

"JUST LIKE CARDEW!"

This week's EXTRA-SPECIAL Story
of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

The

GEM

2^d

No. 1,085.
Vol. XXXIV.
December 28th,
1928

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WEDNESDAY.

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**CARDEW'S
PLUCK!**

(A thrilling scene from this week's
grand story of Tom Merry & Co., at
St. Jim's.)

ANOTHER LONG STORY OF THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S —

Just Like



"A born slacker!" That's the opinion St. Jim's has of Ralph Reckness Cardew. And no wonder, for pigs might fly before his chums could succeed in reforming him from his slacking ways. But it's amazing what a change comes over Cardew after his first meeting with Molly Harwood, and still more amazing are the sacrifices he is prepared to make in order to win her friendship.

CHAPTER 1.

A Runner Wanted!

"BLOW!"

Tom Merry made that remark as if he meant it. The captain of the Lower School at St. Jim's sat in his study and chewed the end of a pencil with a very thoughtful frown on his face.

Tom was alone. Manners and Lowther, his study-mates in Study No. 10, were out of doors. As it was a half-holiday, and a crisp, sunny afternoon, it was quite unusual for Tom Merry to be indoors. Certainly, if he had had his choice in the matter, he would have been out with Manners and Lowther, punting a football about in the Close. But, as captain of the Shell and of the junior school, Tom often had to stay indoors and carry out his various duties as skipper, when his chums were making the most of the half-holiday in the open air.

"Blow!"

Tom Merry repeated that exclamation with even more emphasis than before.

Whatever the problem was with which he was wrestling it seemed to be a troublesome one.

The frown upon his face seemed to be a fixture. He

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chewed his pencil and gazed at the ceiling. He chewed his pencil and gazed at the floor. Then he chewed his pencil and gazed at the coal-scuttle.

"Blow!"

Evidently neither the ceiling nor the floor nor the coal-scuttle had brought inspiration to the captain of the Shell.

"Come in!" called out Tom abstractedly, as a tap sounded on the study door.

The door opened and a gleaming eyeglass beamed into the study. The elegant figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth, entered.

"Hullo, deah boy!"

Tom Merry did not answer; he did not even hear. He was staring at the inkpot on the table with a wrinkle of concentrated thought on his forehead.

"I just looked in, deah boy—" began Arthur Augustus.

"Of course, there's Wildrake," murmured Tom absently.

"Hallo, Gussy! Take a pew."

Arthur Augustus seated himself in an easy-chair, and adjusted his trousers slightly in order to preserve their perfect creases.

"I just looked in, deah boy—"

"I s'pose Roylance wouldn't do?" said Tom.

"Woylance?" echoed Arthur Augustus.

"No; Roylance," said Tom absently.

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—IN WHICH RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW TAKES THE LEAD!

Cardew! *by* Martin Clifford



"I said Woylance! But what the mewwy dickens do you want with Woylance, anyway?"

Tom stared at the carpet in silence, deep in thought.

"Well, I just looked in to tell you, deah boy—"

"Pr'aps it had better be a New House chap," said Tom.

"To tell you, Tom Mewwy, that my Cousin Ethel—"

"There's Blake," said Tom. "But I don't think he's quite the chap for it; or Monty Lowther, either."

Arthur Augustus coughed.

"You seem wowwied!" he exclaimed.

"Worried?" said Tom absently. "Oh, ah—yes! I was just wondering whether, perhaps, after all, Clive is the better man—"

"Anyway, I shan't keep you a moment, deah boy. I just looked in to tell you that my cousin, Ethel Cleveland, you know—"

"Gore's no good," sighed Tom.

"Look heah—"

"Blow!" repeated Tom, more emphatically than ever.

"Weally. Tom Mewwy—"

Tom gazed at the swell of St. Jim's, but there was a far-away look in his eyes.

"I want to tell you something!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, a little warmly.

"Eh? Oh, yes!" said Tom vaguely. "Carry on! I wonder whether Pratt of the New House can run?"

"My Cousin Ethel is stayin' with Mrs. Holmes—"

Tom nodded.

"I know she is. That all? Thanks for telling me, all the same."

"You uthah ass!" snorted Arthur Augustus. "It was not to tell you that that I came heah."

"Wasn't it? Then why did you tell me?" exclaimed Tom, in surprise.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy breathed hard.

"I wanted to tell you, deah boy, that—"

"Cardew!" exclaimed Tom. "He'd be the chap! But then you never can rely on Cardew. He's a slacking ass, and unreliable."

"Bai Jove! Bothah Cardew! I want to say—"

"You're right, Gussy. Bother Cardew! He would put up a fine show if he cared, but he might let us down. Blow!"

Arthur Augustus adjusted his eyeglass and glared at the captain of the Shell.

"Listen!" he hooted. "My Cousin Ethel tells me that she has a fwiend comin' to stay with her and Mrs. Holmes. The gal's name is Molly Harwood. I undahstand she is wathah a pwetty gal. She awwives at St. Jim's on Fwiday."

"If only we could rely on Cardew," said Tom regretfully. Arthur Augustus jumped.

He had imagined that he had succeeded at last in getting his information across, so to speak. Evidently he hadn't. Red and wrathful, the swell of St. Jim's rose to his feet, with a snort.

"I considah it fwightfully wude of you not to listen to a word of what I have been twyin' to tell you!" sniffed Arthur Augustus. "If this were not your studay, I should be stwongly inclined to administrah a most feahful thwashin'!"

"Why, what's wrong, old chap?" inquired Tom, looking very taken aback. "Fact is, I'm trying to worry out the team to run against Greyfriars in the big cross-country race that's been fixed up. I've got the first nine names settled. You're down, of course."

This piece of news caused Arthur Augustus to brighten up. Considerably mollified, the swell of St. Jim's beamed at Tom Merry.

"Splendid! You can wely on me to do my vewy best, deah boy! Those Gweyfwials men are pwetty stwong on athletics, but I fancy we shall beat them."

"I hope so," said Tom doubtfully. "But Wharton's bringing over a very hot team. I've got his letter here, and he mentions some of the names. It ought to be a close thing. I only wish I could decide on a chap to take the tenth place in the St. Jim's team."

"Who have you got so far, deah boy?"

"There's you, Gussy. And Manners and myself from this study. Talbot, Kangaroo, and Levison I've got. And Figgins, Kerr, and Redfern of the New House. That's nine. The team has to be made up of ten chaps. The tenth is the trouble."

"What about Blake, deah boy, or Hewwies, or Dig?" suggested Arthur Augustus loyally, mentioning his three particular chums in the Fourth.

Tom smiled.

"I've wondered about them all, Gussy. But I don't think they are quite the chaps we want for this. It's a stiff show; seven miles' run across country takes some doing. Blake and Herries have both got stamina, but I don't think they could quite show the pace. And I fancy seven miles might be a bit too much of a good thing for Digby."

"I don't altogethah agwee," said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head. "When in twouble, come to Study No. 6—that's a good motto, deah boy!"

"I'll remember it," said Tom gravely.

"Anyway, I will leave you to wovwy it out for yourself," said Arthur Augustus. "I twust you will solve the pwoblem satisfactorily eventually."

"Thanks! By the way, weren't you telling me something—something about Cousin Ethel?" said Tom.

Arthur Augustus, now that he knew he was in the team to run against Greyfriars in the cross-country event that had been fixed up between the juniors of the two schools, was feeling kindly disposed to the world once more. His ire at Tom's lack of interest in his news had departed.

"Yaas!" he nodded. "Wathah intwestin' news. Ethel tells me that she has a gal fwiend comin' to stay with her while she's with Mrs. Holmes—a gal called Molly Harwood. She is said to be wathah a pwetty gal. Wathah good news—what?"

Arthur Augustus had delivered himself of his news once more, and this time he looked at Tom Merry, expecting to see the face of the captain of the Shell alight with pleasure.

But, to the surprise and wrath of Arthur Augustus, the far-away look had returned to Tom Merry's face.

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Tom Merry's thoughts, clearly, were too busily occupied by the important question of the tenth man for the St. Jim's cross-country team to allow any other ideas to enter his mind, not even news of such interest as the arrival of Molly Harwood, Cousin Ethel's friend.

"Clive!" said Tom.

"What?"

"I'll have to be Clive, I suppose. He's pretty fast, and he should be able to stick the distance."

"You—you—you—" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"I'll go along and see him, I think, and ask him if he thinks he could put up a good show," said Tom thoughtfully. "What were you saying, by the way, Gussy, old chap? Something about Cousin Ethel, wasn't it? I didn't quite catch it."

Arthur Augustus adjusted his eyeglass and looked at Tom with a withering look. Then, without a word, the swell of St. Jim's turned and strode from the study, and slammed the door behind him. Tom Merry stared after him blankly.

"Now, what on earth's made him waxy, I wonder?" murmured the captain of the Shell. "Funny!" he added, in a puzzled voice.

Then, with a shrug, Tom dismissed Arthur Augustus' strange huffiness from his mind—it was no time for puzzles!—and left the study to make his way to the Fourth Form passage to interview Sidney Clive.

CHAPTER 2.

Tom Merry Speaks His Mind!

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW, the slacker of the Fourth, stood at the window of Study No. 9 in the Fourth Form passage and yawned.

Cardew was bored—a state in which he often found himself.

He almost regretted that he had declined the pressing invitation of his two study-mates, Levison and Clive, to accompany them on a ramble that afternoon along the river. Still more did he regret that he had not joined Racke and Crooke for the afternoon in some shady little scheme or other that he knew they had planned. At the time it had seemed too much trouble to decide on anything. But now that he was all alone in the study Cardew found that time hung heavily on his hands.

He turned away from the window, with another yawn, and dropped into an armchair. Taking a gold cigarette-case from his pocket, the slacker of the Fourth selected a cigarette and lit it.

The House was more or less deserted, he knew. Both boys and masters had taken the opportunity of the fine weather to be out of doors. With few exceptions, Ralph Reckness Cardew was alone in the School House, and so he felt quite safe from interruption. Therefore he did not bother to lock the door.

He leaned back in the chair with his feet on the table and blew smoke-rings at the ceiling. His eyes were half-closed, lazily.

"What a life!" he murmured.

He was smoking his third cigarette when there was a sudden tap on the door. The door opened.

Ralph Reckness Cardew gave a start. But he did not rise, nor even turn his head. If he was booked for trouble—Cardew told himself that he was booked for trouble, so why worry about the inevitable?

"Hallo!" murmured Cardew lazily. "Come in and make yourself at home, whoever you are."

He was quite prepared for anything. Had it been Kildare, the captain of the school, or Mr. Railton, his Housemaster, he would have shown no surprise or dismay. But, though he had not betrayed any alarm, it was a relief to Cardew to hear the voice that answered him. For it was the voice of Tom Merry.

"I was looking for Clive," said Tom shortly.

"Sorry; he's not here, dear boy," drawled Cardew.

"So I see."

Tom Merry strode forward and came into Cardew's line of vision. The slacker of the Fourth blew another smoke-ring and smiled at him.

"Anythin' important?" he murmured.

"It'll wait!" said Tom shortly.

"Good! Sit down if you've come to stay," suggested Cardew coolly. "Have a cigarette?"

"Don't talk like a fool, Cardew!"

Tom Merry stood looking down contemptuously at the lounging figure of the slacker of the Fourth.

"This how you spend a ripping afternoon, Cardew, as a rule?" he asked.

Cardew yawned.

"Sometimes," he agreed. "Any business of yours?"

For a moment Tom did not answer. Then he nodded.

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"Yes; in a way, it is my business!"

"Really?" smiled Cardew. "How do you make that out, Thomas?"

"Because I happen to be junior captain of games!" said Tom grimly. "When I find a fellow who could be taking a big part in sport if he chose making himself fit for nothing by slacking and smoking, I think it's very much my business. That chap, whoever he happens to be, is not only letting me down, but the school as well. See?"

