat; there's a distinct bulge under your waistcoat! For once I think you've been speakin' the truth! You have been to friend Figgins' study!"

"So I have!" hooted Trimble.

Cardew waved a perfectly manicured hand.

"I am aware that friend Figgins received a hamper this mornin'," he remarked, "an' I should say that the best part of that hamper has now found its way into your capacious stomach! It's a case of one man's loss is another man's gain, I know. But why come an' tell us about it?"

Levison and Clive grinned. Trimble snorted.

"Oh, don't rot!" he snapped. "I haven't touched Figgins' cake or his jam. Never knew he had a hamper this morning. Besides, it was a rotten cake, anyway, and the jam wasn't anything to shout about!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Even Cardew's immobile features broke into a faint smile at that admission.

"Isn't it wonderful how he rolls 'em out?" said Cardew. "You know, dear man, you'll make a first-class M.P. one of these days—that is," he added thoughtfully, "if they don't give you a life sentence first!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Trimble peevishly. "I tell you I've got some news for you!"

Cardew yawned.

"Tell it to someone else!" he remarked in a tired voice.

"Now, Skimpole's a quiet sort of youth, with a really commendable store of patience. He'll let you run on for hours. I can't stand it, you know. Every time you confide in me, old fat man, I feel an irresistible desire to prod you with the poker!"

"Oh, really, Cardew," said Trimble peevishly, "I shan't tell you now that Figgins and his rotten crowd are going to raid our dorm to-night and bag our feed!"

Cardew's lethargy fell from him like a cloak.

"What's that, old bean?" he asked. "Figgins on the giddy warpath—what?"

Trimble smiled. He felt that he had made an impression at last.

"I was in the study—under the table, you know," he explained—"when that rotter Figgins and a whole crowd of New House fellows came in. Not that I was afraid to show myself, of course."

"Of course not!" said Cardew. "We all know what a valiant chap you are, old bean! But continue! I'm sure dear Ernest and Sidney are frightfully interested!"

"It was a meeting," went on Trimble—"a protest meeting. All the New House fellows are wild because you're the junior captain. Mark you, I'm not surprised," added the fat Fourth-Former. "If the chaps wanted a new captain, why on earth couldn't they have elected me?"

"Echo answers why?" drawled Cardew. "But get on with the giddy narrative, old fat man. Can't you see that you're keepin' us on what the novelists describe as tenterhooks?"

"Oh, really, Cardew! Anyway, I heard Figgins tell those

New House rotters that, at five to ten to-night, they're going to raid our dorm and sneak off with our blessed grub! Cheek, I call it!"

Cardew nodded.

"Most frightful cheek," he observed, "especially as your humble is goin' to quite a lot of expense to make the feed worthy of its founder! I think you said our friends from the New House intend to sally forth from their stronghold at five minutes to ten to-night—what?" he added.

"That's right!"

Cardew smiled.

"Thank you, old top!" he said, with a faint grin. "For once in a way you have, unconsciously, been useful. Kindly accept the thanks an' blessings of your captain. Shut the door behind you, old bean."

Baggy Trimble glared.

"Is that all the thanks I get?" he hooted. "But for me that feed would have been a wash-out!"

"As it is," drawled Cardew, "the feed is more of a certainty than before. I'm standin' the giddy tuck. You've stood the information, so to speak. We'll call it square. Now travel, old fat man, an' if you really want to burst your waistcoat buttons to-night, don't let on a word to anyone about Figgins' raid."

It was on the tip of Trimble's tongue to make a rejoinder. But he thought better of it. With a sniff, he rolled out of Study No. 9. When he was gone, Cardew turned to his study-mates.

"You see, even our tame porpoise has his uses," he remarked.

"What are you going to do about it?" asked Levison.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"Leave it to your uncle, old beans," he drawled. "Do you know I've done quite a lot of thinkin' since my Form-fellows honoured me by electin' me their captain. Mark you, dear men, I won't say that a captain's life isn't a strenuous one after this, but it's surprisin' how the old brain-box functions when emergencies crop up."

"Which means?" asked Clive rather sarcastically.

"Which means, dear old Sidney," answered Cardew, "that your humble has already thought of a wheeze to put the kybosh on Figgins' charitable scheme. Don't ask me to explain just now; all this bustlin' an' hustlin' an' talkin' is frightfully fatiguin'."

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"It's true, my dear Ernest," said Cardew, stifling a yawn.

"An' but for the fact that I'm now junior captain, an' as such am supposed to set a glorious model to youth, I'd take forty winks on the sofa!"

Levison and Clive grinned. None was more gratified than Cardew's closest chums to see the remarkable change that had come over him. But both Levison and Clive, in their innermost hearts, wondered just how long the change would last. No longer did the dandy of the Fourth laze away his leisure hours on the study sofa; no longer did he indulge in the fragrant weed. And as for betting and gambling, these weaknesses in the character of Ralph Reckness Cardew seemed to be things of the past.

Cardew felt the gaze of his chums bent upon him, and, doubtless, read the thoughts that were passing in their minds.

"When you two fellows look at me like that," he drawled, "you make me wonder whether I can keep this energetic game up for keeps. Do you know, I often wonder how Tom Merry kept the captaincy so long. The dutiful Thomas never shirked games, always seemed to do the right thing at the right moment, an' was simply bubblin' over with energy. What the fellows wanted a new captain for is beyond my feeble intellect, for the dutiful Thomas was a paragon of all the virtues."

"You silly ass!" said Levison, with a smile. "Tom Merry was a good man in the job, I'll admit, but you're turning out to be just as good."

Cardew nodded.

"That's it," he admitted. "The dutiful Thomas set such a high standard of excellence that livin' up to it is awfully trizin'."

Clive frowned.

"Look here, Cardew, you're not thinking of chucking up the captaincy, are you?" he said meaningly.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"Alack an' alas, no!" he replied. "You men know that the old granddad wanted me particularly to do somethin' at school. I told him I would—told him that I would justify my existence, an' all that. It's an awful fag, but I wouldn't let the old boy down not for all the tea in Ceylon."

"Well, you've certainly done something since he saw you, old chap," said Levison. "When Lord Reckness came down the other week his hopeful grandson was one of the most unimportant members of the junior school. A week after he had gone you became one of the most important members."

"Oh, what a rise was there!" grinned Clive.

"Oh, what a fall there may be, my countrymen!" said Cardew, with a grimace. "But seriously, though, you men, the old boy hasn't answered my telegram or my letter. I was full of beans when I wrote an' told him that I had justified myself. I think he might have written back an' said 'Bravo!' or somethin' encouragin'—what!"

"Perhaps Lord Reckness is away from town," suggested Levison.

Cardew smiled.

"Perhaps you're right, dear men. We'll let it go at that."

But for all his words, it was apparent that Cardew felt hurt that Lord Reckness had not replied to his telegram or his letter. No one realised better than Cardew himself what a struggle it had been for him to take an active part in the affairs of St. Jim's.

Before he had been elected captain Cardew had turned a very languid gaze upon the world before him. Anything in the nature of physical exercise was enough to make him shudder—Cardew much preferring to lounge on the study sofa while other energetic juniors chased the leather on Little Side. But Lord Reckness' request that he should "pull himself together" had not fallen on deaf ears, for if there was one person on earth for whom Cardew was prepared to make sacrifices that person was his grandfather. And it was typical of the elegant Fourth-Former that once he set his mind upon anything he achieved it.

After the departure of Lord Reckness a fortnight or more ago Cardew had cast covetous eyes at the captaincy. Within a week he had been elected by a majority of one vote. But although Cardew felt that he had justified his existence, he found the worries and cares of his new position more than a little irksome. His was a nature that only accomplished things so long as there was an interest that urged him to do so. Once the interest was gone Ralph Reckness Cardew became bored.

And a week of the captaincy was already beginning to bore him.

He glanced at his watch, and then yawned.

"Oh, gad!" he remarked. "It's time for the footer practice! What a life!"

"Oh, it's not so bad as that," said Levison, with a grin.

"Come on, let's get changed!"

The chums of Study No. 9 were about to depart when there came a tap at the door, and Kildare, the stalwart captain of the school, came in.

"Just a word with you, Cardew."

"Take a pew, old bean," returned Cardew.

But the captain of the school shook his head.

"I just want to remind you, Cardew," he said quietly, "that it's compulsory practice to-day."

"I was remarkin' the same to dear Sidney and Ernest, here, old bean."

"You'll see everyone turns up, Cardew," said Kildare.

"Last week there were five absentees. If every fit man isn't on the ground this afternoon, look out for squalls!"

And with that warning Eric Kildare took his departure.

Cardew made a helpless gesture.

"You see, dear men, I've got to punt round all the giddy corners lookin' for the slackers. If they're not on Little Side I get it in the neck. What a life!"

Levison and Clive linked arms with their whimsical study-mate and walked him out of the study. And in five minutes the three of them were changing into footer kit.

CHAPTER 3.

Persuasive Measures!

"COMIN'?"

It was Aubrey Racke who asked that question.

The black sheep of the Fourth was lounging up against the study mantelpiece in an elegant attitude.

Gerald Crooke, his study-mate, shook his head.

"No! It's compulsory, games practice this afternoon," he said.

Aubrey Racke sneered.

"What about it?" he said. "Who wants to play football, anyway?"

Crooke grinned.

"Well, I don't want to," he said ruefully. "But Cardew saw me in the passage five minutes ago and warned me that if I didn't turn up to time he'd drag me down to Little Side."

"Hang Cardew!"

"Hang him if you like," said Crooke slowly; "but the rotter meant it. He also told me to pass the news on to you."

"Like his blessed cheek!" sneered Aubrey Racke, pulling out a gold cigarette-case and lighting up. "Who's Cardew, anyway?"

"He happens to be junior captain, that's all."

"Oh, that doesn't count for anythin'!" said Racke, with an unpleasant grin. "I know Cardew's game. He's playing a game of bluff for a little while, just to throw dust in the fellows' eyes, an' then he'll quietly blossom forth as a giddy goer again. This pi stuff may be good enough for Tom Merry an' his saintly crowd, but it doesn't wash with me, old bean!"

Crooke shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm not sure that Cardew is shamming the pi stuff," he returned. "It looks to me as if the silly ass has turned over a new leaf, or something. He's a regular little Eric these days."

Aubrey Racke winked knowingly.

"He seems to have taken you in, old bean," he drawled. "I tell you he's just as much a goer as he was in the old days."

It was Crooke's turn to sneer.

"He took you in last week, anyway."

"What do you mean?" demanded Racke.

"I seem to remember a chap saying that he wouldn't turn up for footer practice, whatever Cardew did, but that same chap came along with the rest, as meekly as any of 'em."

Racke's face crimsoned.

"You're gettin' at me?"

"Go hon!" exclaimed Crooke, enjoying the expression on his study-mate's face.

"I went along, just to give colour to the idea that Cardew has reformed, you idiot," exclaimed Racke. "But I'm not goin' down to the practice to-day, not for all the Cardews in the world."

"Excuse me buttin' in, dear men!"

It was Ralph Reckness Cardew who looked in at the study at that moment. His face was expressionless as he gazed at the two black sheep.

"What the thump do you want?" demanded Aubrey Racke savagely, whilst Crooke looked uneasy.

"Just to remind you, old beans, that it's compulsory footer to-day."

Aubrey Racke sniffed.

"I'm giving it a miss," he said, with as much confidence as he could muster.

Cardew's eyebrows elevated a trifle.

"Think again, dear man."

"Oh, don't rot!" snapped Racke. "This pi stuff is all right for Tom Merry and his precious crew, but it won't work with me. I'm not chasin' all over a blessed footer field this afternoon. I've got an appointment with Banks, at the Green Man."

"Really?" drawled Cardew. "At the risk of displeasin' Mr. Banks I must cancel that appointment. In other words, you're goin' down to the footer, old bean."

"I'm not!"

"Yes, you are, my dear Aubrey," said Cardew easily.

"An' so are you, aren't you, Crooke?"

Crooke shifted uneasily in his chair and vouchsafed no reply.

Aubrey Racke's unpleasant features were savage.

"Go an' eat coke!" he snapped. "You were one of the first to dodge footer practice in the old days."

"Alas," murmured Cardew, "too true!"

"Have we all got to turn because father has turned?" asked Racke, sneeringly.

"Not necessarily, my dear Aubrey," replied Cardew smoothly. "But as junior captain I have, alack, many duties to perform, many rules to observe which, perhaps, I may have overlooked in the old days. Still, from the classic example before you, old beans, you can see that it is never too late to mend, what?"

"Oh, ring off!" snapped Aubrey Racke. "Come on, Crooke, we'd better be gettin' along, or Banks'll think we're not comin'!"

Crooke made a half-hearted attempt to rise, but a glance from Cardew decided him to stay where he was.

"Are you goin' down to the practice, my dear Aubrey?"

There was a world of meaning in Cardew's voice which did not pass the black sheep unheeded, but Racke had boasted to Crooke that he wouldn't attend the practice, and vanity prevented him from doing voluntarily what he knew he would have to do in the long run.

"I'm not!"

"Oh, gad!" said Cardew sorrowfully. "Then I shall have to treat you like I did Mellish."

He made one stride across the room and grabbed Aubrey Racke by the collar. As he went Cardew caught up a fives'-bat.

"Here, keep off, you rotter!"

Bump!

Aubrey found himself being jammed face downwards over the table. He struggled violently to free himself, but there was surprising strength in Cardew's wrist and arm, for the black sheep was still face downwards when the fives'-bat came into play.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,053.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Stop it, you rotter! Whoop! Yoooop!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

Cardew whacked away as nonchalantly as if he were beating a carpet. Racke's howls rang through the study.

"Leggo! Yarooooop! Crooke, help! Yow!"

But Gerald Crooke did not show any great enthusiasm to go to the succour of his misguided study-mate.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Just say when you're willin' to go down to the practice an' I'll chuck this," drawled Cardew. "Don't make it a long job, Aubrey, old bean, as I'm feelin' quite tired already."

"Yooop! Yow! Wow! Stop it!" shrieked Racke.

"Just say when, old bean!" said Cardew, in unemotional tones.

"I won't!" roared Racke. "Yow! Grooooo! Stop it!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"You want a lot of persuadin', old bean!" said Cardew. "That's a dozen you've had. If you want another dozen I—"

But Racke's powers of endurance and fortitude had reached their limit. He felt as if he had received a Head's flogging. The mere thought of another dozen unnerved him.

"Stop it!" he howled. "I'll—I'll go down to the rotten practice! Wow! You awful cad!"

Cardew released the black sheep and stood regarding him with a whimsical smile on his face.

"Now, why on earth couldn't you have said that in the beginnin'? Look at the awful fag you would have saved me."

"You awful cad!" hissed Racke, twisting himself into a number of attitudes that would have done credit to a contortionist.

Cardew toyed with the fives'-bat, and his gaze travelled to Crooke.

"Is the dear Gerald as obstinate as his fellow conspirator?" he drawled.

But apparently Crooke wasn't. He had witnessed that terrific whacking, and had speedily made up his mind that "backing up" against Cardew wasn't exactly a profitable business.

"I'm going, Cardew!" he said hurriedly.

"Good!" rapped out the junior captain, and his languid air had gone. "And take this foppin' fathead with you. If you're not changed an' on Little Side within three minutes I'll come after you with the poker!"

With that, Ralph Reckness Cardew turned on his heel and vacated the study.

"What a life!" he murmured. "My admiration for Tom Merry goes up by leaps an' bounds. Fancy havin' to do this sort of thing every week! Ugh! Lemme see, who's the next blighter?"

The junior skipper consulted a slip of paper in his hand.

"Oh, gad!" he exclaimed. "I've three more to interview yet!"

He shuddered as he spoke. For the last ten minutes Ralph Reckness had been rounding up the slackers, and it is to be doubted whether he had ever spent such an energetic ten minutes in his life before. Really, it was surprising how many of the Shell and Fourth Form juniors were disinclined to play football that glorious spring afternoon.

Skimpole had started to tell Cardew that the weighty matters of Determinism were of far more consequence than "propelling a muddy sphere round a field." That, however, was as far as Herbert Skimpole had got in his explanation, for Cardew's boot had been introduced into the business, and Skimpole had retired to the Shell dormitory to change.

Mellish and Scrope had sulkily declared that they were going out for the afternoon, and it had taken Cardew quite three minutes to point out to these dingy slackers that their presence was required, if not desired, on Little Side. But the business-like end of a cricket stump, applied to the nether garments of Mellish and Scrope had speedily placed the issue beyond doubt, and Mellish and Scrope had also repaired to their dormitory to change.

Meantime, Tom Merry & Co. were punting the ball about on Little Side, waiting for the return of their captain.

"I don't envy Cardew his job," said Tom Merry, with a grin. "But he seems to be doing it pretty thoroughly. Here come Skimpole, Mellish, and Scrope."

"And there's Racke and Crooke," added Monty Lowther.

"My hat! Look at the lovely expression on the dear Aubrey's face!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Racke and Crooke joined the footballers in sulkily silence, but Racke's supercilious features were black with rage.

"Here comes Glyn!"

Bernard Glyn, the schoolboy inventor, joined up with the players. Glyn's face was crimson with wrath.

"Wherefore the thunderous brow?" inquired Lowther.

"That silly ass, Cardew—" began Glyn.

"What's he done?"

"Are you comin' down to footer practice, my dear Aubrey?" asked Cardew. "I'm not!" snapped Racke. Ralph Reckness Cardew caught up a fives' bat, made one stride across the room, and grabbed Aubrey Racke by the collar. Next moment the fives' bat came into play. Whack! Whack! Whack! "Whoop! Stoppit, you rotter!"

(See Chapter 3.)



Glyn breathed hard.

"I was in the middle of some important experiments with a television set," growled the schoolboy inventor, "when the silly ass barged into the study and told me that it was compulsory games practice to-day."

"So it is, old scout," said Tom Merry, with a grin.

Bernard Glyn snorted.