"Quite a nice little sermon!" yawned Cardew. "Any more?"

"It might interest you to know that we're meeting Greyfriars in a cross-country race," went on Tom quietly.

"A rumour did reach me," nodded Cardew. "Didn't interest me, I'm afraid."

"I didn't think it would," agreed Tom. "However, I happen to have the job of choosing the team to run against the Greyfriars crowd—"

"Thank goodness I haven't!" interrupted Cardew, with feeling.

"Thank goodness you haven't—for the sake of St. Jim's!" said Tom. "The point I am getting at, however—"

"So you have a point to get at?" murmured Cardew. "I wondered why you rambled on."

"My point is that I'm not finding it easy to choose the tenth man for the cross-country team, Cardew. I'd wondered for a little if it would be any good asking you to train and run in the team."

Cardew grinned and blew another smoke-ring.

"It wouldn't," he said. "Runnin' is the most beastly fag and a frightful bore, and you can count me out!"

"I'd done that," said Tom contemptuously. "It only crossed my mind for a moment or so that it might be worth asking you to back up St. Jim's. Then I realised that it would be useless to ask you."

"This is all very interestin'," drawled Cardew, but a faint flush had mounted into his cheeks.

"That's why I'm asking Clive to run against Greyfriars, and not you," went on Tom.

"I couldn't dream of cuttin' out a pal, anyway," grinned Cardew. "Besides, Clive is sure to put up a better show than I should," he added dryly.

"That's rot!" retorted Tom. "You know jolly well that you could put up a better show in the cross-country than Clive could. That is, of course, if you chucked this silly smoky business and trained!"

"Thanks for the sermon," drawled Cardew, throwing away his cigarette and selecting another. "If you have quite finished talking, dear man, I should be glad if you would leave me to my own sweet company!"

"Certainly!" said Tom. "You might tell Clive I should be glad if he would look in and see me some time this evening."

"Delighted!" yawned Cardew. "Shut the door behind you."

"I will—in a jiff. But before I go, I'm taking those cigarettes. Hand 'em over!"

Cardew grinned. But there was a glimmering light in his eyes.

"Sorry to disappoint you, Thomas. I'm keeping 'em. And may I inquire, humbly and simply because I thirst for knowledge, what business it is of yours if—"

"It may not be my business," Tom said calmly. "But I am interfering, anyhow—just because I don't like your habits."

And before Cardew could prevent him, Tom had stooped over the lounging Fourth-Former and snatched the cigarette-case from his pocket.

"That's the best place for them, I think," said Tom, and emptied the contents of the case into the fire. He tossed the case on to the study table.

Cardew was on his feet in a moment, his face crimson with anger.

"You seem to be looking for trouble!" he said between his teeth.

"Think so?" Tom nodded. "To be candid, I am. If you want a scrap, I'm your man. There's nothing I'd like better at the moment, Cardew, than to give you the licking of your life! That's the truth!"

Cardew breathed hard.

Tom Merry's candid admission had rather taken the wind out of Cardew's sails. The slacker of the Fourth knew that he was no match for Tom if it came to a fight.

"Well?" asked Tom curtly.

Cardew grinned and unclenched his hands.

"You certainly can be amusin' at times, Thomas," he murmured. "There's more in you than I have sometimes thought. I always thought you were rather a slow-witted kind of chap—good as gold, but not quick in the uptake. I still think that. But you can be original, I find. I congratulate you!"

"Thanks!"

"Not at all." Cardew sat down again, smiling pleasantly.

"P'r'aps you don't mind goin' now? I feel quite sleepy. I think it's because of listening to your long sermons. 'Pon my word, I never knew you could do so much talkin', dear man!"

Tom seemed about to speak, but changed his mind, and left the study.

As the skipper of the Shell vanished, the smiling look on Cardew's face gave place to one of frowning anger.

Even though Tom Merry's plain speaking had done nothing towards persuading Cardew to reform and give up his slacking habits, the words nevertheless rankled.

The frown on Cardew's face lingered. Could Tom Merry have seen it then, he would at least have had the satisfaction of knowing that he had spoilt Cardew's peaceful afternoon!

CHAPTER 3.

Tenth Man!

CLIVE and Levison, back from their tramp in the keen winter air and looking very cheery and healthy after it, entered their study at tea-time, and found Cardew still lounging in the armchair.

"Lazy slacker!" growled Levison.

"You wouldn't come out, but you might have got tea ready for us!" exclaimed Clive.

Cardew grinned.

"Tea?" he murmured.

"Well, I confess the thought of tea did cross my mind. But I dismissed it. The thought bored me. So I went to sleep instead."

"Ass!" snorted Clive.

"Of all the blessed slackers I've ever struck—"

"Funny, you should say that!" drawled Cardew, yawning.

"That's just what Tom Merry told me when he breezed in here this afternoon. Never known dear Thomas talk so much! He's getting quite loquacious in his old age!"

"What did he come for?" inquired Clive curiously.

"Not just to tell you you were a slacker, I suppose?"

"Oh, no! That was just by the way," grinned Cardew. "His feelings ran away with him when he found me sampling the fragrant weed."

"Smoking, were you?" growled Levison. "You wouldn't come out with us because you wanted to stay in and smoke?"

"More or less," nodded Cardew coolly. "But Thomas came in to see Clive."

"To see me?" exclaimed Clive.

"Yes, dear man. Somethin' about runnin' against Greyfriars."

"Tom Merry wants me to run against the Greyfriars team?" broke out Clive excitedly. "Oh, good!"

Cardew stared at his chum in surprise.

"You really mean the idea doesn't appal you?" he asked, in apparent astonishment.

"Ass!" laughed Clive.

"Well, it beats me!" murmured Cardew. "I can't understand some of you chaps. If I thought I had to run seven miles across all sorts of country, I should just lie down and die."

Clive frowned.

"I dare say you would!" he returned biting. "But if you chose you could do it—and, what's more, you could put up a better show than I'm likely to!"

"This modesty is dreadful!" Cardew murmured. "But, do you know, that's just what Tom Merry said. He was really most flatterin'!"

"He asked you to be in the team, and you refused?" exclaimed Clive.

"Not exactly. He said he would have asked me, but he knew I should refuse," explained Cardew airily. "Quite intelligent of poor dear Thomas to guess I should refuse, wasn't it?"

"You would have refused if he had asked you, then?"



As Tom Merry & Co. raced for the subterranean stairway a dull crash sounded from above and echoed round the vaults. "Bal Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Some wottahs have daggled the flagstone back! We are twapped!" Up above, Wally D'Arcy & Co. rolled a big block of masonry on to the flagstone. "Got 'em!" chuckled Wally. (See Chapter 5.)

"Of course. Runnin' is a ghastly bore!"

Clive breathed hard.

It would have been a little humiliating to some fellows to know that they had only been wanted for a team because their chum had refused the place. But there was no jealousy in Sidney Clive's make-up; he merely felt angry that his chum should have no compunction in letting down St. Jim's, when, had Cardew chosen otherwise, he might have helped in no small measure towards the desired victory over Greyfriars.

"Look here, Cardew," said Clive quietly. "Is this playing the game? You can't let the school down! You're wanted. Why not go along to Tom Merry now and tell him you'll run? Then get into hard training!"

Cardew's eyes glimmered.

"My dear ass, the virtuous Thomas has not even asked me, I tell you!" he yawned. "So how could I be so pushin'?"

"You idiot, you know he'd put you in the team like a shot if you promised to train for the run!"

"Possibly. But I couldn't bear to make a promise I should have to break."

"Why would you have to break it?" snorted Levison.

"Because trainin' would soon bore me, dear man. I couldn't bear to go into hard trainin'. What a fag!"

"You're hopeless, Cardew!" exclaimed Clive angrily.

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"A true word," nodded Cardew, with a grin. "I am hopeless!"

Clive glared at his chum, and so did Levison. Then, without another word, Clive turned on his heel and left the study, and made his way to the Shell passage.

He found Tom Merry at tea, with Manners and Lowther. "Cardew says you wanted to see me," Clive remarked to Tom, who nodded cheerily.

"That's right. Sit down and have some tea?"

"No, thanks all the same. I'm tea-ing with Levison and Cardew. Is it about the cross-country run against Greyfriars?"

"That's right," said Tom Merry. "I wanted to ask if you thought you could put up a good show? It's a stiff run—seven miles. You know if you could last the distance. Could you?"

The South African junior nodded eagerly.

"I feel sure I could!"

"That's all I wanted to know, then. You're in the team, unless, of course, some other fellow shows better form. I had wondered about Wildrake, or Roylance. But I think you can beat them."

"Look here," said Clive abruptly. "What about Cardew?"

"What about him?" asked Tom, frowning.

"If he chose Cardew could put up a better run than I'm likely to," Clive blurted out. "I know he could!"

The captain of the Shell smiled.

"You almost sound as if you don't want to be in the team!"

"Of course I want to be in the team. But I'd sooner you had the best men you can get. Cardew is a fine athlete when he takes the trouble, and if you could persuade him to run against Greyfriars I feel sure he'd put up a ripping show."

"I've already spoken to Cardew," said Tom quietly. "I didn't ask him to be in the team, because I knew he'd refuse."

"You don't think it would be worth while trying to persuade him?" said Clive, frowning.

"Candidly, I'm sure it wouldn't."

"No jolly fear!" chimed in Lowther; and the look on Manners' face showed that he agreed emphatically, too.

"Oh, well!" said Clive. "By the way, what about old Levison?"

"He's in the team," Tom told him.

Clive left the study, still looking far from cheerful, in spite of this good news. It was about Ralph Reckness Cardew that the South African junior was worried. Not for the first time was Cardew giving cause for worry to his two long-suffering chums!

But as he heard his study Clive's face brightened.

After all, if Cardew would not run, there was no power at St. Jim's capable of making him do so. And since he would not, the next best thing, in Clive's opinion, was that he himself should run. The fact that both he and Levison would be in the team was a big thing for Study No. 9.

"I'm in the team, old man, and so are you!" Clive told Ernest Levison, as he entered the study, where Levison was busy getting the tea, with a little languid assistance from Cardew.

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Levison jubilantly.

"Great, isn't it?" chuckled Clive. "Both of us running against Greyfriars!"

Ralph Reckness Cardew watched their jubilant faces with an expression of sheer bewilderment.

"You both seem pleased about it," he remarked at last.

"Of course we are, you ass!" chorused Levison and Clive.

"Amazin'!" murmured the slacker of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 4.

Wally's Scheme!

REGGIE MANNERS of the Third chuckled.

Curly Gibson grinned.

Wally D'Arcy, who was the cause of both the chuckle and the grin, neither heard nor saw them.

They had found Walter Adolphus D'Arcy of the Third sitting on his desk in the Third Form-room. It was after tea on the following day, and there was a very thoughtful

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frown upon Wally's brow. For once, the scamp of the Third was in a very solemn mood. His usual cheeky cheerfulness was at present replaced by a deep solemnity.

"Here he is!" exclaimed Levison minor.

Curly Gibson was carrying a pea-shooter, and he raised it. He blew sharply, and a pea shot across the Form-room and landed on Wally's nose. The leader of the Third jumped and gave a yell.

"Ow! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You frabjous asses!" roared Wally.

"Aren't you ready?" demanded Hobbs of the Third.

"Ready for what?" growled Wally.

His friends stared at him.

"You haven't forgotten we're japing the New House?" demanded Curly Gibson indignantly.

"The New House?" repeated Wally vaguely.

"Yes!" snorted Levison minor. "Hang it all, you hadn't forgotten? We've all got pea-shooters ready—"

"Blow the New House!" said Wally emphatically.

"Eh?"

"And blow pea-shooters!" went on Wally.

"Look here—"

"Rats!"

"Aren't you coming along to the New House?" roared Reggie Manners.

"No!"

"But, hang it all—"

"No!"

"Look here, Wally, it's all planned that we—"

"No! I've said no, and I mean no!" grunted Wally D'Arcy. "I'm not going along. You asses can go and pea-shoot the New House if you want to, but I'm not!"