"What's footer practice when I'm in the middle of making a discovery that might benefit the world enormously?" he asked, with the air of one voicing a question that had but one answer.

"Well, footer seems to have won," observed Blake, "otherwise you wouldn't be here now."

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Bernard Glyn glared at the grinning footballers.

"I wouldn't have been here now except that that dangerous maniac Cardew said he'd smash the blessed set if I didn't get a move on and change. And he meant it, too," added Glyn ferociously. "The burbling, idiot picked up a poker. I thought he'd wreck the place."

Monty Lowther grinned broadly.

"Cardew's got more savvy than I gave him credit for," he said.

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I considah—I say, don't wun away when a fellow's talkin'; it's fwihtfully bad form."

Bad form or not, the players continued walking away, a not unusual procedure when the elegant swell of the Fourth began to "considah."

"Bai Jove!" breathed Arthur Augustus. "What beastly mannaahs!"

Meantime, Cardew was strolling along the Shell passage for Study No. 3. George Alfred Grundy shared that apartment with his chums Wilkins and Gunn. Wilkins and Gunn were on Little Side with the rest of the footballers. Their chief had stated his intention of staying in for the afternoon, not so much from a wish to slack or dodge footer practice, but to show Ralph Reckness Cardew just how much he, George Alfred Grundy, thought of his authority. In fact, Grundy had requested his study-mates to tell Cardew that he could "go and eat coke." Wilkins and Gunn had not delivered that message, but they had informed Cardew where their study-mate was to be found.

The door of Study No. 3 flew open as Cardew applied his boot to it.

George Alfred Grundy, sprawling in the armchair, glared. "What the thump do you want?" he demanded in a bellow.

"You!" said Cardew calmly. "You're due on Little Side, old bean!"

Grundy sneered.

"Catch me!"

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know about catchin' you, old bean, but the floor will catch you if you're not out of that chair in two seconds."

"Ha, ha, ha!" George Grundy roared with laughter, but the roar changed into one of pain and surprise as Cardew, after having consulted his watch, strode across the study and tipped up the back of the armchair.

Bump!

"Whoooooop!"

George Alfred Grundy shot out of the chair like a stone from a catapult. He landed on the cold, hard, unsympathetic linoleum with a bump and a roar.

"You dangerous maniac!" he spluttered. "I'll burst you!"

Cardew glanced round the study. On the mantelpiece was a toasting-fork. In a flash the junior captain's hand had closed upon it.

Grundy scrambled to his feet, his heavy face suffused with rage. He rolled up his cuffs in a businesslike way and began to advance on Cardew. That junior watched his approach unperturbed. But the toasting-fork came up like a sword, and at sight of it Grundy stopped.

"What's this fool's game?" he bellowed.

Cardew smiled sweetly.

"You're goin' down to the footer now, an' sharp," he said smoothly. "An' to help you get a move on I'm goin' to prod you like this."

The toasting-fork lunged forward, and Grundy leaped back.

"Keep off, you maniac!" he roared. "If you touch me with that blessed fork I'll—Yooooooop!"

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The toasting-fork lunged out a second time, and on this occasion it found a billet.

"Keep movin', dear man," drawled Cardew. "Unless you do I shall have to keep on puncturin' you—savvy?"

"Why, I'll— Whoooooop!"

Once more a wild howl escaped George Alfred Grundy as the toasting-fork got home. He backed into the passage, and Cardew relentlessly followed him with the fork at the "ready."

"Keep movin'!"

Grundy leaped back again as the toasting-fork lunged out at him. Then, turning on his heel, he raced off down the passage. But if Grundy thought he had escaped that fearsome weapon he was mistaken, for Cardew sped lightly at his heels.

"Little Side, old bean!" he drawled. "There's no time for you to change. If you wander from the path I shall be under the painful necessity of proddin' you—see?"

Grundy did see. It wasn't often that Grundy saw the other person's point of view—the great man of the Shell usually being taken up with his own point of view. But on this occasion he saw and felt with painful clearness. Perhaps it was the first time any of the slackers had been brought to Little Side in this fashion; but there was no denying the thoroughness of the method. Grundy fairly pelted down the stairs, out of the House, and towards the group of footballers.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A roar of laughter went up when it was seen what form Cardew's method of persuasion had taken, and Grundy's face was crimson with rage and mortification. By the time he joined the juniors Grundy's rugged features were almost homicidal in their expression.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Cardew!"

Tom Merry & Co. closed round their captain as he came up. If there was going to be trouble they were prepared to lend a hand. But George Alfred Grundy had had enough for the time being, at any rate, and he contented himself with muttering threats.

"That's the giddy lot," said Cardew. "Oh dear, what a life! Does a chappie have to do this every week, old bean?" he added, with a questioning glance at Tom Merry.

"Practically every week," said Tom, with a grin.

"Oh gad!" The idea of turning out the slackers every week seemed to fill Cardew with dismay.

"What about starting, old chap?" said Tom Merry suddenly. "Here's old Kildare coming along. Looks jolly ratty, too!"

"Oh dear!"

Eric Kildare came striding towards the junior with a frown on his handsome face. He glanced at his watch as he drew level with the waiting juniors.

"Why hasn't the practice started?" he demanded, fixing a stern look on the dismayed face of Ralph Reckness Cardew. "You're exactly half an hour late!"

"Oh gad!" breathed Cardew. "I've been gettin' the fellows to come along, old bean."

"Have you," said Kildare curtly, his keen eyes roving over the juniors. "Then where's Trimble?"

Cardew's face fell. Now he came to think of it he hadn't caught a glimpse of the fat and fatuous Fourth-Former since he had given his warning of the intended New House raid.

"Isn't the fat frog here?" asked Cardew.

"You know he's not," said Kildare grimly. "Look here, Cardew, I gave you warning that if there were any absentees this afternoon you'd catch it. You're exactly half an hour late in starting, and there's not a full muster!"

"Oh gad!"

Kildare's ashplant slipped down into his hand.

"Bend over!" he said curtly.

Cardew backed a pace.

"Eh?"

"Bend over!" rapped the captain of the school. "Sharp!"

Cardew shrugged his shoulders and obeyed.

Whack, whack!

"Now cut back into the House and find that fat freak Trimble," said Kildare. "If he's not out here in five minutes you'll get a warm time!"

"Oh gad!" drawled Cardew. "What a life!"

He gave Tom Merry an expressive glance and doubled off the field. Ralph Reckness Cardew already was beginning to repent him of ever having accepted the post of junior captain. He sped into the House in search of Baggy Trimble, with Kildare's words ringing in his ears. But the fat Fourth-Former was tearing down to Little Side long before the time limit had expired, and Cardew's hoot helped him on every occasion he showed signs of lagging. There was some measure of consolation in kicking Trimble, for Cardew was still smarting from the effect of Kildare's ashplant, but whether the fat and fatuous Fourth-Former found any consolation in it was a question open to doubt.

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"Now get going!" snapped Kildare. "I'm going to keep an eye on you kids!"

And the footer practice started under the vigilant eye of the captain of the school. While Kildare was present, at least, none of the slackers showed any inclination to slack; even Racke and Crooke and Mellish and Scrope had to admit to themselves that chasing the leather was far more beneficial to their health than frowning in a study or smoking, or gambling with undesirable characters like Mr. Banks. It was noticeable, however, that the moment Kildare's back was turned the slackers began to lose a lot of their enthusiasm, which surprised no one less than Cardew—for, truth to tell, he was beginning to feel tired himself!

CHAPTER 4.

A School House Win!

"I SAY, Cardew—"

"Say on, old fat man!"

"Isn't it time for the feed yet?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That muffled peal of laughter echoed round the Fourth Form dormitory that night. It was half-past nine, and not one of the juniors had slept a wink, so to speak, since Kildare had put the lights out.

Baggy Trimble was in a state of feverish impatience. The dormitory feed, which was being "stood" by Ralph Reckness Cardew, had been arranged to take place at ten o'clock. Trimble, however, saw no reason why it shouldn't have started the moment Kildare had retired from the scene. Still, as it was Cardew's feed, the fat junior had to possess his soul in patience. But to Trimble the minutes seemed like hours.

"I say, Cardew," he whispered, "can't we start the spread now?"

There was a chuckle in the darkness.

"Only a few more minutes to go," said Cardew. "Better wait, fatty. You wouldn't like a giddy master or prefect to butt-in on the scene of operations an' confiscate the banquet, would you?"

"No fear!" squeaked Trimble. "Still, it's safe enough to start now."

There was a sound of movement from one of the beds; then a match flickered out. Ralph Reckness Cardew stood revealed in its glow.

"You're going to begin now, Cardew?" asked Trimble anxiously.

"Not here," answered Cardew evasively. Then in a louder voice he addressed the Fourth-Formers. "Look here, you men, certain information reached me this morning that our merry rivals of the New House contemplate a raid on this dorm to-night at five minutes to ten."

There was a buzz.

Cardew waited for it to die down.

"Of course, the proper course would be for us to swarm over to the New House and give the cheeky idiots the raggin' of their lives," he said, in a low, clear voice.

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's scrag the rotters!"

"Some other time, dear men," said Cardew smoothly. "Don't forget we've got a spread on to-night an' we don't want that spoiled."

"No fear!" exclaimed Baggy Trimble, and his words were echoed by the majority of the Fourth.

"It's too risky for all of us to troop over to the New House," went on Cardew. "But one of us can fix up matters quite satisfactorily, I fancy. Your humble will step into the breach!"

"Oh!"

"I've thought it all out, you men," continued the junior captain. "All I shall need is a length of cord."

"What for?"

"To tie the door handle of the New House dorm to the banisters," explained Cardew. "That'll keep the rotters secure for the night. They can make as much row in their own casual ward as they blessed well like. But we don't want a row here—not to-night, at any rate."

"Rather not!"

"You see the position?" drawled Cardew, stifling a yawn. "Just leave it to your uncle. While I'm gone you men can be gettin' the feed ready, an' don't make too much of a rumpus, for goodness' sake!"

"I considah—" began Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Shut up, Gussy!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Save your breath for a speech after the feed, old bean," said Cardew diplomatically. "We're all keen to hear you say a few words, you know. It'll send us off to by-by quicker than a sleepin' draught!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Cardew—"

But Ralph Reckness Cardew was already moving towards the door of the Fourth Form dormitory. He had a length of stout cord in his hand.

"See you men later," he called out softly.

The door closed behind him, and the Fourth-Formers broke out into a regular buzz of excitement. That their junior captain was doing the right thing they knew. For all of them to raid the New House quarters would be asking for trouble. Not that the Fourth were accustomed to shirking trouble with their rivals. It was the feed they were thinking about.

When Ralph Reckness stood a spread he did it on a lavish scale. The present occasion was no exception, for the best part of a tenner had passed into Mrs. Taggles' till in exchange for the delicacies Cardew had ordered. It would be a catastrophe if that extensive feed were to be confiscated at the eleventh hour. That was why Cardew had elected to take the fight into the enemy's country, so to speak.

As he had remarked, Figgins & Co. could make as much noise as they liked in their own quarters, that was their funeral. But it would be highly injudicious to let Figgins & Co. invade the School House that night, despite the fact that their amiable intentions were known in advance.

"Get the candles, Sidney," whispered Levison.

Clive fished under his bed and brought to light a bundle of candles. In a few moments half a dozen of them were sending out sufficient glow to light up the Fourth Form dormitory. Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy pinned blankets over the windows to keep up the pretence to anyone passing in the quad below that the Fourth Form dormitory was in darkness and that its occupants were deep in the arms of Morpheus. Digby and Roynance spread out a clean white sheet in the middle of the dormitory floor, which was to do duty as a tablecloth.

Then Levison and Clive dragged out a huge hamper from underneath the former's bed.

Baggy Trimble's eyes lit up greedily as he beheld it.

"Oh, I say, isn't it a whacker!"

"Enough there for all of us, I fancy," observed Levison.

"And a bit over," added Clive.

"Oh, really, Clive," said Trimble. "I've been starving myself all day for this feed. There won't be much over when I've had my snack, I can tell you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors, having slipped their jackets on over their pyjamas, were crowding round the hamper now, eager to assist Levison and Clive to "lay the table."

"We're waiting for Cardew before we begin," said Levison meaningly, as Baggy Trimble made a movement to snatch a jam tart. "Hands off, old fat man!"

"Oh, really, Levison," said Trimble peevishly. "You might let a fellow sample those tarts. Besides, Cardew may be gone for hours. He may get caught by the New House rotters."

Baggy Trimble was not particularly interested in the fate of Cardew. The contents of that stunning hamper was all that occupied his podgy brain just then. Yet he did not venture to "sample" the jam tarts—Levison saw to that.

Meantime, Cardew had reached the New House dormitory. He chuckled grimly as he saw a faint streak of light filtering through the crack between the flooring of the door. Evidently Figgins & Co. were preparing for their raid. From within the dormitory came the sound of muffled voices, as Figgins and his chums exhorted the New House to get a move on.

"What a surprise you're goin' to have," murmured Cardew as, calmly and noiselessly, he secured one end of the cord to the handle of the door. It was the work of a moment to stretch it taut and fasten it to the banisters.

"That'll do the trick!" murmured Cardew. "Hallo, here they come!"

From inside the New House dormitory came the sound of pattering feet. The followers of Figgins & Co. were setting out on the warpath.

To Cardew's ears came the rattle of the door-handle as Figgins turned it. Then that junior's voice was plainly heard.

"The blessed door won't open!" muttered the leader of the New House, tugging at the handle. "It's jammed or something."

"Don't be an ass," whispered Kerr. "Here, let me have a go at it."

The Scots junior had a "go" at it, but the dormitory door remained fastened. It still refused to budge when Fatty Wynn and several other New House juniors attempted to move it.

Cardew chuckled in the darkness. He was rather amused to hear the whispered comments that were wafted out to him from the other side of the fastened door.

Tug, tug!

Figgins tried to open the door again. He uttered an exclamation of wrath as he found he couldn't move it.

"What the thump's the matter with the blessed thing?" he demanded crossly. "It isn't locked, the key's on the inside. It must be jammed, somehow."

"Jammed?" echoed Kerr. "It wasn't jammed when we came up to bed. Somebody's wedged the door from the outside."

"But who could have done that," protested Figgins. "Nobody knew that we were going to leave the dorm to-night, except ourselves, of course."

There was a deep chuckle from the landing.

"That's just where you New House dummies have made a mistake!"

As that voice rang out Figgins & Co. jumped.

"Cardew!"

"That rotter!"

"That School House waster!"

"Little me!" called back Cardew. "So sorry to disappoint you, old beans, but really we couldn't have you tame lunatics wandering about our dorm to-night. I'll come an' let you out in the mornin', if you're good boys!"

Figgins breathed hard.

"You rotter! Open that door and I'll slaughter you!"

But Cardew was not likely to obey that order.

"Take it quietly, you men," chuckled the junior captain; "an' go back to bed an' get your beauty sleep."

"I'll beaul sleep you when I get hold of you!" roared Figgins in his excitement, forgetting the time and place.

Bang, bang!

(Continued on next page.)

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Fatty Wynn was hammering on the door, with what object in view perhaps only himself knew. Fatty was annoyed. He had visualised the raided feed all that day, and here it was, gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream, as it were. Really, it was too bad!

"Who's cock House?" asked Cardew mockingly. "School House every time, dear men!"

"Yah!"

"Rotter!"

"Waster!"

"Slacker!"

"Open this blessed door!"

The wrathful New House juniors were throwing aside all caution now. Most of them had been awakened from their sleep in order to raid their rivals of the School House. Great preparations had been made in advance. Stockings had been stuffed with paper, pillows filled with flour and soot, and a huge linen bag had been "borrowed" of the matron for the purpose of carting away the spread when they had raided it. Now all these preparations constituted so much waste of time and sleep. Figgins & Co. nearly tore their hair as they listened to the mocking pleasantries of Ralph Reckness Cardew—safe on the other side of the door.

"Oh, if I could only get my hands on the rotter!" exclaimed Figgins. "I'd—I'd burst him!"

Cardew was about to make some reply when he heard the sound of footsteps coming up the staircase.

"Oh, my hat!"

Peering over the banister, he saw the dim, shadowy outline of a man's figure. It did not take Cardew long to identify it. It belonged to Mr. Horace Ratcliff, the unpopular master of the New House.

Mr. Ratcliff obviously had been disturbed by the noise going on in the New House dorm, and the unpopular master never let an opportunity pass him by of exercising his authority. He crept up the stairs, a malicious expression on his thin, sharp features. In his hand was a cane.

And as he mounted the staircase the uproar grew louder and louder.

Cardew whispered a warning to the New House juniors, but if it was heard no one paid any heed to it. Next moment Cardew had darted in the deep shadow of a recess in the landing.

Mr. Ratcliff all unconscious of the rope that stretched from the handle of the dormitory door to the banisters, continued his ascent as stealthily as a mouse.

"Open this door!" roared Figgins, now thoroughly roused.

"Figgins!" Mr. Ratcliff's acid voice rapped out like a pistol-shot, but the leader of the New House did not hear it. What he did hear, however, was a terrific bump as Mr. Ratcliff collided with the tautened rope.

Crash!

The master of the New House descended to the cold, hard linoleum with a bump and a roar.

"Yaroooooo!"

It was a very undignified expression for such an august personage as a Housemaster to make, but it came quite spontaneously. And as Mr. Ratcliff hit the landing the cord securing the handle of the New House dormitory door parted with a snap.

In a trice Figgins & Co. dragged the door open and rushed out on the landing. It was forgivable if they thought that Cardew was the fellow who somehow or another had come a cropper on the landing, for Cardew was the only person who filled their minds just then.

"Give the rotter socks!"

"Collar him!"

Biff, biff! Wallop!

Loaded stocking, pillow-cases filled with soot and flour smote the unfortunate master of the New House from all sides. In the darkness it was impossible for Figgins & Co. to recognise their Housemaster sprawling there. They were content to swipe.

"Grooooooh!" howled Mr. Ratcliff. "Wow! Grooooooh!"