The other Third-Formers stared at Wally blankly. Half a dozen of them had come crowding into the Form-room on the heels of Curly Gibson and Reggie Manners, and they stared at one another in sheer bewilderment. They stared at Wally in the same way. Then they stared at each other again.

"Well, you burbling bandersnatch!" exclaimed Hobbs in deep disgust. "What's the matter with you? Feeling ill?"

"No."

"Look here, what do you mean, young D'Arcy?" roared Curly Gibson. "If you aren't ill—"

"I'm thinking," snapped Wally.

"What with?"

"Oh, rats!"

"Well, what were you thinking?" demanded Manners minor. "Let's know the result. When you start thinking, I'll bet something queer comes out of it. It's not usual for you to think, old chap."

"You cheeky asses!" growled Wally. "Why can't you mind your own giddy business? The fact is—"

"Yes?"

"How can I tell you if you keep interrupting?" roared Wally. "There's a girl coming to the school to-morrow who's the rippingest girl you ever saw!" He glared round defiantly. "She's a pal of my Cousin Ethel, who's staying with Mrs. Holmes, you know. Her name's Molly Harwood, and she'll be staying quite a while with Mrs. Holmes, too."

A grin of satisfaction brightened Wally's face.

"How old is she?" asked Manners minor.

"Sixteen," growled Wally. "I saw her once when Ethel brought her over to our place. Gussy was away, and he didn't see her. But you know what an ass my major is! I bet he tries to cut me out with Molly Harwood."

Wally stared gloomily at the floor.

The faces of his friends had taken on expressions of sympathy. To the stalwarts of the Third there did not seem to be anything amusing in the idea of Wally's having "fallen" for a young lady of sixteen. Wally was only twelve, it was true. But the Third-Formers realised their own merits, and to them it seemed perfectly reasonable that Miss Harwood should appreciate the admiration of Walter Adolphus D'Arcy.

"Yes, I bet your major tries to cut you out," nodded Curly Gibson gloomily. "Those Fourth asses think they are the salt of the giddy earth."

"He'd tell her not to have anything to do with a Third Form chap, I suppose," agreed Manners minor. "Hard luck, Wally!"

"She's a ripper," said Wally thoughtfully.

"Pretty?" inquired Levison minor.

"You bet!"

"I've been trying to think out a scheme to put old Gussy's nose out of joint," confessed Wally. "I know he means to go and meet her at the station, and to take some of the others with him. My Cousin Ethel would be going, too, only she's got a bad cold to-day, and won't go out to-morrow." He grunted. "What I'd like would be to keep Gussy and the other asses from meeting her, and go and meet her myself, you know."

"That's the idea!" exclaimed Curly approvingly.

The fags looked at one another thoughtfully. The New House was quite forgotten. They all meant to rally round Wally in his hour of need.

"What time does the train arrive, anyway?" put in Curly.

"She gets to Rylcombe Station by half-past five," Wally told him.

"That's right," exclaimed Levison minor. "I went to my major's study this morning to borrow a book, and Tom Merry was there talking to Ernie. He was saying that the cross-country team is going for a practice run to-morrow afternoon, but that they would be back by five, in time to go and meet the train at Rylcombe at half-past."

"Going for a run, are they?" grunted Curly Gibson. "That team for the cross-country race makes me tired! It's supposed to represent the junior school, but it's all Fourth and Shell chaps! Not a single Third-Former in it."

"Rotten shame!" agreed Reggie Manners. "Did Tom Merry say where the team would be going for its practice run?" asked Wally, sitting up suddenly.

"Yes, along the Wayland Road," said Levison minor. "My hat!" ejaculated Wally.

"What's up?" asked Curly Gibson, in surprise. "A wheeze!" cried Wally excitedly. His eyes were gleaming. "I know how we'll keep those Upper Form jabberwooks from meeting my girl! Listen!"

And the scheme that Wally D'Arcy propounded to his eager Form-fellows caused the eyes of the fags to gleam joyfully.

CHAPTER 5.

A Cry for Help!

"COME on, you cripples!" Jack Blake of the Fourth made that remark as he cycled slowly along beside the group of running juniors.

The cross-country team, looking very business-like in running-kit, were jogging steadily along the Wayland Road just after four o'clock on the following afternoon. Besides the team itself, Blake, Herries, Digby, and Monty Lowther were there, the latter four on cycles. The cyclists had come to cheer on the team if their efforts flagged. But as yet the selected ten were going strong.

"Greyfriars will have to put in a hot team to beat you chaps!" remarked Monty Lowther, with a chuckle of satisfaction. "You're all going fine, and you've scarcely started your training yet! When you're trained, you'll be good enough for the Olympic games!"

Tom Merry, who was at the rear of the runners, so that he could watch the performance of each man in the team, grinned at Monty Lowther's optimistic remark. Though Tom did not expect to find it anything but a very difficult job to beat the Greyfriars men, he felt as he ran his eyes over his team that he had a very useful collection—even with the absence of Ralph Reckness Cardew!

"Come on, Gussy!" sang out Blake.

"Put a jerk in it!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"No slacking off, Gussy," grinned Herries, winking at Blake.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Come on, Gussy!" admonished Digby. "Make it lively!"

"Weally, Digby—"

"And not so much talking, Gussy!" said Blake severely. "You can't run well if you waste your breath jawing!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"There you go!" groaned Blake. "Always chin-wagging!"

Arthur Augustus glared at his chum but said no more.

The team jogged on at a good swinging pace.

They were near Wayland now, at a spot where the ruins of an old castle, surrounded by thickets, loomed up over the tree-tops on the left of the road. A path led up the hill through the trees to the castle, from the road.

It was as the runners were passing abreast at the end of this path that a sudden faint cry came to the ears of all. The runners halted as one man.

"Hear that?" exclaimed Talbot of the Shell.

"My hat, yes!" muttered Figgins of the New House.

"By Jove, there it is again!"

A second faint cry, vague and shrill, had come to the ears of the St. Jim's juniors.

"It's from the ruins!" breathed Olive.

"Here, let's go and investigate!" rapped out Kangaroo sharply, and with one accord the juniors broke into a run again, this time along the wooded pathway that led to the ancient ruins. As they drew near, a third cry came through the trees.

With startled faces, the group of juniors broke into the clearing where the old ruins stood. Except for a lofty broken arch, there was little more left of the old castle than mossy piles of masonry.

And the ruins seemed empty!

"There's no one here," muttered Redfern.

The juniors stared round. Certainly, there was nobody in sight. But they had all heard the cry as of someone in terror, or, at any rate, needing help.

"There was someone here," declared Tom Merry.

Suddenly Manners flung out a pointing hand.

"Look!"

He was pointing at a black gap in the old flagstones under the arch. It was a gap, as they all knew, that gave access to the stone stairs leading down to the ancient dungeons. As a rule, a stone blocked the entrance. But the flagstone had been dragged back, revealing the square, yawning aperture, and the stairs winding down.

"The flagstone's been dragged back," breathed Manners. "Someone must have gone down there—"

"And slipped on the stairs, and broken his leg!" exclaimed Kerr, of the New House. "That's about the size of it! Some chap must have been exploring, and is lying down there in the vaults with a bust leg, or ankle, or something!"

"Hallo!" shouted Tom Merry. "Anyone down there?"

There was no answer.

"He must have fainted, whoever he is," muttered Blake.

"Well, I'm going down," said Tom. "Come on, somebody, to lend me a hand at carrying him up, if there is someone down there."

Tom stepped down through the yawning opening, and vanished through the gap, followed by the others. All the St. Jim's juniors wanted to have a hand in solving the mystery, if mystery there was. Pushing and jostling one another in their eagerness, the fellows crowded down the ancient stairway leading to the vaults.

Their footsteps echoed weirdly as they descended. A cold, damp smell rose to their nostrils. Digby had a box of matches, and when they neared the bottom of the

(Continued on next page.)



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winding stairs he struck a light. The little yellow flame glimmered weakly in the gloom, revealing the damp, moss-grown walls, with fungus sprouting from the cracks in the masonry.

Again Tom Merry sent a shout echoing through the vaults, but there was no answer.

The juniors stood in a group near the bottom of the stairs, peering round. Suddenly Digby gave an exclamation.

"My hat! Look! There's a packet of candles!"

Sure enough there was. A dozen candles were lying on the floor in a bundle near one of the pillars. Digby took a candle from the bundle and lighted it. The glow shone brightly on walls and floor and lichen-covered ceiling.

"Who ever brought these candles down here must have hurt himself, and is somewhere in the vaults now, unconscious," said Kerr anxiously.

He picked up one of the candles, and lit it from Digby's. Some of the others followed his example. The eerie glow of the dungeons was banished by quite a cheerful light.

"Come on, you chaps!" cried Levison. "We'll soon find him, whoever he is!"

"Half a jiff!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as a general move was made to spread out and search the dungeons. "What's this?"

His eyes had caught sight of a piece of paper lying on the floor near where the candles had been found. He picked it up, and gave an amazed exclamation.

"My only hat!"

The others crowded round to read the writing on the sheet of paper in Tom's hand. In a villainous scrawl was written in pencil:

"You are my prizzoners. These candles are a present from me, lest you should pine away to death in the darkness of these dunjuns! You will be releessed when the time is ripe.

(Signed) BLACK RUDOLPH,
"The Terror of the Mountains."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther. "Some kid has been having a fine game down here! We've butted into some kids' game—that's all."

"Not so sure about that," said Tom grimly. "Quick, up those stairs, or we may be too late!"

"What on earth do you mean?" cried Blake.

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy, suahly you do not weally mean to suggest that—"

But Tom had already turned and was racing for the stairs.

As he put his foot on the bottom step, a dull crash sounded from above and echoed reverberatingly round the vaults.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus, in startled amazement. "Some wottahs have dwaggd the flagstone back! We are twapped!"

Up above, on the other side of the flagstone, Wally D'Arcy wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"Got 'em!" he chuckled exultantly. "Got 'em! My aunt, that stone was heavy!"

With the help of Curly Gibson, Reggie Manners, and Frank Levison, he rolled a big block of masonry on to the flagstone.

"There!" grinned Curly. "They won't be able to shift that in a hurry!"

"Rather not!" agreed Levison minor cheerfully. "There's only room for a few of 'em at a time at the top of the stairs, and it would take a dozen at least to shift that flagstone row from underneath!"

"Easy, wasn't it?" chuckled Wally. "I knew they'd go down to search the vaults when they heard that yelling. Now, we'll just hide their bikes under the arch, so that no one else will come along and pinch 'em."

The four cycles were wheeled into the shadows, out of sight of the path, and then, with cheerful faces, the four Third-Formers strolled away from the ruins arm in arm.

"Now for Rylcombe station!" chortled Wally D'Arcy. "To meet that giddy train!"

CHAPTER 6.

Wally's Girl!

MISS MOLLY HARWOOD stepped from the train in Rylcombe Station.

She was a slim, pretty girl, with dark wavy hair and laughing brown eyes, and a frank, boyish expression. She was quite tall—almost twice as tall as Adolphus D'Arcy. She stood glancing round, a little puzzled wrinkle on her forehead under her neat, dark hat.

She had understood from Ethel Cleveland's letter that her friend's cousin, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with perhaps

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some of the other St. Jim's fellows, would be at the station to meet her. The platform was deserted, however, but for four small boys excitedly gathered round a penny-in-the-slot machine.

Reggie Manners had put a penny in the slot only to discover that the machine was out of order. Actually, there was a notice to that effect stuck on the machine, but in his eagerness to obtain chocolate, Reggie had not noticed that little point—until it was too late.

Wally D'Arcy, Reggie Manners, Frank Levison, and Curly Gibson were now excitedly trying to get the machine to work, in spite of the facts!

Even the arrival of the train had gone quite unheeded until now. Then suddenly Wally D'Arcy glanced round. He drew a quick breath.