"Take that, you rotter!" roared Figgins, swiping a well-filled stocking at Mr. Horace Ratcliff. "And that!"

"Guggggg! Yooooop!"

Mr. Ratcliff took them both and many more like them. Ratty had come looking for trouble and undoubtedly he had found it, though whether he was pleased he had found it was another matter.

"Oh, gad!" breathed Cardew from the safety of the darkened landing. "What a go!"

He crouched there in the shadow wondering how on earth it was all going to end. It ended abruptly as Mr. Ratcliff, getting his second wind, so to speak, struggled to his feet.

"Boys!"

That one word, uttered in the familiar voice of their

Housemaster, sent cold shivers down the spines of Figgins & Co.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ratty!"

"Oh crumbs!"

On the instant the New House juniors were scuttling back to their beds. How Mr. Ratcliff had come to be on the landing none of them knew. What they did know, however, was that Ratty would make things hot. Like so many ostriches, the New House juniors dived under the bedclothes and hid their heads. Figgins and Kerr alone stood regarding their Housemaster in unmingled horror.

"I—I—I—" began Figgins helplessly.

"We—we—we—" stuttered Kerr.

"You young scoundrels!" rapped Mr. Ratcliff, prancing about like a Dervish in his rage. "You young reprobates! How dare you!"

"You see, sir—" began Figgins.

"We— That is to say—" stuttered Kerr.

"Boys!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff, looking a weird picture under the flour and soot, so to speak. "Boys, stand beside your beds!"

"Oh dear!"

Quite a groan went up from the New House juniors as that command was rapped out. It was useless trying to deceive Mr. Horace Ratcliff in the circumstances, and every junior scrambled out of bed and waited for the Housemaster's next words.

"I have been outrageously assaulted!" stormed Mr. Ratcliff, his beady eyes glinting with anger. "Never have I experienced such treatment in the whole of my career."

Figgins stepped forward.

"We—we're sorry we biffed you, sir," he said apologetically. "But we didn't know it was you. We thought it was—it was—"

"Yes, sir," said George Francis Kerr, taking up the tale. "We had no idea it was you, sir. We wouldn't have swiped you with the pillows for—for worlds, sir!"

"Indeed!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "I hope such is the case—I hope such is the case. I came up here to investigate the abominable noise that was going on. Why were you boys out of your beds?"

Figgins looked helplessly at his chums.

"Ahem! You see, sir, we—we—"

"We—we—we—" echoed Kerr and Fatty Wynn faithfully.

Mr. Ratcliff's cane slid down into his hand.

"I will waste no further time in words!" he said acidly. "It was my intention to report this outrageous assault to Dr. Holmes. On second thoughts I will deal with the matter myself."

"Oh!"

Not one of the New House juniors relished that prospect. True, it was a heinous offence to "swipe" a master—an offence that would merit a flogging from Dr. Holmes. But it was open to question which was the more preferable—a flogging from the Head, or a caning from Mr. Horace Ratcliff. The master of the New House was no athlete, but he could wield a cane with deadly effect.

"Touch your toes, Figgins!"

With many misgivings George Figgins obeyed.

Swish, swish, swish, swish, swish, swish!

It was a "six" that even Dr. Holmes could not have "laid on" harder. Figgins' face was pale when he straightened himself, but not a sound had escaped his lips.

"Oh gad!" murmured Cardew, as he heard the sound of that awful swishing. "This is where yours truly makes himself scarce."

And while Mr. Ratcliff was treating Kerr in a similar fashion Ralph Reckness Cardew crept down the staircase and made all haste to rejoin his Form-fellows in the Fourth Form dormitory.

Meantime, Mr. Ratcliff was flogging the New House juniors with untiring energy. Less stoical fellows than Figgins and his chums were groaning under that terrific castigation. By the time the master of the New House had made a round of the dormitory it resembled nothing so much as a gathering of cats on the tiles, making the night air hideous with their cries.

Mr. Horace Ratcliff was breathing hard when he had finished. That wholesale execution would have taxed the endurance of more athletic men than he. All the same, there was a glint of satisfaction in the Housemaster's eyes that more than suggested he was pleased he hadn't passed the matter over for Dr. Holmes to deal with.

"Ow! Wow! Yow!"

It was a regular chorus of groans that rang through the dormitory as Mr. Ratcliff stalked towards the door.

"Silence!" he snapped. "Let there be no more disturbance in this dormitory. Each boy here will take three hundred lines and his next half-holiday will be cancelled."

"Yow! Wow! Ow!"

The additional "sentence" was received with more

groans, whereat Mr. Ratcliff's sour features took on a more malignant expression than ever.

"The next boy who makes that ridiculous noise will be soundly flogged!"

Really, it was surprising how many juniors found that they could suppress their groans. Certainly, a groan here and there was not worth another flogging.

For two minutes Mr. Ratcliff stood waiting at the door of the dormitory. Then he switched out the light and tramped downstairs. When his footsteps had died away Figgins & Co. resumed their groaning until sleep put a merciful stop to their sufferings. But while Figgins & Co. groaned Cardew and his Form-fellows were having the "spread" of their lives in the Fourth Form dormitory over in the School House. And amid much chortling from the juniors Cardew told of the exciting happenings that had taken place in the New House.

Figgins & Co. had set out to raid a feed—all they had

danced and swayed dangerously for a few seconds and then sent some of its contents gushing forth over Wilkins' and Gunn's impots.

Immediately there were loud cries of alarm and rage from Wilkins and Gunn.

"Look out, you dangerous maniac!"

"My impot!"

But the damage had been done. Those impositions over which Wilkins and Gunn had already spent the best part of an hour were now useless. Certainly neither Wilkins or Gunn would have the temerity to submit them to their Housemaster in their present state.

Two separate and ferocious glares were bestowed on the rugged face of their study-mate that ought to have withered him up on the spot. But they had no such effect. There was a far-away look in Grundy's eyes and a frown on his rugged brow which seemed to indicate that George Alfred was thinking.



Grundy's study-mates eyed each other expressively and then rose to their feet. Wilkins grabbed a cushion, and Gunn picked up the half-emptied bottle of ink. Wallop! Swoosh! "Oh crikey! Groooogh!" howled Grundy. (See Chapter 5.)

collected was a licking apiece, thanks to Ralph Reckness Cardew and Mr. Horace Ratcliff.

CHAPTER 5.

Grundy on the Warpath!

"CHEEK!"

George Alfred Grundy glared as he made that statement.

Wilkins and Gunn, his study-mates, looked up from the table in surprise. Both of them were busy writing lines for Mr. Railton—a task made no more pleasant by interruptions from the great George Alfred.

It was the day following Grundy's memorable arrival on Little Side for footer practice, when he had been relentlessly pursued by Ralph Reckness Cardew, with the business-like end of a toasting fork. Grundy had not got over that humiliation. Indeed, he had brooded over it, and now regarded it as an insult that could only be wiped out in blood, so to speak.

"Cheek! Absolute cheek!"

To give greater emphasis to his remark, Grundy banged his rugged fist on the study table. The result was disastrous in the extreme.

Wilkins and Gunn were sharing a bottle of ink, and as Grundy's heavy fist smote the study table the bottle of ink

"Cheek!" growled Grundy for the third time.

Wilkins and Gunn breathed hard.

"Look at my impot!" howled Wilkins.

"And mine!" hooted Gunn wrathfully.

George Alfred Grundy snorted.

"Blow your impots!"

He said that with an air of finality which was typically Grundyish so to speak. As a general rule whatever Grundy said in Study No. 3 in the Shell passage "went," Grundy being ever ready to back up any statement he made with a pair of fists that were capable of doing quite a lot of damage. Wilkins and Gunn being peaceful fellows, as a general rule, let their study-mate and leader "have his head." But this case was different. Those impositions would have to be done again. There was no doubt about that—no possible, probable shadow of doubt—no possible doubt whatever. And here was Grundy, supremely indifferent to all the extra trouble and time he was putting his chums to. Really, it was too bad!

Wilkins and Gunn eyed each other expressively, and then rose to their feet. The former grabbed a cushion, the latter picked up the half-emptied bottle of ink.

Wallop!

"Yaroooooh!"

The cushion descended on Grundy's head with a mighty

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swipe. But that was not all, for Gunn up-ended the remains of the bottle of ink over Grundy's head.

Swoosh!

"Oh, crikey! Groooooooh!"

George Alfred Grundy was taken completely by surprise. He was so accustomed to ruling the roost that he never expected a show of resistance like this.

"There, you rotter!" snapped Gunn. "That's for mucking up my impot!"

Wallop!

"And that's another for mucking up mine!" hooted Wilkins.

George Alfred Grundy was speechless. Never in the whole of his association with Wilkins and Gunn had he received such treatment. He sat and glared and clawed at the ink which was running down his face, and turning it into something approaching a Christy minstrel's.

It was poetic justice with a vengeance. The ink Grundy had upset had certainly not improved his study-mates' impositions. And it was equally certain that the ink Gunn had upset had not improved the countenance of George Alfred Grundy. For some seconds Wilkins and Gunn stood staring at their handiwork; for a like number of seconds George Alfred Grundy seemed bereft of speech. Then, of a sudden, he recovered his voice.

"You—you cheeky rotters!"

It was a roar that would have done credit to the celebrated Bull of Basban, and it was followed by a spring that Tarzan of the Apes might have envied.

But Wilkins and Gunn, doubtless horrified at what they had done, were seconds in advance of their study-mate. They stood not upon the order of their going but went. After them raced George Alfred Grundy, his face crimson with rage under the rapidly drying ink.

"Stop!" roared Grundy. "Stop, you rotters! I'll pulverise you!"

Really it was hardly to be expected that Wilkins and Gunn would obey that injunction. Stopping just then would have required more courage than Daniel drew upon when he entered the lion's den.

Wilkins and Gunn fairly flew.

"Stop!" bawled Grundy.

Wilkins and Gunn vanished round a corner of the passage at lightning speed.

"Grundy!"

It was Mr. Linton's voice.

The master of the Shell stood at the top of the staircase as Grundy came flying along. The Form master looked once at Grundy's blackened face and jumped.

"Grundy! Stop!"

George Alfred Grundy stopped. Mr. Linton rustled up to him.

"Boy," he thundered, "what does this mean? How dare you rush about the passages in this ridiculous state?"

"I—I—I—" stammered Grundy, breathlessly and confusedly.

Mr. Linton held up his hand.

"How dare you paint your face in that foolish fashion, Grundy?" he inquired. "Such tomfoolery from a boy in my Form is deplorable!"

"I—I—I—" stammered Grundy, breathlessly and confusedly.

"Go and clean yourself at once!" snapped Mr. Linton. "And write a hundred times: 'I must not do childish things.'"

"Ch-ch-childish th-th-things!" stuttered Grundy. "But I—"

Mr. Linton rustled away majestically, leaving the burly junior of the Shell gasping.

"Well, I'm hanged!" ejaculated Grundy at length. "Of all the injustice—"

Words failed him. He crawled off dismally to the bath-room, vowing threats of vengeance on the heads of his study-mates. But those two daring youths were careful to keep out of his way. It was exactly half an hour later when Grundy returned to his study. His face was red and furious as the result of his activities with a scrubbing-brush, but there were still lingering traces of the ink.

"I'll make those rotters sorry for this!" he growled, as he surveyed his face in the mirror. "But I'll settle with that cheeky idiot Cardew first!"

Having reached that decision the great George Alfred stalked out of his study and made tracks for the Fourth Form passage. He halted outside Study No. 9. Then, with a sweep of his mighty fist, he sent the door swinging open.

Cardew, Levison, and Clive were in the study, the former grappling with the task of selecting the names of the eleven who were to represent the junior footer team in the final match that season with Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars. It was not such an easy task as many of the juniors supposed, for the claims to inclusion in the team were many, and Cardew was endeavouring to treat each claim with an

impartial eye. Levison and Clive were playing a game of draughts. Not one of the three welcomed the interruption or the manner of it.

"What the thump do you want?" demanded Levison.

Grundy glared.

"I've come to tell a cheeky ass what I think of him!" he retorted.

Cardew yawned. He had an idea that he was the "cheeky ass" referred to.

"Shut the door, old bean," he drawled, "and shove yourself on the other side of it."

Grundy wagged a finger almost under Cardew's nose.

"Yesterday," said the Shell junior, "you had the awful cheek to order me down to the footer practice."

Cardew nodded.

"What a memory!" he said languidly. "I don't know how you manage to do these things without a brain, dear man!"

Grundy's finger wagged viciously.

"See here, Cardew," he said wrathfully, "I've had enough of you!"

"The feeling is mutual—what?"

"And I'm going to make you feel sorry that you chased me with a toasting-fork. Now you know!"

To Grundy the events of yesterday afternoon ought to have occasioned the skies to fall and the earth to cease turning round. But neither of these things, strange to say, had happened. What had happened, however, was that Grundy had been made to toe the line.

Cardew yawned openly.

"Have you finished, old bean?"

"Finished!" snorted Grundy. "I haven't started yet!"

"Oh gad!" said Cardew, in mock horror. "Can't you put it in writin', old bean? So much less borin' than listenin' to your dulcet tones."

Grundy glared—a ferocious glare. But the peculiar smile on the good-looking face of Ralph Reckness Cardew remained. If Grundy had hoped to intimidate the junior captain with that glare he was disappointed.

"I'm going to thrash you!" roared Grundy. "I'm going to give you the licking of your life! I'm going to make you sorry you ever took on the job of captain! I'm going—"

"Here, steady on, old bean!" drawled Cardew. "You'll die of heart failure if you tackle all those things at once!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Levison and Clive.

"You can laugh!" exclaimed Grundy. "You'll be wanted later on to pick up the bits when I've finished with this—"

He made an expressive gesture towards the imperturbable Cardew.

"Oh, gad!" exclaimed Cardew, in mock horror.

Grundy fairly trembled with rage. He had been nursing his grievance now for twenty-four hours or more, and, like wine, it had improved with keeping.

"You rotter!" he burst out. "You're going to fight me!"

Cardew looked astonished.

"I?" he queried. "Oh gad! What a life!"

"You're going to meet me in the gym!" growled George Alfred Grundy, "an' then I'm going to give you the thrashing of your life!"

"But I don't want to scrap," said Cardew, with a yawn. "It's an awful fag, and a chap's likely to get damaged in the process. Can't you fight some other chap, old bean?"

"Stop rotting!" hooted Grundy. "I'm going to thrash a slacking, cheeky rotter—that's you!"

"Thank you for your opinion," drawled Cardew. "But I'm not goin' to scrap a wooden-headed idiot, old bean! I'm rather careful about my knuckles, you know."

George Alfred Grundy glared. He was essentially a man of action, not words, and he knew that Cardew was superior to him in this battle of words.

"Are you going to fight me or not?" he demanded truculently.

Cardew seemed to consider for a few seconds.

"On one condition, old bean," he answered slowly.

"What's that?"

"That I'm allowed to have a toasting-fork—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison and Clive could restrain their roars no longer. The expression on Grundy's face as Cardew made mention of the toasting-fork was ludicrous in the extreme. The burly Shell fellow seemed on the point of bursting. He glared at the laughing faces around him, and then he reached forward.

Smack!

Grundy's open palm came across Cardew's cheek with the report like a pistol shot.

There was a dead silence in the study. Levison and Clive looked serious. Cardew, except for the peculiar glitter in his eyes and the crimson mark that was already springing to his cheek where Grundy's hand had smote it, seemed as nonchalant as ever.

"Now what's your answer?" hooted Grundy.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders. "There's nothin' for it, old bean, but to accept," he answered coolly. "It's an awful fag an' a bore thrashin' a fellow on a nice evenin' like this, but I'm an obligin' fellow."

"Then you'll be in the gym in ten minutes' time?" said Grundy, with gleaming eyes.

"Yes," replied Cardew languidly. "An' I won't bring the toastin'-fork this time."

George Alfred Grundy snorted and turned on his heel. The study door slammed, and the Shell junior tramped off down the passage. When his heavy footsteps had died away, Cardew turned a smiling face on his study-mates.

"Here's a go!" he said lazily. "This is what comes of takin' over the captaincy. What a life!"

Levison and Clive looked a trifle anxious. A scrap with Grundy was no light affair, for the burly Shell junior was a fighting man of repute. That Cardew was good with the "mittens" they knew, but just how good had never been discovered.

"You were an ass to goad him on, old chap," said Levison.

Clive nodded.

"A little tact and Grundy would have cooled down," he said.

"Think so?" yawned Cardew. "What a pity! This skipper's job's awfully tiring, what with one thing an' another. I haven't finished selectin' the giddy players for the match with Greyfriars, an' now I've got a fight on my hands!"

"You don't seem very worried about it," said Clive, with a faint grin.

Cardew yawned and rose to his feet.

"Never trouble worry, till worry troubles you, old beans," he said, with a faint grin. "Grundy wants a fight, an' although it's an awful fag, I'm not averse to improvin' the shinin' hour with a little exhibition of the noble art."

"All the fellows will be there," said Levison thoughtfully. Cardew nodded.

"Does that imply, my dear Ernie, that you think I shall let the study down in front of a full house?"

Levison shook his head.

"I'm not thinkin' that," he answered. "But it wouldn't do you any good if Grundy licked you."

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"It's on the knees of the gods," he drawled. "As a famous statesman once said: 'Wait an' see.'"

With that remark Ralph Reckness Cardew sauntered unconcernedly out of the study, and Levison and Clive, with an expressive glance at each other, followed him. One thought ruled their minds just then. Would Grundy's mighty fists vanquish their chum and study-mate, or would Cardew, by some miraculous means, succeed in vanquishing the great George Alfred? It was a thought that troubled them, but if looks were any means of telling, it did not trouble Ralph Reckness Cardew as he strolled towards the gym, whistling softly.

CHAPTER 6.

The Fight!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

Baggy Trimble burst into Study No. 10 in the Shell passage like a cyclone.

Tom Merry & Co. jumped.

"You silly idiot!" roared Tom in exasperation.

Baggy Trimble grinned.

"I say, you fellows, there's a fight on!"

"What?"

The fat Fourth-Former grinned.

"A fight—in the gym, between Grundy and Cardew!"

The Terrible Three looked interested and alarmed at the same time. If Baggy Trimble's news was true, that fight was likely to end in an easy victory for Grundy, if they were any judges of the merits of the two.

"He, he, he!" cackled Baggy Trimble. "Rich, isn't it? I hope Grundy gives that rotter Cardew a fearful licking."

"Oh, you hope that, do you, old fat man?" asked Tom Merry.

Trimble nodded.

"Yes. The beast chased me down to the footer yesterday," he said indignantly. "Kicked me all the way."

"He didn't kick you enough," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, really, Merry—"

"But we'll soon rectify that little omission," said Tom Merry, drawing back his boot.

"Yooooop!"

Baggy Trimble found himself spun round. Next second a boot landed on the seat of his trousers. In fact, several boots found a billet there, so to speak, as Manners and Monty Lowther followed Tom Merry's initial move. Roaring lustily, Baggy Trimble was dribbled out in the passage. Then he took to his heels.

"I suppose the fat ass was speaking the truth," said Tom Merry.

"I'm not surprised if there's a fight on," remarked Manners. "Grundy was breathing threats of slaughter yesterday when Cardew chased him down to the footer ground with the toastin'-fork."

"Let's go along to the gym," said Tom.

And the Terrible Three set off in that direction. They soon learned that Trimble's news was correct, for there was a stream of juniors from the Fourth and Shell trekking towards the gym. Everybody was discussing the forthcoming fight, and the chances Ralph Reckness Cardew, the slim dandy of the Fourth, stood of being slaughtered, or alternately, of escaping slaughter at the hands of his burly opponent.

The gym was packed when Tom Merry and his chums arrived. Levison and Clive were with Cardew, the latter looking very unconcerned.

"Best of luck, Cardew," said Tom Merry.

At that moment George Alfred Grundy swaggered over to his corner. He glared ferociously at Cardew, and that youth yawned in return.

Wilkins and Gunn, whose awful conduct in Study No. 3 had been "overlooked" by their study-mate, were busying themselves as Grundy's seconds.

Jack Blake, who had consented to act as referee and timekeeper, borrowed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's gold "ticker," and motioned to the two contestants.

"Gentlemen," roared Blake to the assembled juniors, "on my left, George Alfred Grundy."

There were cheers, boos, and much laughter following that announcement.

"On my right, our esteemed skipper, Ralph Reckness Cardew," went on Blake.

At which there was renewed cheering and laughter.

"What these silly asses are fighting about is beyond me," said Blake, in a loud voice.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But may the best man win!"

"Hurrah!"

"Eat him, Grundy!"

"Knock his head off, Cardew!"

The rival partisans indulged in a few personal remarks, and then silence settled on the crowd in the gym as Blake, having seen that Cardew and Grundy were anxious to be up and doing, called "Time!"

Grundy swaggered to the centre of the improvised ring; Cardew rose languidly from his corner and sauntered to meet him. They shook hands.

Biff!

George Alfred Grundy led with a terrific right hook that would have stretched Cardew on his back had it landed. Everyone amongst the onlookers fully expected it to land. Certainly Grundy did. But somehow or other Cardew managed to dodge that devastating hook.

Biff! Biff!

Before Grundy had quite recovered from his astonishment, two stinging jolts to the ribs shook him from head to foot. Evidently this scrap with the slim, elegant junior of the Fourth was not going to be the walkover he had anticipated. Grundy fell back on the defensive, and Cardew gave him plenty of work to do for the languid air had fallen from the junior skipper, and it was soon borne in on the minds of the juniors present that the one-time slacker was more than "useful" with his fists.

When that round came to a close Grundy's face bore the marks of heavy punishment, whilst Cardew was practically untouched.

"Good man!" said Levison, as he busied himself with the towel. "You've got the measure of him."

"Think so, Ernie?" asked Cardew.

Levison nodded, and Clive grinned. That opening round had proved to the chums of Study No. 9 that Cardew knew more about the noble art of self-defence than either of them had given him credit for.

"Time!"

The next round opened up with Grundy rushing at his slim opponent like a bull. Grundy's great fists sawed through the air, but very few of his blows landed, and a gasp of dismay went up from his study-mates when Cardew, seeing an opening, delivered a jolting uppercut that swept Grundy clean off his feet and deposited him on his back.

A wild burst of cheering greeted that knock-down, and Blake began to count:

"One—"

That was as far as he got, for Grundy unwisely jumped to his feet, instead of taking advantage of the count, and dashed in again.

Biff!

A wild, terrific, straight left connected with Cardew's chin. For one moment he rocked on his feet, and Grundy,

thinking that he had his opponent at his mercy, dashed in to finish the fight.

"Look out, Cardew!"

"Finish him off, Grundy!"

But the "finishing off" was not destined to take place in that round, for Cardew, showing an amazing knowledge of ring footwork, danced away from his heavier opponent until he had recovered, and by that time the round came to a close.

"Phew! That was a near thing," said Clive, as he sponged his chum's face.

Cardew grinned.

"It was like the kick of a mule," he said. "But Grundy will be lucky if he gets another one in like that, my dear Sidney."

In Grundy's corner Wilkins and Gunn were urging their chum to try that famous straight left again.

"You had him groggy, old man," said Wilkins.

"Absolutely," said Gunn. "But don't run after him, Grundy," he added. "Cardew's much quicker on his feet than you are. Let him come after you."

Grundy, even in that moment, could not forget that he was Grundy, leader of Study No. 3. He glared at Gunn.

"You shut up, Gunn!" he snapped. "When I want your advice I'll ask for it!"

"Oh!"

"Time!"

This time it was Cardew who led off. He feinted with his left, drew Grundy's guard, and then plumped in right and left with such force that the burly Shell junior was hard put to it to keep his balance. But he recovered, and then followed an exchange of blows that sent the onlookers into a frenzy of excitement. It seemed madness for Cardew to attempt this foot-to-foot slogging, but his knowledge of ringcraft was far superior to that of Grundy, for, with several movements of the head to left and right, he escaped the full force of many of the blows, the gloves merely whistling over his sleek head of hair. To the watching juniors it appeared as though Cardew was taking the full force of the blows, but Tom Merry and a few other experienced fighters knew that the burly Shell junior was getting the worst of that exchange, not Cardew.

"Finish him off, Grundy!"

"Go it, Cardew!" yelled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy excitedly. "Give him a straight left!"

Crash!

"Man down!"

A terrific right hook which Cardew failed to "slip" sent him crashing upon his back. Unlike Grundy, Cardew rested whilst Blake began to count:

"One—two—three—four—"

Still Cardew did not get up.

Levison and Clive were getting anxious, but their anxiety changed to relief when Cardew winked at them.

"Five—six—seven—eight—"

Cardew rose to his feet. Next moment, to Grundy's astonishment, his slim opponent was coming at him with all the fury of a tiger. The burly Shell junior found himself being forced back to the ring. Right and left, left and right—blows fairly rained upon him.

"Go it, Cardew!"

"You've got him!"

Levison and Clive were wildly jubilant. They could see now that Cardew had his opponent at his mercy.

Wilkins and Gunn looked glum.

"Get on the move, you ass!" howled Wilkins.

But that was what Grundy was trying to do. Cardew had forced him into a corner from which there seemed no retreat. Grundy's eyes were streaming with water, and his lashing fists simply beat the empty air. The end seemed imminent.

It was not long in coming.

Cardew feinted with his left, and then:

Thud!

It was the cleanest knock-out that had ever been witnessed in the historic gym for many a day. Grundy's head shook back, his knees sagged under him, and then he dropped to the floor—knocked out!

Cardew, breathing hard, stood back. Blake's monotonous voice tolled out the fateful seconds. But the Fourth-Former could have gone on counting for five minutes, for all the signs of recovery Grundy showed.

Grundy was "out"—very much out, and Ralph Reckness Cardew of the Fourth had won.

"Hurrah!"

"Bravo!"

"Good old Cardew!"

Cardew tossed off the gloves and moved towards Grundy. That unfortunate youth was just coming to.

"Groooooough!" he murmured dreamily to Wilkins. "What—what hit me?"

And then the defeated Shell junior caught sight of Cardew.

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"That—that last punch was like the kick of a mule, Cardew," he said in a low voice. "I never thought you had it in you. Shake!"

Cardew took the proffered hand and shook it warmly.

"Sorry I hit you so hard, old bean," he said.

Grundy struggled up.

"You're a good man, Cardew," he said sincerely. "A better man than I am, with the gloves. I'll get you to show me that knock-out one of these days."

"Right-ho!" said Cardew, with a grin. "Any time you like."

And with that he rejoined his chums, collected his jacket, and marched off to the bath-room with Levison and Clive, the cheers of the juniors following him as he went.

"Bravo, old chap!" said Levison, thumping his chum on the back. "It was a grand scrap!"

"Topping!" exclaimed Sidney Clive.

"Agreed," said Ralph Reckness; "but for all that, frightfully tirin'!"

CHAPTER 7.

Not a Success!

"IT'S up to you, Figgy!"

George Francis Kerr made that pronouncement with portentous gravity.

"It's up to you, Figgy!"

David Llewellyn Wynn provided a faithful echo, so to speak.

Figgins looked thoughtful.

The leader of the New House was sitting on the edge of the table in his study. Fatty Wynn was comfortably ensconced in the armchair, whilst Kerr leaned up against the mantelpiece.

The New House trio did not look happy. It was a half-holiday—one of those glorious spring days that make life really worth living. But Figgins & Co. looked very depressed. It was a half-holiday for the rest of St. Jim's, but not for the juniors of the New House, for at two o'clock sharp they were expected in the Form-room. Since the untimely arrival of Mr. Horace Rateliff in the New House dormitory, when Figgins & Co. had contemplated a lightning raid on their rivals in the School House, the master of the New House had been unduly severe. Doubtless that

was due to the "biffing" he had received on that momentous occasion, for Mr. Ratcliff was not of a forgiving nature. In the Form-room, lines and lickings had fallen upon the hapless juniors in his charge like leaves in Vallombrosa.

Figgins turned a moody face towards the study window. Outside, the spring sun streamed down invitingly. In the Form-room there would be little sun. Really it was too bad of Mr. Ratcliff to detain his pupils on that glorious afternoon.



With Cardew lunging at him with the toasting-fork, George Alfred Grundy fairly tore towards the group of footballers. It was the first time any of the slackers had been brought to Little Side in this fashion, and the juniors roared. "Ha ha, ha!" (See Chapter 3.)

"He may do the decent thing," murmured Kerr thoughtfully. "Old Ratty has his good points, you know."

Figgins grunted.

"Very few," he muttered. "And I'm blessed if I've ever seen any of 'em!"

"If you put it to him nicely," went on Kerr, "the old hunk may let us off. Tell him how sorry we are, and all that!"

"Pile on the giddy agony," contributed Fatty Wynn.

"Blessed if I don't try it on, anyway!" said Figgins, coming to a decision. "I particularly want to see the waxworks show at Rylcombe this afternoon."

"Same here!"

The advent of a travelling waxworks show in the village of Rylcombe had been regarded with interest by the juniors at St. Jim's, for it was certainly something of a novelty. Figgins & Co., in deciding to visit the show had quite forgotten for the moment that they were in detention for that afternoon. Still, there was a chance—a very slight chance—that Mr. Horace Ratcliff might "do the decent thing" and cancel that detention.

Figgins moved towards the door.

"I'll trot along and see old Ratty," he murmured, not with any degree of assurance, however.

"Good man!"

The study door closed, and the leader of the New House strode along to his Housemaster's study. He tapped on the door respectfully—very respectfully. A harsh, grating voice bade him enter.

Mr. Horace Ratcliff was seated at his desk, checking a number of exercises. From the expression on the Housemaster's face, those exercises had not come up to the scratch, so to speak.

He turned a basilisk eye upon George Figgins.

"Well?"

Figgins coughed.

"Excuse me, sir," he began, "but I've come here—" he faltered.

"So I perceive," said Mr. Ratcliff dryly. "And you've come at the right moment, boy. I have been checking the English history papers; and yours, particularly, Figgins, is most slovenly executed."

"Oh!" Really it seemed that Figgins had not chosen a propitious moment to make his appeal.

"Most slovenly!" went on the master of the New House. "A disgrace to your Form."

"Oh!" Figgins' vocabulary seemed rather limited.

Mr. Ratcliff treated the hapless junior to a frigid stare.

"I believe the junior members of this House are under detention this afternoon," he remarked. "Excellent! They will be able to improve the shining hour with a close study of English history."

"Oh!"

Mr. Horace Ratcliff looked at his watch. It wanted five minutes to two.

"You will assemble the New House juniors in the Form-room at two o'clock sharp, Figgins," he said. "Any boy absenting himself will be dealt with summarily."

"Oh!"

Mr. Ratcliff turned to the English history papers again. But Figgins did not stir.

"Why are you standing there, boy?" demanded the New House master irritably, looking up from his desk. "I thought I told you to assemble the juniors in the Form-room!"

Figgins fidgeted first on one foot and then on the other.

"I—I came here, sir, to ask you a favour."

It was out now, and the effect it had upon Mr. Horace Ratcliff was extraordinary. A peculiar expression of amazement mingled with anger settled on his hard face.

"A favour?" he echoed incredulously.

"Yes, sir."

"Bless my soul! Am I to understand that you contemplated, for one moment, asking me to cancel the detention, Figgins?"

Mr. Ratcliff had hit the bullseye first time. Figgins began to wish that he hadn't contemplated asking that favour. But the long-legged leader of the New House was a stickler.

"You see, sir," he said, "it's a half-holiday—"

"Indeed?" rapped Mr. Ratcliff. "I believe I am aware of the fact."

"And—and we're frightfully keen to see the waxworks show, sir!" blurted out Figgins.

"The waxworks show?" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Is it possible, boy, that you desire to be excused detention in order to visit a waxworks show?"

"Ye-es, sir!"

"Goodness gracious!" murmured Mr. Ratcliff, quite taken aback. The idea of his pupils being interested in a waxworks show amazed him; the master of the New House regarded such shows and others of their kind as abominations. Whether Mr. Ratcliff had ever been interested in such attractions during his own schooldays was unknown. Indeed, the juniors of the New House were beginning to believe that, by some strange process or other, Mr. Ratcliff had never been a boy. If he had, it had certainly been many years ago—so far back as to be entirely forgotten.

Figgins waited patiently, but not hopefully.

Mr. Ratcliff recovered slowly from the shock. Then he fixed a stern eye on George Figgins.

"Boy!" he rapped, and his hand wandered to a cane on his desk. "I will overlook your impertinence in making such a request! Go!"

Mr. Ratcliff's tone did not imply, however, that he overlooked that "impertinence" graciously.

"Then—then you won't let us off detention, sir?" asked Figgins.

Really it was a dangerous remark to make in the circumstances. Mr. Ratcliff's hand had wandered to the cane. Now his hand closed on the cane, and the master of the New House rose to his feet.

"How dare you, Figgins!" he rapped. "I have already informed you that such a request is impertinent, and yet you dare to repeat it. Hold out your hand!"

"Oh crumbs!" Figgins' face fell.

"Hold out your hand!"

Swish!

"And the other!" snapped the New House master.

Swish!

"Now kindly leave this study and assemble the boys in the Form-room at once, Figgins!"

"Owl! Yes, sir!"

George Figgins departed from his Housemaster's study with a woebegone face. He squeezed his hands under his armpits in an endeavour to assuage the pain of those two stinging cuts. His mission to Mr. Ratcliff's study had hardly been successful. No one knew that better than Kerr and Fatty Wynn when their study-mate opened the door of their study and marched in.

"Licked?" asked Kerr sympathetically.

Figgins nodded.

"The beast!" exclaimed Kerr.

"The rotter!" added Fatty Wynn. "Hard luck, Figgy!"

The leader of the New House juniors explained to his sympathetic chums what had transpired in the Housemaster's study.

"The old tyrant!" groaned Figgins. "He's got it in for us over that dormitory bizney. It was all Cardew's fault, really!"

"Well, I wouldn't say that," said Kerr thoughtfully.

"Cardew didn't know that Ratty was coming along."

But Figgins was unreasonable at that moment.

"I tell you it was Cardew's fault!" he reiterated. "I'm going to make that School House slacker sit up one of these days!"

"Ahem!" coughed Kerr. "It's time we were getting along to the blessed Form-room! Come on, Figgy, let's round up the fellows."

And the New House trio vacated the study to round up the juniors. In view of Mr. Ratcliff's warning, it ill behoved any junior of the New House to absent himself from detention that afternoon, and at two o'clock sharp there was a full muster of both Shell and Fourth Form juniors when Mr. Horace Ratcliff stalked in with rustling gown.

The unpopular master of the New House carried a bundle of exercises under his arm, which he proceeded to distribute to their rightful owners.

"These exercises are disgracefully done!" rapped the New House master. "Each boy will write them out afresh. And on no account is any boy to leave the Form-room before half-past four."

There was a suppressed groan from the New House juniors. There would be no chance of leaving the Form-room before that time if those English history papers had to be done afresh. But Mr. Ratcliff did not relent when he saw the miserable faces of his pupils; on the contrary, they seemed to afford him great satisfaction.

"You will commence your task!" he rapped. "And I need not remind you that any further slovenliness will be dealt with summarily."

With that Mr. Horace Ratcliff rustled towards the door of the Form-room and took his departure. The moment he had gone a combined groan from the Shell and Fourth Form juniors went up. At that moment Mr. Horace Ratcliff was the most unpopular man on earth, and Figgins & Co. the most doleful members of the New House at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 8.

French Leave!

"HANG it!"

George Figgins threw down his pen with a gesture of disgust. Kerr and a dozen other New House juniors did the same.

"Hang it!"