"Chuck it, you asses!" he whispered warningly. "Here she is!"

"Look here, I've lost my penny," began Reggie Manners wrathfully, "and I'm hanged—"

"Blow your penny! Serves you right for sticking it in a machine that won't work," retorted Wally. And the leader of the Third, blushing furiously, stepped forward to greet Cousin Ethel's friend.

Molly Harwood, carrying her dressing-case, was already moving towards the station exit. She paused in surprise at sight of a small boy standing before her, crimson as a beetroot as he raised his cap.

"How do you do?" mumbled Wally D'Arcy.

Molly Harwood smiled. She had recognised him now.

"Why, it's Wally!" she exclaimed, putting down her bag and kissing the fag.

Wally, if he had been red before, was now the colour of a setting sun. It was a distinct triumph, but in front of the other Third-Form men he was not sure if it was quite to be desired. However, the admiring glances of the other three fags as they gazed at "Wally's girl" reassured him on that point.

"I've come to meet you," explained Wally, grinning. He was not likely to remain bashful long under any circumstances! "How are you? You're looking fine."

"Thank you!" laughed the girl. "It's very kind of you to come to meet me. But I thought your elder brother would be here?"

Wally coughed.

"You did, eh?"

"Your cousin Ethel told me he would, in her letter," explained Molly.

"She must have been wrong, you know," grinned Wally, and turned to his chums. "Let me introduce these asses."

"Look here, young Wally—" began Curly indignantly.

"Shut up!" growled Wally, glaring at him. "Where's your manners? This pie-faced chump is Curly Gibson," he added.

"Look here, you frabjous idiot!" roared Curly. "I'm no more pie-faced than you are!"

"And this chap with the face like the back of a cab is Reggie Manners," went on Wally, heedless of Curly. "And this prize chimpanzee is Frank Levison."

"Look here, Wally—"

"You cheeky ass—"

"How do you do?" laughed Molly, her eyes dancing as she glanced down at the indignant fags. "I don't think you are very polite to your friends, Wally," she added, trying not to smile.

"Oh, they need keeping in their place, you know," said Wally confidentially. "Gimme your bag, will you? This way."

Proud as a peacock, Wally strutted out of the station with Molly Harwood in tow, so to speak, like a little tug in charge of a graceful liner. At that moment, Wally of the Third would not have changed places with the captain of St. Jim's himself.

"She's a stunner," whispered Curly to Levison minor, as the other three followed. "I don't wonder Wally doesn't want his major to cut him out!"

"We back up Wally!" nodded Levison.

"All along the line," agreed Reggie Manners.

A few minutes later, the four delighted Third-Formers, together with their precious charge, were in a cab rolling towards St. Jim's through the dusk.

Molly Harwood was quite content to be in their company. Though she was puzzled to know why Wally's major had failed to meet her train, she was very amused by the conversation of Wally and his pals. It would have been rather a shock to her had she known that Curly, Reggie, and Frank Levison regarded her as being "Wally's girl"—but that she did not know.

"How is your Cousin Ethel?" she asked Wally.

"Oh, all right, you know," returned Wally. "Gets rather bored, of course, with all those asses in the Fourth and Shell. It's sickening for her; but they're always asking her to tea, and showing her round."

"It sounds rather nice of them," laughed Molly.



A swarm of St. Jim's fellows had stationed themselves on the banks of the stream to watch the runners in the great cross-country race. There was a cheer as Tom Merry splashed through the water almost on the heels of Reginald Talbot! (See Chapter 10.)

Wally frowned darkly.

"You don't know yet what asses those Shell and Fourth chaps are," he explained. "We men in the Third won't mix with 'em at all."

"Rather not!" nodded Curly Gibson. "You stick to the Third, Miss Harwood. We'll show you round St. Jim's. And you must come and have tea in the Third Form room one day. Reggie's got some kippers."

"That sounds very nice," said Molly Harwood, with twinkling eyes.

"You won't mind if they're a bit niffy?" asked Reggie carelessly. "I've had 'em in my desk a few days."

"A bit—er—niffy?" echoed Molly.

"A bit, you know," explained Curly, "high! Personally, I like 'em high—more flavour."

"I—I'm not sure that I do," said Molly Harwood. "In fact, I think that if you'll excuse me—"

She broke off abruptly.

The sudden shriek of an electric motor-horn had sounded, and a car, with glaring head-lamps, came shooting round the bend ahead, driven at a mad pace. The cabby gave a startled cry, and swung the horse to the side of the road. The car roared by, missing the cab by inches. The horse reared in terror, and one of the wheels took the ditch by the roadside. The cab lurched, and the cabby went tumbling from his box into the ditch.

There was a cry of alarm from Molly Harwood.

The next instant the scared horse, with no one at the reins, had broken into a wild, frightened gallop, and was careering at a mad pace along the darkening lane.

CHAPTER 7.

"Well Played, Cardew!"

A GAIN Molly Harwood gave a cry of alarm. Her face had gone a little pale.

"My hat!" gasped Wally. "The cabby's fallen off, and the horse is bolting!"

The four Third-Formers looked at one another, with white

faces, as the cab rolled and lurched dangerously behind the runaway horse.

"If—if we go in the ditch—" breathed Reggie Manners in a frightened voice.

"Shut up!" hissed Wally. "I—I say, it's all right, Molly. The horse will stop in a jiffy!"

The girl did not reply. But it was almost as if the horse had heard Wally's remark, and was out to prove him wrong; for it increased its already tremendous pace, and the ancient cab fairly hurtled along the road.

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Molly faintly.

Wally's lips tightened.

"I'll stop the giddy beast!" he exclaimed, in rather a hoarse voice; and he jumped to his feet within the swaying cab.

"What are you going to do?" cried Molly sharply.

Wally turned the handle of the door and swung it open. "Don't be scared," he said, in a voice strangely unlike his usual cheery tones. "I'm going to climb out and get up on to the box. If I can get hold of the reins I can stop the beast!"

But the girl caught his wrist tightly.

"You'll do nothing of the sort!"

"But—"

"You'd be killed, Wally!"

"Rats! I—I mean, I'll risk that. Anyway, even if I am—"

At the back of Wally's mind was a vague idea that if he died in saving the life of the object of his admiration it would be for a good cause. But he boggled at putting it into words, and broke off.

But something in his eyes may have told Molly Harwood. She stared at him wide-eyed, gripping his wrist tightly as the runaway cab rushed on its mad career, and then drew a deep breath.

"Wally dear," she said quietly, "you aren't going to try anything so silly or so brave. Promise me you'll stop here."

"Oh, all right!" grunted Wally. "But—"

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"I—I'll see if I can do anything!" Molly exclaimed, and jumped to her feet.

She leaned out of the open door, staring ahead, wondering if there would be a chance of catching the flying reins from where she was; but the reins were trailing in the road. She gave a sudden cry as she saw ahead, in the gathering darkness an abrupt curve in the road.

The girl realised in a flash that the cab could never hope to take the curve at that desperate speed. It would overturn, for certain. And then—

"Look here," said Wally, "I—"

She did not hear him. With thundering hoofs the horse was careering on towards the swiftly-nearing bend.

And then a sudden shadow seemed to detach itself from the roadside. A lithe figure was racing along beside the horse—had caught at the bit. Molly Harwood gave a gasp.

In the light of the lamps she saw that the figure that was battling with the horse wore a St. Jim's cap.

They were very near the bend now. But the horse was slowing down, forced to do so by the incessant drag upon the bit. How the fellow racing beside it managed to keep his feet seemed a miracle.

"Oh!" gasped Molly Harwood. "Oh! He—he's done it!"

The words choked in her throat.

Suddenly the horse gave in. It slowed to a dead stop, and stood quivering between the shafts. The four white-faced fags looked at one another.

"Whew!" gasped Curly Gibson.

"Narrow shave, that!" breathed Wally. "I say, you might have let me try to do something. I—"

"Everybody all right?" asked a cool voice.

The St. Jim's fellow who had saved them from disaster was standing by the window. He raised his cap as he caught sight of Molly Harwood.

"Hallo, you!" grunted Wally in disgust.

"Why, it's my excellent young friend, Walter Adolphus!" exclaimed the drawing voice of Cardew of the Fourth.

Wally glared at him. Though he probably owed Cardew his life at that moment—for the overturning of the cab might easily have proved fatal for some of the occupants—Wally did not feel very thankful to Ralph Reckness Cardew at that moment. It seemed to Wally that Cardew had distinctly collared the limelight, and robbed him of a chance to shine before Molly Harwood.

Wally glowered as he watched Molly Harwood thrust out her hand impulsively to Cardew.

"Thank you!" she said, and laughed shakily. "You were awfully brave. I—I can't thank you enough."

Cardew smiled as he took her hand.

"Oh, nothin' brave in it, honest!" he murmured. "It was pretty easy, with an old nag like that."

"I think it was very, very brave," she said frankly.

"That's very flatterin'," sighed Cardew. "I only wish you were right! But I'm horribly afraid it is more flatterin' than true, you know—what?"

"Nonsense!" cried Molly Harwood. Then she turned her head, listening. "Hark!"

Someone was running up the lane. The portly figure of the cabby appeared, looking very wet and muddy, but exceedingly relieved to find his cab and its occupants safe and sound.

"You the cabby?" inquired Cardew. "Rather deserted the post of danger, didn't you?"

"I was thrown orf," protested the cabby. "Right orf! My, but the feller that was drivin' that car ought to be in quod, that he ought! It was him that set old Nellie orf."

"Who is Nellie?" inquired Cardew gravely.

"My old mare there," said the cabby, and hurried to the animal's head.

"Well, I suppose I'd better be gettin' along," said Cardew. "Excuse my askin', by the way, but you must be Miss Harwood, Miss Cleveland's friend?"

"Yes," said Molly. "Are you a friend of Ethel's?"

Cardew smiled a trifle dryly. He knew very well that he was not exactly one of Cousin Ethel's favourites at St. Jim's.

"Well, yes," he murmured. "I think I can claim that honour, don't you know?"

"Then I expect I shall see you again!" said Molly brightly.

Cardew nodded quite vehemently.

"You can bet you will!" He spoke as though he meant it. "Rather, Miss Harwood! My name, by the way, is Cardew—since our excellent young friends here haven't thought it worth while to introduce us."

"Oh, rats!" snapped Wally.

"Cardew," repeated the slacker of the Fourth, with a smile, "School House, Fourth Form. Good-bye!"

Molly held out her hand, and Cardew gripped it and raised his cap.

"Good-bye, Miss Harwood! Good-bye, Wally, my excel-

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lent young friend! Good-bye, Kids! Good-bye, Nellie!" he added, bowing gravely to the horse.

The cabby had mounted his box again, and the cab rolled forward. Cardew watched it till it disappeared into the darkness with rather an odd look on his handsome face.

In the cab, Molly Harwood turned a bright face to the four fags.

"What a nice boy!" she exclaimed. "And how brave he was! Goodness knows what might not have happened if he had not been there!" And she gave a little shiver.

From Walter Adolphus D'Arcy there came a disgusted grunt.

"Of course," went on Molly Harwood hastily, "you would have stopped it just as well, if I'd let you try, Wally!"

Wally grinned—a very cheerful grin.

"Oh, I dunno!" he said modestly. "I'd have had a shot, anyway!"

"You were really just as brave as he was, I think," said Molly, and she meant it. There was quite a misty look in her brown eyes as she looked at the scamp of the Third. "You would have climbed out, if I hadn't stopped you. I think that was tremendously brave!"

"Rather!" exclaimed Curly Gibson. "Frightfully brave!"

"Oh, rats!" answered Wally. "Don't be a chump, Curly!"

But there was a look on his face that showed that Wally at that moment was as happy as a king.

CHAPTER 3.

Cardew Changes His Mind!

R ALPH RECKNESS CARDEW came out of the Fourth Form room on the following morning, after second lesson, looking very cheery.

It was not that Mr. Lathom's instruction in Latin prose had given him any particular pleasure. Nor was it simply the fact that it was a bright, warm morning, with the sun shining. Cardew had some other reason for his cheeriness apparently.

He came out at the top of the steps leading into the quad whistling. Tom Merry was standing there enjoying the sunshine, together with Manners and Lowther. To Tom's surprise Cardew stopped and nodded to him in quite a friendly way. It seemed as if Cardew had quite forgotten his extreme irritation with Tom for the talking-to he had received on the previous Wednesday afternoon.

"Hallo, dear, man!" murmured Cardew. "Rippin' mornin'—what?"

Tom nodded.

"What's this yarn about you an' some of the others gettin' shut up in the vaults of the old castle yesterday evenin'?" inquired Cardew. "Levison and Clive were full of it when they came in last night!"

"Some silly trick some asses played on us!" returned Tom, with a wrathful snort. "We don't know who it was. After we'd been in the vaults an hour we suddenly found the stone had been shifted away from us. But when we came up there was no one in the ruins."

"Very rum," commented Cardew, and went his way, looking thoughtful.

Cardew had a very shrewd instinct when it came to solving riddles. He knew that Arthur Augustus and his friends had been going to meet Molly Harwood at the station on behalf of Cousin Ethel. He knew, too, that Wally D'Arcy had taken the trouble—unusual in a Third-Former—to meet her instead. Putting two and two together, Cardew deduced that Wally could have explained how it was that the running team had become shut up in the ruins of the old castle at Wayland! Clearly, since Wally had been returning to St. Jim's at about the same time of their ultimate release, some of his pals in the Third had undertaken to release the prisoners for Wally a little later on—when it was too late to meet Miss Harwood's train at Rylcombe!

Cardew grinned. But he had not the slightest intention of communicating his suspicions to Tom Merry & Co. He went on his way, whistling brightly.

His way led him in the direction of the Head's garden. He had a quarter of an hour in which to do as he liked before third lesson, and he had an idea that he might find Molly Harwood walking in the Head's garden at about that time.

He was not disappointed.

Cousin Ethel was there, too. The two girls halted in their walk as Cardew came up, raised his cap, and leant, smiling, on the gate.

"Good-morning!" said Cardew.

Cousin Ethel smiled at him brightly, rather to Cardew's surprise. He knew that in the past Gussy's pretty cousin had not approved of him for several reasons—chief among them being that she was well acquainted with some of his shady habits, such as cigarette-smoking. But Cardew

realised that no doubt Molly Harwood had told her about his action on the previous evening in stopping the runaway horse. Apparently, judging from her smile, Cousin Ethel, in consequence, was going to forget any prejudices she might have had against the slacker of the Fourth.

Molly Harwood smiled at Cardew even more brightly than did Cousin Ethel.

"Jolly morning!—what?" said Cardew. "What does it feel like to have the run of the Head's garden? We little boys aren't allowed in, you know. But I suppose he's not afraid you'll kick a football into his best greenhouses—eh?" he added, with a chuckle.

Molly held out a hand to him with a frank smile. "I'm so glad to see you!" she exclaimed. "I feel that I never thanked you last night for all that you did."

"Oh, but you did!" Cardew assured her, and it would have amazed any of his fellow juniors to see that the cool, self-possessed Cardew turned a little pink. "Please forget all about that!"

"I can't do that!" she laughed. "I think it was very brave of you," put in Cousin Ethel, with a ring of admiration in her voice.

"Really, it wasn't!" pleaded Cardew. "All I did was to get a lucky grab at the rein, you know, and then I couldn't help runnin' along beside Nellie—I think that was her name—because if I'd let go I should have fallen a frightful crack. The truth is, I was funky of letting go, so I hung on. And then Nellie got tired."

"I think you are very modest," smiled Molly. "Modest?" exclaimed Cardew, in genuine astonishment. "Me? Oh, rather not! Ask any of the chaps. I'm never modest."

Tom laughed merrily, and Cardew grinned. There was a step behind him, and the slacker of the Fourth turned.

He had almost expected to see George Figgins, of the New House. Figgins was a great chum of Cousin Ethel's. But it was not Figgy; it was Walter Adolphus D'Arcy of the Third.

"Hallo, kid!" exclaimed Cardew cheerfully. Wally glared at Cardew as though he could have eaten him. Wally knew very well what had brought Cardew to the gate of the Head's garden that morning, and his blood boiled with a jealous wrath.

"Hallo, everybody!" said Wally, his eyes on Molly Harwood.

"Hallo, Wally!" she exclaimed brightly. "How are you, Wally?" asked Cousin Ethel, with a smile.

"In the pink, thanks, Ethel, old girl!" answered her cousin cheerfully.

He turned to Cardew, and his face went grim. "I saw Levison just now," he grunted. "He was looking for you."

"Kind of him," drawled Cardew lazily. "He wanted you badly, I fancy," said Wally.

"Can't bear to be without my charmin' company—eh?" grinned Cardew. "You know, Miss Harwood, it's terrible to be so popular that one's friends can't bear you out of their sight!" He paused, then added whimsically: "I told you I wasn't so very modest—what?"

"Aren't you going to find Levison?" asked Wally, breathing hard.

"Oh, no!" Cardew grinned at Wally. It amused him to see the Third-Former so angry at his presence there. "Why should I, my excellent young friend?"

Wally snorted. "I suppose you have heard by now why D'Arcy major never turned up to meet you last evenin'?" Cardew went

on, turning to Molly Harwood. "Locked in a giddy vault, you know, all among the rats and bats! Rotten luck, wasn't it?"

"Yes, I heard," she answered. "Wasn't it a shame? Some silly people thought it funny, I suppose, to shut all those poor boys up in those vaults like that."

"I suppose so," nodded Cardew, glancing at Wally, who started guiltily, as he caught the Fourth-Former's look. "Wonder who the silly people could have been, Wally?"

"How should I know?" growled Wally.

"I was only remarkin', dear kid!" grinned Cardew. "You couldn't know, of course!"

"Nobody knows, do they?" said Molly. "Surely no boys from St. Jim's would do such a horrid trick!"

Wally shuffled his feet, and looked anywhere but at Cardew.

"Who knows?" returned Cardew. "It certainly was pretty caddish—wasn't it, Wally?"

"No, it wasn't!" burst out Wally wrathfully. "I—I mean, that is—"

"You seem quite worried about it, my dear kid," drawled Cardew. "Why so hot and bothered?"

Wally glared at the lazily smiling Cardew. Then suddenly his eyes gleamed.

"Anyway, by all accounts, you ought to have been there with the others," said the leader of the Third triumphantly.

"What do you mean by that?" exclaimed Cardew, in surprise.

"Why, it was the cross-country team that's going to run against the Greyfriars chaps!" sniffed Wally. "If you weren't such a blessed slacker, you'd be in that team!"

There was an awkward silence, in which Wally surveyed Cardew triumphantly, delighted to see that he had made his "rival" look distinctly uncomfortable.

"What team is that, Wally?" asked Molly Harwood, anxious to break an awkward silence.

"The team that meets Greyfriars in a big cross-country race," grinned Wally. "All the best runners in the junior school are in it, or most of 'em!"

Cardew had gone very red. He glanced swiftly at Molly Harwood, and saw that she was looking at him with a clear look of disappointment.

"Perfectly right, what the kid says," murmured Cardew, though he was still rather red.

"What? That—that you ought to be in the team, but aren't?" faltered Molly Harwood, and her voice echoed her obvious disappointment.

Cardew crimsoned again. He had not meant that!

"I was really meanin' that it's true that most of the best athletes in the junior school are in the team," he said slowly.

"But surely you—you are very athletic, aren't you?" cried Molly. "Why, the way you ran beside that horse yesterday—not many boys could have done it at all, let alone stop the horse! I think it's a shame if they've left you out of the team against Greyfriars!"

Cardew looked away, confused. Somehow, in the presence of Molly Harwood, his usual coolness seemed sometimes to fail him. Wally chuckled.

"They've not exactly left Cardew out," he remarked heartlessly.

"What do you mean?" cried Molly, mystified.

"You'd better explain, Cardew!" grinned Wally.

For answer, Cardew broke into a sudden odd laugh. He was strongly tempted to give the scamp of the Third a stinging box on the ear—but that was impossible before the girls. Suddenly, in his queer, whimsical way, he resolved to tell the cold truth about himself.

"Walter Adolphus means," he said airily, "that I wasn't

(Continued on next page.)

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asked to join the team against Greyfriars because they know I was too much of a slacker to train for the race. Laziness is chronic with me, ain't it, Wally?"

The scamp of the Third did not answer. Now that he had so effectively "shown him up," Wally was beginning to feel a pang of remorse even for Cardew, whom he had always disliked, and whom he now regarded with particular bitterness for his "cheek" in finding evident favour in Molly Harwood's eyes.

"But—but you are joking?" cried Molly Harwood, and there was a note of real distress in her voice that shamed Cardew.

"Of course he's joking," said Wally gruffly.

"Kind of you to try and defend me, kid," said Cardew, with an ironical smile. "Afraid it's too late. I was speaking the cold truth, Miss Harwood. I'm rather a slacker, honestly. Born lazy."

Though he spoke lightly enough, Cardew did not meet Molly Harwood's frank brown eyes.

"I—I'm sorry to hear you admit that," said the girl slowly. "After last night I—I imagined—"

"That I was always doin' heroic things?" chuckled Cardew. "Oh, no, I'm not."

"Not that," answered Molly, flushing. "But I thought you were the sort of boy that—that—"

"Yes?" prompted Cardew, when she paused.

"Why, the sort that always did his best!" she finished candidly.

Cardew winced. Molly Harwood coloured again.

"I'm sorry if—if—"

"If I don't like hearing that?" answered Cardew. "Oh, but it's good for me, you know. And it's I who should apologise, anyway, for disappointin' you—what?"

He glanced at his watch.

"Time I was gettin' along, I'm afraid," he murmured. "If I don't get into class in time, old Lathom will start the lesson by flayin' me alive."

"I must cut, too," said Wally regretfully. "So long!" And Wally cut. But Cardew still lingered.

"Jolly mornin', isn't it?" he remarked vaguely.

Then suddenly he turned to Molly Harwood, with a face that was unusually candid and open for the slacker of the Fourth.

"Look here, Miss Harwood," he said hurriedly, "I'm blessed if I don't ask Tom Merry to stick me into the giddy team, after all, to run against Greyfriars. If you think I ought to—well, do my best, as you put it—"

He broke off awkwardly. Molly Harwood's face had brightened amazingly.

"You mean that?" she cried. Her eyes danced.

Cardew grinned.

"Rather!" he exclaimed. "Well, I must buzz off! Good-bye! Good-bye, Miss Cleveland!"

And, with shining eyes, Ralph Reckness Cardew turned and hurried off towards the School House.

CHAPTER 9.

Cardew's Promise!

"COME in!" called Tom Merry.

The captain of the Shell was sitting alone in Study No. 10 after dinner that day, when there was a tap at the door. Tom was busy changing into running kit, for the cross-country team were going for a training run that afternoon.

The door opened, and Ralph Reckness Cardew entered.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom in surprise.

He did not look very pleased to see Cardew. The slacker of the Fourth smiled dryly.

"Wonderin' what I've come to bother you about, eh?" he remarked.

"I'm just off for the run," said Tom shortly. "I hope you don't want to keep me?"

"Not in the least, dear man. Fact is, I was thinkin', oddly enough, of comin' on the run with you."

Tom Merry jumped.

"What?" He stared at Cardew blankly.

"Not sunk in yet?" drawled Cardew. "I simply said I was intendin' to come for the run this afternoon with you chaps—if you have no objection to my company. Think you could bear it?"

"If you're trying to be funny," began Tom, "I've no time to waste—"

"Funny? Me? Dear man, I never try to be funny! I am just goin' off to change into runnin' kit. I look rather nice in runnin' kit, by the way. I'll join you men at the gates."