It was exactly twenty minutes since Mr. Ratcliff had left the New House juniors to their task in the Form-room. Figgins & Co. had begun their task unwillingly, and as the minutes had passed their unwillingness grew and grew to rebellious proportions.

"I'm fed-up!" growled Figgins.

"Same here!" said Kerr.

And there was a general nodding of heads. Undoubtedly the New House juniors were fed-up. Through the windows of the Form-room came the cheery voices of fellows who were more fortunate than themselves. That was sufficient to make any of them "fed-up," and the additional reminder in front of them in the shape of the English History papers constituted the limit.

"I'm not sticking it," growled Figgins, bringing his fist down on the desk with considerable force. "Blow, Ratty!"

"Boil him!" exclaimed Kerr fiercely.

"Burst him!"

Figgins rose to his feet and crossed to the window. His face clouded as he saw Cardew, Levison, and Clive in the quad below. The chums of Study No. 9 were setting out for the waxworks show.

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Figgins shook his fist at Cardew as that youth looked up at the window.

The junior captain murmured something to his chums and then came over to the window.

"What's up, Figgy?"

"You jolly well know we're detained," growled Figgins. "All your blessed fault, too."

Cardew looked surprised.

"Oh, bad luck," he said sympathetically. "I didn't know, as a matter of fact, old bean. I fail to see how it is my fault."

Figgins growled.

"You know Ratty came along to the dorm the other night?"

Cardew nodded.

"I do," he replied. "An' I yelled a warnin' to you silly asses, but you didn't take any notice. An' as it wasn't exactly wise to linger in the vicinity, I hopped it."

"Oh!" Figgins was somewhat mollified. True he hadn't heard the warning that Cardew had uttered, but it made a difference if Cardew had uttered it.

"You want to bring up your giddy Housemaster in the way he should go," drawled Cardew. "Now, if we had a tyrant like old Ratty in the School House, we'd give him jip, what?"

Figgins' face clouded again.

"You School House worms are all talk," he snapped. "You wouldn't be able to do much with Ratty. He's too sharp."

"An' so is your humble," said Cardew. "Look here, Figgy, old bean, if you like to leave it to me, I'll make old Ratty sorry for himself. A great idea is dawnin' in my powerful intellect."

"Eats!"

Cardew shook his head sorrowfully.

"I can't explain the giddy wheeze just now," he murmured. "It would take too long to tell you usin' words of one syllable. But let it go at that, dear man."

"You cheeky idiot!" roared Figgins. "If I weren't detained I'd come down and lick you!"

"Naughty, naughty," chided Cardew gently. "New House little boys can't break detention, you know. It isn't done. Only School House fellows have got the nerve for that. So long, old bean. An' don't forget I've got a wheeze to down old Ratty."

With an airy wave of the hand, Cardew rejoined Levison and Clive and sauntered off towards the gates.

Figgins withdrew his head from the window and walked back to his desk. His face was clouded.

"You heard that cheeky School House worm?"

Kerr and Fatty Wynn nodded.

"As good as said we hadn't the nerve to break detention," growled Figgins. "Blessed if I don't cut off."

"Ratty may pop in at any moment," remarked Kerr. "If he found us missing, the giddy chopper would come down with a vengeance."

And Fatty Wynn nodded dolorously.

"I don't care!" exclaimed Figgins recklessly. "I'm not doing any more blessed English History, anyway. Might just as well cut off."

"It's a glorious afternoon," muttered Kerr, casting a longing glance out of the window.

"And I'm keen on seeing the waxworks show," said Fatty Wynn.

Figgins' eyes gleamed.

"Let's chance it," he said.

There was a silence, what time Fatty Wynn and Kerr considered the matter.

"Well?" said Figgins at last. "Are you game?"

Kerr and Fatty Wynn nodded.

"We'll risk it!"

The rest of the detained juniors looked on interestedly. More than a dozen of them were contemplating cutting detention themselves. It only wanted an example to put thoughts into action, as it were. And the example was provided by George Figgins.

The long-legged leader of the New House tramped towards the door of the Form-room and tugged at the handle.

The door did not open.

"The rotter!" growled Figgins wrathfully. "He's locked the blessed door."

It was true. Mr. Ratcliff doubtless had a suspicion that some of the more unruly members of his House would not be above cutting detention, and the master of the New House had taken the precaution of locking the Form-room door. But if Mr. Ratcliff imagined that that check would quell the rebellious juniors he was doomed to disappointment. As the scribe of old has remarked, "four walls do not a prison make." If exit by the door was denied Figgins & Co. there was always the window.

True, the exit via the Form-room window was more dangerous than via the door, for there was a drop of a dozen feet or more to the quad below. But Figgins & Co. were

accustomed to taking risks, and a thoughtful builder had elected to place a drain-pipe just outside the window, down which a fairly energetic youth could scramble if he had the mind to.

Figgins & Co. had the mind to.

The three juniors crossed to the window and peered out. The coast was clear. Next minute Figgins was scrambling over the sill and clutching at the friendly drain-pipe. After him went George Francis Kerr.

Figgins climbed down that drain-pipe with an agility and ease born of practice. Kerr did likewise.

"All clear," murmured Figgins, when his feet touched the quad. "Get a move on, Fatty!"

Fatty Wynn next essayed the climb. He lowered his excessive avoirdupois over the window sill and, with much puffing and grunting, shinned down the pipe. His attempt was not so agile, but the ultimate result was the same, for he dropped beside his chums at last, breathing hard.

"Good man!" said Figgins. "Now make for the school wall. Can't go out of the gates, or old Taggles will spot us."

With Kerr in the lead, the New House trio crossed to the school wall. By means of a friendly oak tree they gained the top of the wall. Glancing back, Kerr grinned as he saw Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence following their example. And after the "New Firm" came half a dozen other New House juniors. It was a general exodus from the Form-room.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn dropped to the road and set off for Rylcombe. The deed was done now and, at the moment, there were no regrets.

"This is better," said Figgins, with a grin, as he strode out.

"Much better," agreed Kerr and Fatty Wynn.

"And we'll see the waxworks show, after all."

It was a cheering thought and the New House trio stepped it out briskly. If Mr. Ratcliff discovered that they had broken detention, retribution in a painful form was certain to follow. But that risk had to be taken. By the time Figgins & Co. had reached the village all thoughts of Mr. Ratcliff had passed from their minds; that severe gentleman, they reckoned, was frowning in his study. In that, however, Figgins & Co. were wrong. Mr. Horace Ratcliff was not in his study; in fact, he was much nearer his recalcitrant pupils than was good for their health, so to speak.

CHAPTER 9.

Mr. Squeers!

"WALK up! Walk up!"

Mr. Jaggers' stentorian voice awoke the echoes of Rylcombe.

Mr. Jaggers' "Famous Waxworks Show" was causing quite an excitement amongst the villagers.

"Admission sixpence—sixpence only!" bellowed Mr. Jaggers. "The finest waxworks show in the wurr-uld!"

Mr. Jaggers himself was causing almost as much excitement as his waxworks show. He was a podgy, middle-aged gentleman, with a flowing moustache and a red, bloated face. On his head, stuck at a rakish angle, was a silk hat many sizes too small for him. Around his podgy figure was a frock coat that threatened to burst at the buttons at any moment. His rather big feet were encased in patent leather shoes; over these were a pair of odd spats. In the black cravat at his neck glinted an enormous "diamond"—at least, Mr. Jaggers fondly hoped that it would be mistaken for a diamond. After all, no one had seen him purchase it for the modest price of sixpence at a famous universal stores.

"Walk up, ladies and gentlemen!" bellowed Mr. Jaggers.

The ladies and gentlemen walked up all right as far as the big marquee which housed Mr. Jaggers' Famous Waxworks Show, but they seemed disinclined to proceed farther. Perhaps it was due to the fact that farther progress would cost them sixpence, or it may have been due to Mr. Jaggers' comical appearance.

"The finest waxworks show in the wurr-uld!" called out Mr. Jaggers modestly. "Walk up, ladies and gentlemen—run away, you kids—walk up, walk up!"

Thus encouraged, a few members of the crowd paid their sixpences and passed into the big marquee.

Mr. Jaggers positively beamed when a number of St. Jim's juniors joined the crowd.

"Walk up, young gentlemen!"

Cardew, Levison, and Clive walked up. After them came Tom Merry & Co. and Jack Blake & Co. Mr. Jaggers rubbed his podgy hands in great satisfaction as ten more sixpences found their way into his pockets.

The St. Jim's juniors passed into the tent.

"Oh gad!" Cardew started back as he came face to face with a fearsome-looking figure standing over six foot high, whose clothes hung upon a frame that was like a

skeleton's. The figure was labelled "The thinnest Man in the World!"

"Gave me quite a turn," breathed Cardew. "I should say he was the thinnest. Hallo, there's Henry the Eighth!"

The chums of Study No. 9 crossed over to a wax figure clad in a dowdy suit that certainly never resembled anything that came out of Henry the Eighth's wardrobe. But the figure itself was decidedly good. In fact, the majority of the wax figures of famous men and women were cleverly executed; it was the dowdy clothes in which they were garbed that rather spoiled the general effect. Still, that was only to be expected if the estimable Mr. Jaggers had anything to do with their dressing.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, surveying a figure through his celebrated monocle. "Here's Dick Turpin!"

"And here's Dr. Crippen!" exclaimed Blake.

Arthur Augustus turned to look at his study-mate. Then he jumped as a young lady with a smiling face stood in his path.

The elegant swell of the Fourth politely raised his topper and bowed.

(Continued on next page.)

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"I'm awfully sorry, miss," he apologised, and moved out of the way.

Blake & Co. shrieked as they watched their elegant chum.

"You silly idiot!" roared Blake.

"You chump!" laughed Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Fathead!" said Digby. "It's only a wax figure!"

"Oh cwwmbs!" murmured Arthur Augustus; and he stared at the smiling figure of the wax lady unbelievably. But, naturally, the figure did not move. The expression on the face did not change, and it was born in on Arthur Augustus' mind at last that he had made a mistake. The expression on their noble chum's face sent Blake & Co. into convulsions.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus turned a crimson face on them.

"Weally, deah boys," he said warmly, "I fail to see the weason for this wibald laughtah!"

But that was where the noble Arthur Augustus and his chums differed. Blake & Co. did see the reason, and they thoroughly enjoyed the joke.

Meantime, Cardew had seated himself, whilst Levison and Clive wandered round the marquee "seeing the sights." There was a thoughtful expression in Cardew's face which gave place slowly to a grin.

"By gad!" he murmured. "It's a wheeze. A first-class, gilt-edged wheeze, jewelled in every movement, so to speak."

Whatever that wheeze was it afforded Cardew some amusement, for when he rejoined his chums he was grinning.

"What's the giddy joke?" asked Levison.

"Tell you later, old bean," answered Cardew. "Hallo, here come those New House asses. They must have cut detention!"

Figgins & Co. strolled in at the tent door, looking and feeling very pleased with themselves. And at their entry Cardew, Levison, and Clive made their exit. They had made a tour of the place and seen everything there was to see. But instead of heading straight for the bunshop as Cardew had previously arranged, that cheery youth walked up to Mr. Jaggars and drew him on one side.

"Excuse me, Mr. Jaggars—"

The proprietor beamed a friendly smile on the elegant junior of the Fourth.

"Have you enjoyed the show, young sir?"

"Immensely," returned Cardew. "But might a fellow make a suggestion?"

Mr. Jaggars beamed.

"Why, certainly, sir!"

"You're a business man," drawled Cardew, much to Levison's and Clive's amazement. "An' I've got a proposition to make to you."

Mr. Jaggars eyed the immaculate St. Jim's junior curiously. That Cardew was well supplied with that useful commodity cash was written all over him. His clothes were well cut, his very manner seemed to suggest affluence. And Mr. Jaggars thought only of pounds and shillings and pence whenever the word "proposition" was made in his hearing.

"Go ahead, young sir!"

Cardew's face was deadly serious.

"Have you ever heard of Mr. Squeers—Mr. Wackford Squeers, my dear sir?"

Mr. Jaggars contemplated for a moment.

"Can't say I 'ave."

Cardew looked surprised.

"Then you haven't read Charles Dickens," he remarked.

"No, I met a chap named Bert Dickens once," said Mr. Jaggars thoughtfully. "E was a rare 'and at juggling—"

Cardew shook his head.

"No relation, I'm sure!" he explained. "Charles Dickens was a famous writer."

"Was 'e?" said Mr. Jaggars, without a great show of interest.

"He was," continued Cardew. "He provided us with such wondrous tales as 'Oliver Twist,' 'A Christmas Carol,' 'The Pickwick Papers,' 'Nicholas Nickleby,' an' heaps of others."

"Did he now?" exclaimed Mr. Jaggars, wondering where all this was leading him.

Cardew nodded. Levison and Clive exchanged glances. What their study-mate was driving at was beyond them.

"Now, in 'Nicholas Nickleby,'" said Cardew, "there was a character with the name of Wackford Squeers. He ran a school called Dotheboys Hall."

"Did 'e?"

"He did," said Cardew. "This Mr. Squeers was a regular old tyrant; used to whack his pupils every day as a matter of principle. Now, a wax figure of this celebrated Mr. Wackford Squeers would prove a tremendous draw in a show like yours, Mr. Jaggars."

Mr. Jaggars looked doubtful.

"I don't know, so much."

Cardew smiled.

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"That's because you haven't read 'Nicholas Nickleby.' But millions of people have read it, old bean, an' every one of them carries in his mind an image of the tyrannical Mr. Wackford Squeers."

Mr. Jaggars was all at sea. He began to imagine that Ralph Reckness Cardew was a trifle "touched."

"But I don't see—" he began.

Cardew cut him short by pulling a well-filled wallet from his pocket.

"Look here, Mr. Jaggars," he said easily. "I like you. I like your show, what? Now, I would particularly like you to exhibit a wax figure of this Mr. Wackford Squeers. If you will do me the favour of sayin' how much such a figure would cost to make I shall be most happy to foot the bill."

Mr. Jaggars' eyes opened wide. Never in all the course of his chequered career had he encountered such a person as Ralph Reckness Cardew. But Mr. Jaggars always kept an eye on the main chance. He had no doubt that Cardew was quite mad, but Mr. Jaggars was prepared to humour him for a consideration.

"I dunno that I could allow that," he said in a tone which indicated the contrary. "You see, a wax figure costs anythin' up to a tanner to make."

Cardew plucked two five-pound notes from his wallet.

"Dear man, don't let that disturb you," he said, pushing the two notes into the amazed Mr. Jaggars' palm. "Money is no object. I simply want your guarantee that you will humour this little whim of mine an' make me a wax figure of Mr. Wackford Squeers."

"Bless your 'eart and soul, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Jaggars in a burst of friendliness. "I'll do anythin' to oblige a young gent like you, sir."

Which was undoubtedly true. Mr. Jaggars was prepared to make wax figures for the rest of his life at a tanner a time.

"What's this here Mr. Squeers look like?" he asked Cardew.

Cardew smiled.

"I've got a photograph of him," he said. "Quite a good photograph, showin' him in a royal rage. I'll bring it along to-day, old bean."

"Which you're very kind, young sir."

"Not at all," said Cardew. "I'm born that way, you know. Now, how long will it take you to make a wax figure of this Mr. Squeers?" he added.

Mr. Jaggars considered.

"A week at the outside," he said, after a pause.

Cardew shook his head.

"That's too long," he said. "Can't you put in a bit of overtime on the job an' get the giddy thing finished by Saturday?"

He pushed another five-pound note into the astonished Mr. Jaggars' hand. Really, it was wonderful how quickly Mr. Jaggars changed his mind to accommodate Cardew's whimsical fancy.

"Of course, sir, if you particularly want it done by Saturday—"

"I do!" said Cardew emphatically. "What's more, I can promise you that everyone at St. Jim's will come along an' see it. You see, they all know Mr. Wackford Squeers, of Dickens' fame," he added hastily.

"Oh!" Mr. Jaggars' eyes lit up. If every boy at St. Jim's came along to see his show that would mean a considerable profit to him. Trade not being particularly good in the waxwork line Mr. Jaggars was prepared to jump at the chance.

"I'll guarantee at least a hundred and fifty fellows will come along, dear man," said Cardew, watching the showman's face closely. "That's a hundred and fifty sixpences, you know."

"Three pound fifteen," said Mr. Jaggars, with a lightning-like calculation.

"Is that so?" drawled Cardew. "Well, Mr. Jaggars, you may bank on that sum, providing you have the figure ready by then."

"You rely on me, sir," said Mr. Jaggars. He was more than convinced now that Cardew was mad, and that his proper place was in a home for imbeciles. Still, a man experiencing hard times could not afford to sniff at the proposition; this peculiar schoolboy had made, especially when it was backed up with hard cash.

"You'll do the trick, what?" drawled Cardew. "Good man! I'll trot down the photograph an' the necessary clothes for the figure in an hour's time."

"Very good, sir!"

Cardew smiled, linked his arms in those of Levison and Clive and sauntered away. He left behind him a very astonished proprietor of a waxworks show—very astonished, but considerably better off from his meeting with Ralph Reckness Cardew.

"Off his bloomin' nut!" was Mr. Jaggars' private opinion of Cardew when that worthy was gone. "Loony! Absolutely!"

And at that moment Levison and Clive were almost of the same opinion as the estimable Mr. Jaggers.

CHAPTER 10.

A Near Thing!

"WHAT the thump's the idea, Cardew?" Levison asked that question of his chum just as they were out of earshot of Mr. Jaggers.

Cardew grinned.

"Nothin' much," he drawled. "Just a wheeze against old Ratty, dear men, that's all."

"Oh, don't be so jolly mysterious about it!" said Clive.

"What's Ratty got to do with Mr. Wackford Squeers and Mr. Jaggers?"

"Everythin' in the world at the moment, my dear Sidney," said Cardew. "You see, it's like this. Figgy an' his crowd of asses have been gettin' it in the neck of late; the dear Ratty has been trampin' the giddy warpath with a vengeance."

Clive grunted.



"If Mr. Jaggers labours under the impression that the effigy is a true likeness of that tyrant of tyrants, Mr. Wackford Squeers, what can a fellow do?" added Cardew, by way of explanation. "After all, unless I'm mightily mistaken, the estimable Mr. Jaggers' only concern in life is the accumulation of filthy lucre. He already is satisfied, old beans; it now remains for us to be satisfied."

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Levison.



Blows fairly rained upon Grundy as Ralph Reckness Cardew came at him with all the fury of a tiger. The end seemed imminent, and it was not long in coming. Thud! Grundy's head shook back, his knees sagged under him, and he dropped to the floor—knocked out! (See Chapter 6.)

"That's nothing new," he remarked.

"Exactly," drawled Cardew. "But we are taught by our wise preceptors always to extend the giddy hand to those who are less fortunate than ourselves, what? In this case, it is an accepted fact that when brains an' things were being served out they forgot the New House—"

Levison and Clive grinned.

"This is not a laughin' matter, dear men," went on Cardew seriously. "Without brains a fellow is labourin' under a fearful handicap. Such is the deplorable state of affairs obtainin' in the New House casual ward. Figgy an' his pack simply haven't got the grey matter to take their old tyrant of a Housemaster an' squat on him. But, as I have remarked before, at every emergency some clever johnny appears from somewhere or other an' tackles somethin' that has baffled his fellow-creatures—"

"What on earth are you gassing about?"

Cardew came to a halt.

"Just take a look at your noble skipper, dear men," he remarked. "Cannot you see the genius simply oozin' out of him? Cannot you perceive the man specially endowed by nature to come to the rescue of those unfortunate half-wits of the New House?"

Clive snorted.

"I see a thumping idiot," he exclaimed candidly, "who is like a sheep's head—all jaw!"

Whereat Ernest Levison grinned.

Cardew wagged an admonishing forefinger at his chums.

"There you do me a grave injustice," he said. "It has been given to me to down old Ratty in such a way as will take him a whole term at least to recover from the shock. In short, dear men—for I see your powers of patience are wearin' fearfully thin—there will be exhibited in Mr. Jaggers' remarkable waxworks show a lifelike effigy of the execrable Mr. Horace Ratcliff, M.A.—"

"Oh!"

A light was beginning to dawn in the minds of Cardew's chums just then.

"What a rag!" said Clive, bursting into a roar of laughter.

Cardew bowed mockingly.

"Thank you, old beans, for the slight applause. I expected more!"

"My hat!" roared Levison. "You'll get all the applause you want when that effigy is put up for public exhibition."

"But you'll have to be thundering careful," observed Clive. "It would mean the sack if the Head got to hear of it."

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"That is all in the game, dear men," he said. "Here is the New House labourin' under the tyrant's yoke. In the circumstances, is it not worth while to take a risk?"

It was a risk, and no one better than either Levison or Clive knew how grave it was. Japing such an august personage as a Housemaster was tantamount almost to twisting a lion's tail—and japing him in such a public fashion as Cardew contemplated was something even worse.

"You like the idea, what?" drawled Cardew.

"It's a terrific jape," said Levison. "But—"

"A topping rag," said Clive slowly. "But—"

"Then leave the rest to your uncle," said Cardew.

"Ratty will be tearing his hair," began Levison. "He's—"

"Oh, my hat!"

He broke off with that exclamation and pointed along the road. Striding towards the trio was the angular figure of Mr. Horace Ratcliff. It needed no thought-reader to discover what was in the mind of the unpopular master of the New House. Having had occasion to go down to the village, it had occurred to the suspicious-minded master of the New House that he might just as well look in at the waxworks show to see if any junior member of the New House had "cut" detention. Such a thought would not have occurred to the majority of the masters at St. Jim's; most of them believing in meeting trouble when it came along, and not giving up their leisure moments to seeking it. But Mr. Ratcliff was different, very different, from his

colleagues, as was instanced when he had locked the Form-room door upon his pupils a short time back.

"Oh gad!" exclaimed Cardew, eyeing the approaching figure with misgiving. "Ten to one he's goin' to drop in at the show!"

Levison and Clive nodded.

"An' Figgins an' his crowd are there," said Cardew. "An' so are Redfern an' his crush; they went in just before I had my talk with Mr. Jaggars."

"They'll get spotted for a certainty," said Levison anxiously.

Cardew shook his head.

"No, they won't," he replied. "You two cut back an' give 'em a tip. I'll look after old Ratty. Tell Figgy & Co. to take the other road. Don't waste time askin' questions, dear men," he added anxiously. "Just do the farewell trick."

There was no time to waste on questions just then. Mr. Ratcliff was only about twenty yards away, so Levison and Clive took leave of Cardew in as natural a manner as they could muster and walked briskly back to Mr. Jaggars' show-ground.

Meantime, Cardew strolled towards Mr. Ratcliff. The sharp-faced master of the New House gave him a grim acknowledgment as the junior skipper capped him, and was about to stride on when Cardew called him.

"Excuse me, sir!"

Mr. Ratcliff stopped and faced about.

"What is it, boy?"

"It is, I believe, the rule at St. Jim's," drawled Cardew, keeping one eye on the road that lay behind Mr. Ratcliff, "for a Form master to enlighten any of his pupils who are in doubt about anythin'."

Mr. Ratcliff glared.

"Are you attempting to joke with a Housemaster, Cardew?" he asked suspiciously.

Cardew's face expressed surprise.

"Certainly not, sir," he replied. "I'm deadly serious!"

"And do you think the highway the proper place to ask such questions?" asked Mr. Ratcliff, with glinting eyes.

"Most certainly, sir," drawled Cardew, "if the matter is of any importance."

The New House master's face grew grim. Apparently he didn't consider the King's highway a desirable place to ask questions. Still, as a master, he had to indulge Cardew to a certain extent.

"And what matter is it of such importance, Cardew, that occupies your mind on a half-holiday?" he asked, with biting sarcasm. "And why should you elect to waste my time? Why not ask Mr. Railton, your own Housemaster?"

Cardew, still keeping an eye on Mr. Jaggars' show-ground, noticed with relief that Figgins & Co. and Redfern & Co. had cautiously made their exit and hurried round to another road that would take them back to St. Jim's.

"I've just been to the waxworks show, sir," said Cardew languidly. "There's an excellent effigy of King Henry the Eighth—you know, sir, the merry monarch who had umpteen wives!"

"What—what!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff in amazement. "Do you dare to stop me to talk about such stupid matters as waxwork effigies?"

"One moment, sir," went on Cardew coolly. "This is a matter affectin' one's general knowledge. You see, sir, dear old Ernest says most positively that old Henry had eight wives—"

"Upon my soul!"

"An' dear old Clive, he's a frightful swot at English geography—I mean history—says equally positively that old Henry had nine wives. I think dear old Sidney got a trifle mixed thinkin' of the jolly old cat with nine lives, what?"

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes nearly started out of their sockets. To think that a junior of the School House should engage him in a conversation as to the number of wives Henry the Eighth had possessed, on such an occasion and in such a place, left him almost speechless. He stared down at Cardew's impassive face with an expression very much like that of the fabled Gorgon.

Cardew, however, bore the scrutiny without a flicker of the face.

"Boy!" stormed Mr. Ratcliff. "Boy! Are you out of your senses, or is this a piece of impertinence?"

"Neither, sir," answered Cardew demurely. "A trifle out with my figures, that's all. You see, sir, I had a well-developed idea that old Henry had six wives, but I'm beginnin' to entertain doubts now."

Mr. Ratcliff was beginning to entertain doubts as to Cardew's sanity. But that imperturbable junior's next words more than indicated that Cardew was indulging in one of his whimsical leg-pulls. Even Mr. Ratcliff had heard of Cardew's reputation in that direction.

"Of course, sir," said Cardew, watching the master's face

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critically, "if you are in an equal dilemma an' cannot satisfy the cravin' for knowledge of ignorant youth, I have no other recourse but to repeat the question to my own Housemaster!"

But that remark proved too much for Mr. Ratcliff. He had no doubt now that his august leg had been pulled. The thought angered him beyond measure. Before Cardew knew what was happening Mr. Horace Ratcliff was doing something in public that perhaps no master at St. Jim's had ever been known to do. He boxed Cardew's ears!

Smack!

Cardew staggered to one side under the impact of that terrific swipe.

Smack!

Cardew staggered back to his original position as Mr. Ratcliff followed up his left-handed swipe with a right-handed one.

"Yoooooop!" gasped Cardew.

"Boy! Wretched boy!" stormed Mr. Ratcliff. "How dare you! How dare you play such an impertinent prank on a master!"

It seemed to be the New House master's intention of boxing Cardew's ears again, but he restrained the impulse, fortunately for Cardew.

"You young rascal!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff, almost beside himself with rage. "I shall report this to your Housemaster! Go, before I am tempted to box your ears again!"

Cardew did not need a second bidding. He went.

And Mr. Ratcliff, a sour expression on his hatchet features, strode on towards Mr. Jaggars' Waxworks Show.

Needless to say, when the unpopular master of the New House poked his hatchet features round the flap of the tent, to the astonishment of Mr. Jaggars, he found no sign of Figgins & Co., or any other New House junior, for that matter.

Undoubtedly Cardew had saved the situation for Figgins & Co., for by the time Cardew arrived at St. Jim's those cheery youths were once more in their Form-room, scribbling away at the English history papers as if for a wager.

"Jolly decent of Cardew!" said Figgins to Kerr.

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed the Scotch junior warmly.

"Wonder how he managed to keep old Ratty busy!" mused Redfern.

"Goodness knows!"

But the "hows" and "wherefores" the New House juniors learned an hour or so later. During that time Cardew, having collected a large photograph of Mr. Ratcliff which Manners of the Shell had taken on one occasion when the New House master was chastising a junior in the quad, and also having collected a cap and gown from that august gentleman's wardrobe, had cycled down to Mr. Jaggars and handed these articles over.

Mr. Jaggars was still of the opinion that Ralph Reckness Cardew was quite mad, but he had given that whimsical youth his word that the effigy would be completed by the Saturday, as promised, and that it would bear a likeness to the photograph of "Mr. Wackford Squeers" that his own mother wouldn't have failed to recognise him. Whereat Ralph Reckness Cardew had cycled slowly back to St. Jim's thoroughly satisfied that his great wheeze for a master-rag on Ratty was now well under way. Of the risk he was running the nonchalant skipper of the Lower School never gave a thought. Cardew was interested; that was enough. Of the "interest," so to speak, in another form, that was to spring from his daring wheeze only the future could tell.

CHAPTER 11.

Ratty Waxes Waxy!

"WALK up! Walk up!"

Mr. Jaggars was doing a roaring trade.

It was the Saturday afternoon following Cardew's initial visit to the waxworks show, and a constant stream of fellows from St. Jim's—lags of the Second and Third, juniors of the Fourth and Shell, seniors of the Fifth and Sixth, and even such elevated personages as prefects—trekked towards Mr. Jaggars' establishment.

The proprietor was beaming good nature. Why over a hundred schoolboys should be attracted to his show simply to see an effigy of Mr. Wackford Squeers—a person of whom Mr. Jaggars himself had never heard, until Cardew had approached him—was beyond his comprehension. Not that that mattered. What did matter, as Mr. Jaggars confided to one of his assistants, was the "durocks." And that, in the form of sixpences, were rolling in at a terrific rate.

"Record attendance, what?"

It was the drawing voice of Ralph Reckness Cardew as that junior plucked Mr. Jaggars by the elbow and gave him a beaming smile.

Mr. Jaggars beamed back.

"I dunno the whys and wherefores of it, young sir,"



Arthur Augustus D'Aroy jumped as a young lady with a smiling face stood in his path. The swell of the Fourth raised his topper, and bowed. "I'm awfully sorry, miss," he apologised. Blake & Co. shrieked as they watched their elegant chum apologising to a wax figure. "Ha, ha, ha!" (See Chapter 9.)

he said, with an expansive smile, "but you've done somethin' that I've never done in me life before. Why, young sir, you'd make your fortune in the waxworks game!"

"Do you think so?" drawled Cardew. "I'll bear that seriously in mind."

Levison and Clive, who were with their study-mate, grinned.

"Come on, let's get in!" said the former.

Mr Jaggers winked, as a terrific roar of laughter came from a score or more throats from within the big marquee.

"They seem amused, them boys of your school."

"I'll bet they are if the effigy is like the photograph," said Cardew.

"It's come out a treat, sir," said Mr. Jaggers. "It looks the real thing, especially with them clothes you so kindly gave me for it."

"Good man," drawled Cardew. "Come on, Sidney, an' you, Ernle; let's join the merry throng—what?"

The trio passed into the tent.

Quite thirty fellows from St. Jim's were inside the tent already, for the news had been broadcast by Baggy Trimble just as Cardew had planned, that there was a wonderful figure of Mr. Horace Ratcliff on view in Jaggers' show that afternoon. How it had got there was known only to a chosen few. That it was there was the main thing. And, to judge by the roars of laughter that went up from the St. Jim's fellows, that effigy was the "goods."

Cardew pushed his way through the crowd. Then he burst into a roar of laughter as he gazed at "Mr. Wackford Squeers."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison and Clive joined in that spontaneous roar of merriment.

Inside Mr. Ratcliff's gown was an exact double of that learned gentleman. There was an expression of ferocity on the wax face that many a St. Jim's fellow had seen before. On top of the wax figure was a mortar board, set at a slightly rakish angle. In one of the wax hands was a formidable-looking birch. To complete the picture there was a large label placed at the figure's feet which bore the legend:

"MR. WACKFORD SQUEERS,
Beloved by Nobody—Hated by All!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Isn't it rich?"

"He, he, he!"

"Ratty to the life, what?" drawled Cardew. "I wonder how the thing came here?" he added thoughtfully, at which there was a fresh roar of laughter from those juniors who were "in the know."

Tom Merry drew Cardew on one side.

"I say, old scout, it's rich!" said Tom, with tears of merriment running down his face. "Absolutely it!"

"Rather!" chimed in Monty Lowther and Manners.

"But there will be the deuce to pay if old Ratty sees it!" added Tom.

Cardew grinned.

"Oh, he's coming to see it!" he remarked, with a drawl. "Knox is outside, old beans; you can bet your sweet life that once Knox gets his giddy optics on this he'll be off to St. Jim's as fast as he can travel."

"Oh!"

The faces of Tom Merry & Co. grew serious. A rag was all right in its way, but if Mr. Ratcliff should see this effigy of himself, serious trouble was certain to follow. But that did not detract from Cardew's enjoyment of the affair, if one was to judge by the expression on his face.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

This time the roar of laughter came from a crowd of New House juniors. Figgins & Co. had almost jumped clear of the floor when they first set eyes on that remarkable image. For one moment they imagined that they were in the presence of Mr. Horace Ratcliff himself.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my giddy aunt!"

"What a rag!"

"Ratty to the life!"

"How did it get here?"

That last query came in a chorus, but Figgins & Co. did not join in it. They were staring at Cardew fixedly.

Figgins strode over to that imperturbable youth.

"Is that the great stunt you were talking about the other day?" he asked.

Cardew nodded.

"It is. Good—what?"

"Rather!" exclaimed Figgins and his chums.

"But there'll be the deuce to pay for it," said Figgins a moment later.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"Think so, old bean? What's the odds, anyway? There's no pleasure without pain, you know."

By this time the big marquee was practically filled with St. Jim's fellows. The fags roared with laughter in that abandoned way peculiar to fags. The Shell and Fourth-Formers were not far behind in that respect. Even the Fifth could not restrain their merriment. And the Sixth almost forgot their dignity as to laugh nearly as long, if not as loudly, as the fags.

There was no doubt about it; Cardew's "rag" was a great success. There was no doubt about it either that Gerald Knox would report the matter to Mr. Ratcliff, for Cardew, keeping an eye on the unpopular prefect, saw him grin as he looked at the effigy, then burst into laughter. After that, Knox backed to the door of the tent and was soon striding back to St. Jim's.

Knox was not above currying favour with a master at any time, let alone the New House master. The prefect had enjoyed the rag as well as anyone, but he felt that he could derive a double benefit from seeing it and reporting the affair to Mr. Ratcliff. Strictly speaking, it was the duty of a prefect to report this affair to the master concerned, although Knox was not acting from a strict sense of duty.

He found Mr. Ratcliff closeted with Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton, checking a pile of examination papers.

Dr. Holmes looked up irritably as Knox intruded.

"What is it, Knox?"

Gerald Knox explained.

The faces of the three masters wore extraordinary expressions when the prefect had finished.

"Good gracious!" gasped Dr. Holmes.

"Is it possible?" murmured Mr. Railton.

"Some wicked young reprobate—" began Mr. Ratcliff, almost dancing up and down in his wrath.

Dr. Holmes stayed him with a gesture.

"Pray calm yourself, my dear Ratcliff," he remonstrated. "There is no need to jump to conclusions. There must be some mistake."

"Excuse me, sir," interrupted Knox, rather enjoying the situation. "The wax effigy couldn't have been made more like Mr. Ratcliff if he had sat for it himself!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"I mean, it's so life-like, sir," added Knox.

Dr. Holmes reached for his hat.

"This needs looking into without delay, gentlemen," he said. "We will leave these papers. Come!"

He donned his coat, what time Mr. Railton and Mr. Ratcliff, the latter almost foaming at the mouth, hurried out for their hats and coats.

In less than five minutes the three masters were tramping down to Mr. Jaggars' waxwork show.

That gentleman himself was absent when the trio arrived. Doubtless he was improving the shining hour in expending some of his profits in liquid refreshment at the local tavern.

"Sixpence, please!"

Mr. Jaggars' assistant stepped in front of Mr. Ratcliff—that gentleman being in the lead—as the three masters drew level with the tent flap.

"Sixpence, indeed!" snorted Mr. Ratcliff, and he brushed aside Mr. Jaggars' assistant as if he had been a fly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" An earsplitting roar of laughter greeted the ears of the three masters as they moved inside the tent. Mr. Ratcliff's thin features were purple.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ratty to the life!"