He turned towards the door.

"Half a minute!" exclaimed Tom wonderingly. "Do you really mean this, Cardew, or are you just rotting?"

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"I mean every word of it, dear man."

"But—but you—"

"Fact is," explained Cardew coolly, "the whim's just possessed me that I'd like to run against Greyfriars in the big cross-country event. I know I'm not in the team, and I don't suppose you would shove me in it now until I had sort of proved my giddy worth. So I mean to go runnin' with the team until you jolly well have to give me a place. See?"

Tom Merry stared at him dumbly. Cardew sighed.

"I'm sorry for poor old Clive," he murmured. "I hate to bag his place. But it has to be! Unless you like to give me your own place, Thomas!"

"Ass!" Tom stared at the Fourth-Former in a puzzled way. "You're a queer chap, Cardew!" he added abruptly.

"I know it," sighed Cardew. "Fearful, ain't it?"

"If you'll give me here and now your definite promise to chuck smoking and all that sort of rot, and train hard with the others for this cross-country run, I'll give you a place in the team," said Tom evenly. "But I want your promise now."

"I promise," said Cardew, and grinned wryly. "It's goin' to be an awful bore, but I promise!"

Tom Merry's face had lighted up. Cardew's presence would make all the difference in the team, he knew. He held out his hand. Cardew took it.

"And now," grinned Tom, "you funny ass, tell me why on earth you've suddenly changed your mind like this."

"Sorry!" said Cardew, and shook his head. "Can't be did."

"But you must have some reason!" exclaimed Tom.

Cardew grinned rather oddly.

"I changed my mind," he said slowly, "entirely because of that bright young spark Walter Adolphus D'Arcy. Thank Wally, not me."

And, with a nod, Ralph Reckness Cardew strolled from the study, leaving Tom staring after him in surprise.

"What on earth has Wally to do with it?" muttered Tom, with a puzzled frown. "What did he mean?" Then he shrugged his shoulders, with a laugh, and gave it up.

"Cardew's a queer chap!"

And the skipper of the Shell hurried on with his changing.

A large crowd of juniors from both Houses had gathered at the gates to watch the start-off of the runners. Nearly a couple of dozen had turned out with bicycles to accompany the runners on the road as far as they could, though later the runners would be striking off across country.

There was considerable surprise when Cardew arrived on the scene, looking very slim and handsome in his running kit.

"My hat!" exclaimed Kerruish of the Fourth. "Look who's arrived!"

"Cardew's running!" gasped Julian.

"What the thump—"

"Am I dreaming?" ejaculated Clifton Dane. "Who said the age of giddy miracles was past?"

Cardew, however, seemed quite oblivious of the excitement he was causing. He mingled with the members of the cross-country team as though he were quite ignorant of the fact that he was one of the very last fellows they had expected to see with them.

Clive and Levison were as amazed as anyone, for Cardew had not told his chums of his intention. But their delight was tremendous—Clive's as much as Levison's, although the former realised at once that if Cardew stuck it, it would cost him his own place in the team.

"Of course I am goin' to stick it through," drawled Cardew, in response to an eager question from Clive. "I've given my blessed promise to Thomas to train like the very dickens. No smokes—or anything like that—till after the race against Greyfriars. Awful, ain't it? By the way, Clivey, I'm sorry if this means you'll lose your place. But circumstances compel me."

"What circumstances?" asked Levison curiously.

"Ask Wally D'Arcy," yawned Cardew.

Levison stared at him in bewilderment at that answer. But before he could speak Tom Merry came up to them.

"I want to speak to you, Clive, old chap," said Tom. "I hope you won't be very disappointed, but I'm afraid I can't promise you a place in the team, after all. Cardew's running, and he's too good to be dropped. But it's quite possible one of the chaps may crack up, or get ill; so I'd be glad if you'd carry on training, as reserve. Will you?"

"Rather!" grinned Clive cheerily. "Trust me!"

There was a cheer from the onlookers as the eleven white-clad figures trotted out of the gates and away up the road, followed by a swarm of cyclists.

And a good deal of the cheering was really for the benefit of Ralph Reckness Cardew—no longer the slacker of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 10.

Baggy's News

THE fact that Ralph Reckness Cardew had for some reason given up his slacking habits, and was running for St. Jim's in the team against Greyfriars, spread through the Lower School like wildfire.

The team was getting down to hard training, and the presence of the enigmatical Cardew in the group of runners that met every morning for a practice spin before breakfast caused a good many of the fellows who would not otherwise have done so to turn out and watch the team at practice.

Cardew, as Kangaroo remarked, was the star turn of the St. Jim's cross-country team.

Tom Merry, running into Wally of the Third in the Hall one afternoon, remembered Cardew's answer when he had been asked for a reason for his decision to run. "Ask Wally!" was what Cardew had said, and Tom stopped the Third-Former and put the question to him there and then.

"Hallo, kid!" he exclaimed. "I say, why is Cardew running, after all?"

Wally looked very taken aback.

"How should I know?" granted Wally, and tried to pass on.

Tom barred his way.

"Out with it, young 'un! What's the meaning of it?"

"I don't know what Cardew means!" growled the leader of the Third. "He's an ass! He always was a chump!"

And Wally departed, leaving the captain of the Shell no wiser.

But Baggy Trimble, the Paul Pry of the Fourth, had his own methods of obtaining information when he was curious. Baggy burst excitedly into the Common-room later, fairly bubbling over with news.

"What's up with you, old fat bean?" inquired Monty Lowther, glancing up from a game of chess with Talbot.

"Postal-order arrived at last?" grinned Talbot.

"He, he, he!" sniggered Baggy.

The fat Fourth-Former halted by the fireplace, and glanced round at the group of juniors. Besides Monty Lowther and Talbot, Tom Merry and Manners were there, and Study No. 6, and Kangaroo, and Levison, and Clive, and one or two others.

"What's the joke, Trimble?" asked Levison, looking round from the game of dominoes he was playing with Clive and Tom Merry and Manners. "Take that face away—it hurts!"

"Oh, really, Levison!" Trimble blinked at Levison indignantly. Then suddenly he broke out into another series of cachinnations.

"Stop making a noise like a cheap alarm-clock, and tell us what you are sniggering about!" roared Blake.

"He, he, he!" was Baggy's only reply. He fairly shook with merriment.

"Bai Jove! Pway stop that howwible noise, Twimble!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"He, he, he!"

"Bump the fat ass!" roared Herries.

"Hear, hear!"

Half a dozen of the juniors collared Trimble. His mysterious sniggerings suddenly ceased.

"Ow! Yarooooop! Leggo!" roared Trimble. "I shan't tell you about Cardew if you don't leggo!"

Levison gripped him by the shoulder with a vice-like grip. "Oh, yes, you will!" snapped Levison. "What silly yarn's this about Cardew?"

Baggy wriggled helplessly in Levison's grip.

"Ow! Leggo, you rotter! I'll tell you! Cardew— He, he, he!"

"Stop that!" roared Levison, shaking him. "What's this about Cardew? Out with it!"

"Cardew's mashed on Molly Harwood!" sniggered Baggy.

"He, he, he! He's always seeing her! They went for a walk yesterday. And this evening he was talking to her at the gate to the Head's garden! I happened to be near, and they didn't see me. I—er—happened to have stopped a jiff to tie up a shoe-lace, and I heard what they were talking about! It's because she wanted him to go in for the run against Greyfriars that Cardew said he would! He, he, he!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Digby.

Levison fixed a grim look on Baggy Trimble.

"So you were eavesdropping, were you, when Cardew was talking to Miss Harwood?" he said, a dangerous note in his voice.

"I tell you he's mashed on her! He, he, he! What a scream! I'd never have thought Cardew would— Ow! Yarooooop!"

Baggy's merriment ended abruptly, and gave place to a fiendish yell as Levison dealt him a stinging box on the ear that sent the fat junior reeling.

"You fat toad!" said Levison wrathfully. "How dare you! Can't Cardew be friendly with Miss Harwood without worms like you sniggering about it, and spying on him?"

"Oh, really, Levison!" Trimble, massaging his ear tenderly, hastily put a table between himself and Cardew's angry chum. "I wasn't spying! Surely you know me well enough to realise that I wouldn't stoop to such a thing! We Trimbles are the soul of honour!"

"Get out of here, before I give you the licking of your life!" ground out Levison. He took a stride towards Baggy, who hastily scuttled for the door. But he was not quite quick enough to escape Levison's boot, which landed squarely on his fat person as he bolted out through the doorway.

With a final howl, Baggy shot into the passage, and collapsed into a fat, breathless heap on the linoleum. He scrambled up hastily.

"Yah! Beast!" howled Baggy. "Bully! I tell you Cardew's mashed—"

He did not finish. Levison made a movement towards him, and Baggy shot off down the passage like a runaway steam-roller, as Monty Lowther remarked cheerily. Levison slammed the door and returned to the fireplace, with a clouded brow.

Both Levison and Clive had noticed that their chum had not been in the House very much of late, but Cardew had not given any reason for his frequent disappearances, and they had not asked for one. Now they knew why. Cardew had been seeing Molly Harwood on those occasions!

"Well, she's a jolly nice girl, anyway," said Tom Merry quietly. "She'll do Cardew good."

"Looks as though she's done him good already, if she persuaded him to go in for the cross-country," put in Talbot.

Levison nodded.

"Rather! If she can reform Cardew, we shall all have a lot to be thankful to Miss Harwood for."

The juniors had all met Molly Harwood several times during the last few days. She had been to tea with Cousin Ethel in Study No. 6—at which spread in Molly's honour, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had shown a marked admiration for his cousin's pretty friend. Molly had also been to tea in Study No. 10, as guest of the Terrible Three, and a good many other juniors had been invited. Altogether Molly Harwood had made friends galore among the School House juniors, thanks to her ready smile and frank, open ways.

But no one had guessed that Cardew had become a great chum of hers. It had remained for Baggy Trimble to find that out.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been looking distinctly thoughtful since Baggy's disclosure. A frown clouded his aristocratic brow.

"I weally cannot admire Miss Harwood's choice of fwiends, if she is pally with a fellow like Cardew!" said Arthur Augustus, a trifle warmly. "Weally, Cardew is not at all the chap for her to be fwiendly with! I feel I ought, pewwaps, as a cousin of Ethel's, to warn Ethel's fwiend—"

"You'll do nothing of the sort, you silly idiot!" said Levison, with equal warmth.

"Weally, Levison! As a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"Bow-wow!"

"You mustn't forget that Cardew stopped the runaway cab she was in," put in Clive.

But that reminder did not seem to cheer Arthur Augustus in the least. In fact, quite the opposite. His gloom obviously increased.

"Yaas, but—"

"Think she ought to be friendly with you instead, eh, Gussy?" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"Wats!"

And with a sniff of indignation, the swell of St. Jim's left the Common-room, with a flush upon his aristocratic face. Levison glared after him.

"The silly footer—" he began warmly.

"Oh, chuck it!" laughed Tom Merry. "Gussy's feeling a bit sore at the moment, that's all. He's not the sort of chap to try and spoil Cardew's friendship with Miss Harwood."

"Rather not!" agreed Blake.

And Levison, smiling again, sat down to resume his game of dominoes.

CHAPTER 11.

The Great Race!

DURING the following days, the training of the cross-country team increased in strictness. Visits to the tuckshop were barred utterly, and running was the order of the day. The excitement of the whole school was keyed up to a high pitch, for the contest against the merry men of Greyfriars was an important event.

The days seemed to speed by for Tom Merry and his team.

The captain of the Shell was delighted with the result of the training through which he had put his men. The team had hardened splendidly, and on the final practice run excellent times were put up by all.

At last the great day came, cool and crisp. There had

been rain earlier in the week, just enough to have softened the ground sufficiently but not too much. The Greyfriars team had come over on the previous evening, so that they would start as fresh as their rivals on the day itself. A spare dormitory had been placed at the disposal of the visitors, and in the morning they were looked after by Tom Merry, Blake, and Figgins, who had been excused classes for the special purpose of entertaining the guests.