Mr. Railton drew his colleague by the arm.

"Calm yourself, Ratcliff," he whispered.

The New House master gulped something in his throat, and his hand tightened on his walking cane. Without seeing the effigy of which Knox had spoken, he knew now that in some unaccountable fashion it bore some likeness to him.

Another storm of cheering came to a sudden dismayed climax as Dr. Holmes pushed his way through a crowd of St. Jim's fellows who were surrounding a wax figure. And as the Head's eyes took in that amazingly life-like figure he jumped.

"Bless my soul!" he gasped. "What an extraordinary likeness!"

"Oh—ah!" As Mr. Railton gazed at the wax effigy he was hard put to it to restrain a smile. But it was different with Mr. Ratcliff.

"Monstrous! Libellous!"

The New House master gave one prolonged, horrified stare at that wax figure, with the upraised cane, and then, in a burst of ungovernable anger and fury, he jumped at it like a cat springing on a mouse.

Whack!

The New House master's cane descended on the mortar-board and sent it flying.

Whack!

Another swipe almost decapitated the head. The figure presented a more extraordinary appearance than ever. The wax head, supported only by a number of thin wires, now reclined at an angle of forty-five degrees from the shoulders. The sight proved too much for the St. Jim's juniors. They burst into another roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Whack!

Dancing about like a dervish, Mr. Ratcliff aimed another vigorous swipe at his "double." This time the wires supporting the head parted, and the head rolled down to the floor and came to rest at the feet of Dr. Holmes.

That learned gentleman gazed at it in horror.

"Oh, ye gods!" breathed Figgins & Co.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Oh, my head!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dr. Holmes collected himself. He held up an imperious hand. There was a thunderous expression on his face as he gazed at his pupils.

"This is monstrous!" he said sternly. "How dare you boys stand there and make that ridiculous noise. Leave this—this tent at once and return to school. At once!"

"Oh, gad!" murmured Cardew. "This is where we do the disappearin' trick!"

In a noisy swarm the St. Jim's fellows poured out at the exit.

Meantime, Mr. Railton had taken the infuriated Mr. Ratcliff forcibly by the arm and drawn him away. It was just as well, for the New House master seemed inclined to wreck the place.

"My dear Ratcliff," said Mr. Railton. "Calm yourself!"

"I—I—I—" stormed Mr. Ratcliff. "I'll—I'll prosecute! Libel! I'll sue for damages! I'll—"

"What's all this 'ere'?"

It was Mr. Jaggars.

That podgy gentleman moved unsteadily on his feet. Evidently he had imbibed not wisely but too well. But when he saw the damage that had been done to his wax effigy of Mr. Wackford Squeers he was consumed with a mighty wrath.

"Who did that?" he demanded, prancing about in warlike fashion. "Hic! Who did it?"

Dr. Holmes eyed him sternly.

"This is a serious matter, my good man," he said quietly. "A master of St. Jim's has been grossly held up to public ridicule with that abominable figure—"

"Eh?" blinked Mr. Jaggars from bleary eyes.

Mr. Ratcliff danced up to him in a towering wrath.

"How dare you!" he roared, shaking his fist in the face of the showman. "How dare you! I shall claim damages, heavy damages for this, my man!"

"Oh, will you?" said Mr. Jaggars truculently. "An' who's going to pay this 'ere damage—hic—that's what I want to know—hic!"

And he shook a dirty, podgy fist right under Mr. Ratcliff's nose. What all the trouble was about Mr. Jaggars was not quite certain. The amount of liquor he had consumed had not improved his eyesight. Certainly he had not yet recognised the remarkable likeness Mr. Ratcliff held to the wax figure of "Mr. Wackford Squeers," or vice versa. All Mr. Jaggars knew was that one of the biggest "draws" he had ever put into his waxworks show had been destroyed. That being so, somebody had to pay for it.

"I'll have the law on you for this!" he roared. "That there—hic—figure cost pounds! I'll—hic—I'll—hic!"

Really it seemed that Mr. Jaggars' vocabulary was reduced to "Hic!" Dr. Holmes motioned to his colleagues.

"Let us go," he said quietly. "We will investigate this matter when the wretched man is sober!"

"But, sir—" began Mr. Ratcliff, intoxicated with rage almost as much as Mr. Jaggars was with liquor. "I'll—"

"Come!" Gently but firmly Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton drew Mr. Ratcliff away. At the door of the marquee, Dr. Holmes turned and faced the befuddled Mr. Jaggars.

"You will hear more of this," he said. "I would advise you, my good man, to retire until you are sober!"

"Oh, would you—hic—would you—hic!"

But the Head of St. Jim's could stand it no longer. There was nothing to be gained by staying in the presence of Mr. Jaggars that afternoon, at any rate. With Mr. Ratcliff between them, Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton walked back to the school. And their conversation was as follows:

"Monstrous!"

"Abominable!"

"Scandalous!"

That summing up, so to speak, was not in keeping with what St. Jim's as a whole thought of the affair. As a contrast, a rag, a junior, and a senior, could have been heard to say in their respective order:

"Spiffing!"

"The jape of the term!"

"What a giddy rag!"

And the instigator of that rag received the hearty thumps of congratulations that juniors from the School House and New House showered upon him with commendable modesty and fortitude. Whether he would receive the thumps of a different nature, which were destined to shower on him at no far distant date, with as much fortitude remained to be seen.

CHAPTER 12.

Just Like Cardew!

"WHAT'S happenin', dear men?"

Ralph Reckness Cardew looked up from the book he was reading and asked that question, as Clive and Levison walked into the study, four days after the memorable "rag" at Mr. Jagers' waxworks show. It was Wednesday afternoon, and therefore a half-holiday.

Levison and Clive looked serious.

"It's all up!" said Levison.

Cardew stifled a yawn.

"Does that mean the giddy secret's out?" he drawled.

Levison and Clive nodded.

"We've just been down to see Jagers," said Levison, "and we met the Head coming away from the place. Old Ratty was with him, and he was carrying his old cap and gown—the things you boned from his wardrobe."

Cardew sat upright on the study sofa.

"Oh, gad!" he ejaculated, with a wry grin. "Then I'm booked for a floggin' or somethin', what?"

"Hope it's nothing worse," said Levison. "Jagers said he had to let on who it was put him up to the wheeze, because of the clothes. Old Ratty had threatened him with a lawsuit. Talked about thousands of pounds for damages."

"Oh, gad!" laughed Cardew. "Never mind, I've had a good run. By the way, you men," he added, as if dismissing the Jagers' affair completely from his mind, "the old granddad wrote to-day. Seemed frightfully bucked that I'd woke up."

"Oh, good!" Both Levison and Clive said that, but it was obvious from their voices that they were not particularly concerned just then with Lord Reckness. They were worrying about his hopeful grandson.

There was a silence in the study for a few moments. Clive broke it.

"Well, it's no good moping about it," he said. "Besides, there's the Greyfriars match this afternoon. Wharton and his crowd will be along any moment now. Time we were changed," he added, noting that Cardew was already changed for the last footer match of the season.

Levison nodded.

"Come along, Clive. See you on the ground, Cardew!"

"Right-ho, old beans!"

Cardew stretched himself out on the sofa. His face was clouded. Looking at him then his detractors would have said that this was the "old Cardew," the personification of laziness.

"This life's gettin' me down," murmured Cardew. "All this runnin' and dashin' about, an' thinkin' an' generally settin' an example is all very well in its way, but a chap mustn't overdo it, as dear old granddad remarks."

He pulled out a letter from his pocket. It had come by the midday post. The letter ran:

"Bravo, Ralph! Sorry I haven't answered your letter before; been away on the Continent on business. So you've justified yourself, my boy; you've given me the proof that I wanted to ram down the throats of certain unmentionable gentlemen to whom we have the doubtful pleasure of being related, who said you were incapable of doing anything. Captain, eh! Jove, Ralph, that's just splendid! But don't overdo it, my boy. You've done what I wanted you to do—more than more than I wanted you to do. Don't let it be a labour of love any longer than is your inclination.—Your affectionate

"GRANDDAD."

"Now, the old boy," mused Cardew, "is what I call a sensible type of sportsman. He's given me the 'ease up,' signal. Blessed if I don't ease up, too."

He sprawled comfortably on the sofa, and gazed into space.

"Let me think things over," he murmured after a silence

of five minutes. "Here am I, junior captain, in for a frightful wiffin', floggin', or expulsion, or the giddy lot. Oh, gad! What a life!"

He yawned at the terrifying prospect ahead of him, and then resumed his reflections.

"Now, that bein' the case, a chappie ought not to fatigue himself dashin' about and chargin' an' generally leadin' the energetic life. If it's a floggin', an' it's a hundred to one chance that it is, a fellow ought to be in good form to stand the racket."

Cardew broke off again, as through the open study window came a number of cheery voices which betokened the arrival of Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars.

"Oh, gad!" drawled Cardew lazily. He was beginning to weaken. Having thought of that ninety minutes' strenuous exercise, and added to it a Head's flogging, he felt almost limp.

He frowned into space for quite five minutes, and then as he heard footsteps coming along the passage he rose from the sofa and crossed to the study door.

Click!

The key turned in the lock.

For a moment Cardew stood gazing at the locked door, a peculiar expression on his face which rather suggested that he was waging a battle with himself.

"It's no good!" he muttered at length. "Every dog has his day. I've had mine, an' I've got a record lickin' to come at the end of it. Oh gad!"

He stretched himself out on the sofa again, and made himself comfortable. In three minutes he was fast asleep.

It was the old Cardew with a vengeance.

Meantime, Tom Merry & Co. and Figgins & Co. were waiting on Little Side for their captain to appear. Really, it was rather bad form that he hadn't been down to welcome Harry Wharton & Co. on their arrival.

"Where's the silly duffer got to?" asked Figgins impatiently.

"Echo answers where?" said Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry & Co. clustered round Cardew's study-mates.

"Where's Cardew?" hooted Blake.

Levison and Clive started.

"Isn't he here?"

"Fatheads!" snorted Blake. "Do you think I should ask where he is if the fathead were here?"

"But we left him in the study five or ten minutes ago," said Levison in perplexity. "Already changed."

Blake snorted.

"I expect the silly ass has fallen asleep!" he grunted, little dreaming how near he was to hitting the truth.

"Let's come and roust him out."

While Tom Merry spoke a few words to Harry Wharton, explaining the cause of the delay in starting, the rest of the junior eleven raced up to the School House.

Bang, bang!

It was a regular tattoo on Cardew's door.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Levison. "The door's locked!"

Bang, bang, bang!

The noise was deafening.

From within came a voice—a still, small voice, a tired voice:

"Go away!"

"He's in there!" roared Blake. "Cardew, you silly ass, have you forgotten it's the Greyfriars match this afternoon?"

"Go away," said Cardew protestingly.

"But it's time for the match, you crass idiot!"

"I know it is," drawled Cardew. "Let Lawrence play, old beans. He's first reserve. I'm goin' to rest this afternoon; I feel frightfully tired."

"Well, my hat!"

"The rotter!"

"My only sainted aunt!"

"What a slacker!"

A few more precious minutes were wasted while the footballers told their captain exactly what they thought of him. Had the door not been locked Ralph Reckness Cardew would have had short shrift. A skipper who deserted his team at the eleventh hour because he wanted to sleep was a new experience to the St. Jim's juniors.

In an angry swarm they tramped back to Little Side. The position was quickly explained to Tom Merry, much to that junior's amazement, and to Lawrence—much to that individual's satisfaction.

"Well, I'm blessed!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "If that isn't the limit!"

It was the limit. Even Levison and Clive had nothing to say in defence of their chum.

That football match started in a peculiar atmosphere, so far as the St. Jim's juniors were concerned, for they were boiling with indignation at the way Cardew had treated

them. But that sort of spirit was not conducive to good football, as was soon proved, for within ten minutes of the kick-off Harry Wharton burst through the St. Jim's defence and scored with a fast ground shot that had Fatty Wynn all at sea.

After that the St. Jim's eleven settled down to real football, and in the keenness of the game the very existence of Ralph Reckness Cardew was forgotten.

By half-time the St. Jim's eleven had drawn level with their opponents; by half-time Ralph Reckness Cardew was deep in the arms of Morpheus.

But before the full ninety minutes had been played there was another summons on the door of Study No. 9.

Bang, bang!

It was Toby the page who stood in the passage and banged at the door, Toby having been informed by various juniors on Little Side that Cardew was asleep in his study.

Bang, bang!

Cardew's eyes opened dreamily.

Bang, bang!

"Go away and let a fellow rest!" growled Cardew.

"Which it's me, sir!" called out Toby. "And the 'Ead's orders are you're to proceed to his study hat once!"

"Oh, gad!" drawled Cardew. "Did the Head say that?"

"His very words, Master Cardew!" replied Toby.

There was a laugh from inside the study. Cardew was thinking of the Head saying "hat once."

"All right, Toby, old bean!" said Cardew. "I'll be with his Majesty in a few moments."

Toby tramped away.

Cardew yawned and stretched himself. Then he looked at himself in the glass.

"Cardew, my son, you're in for a stormy passage. That short nap's done you good."

He turned to the door, and was about to vacate the study when a sudden thought struck him. He crossed to the table, drew out two sheets of paper, and hastily wrote on them. One sheet he enclosed in an envelope, and addressed to Mr. Railton, his Housemaster.

Whistling a tune, Cardew sauntered towards the notice-board and pinned the loose sheet of paper there. Then, having left the sealed envelope in Mr. Railton's study, he made for Dr. Holmes' study.

When he entered, Cardew found three grim faces bent upon him. Dr. Holmes looked like a judge, who had a very unpleasant sentence to pass. Mr. Ratcliff looked as if he could have passed that sentence without finding anything unpleasant in it. Mr. Railton, perhaps, was a little more relenting in his expression than either of his colleagues.

"You know, I suppose, Cardew," began Dr. Holmes, "why you have been summoned here?"

Cardew nodded. Even before that terrifying tribunal his sang-froid did not desert him.

"For bein' a naughty boy, sir," he said gravely. "For experimentin' in the waxwork business."

"Ah! Then you admit, Cardew, that you were responsible for that disgraceful affair? You confess to being the cause of a Housemaster's public humiliation?"

Cardew nodded in reply.

"Wretched boy!" said Dr. Holmes sternly. "Never have I encountered such scandalous treatment of a master in my life before! And but for this—ahem!—Mr. Jagers explaining the affair, and of your complicity in it, Mr. Ratcliff would have brought a lawsuit against him. Do you not see the enormity of your conduct? Do you not realise the gravity of your offence?"

Cardew nodded again.

"I am ashamed of you, Cardew," went on Dr. Holmes grimly. "Utterly ashamed to think that a boy in my care should stoop so low as to insult a master in this unwarrantable fashion. With the facts before me there was no other course open to me but to expel you in disgrace. But you are fortunate in that your Housemaster has pleaded for you—"

Cardew shot Mr. Railton a grateful glance.

"Thank you, sir!"

"You will be flogged in Big Hall to-night," continued Dr. Holmes, "in full view of those boys in front of whom you have humiliated Mr. Ratcliff. Furthermore, you will be detained on half-holidays for a month."

Not a muscle moved in Cardew's face. It was a stiff sentence, but he considered that it was worth it.

"There is another thing," resumed Dr. Holmes sternly. "You will, of course, no longer remain junior captain. Such behaviour as that which you have been guilty of could never be tolerated in a junior captain. You will consider yourself dismissed from that post."

"But I'm not captain now, sir," said Cardew meekly.

The Head looked questioning at Mr. Railton.

"I thought you informed me, Mr. Railton, that this boy, Cardew, took over the captaincy from Merry?"

The GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,053.

"That is correct, sir," said Mr. Railton, giving Cardew a peculiar glance.

"May I explain, sir," said Cardew easily, "that I resigned from the distinguished post of junior captain before I entered this study. Mr. Railton will find my resignation on his desk, whilst there's a notice for the fellows to see pinned to the notice-board."

Dr. Holmes gave Ralph Reckness Cardew a sharp look. The ex-skipper met it calmly. Dr. Holmes signed to him to go.

Ralph Reckness turned on his heel, vacated the study, and sauntered back to his own quarters. Once there, he shut himself in, turned the key in the lock again, and sprawled on the sofa. Even the ringing cheers telling of a St. Jim's victory over their Greyfriars rivals did not awaken him.

There was a fresh surprise for Tom Merry & Co. when they swarmed into the School House after having seen Harry Wharton & Co. off in their brake. For there was Cardew's notice. It ran

"RESIGNATION OF R. R. CARDEW.

"If you fellows will take my tip, you'll persuade Tom Merry to take over the captaincy again. He's the only man who will stay the course. Look what it's done for me.—(Signed) R. R. CARDEW."

"He's a peculiar chump," said Blake thoughtfully, "but I'm not so sure that he isn't right."

That evening there was a full assembly in Big Hall. On the raised dais stood the Head and the masters. On the desk lay a brand-new birch. To one side stood Taggles, the porter; on the other, lounged Ralph Reckness Cardew, looking as unconcerned as if he were attending a cinema. In deep, stern tones Dr. Holmes touched upon the misdeeds of Ralph Reckness Cardew, and many were the glances turned upon Mr. Horace Ratcliff when it became known that it was to Cardew that the unpopular New House master owed that amazingly life-like effigy which had so unexpectedly turned up in Mr. Jagers' waxworks show. There were few amongst the assembly whose sympathy did not go out to Cardew at that moment. His extraordinary action of the afternoon in deserting his team was forgotten now.

A flogging!

Not one of the assembled fellows looked as unconcerned as Cardew when Dr. Holmes announced what punishment he had seen fit to award him. And a tremor ran through the crowd as the Head, having finished addressing the school, motioned to Taggles.

"Take him up!"

Cardew was hoisted over Taggles' broad back. Next moment began the dreaded swishing of the birch. Cardew's face was pale, deathly pale, but not a sound escaped his lips. He endured that terrific castigation with a fortitude that many a senior envied.