The big race was timed to start at two o'clock.

By that time a huge crowd had gathered at the gates—although a large number of the St. Jim's fellows had gone off to station themselves at various vantage points along the route of the run, which had only been mapped out on the previous day by Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's.

"Feeling fit?" asked Tom Merry of Harry Wharton, the skipper of the Greyfriars team, as the runners waited, with coats over their running-kit, for the moment of starting.

"Rather!" nodded Wharton, smiling. "Fit as a fiddle!"

And Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Greyfriars junior who hailed from India's sunny clime, remarked in his weird and wonderful English that the fitfulness was terrific!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry of Greyfriars had come strolling up. He grinned cheerily at Tom Merry & Co.

"Ready for a beating?" he inquired, with a chuckle.

Tom laughed.

"You won't find us easy to beat, you know!" he answered.

"I bet we shan't!" agreed Bob Cherry cordially. "But we mean to have a jolly good try!"

"And so say all of us!" grinned Manners.

Tom glanced at the clock over the old gateway.

"Half a minute to go!" he said, and slipped off his coat, handing it to Monty Lowther.

The other runners followed suit, various juniors taking their coats from them. Mr. Railton, who was to start the race, called out to the runners to line up in the gateway.

The twenty white-clad figures, St. Jim's and Greyfriars fellows mixed indiscriminately, lined up. Mr. Railton glanced at his watch.

"Are you ready?" called out the Housemaster; and the runners toed the line.

Crack!

There was a spurt of smoke from the pistol, and the score of lithe figures woke to life, and a deafening cheer echoed round the old quad of St. Jim's.

The great cross-country race had started!

Tom Merry, running steadily a few paces behind Figgins and Harry Wharton of Greyfriars, watched the knot of runners ahead string out gradually as they passed down Rylcombe Lane. Redfern of the New House had taken first place, with Tom Brown of Greyfriars at his heels. Then came Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. Levison and Kangaroo were next, then four or five Greyfriars fellows. Cardew was behind them, and then came Figgins. Tom Merry, who was keeping a little back, deliberately noted with approval that all his men in view seemed to be going steadily. No one was wasting his strength in a useless effort to draw far ahead at the start of the gruelling course.

Soon the course that Kildare had planned branched aside from the road and along a wide path through the woods. Beyond the woods it came out on to a broad stretch of undulating moorland, and as the runners streamed by there was a cheer from a big group of St. Jim's fellows, juniors and seniors alike, who had gathered there beforehand.

"Go it, Cardew!" Tom heard Clive roar.

Though naturally disappointed not to be running himself, Sidney Clive had taken his disappointment cheerfully, knowing that the best possible team was in the field for St. Jim's.

A little farther on, at a point where the runners had to splash through a shallow moorland brook, Kildare and Darrell of the Sixth were standing. There were several other Sixth-Formers with them, and they gave an encouraging cheer to the St. Jim's runners. Even the mighty men of the Sixth were keenly interested in the race.

For nearly a couple of miles the course, marked by small flags, kept to the moor. There was some rough going and a good deal of uphill work, and by the time the twenty runners took to a narrow, rutted lane between high, wooded banks beyond the moor, they were spread out over a long distance.

Tom Merry was half-way in the stream of runners. Ahead of him, fifty yards or so distant, he could see Talbot of the Shell, running at a swinging pace. No one else was in sight. But at the end of the lane, when the course twisted sharply to the right over a grassy hilltop, Tom had a long view ahead, and could see half a dozen or so white-clad figures moving swiftly along the valley below.

He could not recognise all the figures at that distance, but he picked out the lanky strides of Figgins and the

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dusky form of Hurree Singh of Greyfriars. He caught sight of the celebrated eyeglass of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gleaming in the sunlight as he dropped swiftly down the hillside.

"Our chaps seem well placed," Tom told himself with satisfaction. "But, of course, it'll be the last couple of miles that will make all the difference!"

Every one of the runners would influence the result. The silver cup that was the prize for the winning team would not necessarily go to the school which had first man home. Points would be awarded for each position at the finish, so that a straggler could nullify the fact that another member of his team had got in first. Should anyone fail to complete the limit, points would be scored heavily by the opposing side.

It was not, therefore, merely a test for the fastest



Ralph Reckness Cardew stood in the centre of the wrecked study this, Cardew!" said Glyn grimly from the doorway.

runner of the twenty. It was the best all-round team that would carry off the coveted cup.

In the valley there was another stream to be negotiated, a deeper one than the first. Tom Merry, splashing through it on the heels of Talbot, grinned cheerfully at the swarm of St. Jim's fellows who had set out earlier on to station themselves there to watch. With their cheers ringing in his ears, the captain of the Shell passed Talbot on the farther rise and sped on.

A little later he overhauled a couple of Greyfriars men, and then, on a road near Wayland, he passed Bob Cherry of Greyfriars, and Cardew and Manners of St. Jim's.

The course later turned along by the gleaming Rhyl, though it was a stretch of the river at some distance from St. Jim's. On the towing-path Tom Merry overhauled Redfern, and Vernon-Smith of the opposing school.

At last half the course was finished, and the route turned back in the direction of St. Jim's.

Tom had no idea what his position was in the stream of runners now. Fellows had passed him and had been repassed, till he had lost all count of his position. Not

that such knowledge would have affected his running. Tom was out to do the course as quickly as it was in his power to do it. He knew just how much to save himself, and when he could afford to quicken up for the final spurt. He was running his own race, and he was not worrying about the positions of the other fellows—beyond the fact that, of course, he hoped the St. Jim's fellows were keeping up their end.

Only two miles more to go!

Johnny Bull of Greyfriars came plodding past Tom Merry, but half a mile farther on Johnny was flagging, and Tom overhauled him and took the lead. The Greyfriars junior dropped out of sight behind.

Rylcombe came in sight at last. Tom Merry sped through the village. He was quickening up now, finding he had a good reserve of strength at his disposal.



g and dishevelled, as the juniors crowded out. "And remember
're barred! Barred by the School!" (See Chapter 13.)

Softly thudding feet sounded just behind him.

Someone was drawing level with the captain of the St. Jim's team.

Tom kept on at the same swinging pace, without glancing aside. The fellow beside him drew a little ahead, and Tom saw then that it was the lithe figure of Harry Wharton, the Greyfriars skipper.

With scarcely a yard between them, the two ran on along Rylcombe Lane. Excited groups of St. Jim's fellows, together with a few Greyfriars supporters who had travelled over to St. Jim's with their team, were lining the road at various points now, and there was a burst of cheering as the St. Jim's fellow and the Greyfriars man ran past.

They were very near the school now. Tom Merry, who had quickened his pace some time back, resolved to break into his final spurt.

Even as he quickened up, Harry Wharton did the same, drawing ahead a few yards.

It had been a long, gruelling race. But both the rival captains had plenty of reserve left. At a speed that

brought shouts of admiration from the fellows by the roadside, Saint and Friar raced side by side along the lane towards St. Jim's!

CHAPTER 12.

Last Man Home!

"LISTEN!"

Jack Blake gave that exclamation in the gateway of St. Jim's.

A big crowd of fellows was gathered there, waiting eagerly for the home-coming of the runners. As yet, none of them had appeared. But a sound of far-off shouting along Rylcombe Lane told the eager crowd that the first man was drawing near.

"Here they come!" breathed Herries, and flung out an excited finger, pointing up the road.

Two white-clad figures had come into sight round the distant bend, speeding towards the gates.

"Who is it?" yelled Digby.

"It's Tom Merry!" Blake answered excitedly, a moment later. "And Wharton of Greyfriars! My hat! It'll be a close finish for first place!"

Keeping almost dead level the two running figures sped towards the gates.

"Come on, St. Jim's!" howled Wally D'Arcy, dancing like a dervish in his excitement.

The cheering was deafening now as the two rival captains, still abreast, drew swiftly nearer to the finishing point between the lines of shouting fellows.

In the doorway of the Head's house a little group was standing, watching the two nearing runners with eager interest. Dr. Holmes was there, a kindly smile on his old face. Mrs. Holmes stood beaming beside him, and with them were Cousin Ethel and Molly Harwood.

"He, he, he!" sniggered Baggy Trimble to Blake, Herries, and Digby. "Molly will be disappointed that Cardew ain't in first! He, he, he! He's mashed on her—Oh! Ow! Yarooooop!"

Herries had jabbed an elbow into Baggy's fat ribs, and the fat Fourth-Former doubled up, breathless and gasping.

"She's Miss Harwood to you, anyway," growled Herries. "Hop it, you fat frog!"

And with one of Herries' big feet to help him on his way, Baggy left the three chums of Study No. 6 very hastily.

The shouting had died away now. In breathless silence the onlookers watched as Tom Merry and Harry Wharton strove for the lead, with only fifty yards to go.

Wharton was seen to draw a little ahead, and there was an audible groan. But then Tom Merry, with a supreme effort, shot forward in a final spurt, passed the Greyfriars captain, and crossed the finishing line half a dozen feet ahead.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!" howled Digby joyously. "First blood to the Saints!"

A thunderous cheering echoed round the old quad, scaring the rooks in the elms. Tom Merry was seized and hoisted shoulder high by a crowd of enthusiasts, who a moment later also collared the breathless Greyfriars captain and marched him round the quad, too—"to show there wasn't any ill-feeling!" as Kerruish remarked, with a grin.

"But we haven't won yet!" said Digby warningly. "The rest of the positions will all count. Hallo—who's this?"

Another figure had appeared round the bend in the lane.

This time it was Figgins of the New House, who came in amid a fresh burst of cheering. It was noticed that Cousin Ethel, on the steps of the Head's house, bestowed a very bright smile on George Figgins as he passed by—a fact which caused Figgy to go even more red than his exertions had made him.

After that, Bob Cherry and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh of Greyfriars came in almost together, followed at a few yards by Talbot of the Shell, who just failed to pass them at the finish. Then Arthur Augustus D'Arcy appeared, and Levison. A welcoming cheer greeted them all.

"Five Saints in out of the first eight!" chortled Blake joyously. "Isn't it grand?"

"We shall win—unless the rest of our chaps are miles behind," grinned Digby.

"No sign of Manners yet," remarked Herries.

"Who's this coming?" exclaimed Blake, craning his neck as another figure came in sight along the road. His face fell. "It's a Greyfriars chap."

"Wonder where Cardew is?" put in Digby. "I had an idea he'd be in the first half-dozen!"

Johnny Bull of Greyfriars came in, looking a trifle blown. He was followed by two more Greyfriars men. The faces of the St. Jim's fellows began to look a little less cheery.

"This is going to be close!" muttered Dig.

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"Where the thump are the rest of our chaps?" put in Dick Julian.

Then there was a cheer as Manners appeared round the distant bend. He came in looking fresh, with Redfern twenty yards behind him. Vernon-Smith of Greyfriars, looking rather "whacked," followed them.

"Kangaroo and Kerr and Cardew!" muttered Blake. "They're the last three of our lot. And there are still three Greyfriars men not in! You're right, Dig—it's going to be a mighty close thing!"

"Here's Kangaroo!" cried Herries. "And a Greyfriars chap!"

Kangaroo just snatched next place from Tom Brown of Greyfriars, though it was a matter of inches only. Then Kerr came into view, running with a limp. A stone had cut his foot on the moor, but he came in pluckily, to be followed a minute later by another Greyfriars man.

"Cardew is the last of our lot, then," said Digby. "Who'd have thought it?"

"Blow Cardew!" grinned Blake joyously. "Even if he comes in last—and there's only one other Greyfriars chap not back—I think we beat Greyfriars! We've got the better average."

Kildare was standing near Mr. Railton, and the captain of St. Jim's was making calculations on a piece of paper. He glanced up with a cheery smile.