Later that evening there was a meeting of the Lower School, both Houses being present. Then and there it was proposed to the meeting that Tom Merry should be asked to take over the now vacant post of junior captain. The motion was carried by all present but one. The dissentient voice belonged to Grundy. But no one heeded Georgo Alfred just then, and amid much applause Tom Merry intimated that he would accept office again.

Cardew, who had not attended the meeting for reasons that need no explaining, grinned painfully when Levison and Clive brought him the news.

"Good old Thomas!" drawled Cardew, a spasm of pain wracking his face as he turned on the sofa. "He's the right man for the giddy job. I hope the dear man won't come down heavy on compulsory practice days yet awhile. I've done such a heap of energetic runnin' about recently that I shall be fagged for another term, at least."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Levison, with a smile.

"You're not going to return to your old slacking ways are you, old chap?" asked Clive.

Snore!

That was all the reply that came from Ralph Reckness Cardew; his eyes were closed, his breathing deep and steady. Really, it seemed that the elegant junior had already started on a return to his old habits, for he was genuinely fast asleep!

THE END.

(There will be another topping long story of Tom Merry & Co. next week, entitled: "JAPING THE FIFTH!" For a mixture of thrills and laughs you'll vote this yarn a real treat. See that you order your copy WELL IN ADVANCE.)

A ROOKWOOD TRIUMPH! Pankley & Co. get the shock of their lives when they are forced to play football against a team of hefty-looking girls. But the cream of the joke is that beneath the bobbed hair and make-up of these sporty girls are the cheeky faces of Jimmy Silver & Co.—Pankley & Co.'s deadly rivals from Rookwood!

FOR THE HONOUR OF ROOKWOOD!

By OWEN CONQUEST.



In the barn behind Mr. Judson's house, Jimmy Silver & Co. were speedily transformed into eleven remarkably sturdy "young ladies."

The Lingfield House Footballers!

THE great wheeze was kept dark, even from Tubby Muffin, the tattler of the Fourth Form, until the Saturday morning; but on that day mysterious whispers went round that anyone who wanted to see a bit of fun should stroll over to the Bagshot footer ground that afternoon. No one seemed to know exactly what was going to happen, but the general impression was that Bagshot was going to get the kybosh at last.

After dinner there was a rush of eleven juniors to the bike shed, and off they all streamed post-haste to Rookham, where they were welcomed at the little shop in High Street by the good-natured Mr. Judson.

Mr. Judson was hairdresser, wig-maker, costumier, and many other things. He supplied costumes for the Rookham Theatre Royal, and also for the Amateur Theatrical Society at Rookwood School. The juniors were good customers of his, and Mr. Judson had willingly done what he could for them.

In the barn behind his house were laid out eleven "young ladies" sports costumes," as Mr. Judson called them, and in a very short time eleven remarkably sturdy "young ladies" were inside the gym costumes. The arrangement of the hair was a matter which offered a difficulty, but Mr. Judson's hairdressing skill overcame this admirably, and very soon after eleven "young ladies" were fitted with bewitching shingled or bobbed coiffures.

The juniors, looking at one another, went off into peal upon peal of laughter.

"Faith, and yer big face will give us all away, Lovell, darlint!" exclaimed Tommy Doyle. "Sure, no one would take ye for a girl at all, at all, in them big boots!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Edward Lovell, who was tugging on a pair of football boots which were certainly not very dainty-looking, looked up with a red face.

"You—you Irish ass!" he roared. "What about you, with your blessed Irish accent you could cut with a knife?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sure, an' I'm Miss Bridget—of Malone, from Kilkenny—for one afternoon only!" grinned Doyle.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hurry up, you chaps! There's no time to waste!" urged Jimmy Silver. "And don't forget, for goodness' sake, that I'm Jenny Gold, and captain of this blessed team of female footer experts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And for the love of Mike, don't call me Jimmy, or you'll give the whole show away!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's right, though," said Tommy Dodd seriously. "You must all remember your names and each other's—one slip would bring the Bagshot bounders down on us like a ton of bricks. Young Babbington will be on the touch-line with a crowd of the fellows, but there'll be enough of the Bagshot chaps around to scrag the lot of us if they smell a rat!"

"Rather!" said Jimmy Silver. "Better run through the names, to make sure."

"Right-ho!"

"Line up here, then, and answer your names, girls!" called Tommy Dodd, in a high-pitched voice.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The grinning juniors lined up, and a fine, athletic-looking lot of "young ladies" were ready for the match.

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WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

James Montgomery Babbington, a new boy and a champion duffer, arrives at Rookwood smothered in coal-dust as a result of his encounter with Pankley & Co., the chums of Bagshot, the rival school. Babbington's leg is simply made to be pulled, for on his very first evening at the school he is kidded by Leggett to polish off the Housemaster's tea. That Babbington isn't quite such a duffer as he looks is proved when he more than holds his own with the bullying Higgs and later controls an excited elephant, thereby saving his Housemaster from possible serious danger. To crown all this, Babbington next succeeds in pulling the wool over the eyes of Pankley & Co. by getting them to accept a challenge to a football match, the challenge not coming from Lingfield House School as the Bagshot bounders are led to believe, but from Jimmy Silver & Co., whose intentions are to turn up at Bagshot disguised as girls.

"Everything's all fixed up," says Tommy Dodd, with a smile. "Kick-off two-forty-five, sharp!"

(Now read on.)

ladies" they looked, with their "fetching" coiffures and smiling, pink faces.

"Now, don't grin all the time, for goodness' sake!" said Jimmy Silver, as he surveyed his team, though he could not help grinning a little himself as he spoke. "Pankley's hot stuff, and if he tumbles to our little game, he'll jolly soon knock the grins off our faces!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now answer your names! Gertie!"

"Here!" called Oswald promptly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Edna!"

"Here!" said Lovell.

"Ada!"

"Here!" from Newcome.

"Bridget!"

"Faith, an' here I am, Jenny, darlint!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stop cackling, you asses!" roared Jimmy Silver.

"Gladys!"

"Here!" yelled Raby.

"Muriel! Tilly!"

"Here! Here!" came from Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook respectively.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Valerie!" shrieked Jimmy Silver.

"Here!" drawled Mornington.

"Flossie!"

"Here!" said Putty Grace. "Is my hair on straight, Jenny darling?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Kate!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"Here!" called Conroy.

"That's the lot! Now, come on, chaps—I mean, girls!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here's the blessed bus! Pile in, and off we go for Bagshot!"

With a farewell wave of the hand from the grinning Mr. Judson and his assistant, the stalwart team of young lady footballers piled into the bus and rattled off down the old High Street of Rookham.

A brisk run of about ten minutes brought them to the village of Coombe, and a minute or two later the well-known gates of Bagshot School came in sight.

"Now for it!" murmured Jimmy Silver, noticing that several Bagshot fellows were waiting about near the gates, evidently on the look-out for the team from Lingfield House. "Carry on, driver, right up to the football ground!"

"Very well, miss."

"Don't stop by the gates, whatever you do!"

"Right, miss."

The driver grinned as he turned the bus in at the gates. He had a strong suspicion that the cargo of young ladies in his bus were not exactly what they appeared to be. But Tommy Dodd had taken the precaution to tip him half-a-crown in advance, with the injunction to "keep his mouth shut"; and having taken the tip, the driver was prepared to obey the orders which accompanied it.

Several of the Bagshot fellows jumped back in a hurry as the bus swerved in at the gates without slowing down perceptibly. Then, as they saw that the passengers in the bus were girls, their jaws dropped, and they gazed after the vehicle like fellows in a dream.

A bus-load of girls—and turning in at Bagshot School! What on earth could it mean?

The young ladies seemed to find considerable entertainment in the surprised expressions on the faces of the Bagshot fellows, and there was a chorus of chuckles inside the bus.

"They seem a bit surprised, what?" chuckled Valerie, alias Mornington. "Anybody would think they had never seen a bus-load of pretty girls before!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The bus ground on along the gravel drive until it reached the nearest point to the football pitch. Here quite a crowd was collected, including Pankley and his merry men in football togs, and a number of Rookwood Fourth-Formers, mingled with the Bagshot fellows.

It was not unusual for the juniors of either school to stroll on to the football ground of their friendly rivals on special occasions, or on days when there was no home match.

The bus stopped with a jerk.

"Here we are, then!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "Just on two-forty-five, too! Now, girls, follow me!"

And ten, smiling, fresh-complexioned girls, in neat gym costumes, skipped out of the bus and clustered round their captain. And if some of them showed a heightened colour and appeared a thought uneasy, surely it was only natural in the circumstances, and under the stares of fifty pairs of curious eyes!

A sort of gasp went up from the Bagshot crowd, followed by complete and tense silence.

Then Jenny Gold, alias Jimmy Silver, stepped forward, with a confident smile on "her" cheery, good-looking face.

"Is Master Pankley here?" she said, in a high, clear voice, looking round inquiringly.

Pankley, who had been watching the girls with an air of dazed surprise, pulled himself together with a start.

"Yes, here you are, miss!" he gasped. "I—I'm Pankley."

"Ah, how do you do?" trilled Jimmy Silver coolly, holding out his hand. "Pleased to meet you, Master Pankley!"

Pankley took the outstretched hand almost mechanically, and then dropped it as if it were red-hot. His face turned a fiery red.

"B-but," he babbled—"bub-but, who are you?"

"We're the Lingfield House team, and we've come along for that game of football you promised us!"

Awful!

"THE match! You've come to play the match?"

Pankley, of Bagshot, fairly goggled at the cheery group of athletic-looking girls. His brain was almost turning round!

Here they were—eleven stalwart young ladies actually on the Bagshot ground, and wanting to play a match against him, Pankley, and his team!

It was incredible! Incredible, but true!

Pankley gasped, and the listening group of Bagshot fellows gasped, too.

"I—I—I—" babbled Pankley, and then he stopped.

Miss Gold smiled pleasantly.

"Is anything the matter, Master Pankley?" she inquired.

"We're ready right away, you know."

"I—I—I—"

"Are you feeling quite well, Master Pankley?"

"I? Oh, yes—that is, I—I—" Pankley broke off again. For once in his life the great Pankley was stumped for words.

The situation was preposterous—incredible—impossible!

The idea of playing a team of girls made Pankley feel faint! Never in all his experience had he heard of such a thing! Whatever the result of the match, it was certain he would never hear the end of it!

The Bagshot junior team to play a team of girls!

It was unthinkable!

Putter gave Pankley a nudge.

"Say something, Pankley!" he hissed. "Tell 'em we can't play. Tell 'em it's a mistake. Tell 'em anything!"

"Really, Master Pankley!" broke in Miss Gold, a trifle impatiently. "Don't you think we might start?"

Pankley gritted his teeth. The situation was desperate, but upon one thing Pankley was resolved. He would never play a team of girls!

"I—I—I—I'm sorry," he managed to gasp out. "There's some mistake. I didn't know."

"Nonsense!" said Miss Gold briskly. "There's no mistake. Lingfield House, that's us! I've got your letter."

There was a breathless hush as the crowd of fellows standing round hung upon the words of the rival captains.

What would Pankley do?

That was the question.

"Yes," said Pankley desperately, "I'm awfully sorry. You will think me rude I know, Miss Gold, but—"

"But what?" demanded Miss Gold.

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"But I—I—I really can't play your team," stammered Pankley. "You—you see, I didn't know!"

"You didn't know we were girls, I suppose?" said Miss Gold crisply. "Well, never mind that, Master Pankley. We'll give you a good game, all the same."

"That's right, Jenny! Stand up to him!" cried a high-pitched voice from the ranks of lady footballers.

There was a cackle from the crowd, and Pankley, crimson and desperate, looked round in a hunted way. There was a stir as a tall, good-looking senior pushed his way through the throng. At the sight of the girls and Pankley & Co. facing each other he stared and rubbed his eyes. It was evident that Mason, captain of Bagshot School, could hardly believe his eyes. He turned swiftly to Pankley.

"What's all this, Pankley? Who are these—these young ladies?"

"They—they're a football team, Mason," stammered Pankley.

"Football team? What football team?" demanded Mason.

"Lingfield House, Mason. I—I fixed up a match with them."

"You fixed up a match with a team of—ahem!—girls!" cried Mason. "Excuse me, miss!" he said, turning to Miss Gold apologetically. "I beg your pardon! But I—I was rather surprised."

"Oh, don't mind us!" said Miss Gold, with a smile. "Master Pankley fixed up a match with us, and now he wants to back out of it."

"Shame!" came a murmur from the crowd.

The fellows, Bagshot and Rookwooders alike, were grinning now. They were beginning to enjoy the scene and the discomfiture of the lordly Pankley.

Mason bent a stern look on the unfortunate Pankley.

"What's this, Pankley? Did you fix up a match with this team?"

"I—I— Yes, I suppose so, Mason," stammered Pankley desperately; "but—but—"

"But what?" said Mason sharply. "You must know whether you did or not!"

"Yes, I did, Mason; but I didn't know it was a girls' team."

It was out at last, and there was a shout of laughter from the crowd, in which the girls joined merrily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!"

Pankley, crimson with confusion and mortification, almost tore his hair.

"I didn't know!" he gasped. "Lingfield House—I didn't know!"

Even Mason was smiling.

"Well, you should have made sure," he said. "But that these young ladies have arrived you must play them, on course."

"What!" gasped Pankley, while Putter reeled against Poole and groaned deeply.

"Play 'em, I said," repeated Mason sharply, "and get on with it quickly. You've wasted quite enough time already. I am very sorry, miss," he continued, turning to Miss Jenny Gold, who was grinning widely. "I must apologise for the bad manners of Pankley, but we'll get right on with the game now, and I'll referee for you myself."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Mason! That is so good of you!" cooed Jenny.

"Not at all!" said Mason, blushing and leading the way on to the field. "Get a move on, Pankley!"

And to the accompaniment of loud chuckles from the touch-line, Pankley led a very shamefaced-looking team on to the field.

The girls lined up without a moment's delay, and very businesslike they looked in their neat gym costumes and rather large football-boots. Jenny Gold won the toss.

"Ready?" smiled Mason.

Miss Gold nodded.

"Go ahead!" she said tersely.

Pheep!

Mason blew his whistle, and the amazing match started.

(The idea of playing a team of girls is unusual, to say the least, but there's no way out for Pankley & Co. How they fare in this remarkable match will be told in next week's extra-thrilling instalment. You can only make sure of reading it, chums, by ordering your copy early.)

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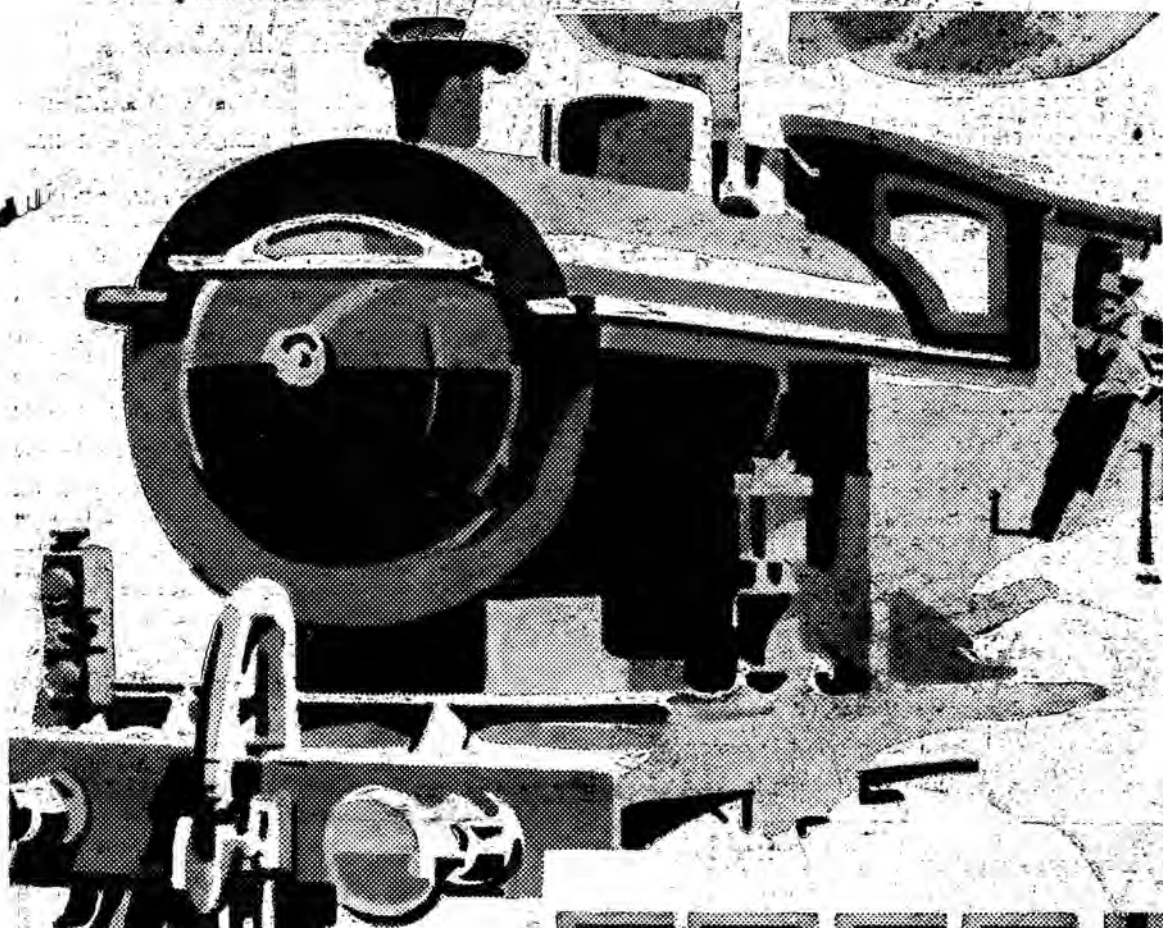
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