"St. Jim's wins, sir!" he remarked. "It doesn't matter whether the last Greyfriars runner, or the last St. Jim's chap collars nineteenth place, it can't affect the result now. We are several points ahead."

"Provided all the runners get home within the time limit, Kildare," answered Mr. Railton.

"I hardly think anyone will fail to do that," said Kildare, with a smile.

A terrific cheer rang out, louder than any of the others, as it was swiftly passed from mouth to mouth that St. Jim's had the victory in their hands. But the fellows still lingered to see the last two runners come in. The tenth Greyfriars man came into view at last, and crossed the finishing line.

"Where the dickens is Cardew?"

That was the question that everyone was asking.

Mr. Railton was already glancing at his watch. Unless Cardew arrived during the next fifteen minutes, he would have failed to finish in the time-limit, and Greyfriars would score heavily. Victory would be snatched from St. Jim's at the last moment, after all!

"Where's Cardew?"

The minutes dragged by, but still there was no sign of the slacker of the Fourth. The fifteen minutes of grace dwindled to ten, and then to five. The excitement became electric.

"If Cardew doesn't get in before the next five minutes are up, Greyfriars wins!" said Blake grimly, staring at the clock over the gateway.

"If he let's St. Jim's down—" began Herries, and broke off. "But, hang it, a blind cripple could have gone over the course in this time! Even Trimble could have done it, I shouldn't wonder! What on earth could have made Cardew so long?"

"I suppose it can't be that he's been smoking on the sly all this time, when he was supposed to be training?" said Dig grimly. "If he has, it wouldn't be surprising if he cracked up and came in miles behind everyone else!"

"But he gave his word of honour not to smoke before the race. He promised Tom Merry," said Blake.

The minutes dragged on. A breathless hush had fallen on the onlookers. Still there was no sign of Cardew.

Mr. Railton was looking at his watch, and turned to speak to Kildare, who was looking very gloomy.

"One more minute only, Kildare," said Mr. Railton.

A minute later, with still no sign of the missing Fourth-Former, Mr. Railton put his watch back into his pocket.

"The time-limit has expired," he announced. "Greyfriars score twenty extra points, since a St. Jim's runner has failed to complete the course within the time-limit. That gives the victory to Greyfriars."

There was a tense silence as Mr. Railton and Kildare turned and strode into the quad through the gateway. And then suddenly someone gave a shout.

"Look! Here he comes!"

Round the bend of the road a slim, white clad figure had come into view, running towards the school gates.

Cardew had arrived at last. But he had arrived too late!

"Here comes the slacker that's let down the school!" yelled Kerruish.

And someone else started a low hiss.

It was taken up instantly on all sides. The crowd of watching fellows, angry and bitter as they were with Cardew for having allowed Greyfriars to snatch the victory, were not inclined to control their feelings. Had they felt that

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Cardew had done his best, they would not have blamed him. But one and all felt sure that Cardew, splendid athlete as he could be when he chose, had let St. Jim's down through his own slackness.

"Sssssssss!"

The hissing swelled louder.

"Shut up, you idiots!" shouted Tom Merry hoarsely, gazing round in startled anger from where he stood, with a coat over his running-kit, inside the gates. "Stop! What will the Greyfriars men think? Stop!"

But Tom Merry and the few who felt as he did were powerless to stop the outburst. The St. Jim's juniors were too bitterly angry with Cardew to think of the little group of Greyfriars men who stood silently watching the amazing scene.

"Sssssssss!"

Cardew heard the sound suddenly, as he ran on towards the school gates.

The colour flooded into his cheeks. He seemed to falter for a moment—a look of startled amazement on his face. Then the look changed to one of bitter fury. The colour died out of his cheeks, leaving them deathly white. His eyes glittered, and his lips were tightly set as he picked up his pace again and kept on, looking neither to right nor to left, towards the gates.

"Sssssssss!"

Between the hissing ranks Ralph Reckness Cardew ran on, his handsome face still white, and his eyes riveted straight ahead. By no other sign did he betray his feelings.

From the steps of the Head's house Cousin Ethel and Molly Harwood were watching with wide, startled eyes. As he passed in at the gates Cardew was seen to shoot a swift look at Molly Harwood. There was distress in the girl's face, as the hissing rose louder still.

Cardew crossed the finishing-line and slowed to a halt. There was a queer look in his face, a defiant look gleaming from his eyes, despite the careless nonchalance that he had assumed.

"Bit late, aren't I?" drawled Cardew.

"Greyfriars wins, thanks to you!" shouted Hammond bitterly.

"Well, I found runnin' rather a bore!" replied Cardew, with icy coolness.

But Tom Merry, watching Cardew's face, realised that, under the mask-like surface, he was passionately angry at the reception he had received.

The slacker of the Fourth turned his head a fraction, and again he shot a swift look towards the steps of the Head's house. But they were empty now.

There was a twisted smile on Ralph Reckness Cardew's handsome face as he strode through the now silent crowd towards the School House, and vanished through the doorway.

CHAPTER 13.

Barred!

CARDEW sat alone in Study No. 9 and stared, frowning at the carpet.

It was later that evening. After the big tea in their honour in the Common-room, and the presentation of the cup by the Head, the Greyfriars men had departed from St. Jim's. They had snatched victory by a few points only; had Cardew crossed the finishing-line a few minutes earlier than he had, the cup would have been won by St. Jim's; but the points lost by Cardew had been enough for Greyfriars to turn the tables. And, in consequence, the merry men of Greyfriars had departed in triumph.

Cardew had not attended the tea.

He was sprawling now in a big chair by the study window. His face was not very pleasant to look at. Evidently his thoughts were not very pleasant at that moment, either.

There was a tap on the door. Cardew started.

"Come in!"

The door opened, and Tom Merry entered the study, closing the door behind him.

"Hallo!" yawned Cardew.

Tom crossed to the window and stood facing Cardew with a clouded brow. Cardew stared back at him coolly. But in the eyes of the slacker of the Fourth there was a bitter gleam.

"Come to lecture me on the error of my ways?" murmured Cardew. There was a faint note of defiance in his voice.

"I came to ask why it was you failed to get home within the time limit," returned Tom quietly.

There was nothing offensive in his tone. But Cardew was on edge, and read offensiveness in Tom's remark. His eyes gleamed.

"Find out!"

"No need to adopt that tone, Cardew," said Tom shortly. "I'd rather expected that you would come and explain to me yourself since I'm the skipper of the team. An explanation was due, you will admit. But, instead of that, you seem to have spent all your time since the race in skulking in your study."

Cardew's eyes gleamed.

"I've nothin' to say!" He laughed bitterly. "When I got in I was hissed by the whole school in front of—" He broke off; then went on abruptly: "In front of the Head, and in front of Mrs. Holmes and her guests."

"That was rotten!" said Tom quietly. "I'm sorry that happened. But I was not responsible."

"So you say!" snarled Cardew, for a moment his temper flaming out.

Tom flushed angrily.

"Careful, Cardew!" he said warningly. "There are some things I won't stand. I came here and asked you civilly enough if there was any reason for the show you put up this afternoon. Kerr, for instance, was late getting in—though he did get in in time—because he had cut his foot. I had hoped something of the same sort might have happened to you."

"It didn't!"

"You found you simply couldn't stand the distance?"

"We can't all be first man home, like the great Thomas!" yawned Cardew. But there was a queer, bitter gleam in his eyes as he spoke.

"I didn't ask you to be first!" snapped Tom. "But I'd a right to expect you to get in in time! And you could have done it, with heaps of time to spare—unless you had some good reason, as Kerr had. You say you had no reason. Well, if you cracked up on this afternoon's run, as you admit, there can only be one reason for it."

"What is that reason, dear man?" drawled Cardew. "I'm interested."

"The only reason I can think of is that you've been ruining your wind with cigarettes when you were supposed to be in strict training, in spite of your promise to me!"

"Well?" said Cardew, after a moment's tense pause.

"Haven't you anything to say?" demanded Tom.

"Nothin'!"

"You don't deny it?"

"No!"

"Then you admit that you did break your promise?" exclaimed Tom contemptuously. "I wouldn't have thought that of you, Cardew—although all the other fellows are saying it—but for your admitting it like this. Hang it, man, there are limits!"

"I've nothin' to say," repeated Cardew. "Except that I consider St. Jim's owes me an apology for hissin' me. Whatever I'd done, it was caddish to hiss me in front of the Greyfriars men and in front of the Head and—" He choked and broke off.

"Two wrongs don't make a right," answered Tom Merry grimly. "You let down the school, and you can scarcely complain if the fellows lost their tempers. But that has nothing to do with it. You went back on your promise, and let down the school. You pushed Clive out of the team; and then, in spite of your word, smoked and played the fool, instead of keeping to strict training, so that you cracked up and let Greyfriars win. You utter cad!"

"Thanks!"

"Why the dickens didn't I put Clive in the team, instead of trusting you?" burst out Tom.

"A pity you didn't, wasn't it?" mocked Cardew.

Tom stood glaring down at the slacker of the Fourth, with clenched fists. There was a world of contempt in his eyes. For a moment Cardew thought Tom was going to strike him. But then the captain of the Shell unclenched his hands.

"You're not worth licking!"

And Tom Merry swung on his heel and strode from the study, leaving Ralph Reckness Cardew alone with his thoughts.

But he was not left long in peace.

A sudden commotion in the passage caused him to turn his head, listening. The next moment the door burst open, and a swarm of St. Jim's juniors—New House as well as School House—crowded into the study.

"Here he is!" yelled Grundy. "Here's the smoky rotter! Here's the chap that let down St. Jim's!"

"Collar the rotten traitor!" roared Owen of the New House.

"Smash up his rotten study!" yelled Gore.

Cardew jumped to his feet. His face was very white. He did not speak, but he clenched his fists and put up his hands. Whatever else his faults, Cardew was never the chap to show the white feather.

The swarm of juniors rushed at him in a body. Cardew hit out coolly, and Kerruish went down before a deadly left-hander. Lennox staggered back, his nose streaming

(Continued on next page.)

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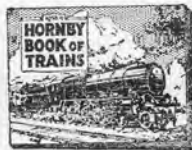
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red, as Cardew's right landed with all his force behind it. Then Cardew was swept off his feet, and went down in his turn before the overwhelming odds.

"We'll teach him to smoke and crack up against Greyfriars!" roared Hammond.

Cardew struggled, but he was helpless. Already he heard the sounds of damage being done, as the angry juniors proceeded to wreck his study.

"Steady on, there!" shouted Wildrake. "It's Cardew we want! Leave his study alone! It's Levison's study, and Clive's, as well as Cardew's, remember!"

"Rats!" grinned Gore.

"You cads!" panted Cardew.

Struggling still, he was dragged to the table and held face-down across it. A cricket stump was found in a cupboard; and Cardew gritted his teeth. But not a sound escaped his tightly set lips as the stump rose and fell.

It was a white-faced, dishevelled Cardew who was left, ten minutes later, panting in the centre of a wrecked study. He was sore and aching, and there was a cut on his face. He was not a pleasant sight as he staggered to his feet.

As the juniors crowded out of the study Glyn turned in the doorway.

"Remember this, Cardew," he said grimly, "you're barred!"

"Barred by the school!" shouted Wildrake.

The door slammed, and Cardew was left alone amid the wreckage of the study.

CHAPTER 14.

Cardew is Certain!

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW strolled in through the gates of St. Jim's with his hands in his pockets, whistling.

Whether he really felt as cheerful as he appeared, or whether his manner was simply for the benefit of the groups of fellows gathered there, he alone could have said.

It was Sunday evening—the day following the cross-country race.

"Rippin' evenin', ain't it, Glyn?" remarked Cardew with a drawl. "Nice an' fresh an' dry, an' not too chilly! The sunset looks nice, too, what? Poetic an' all that!"

Bernard Glyn did not answer. He turned his back on Cardew and continued his conversation with Clifton Dane as though Cardew had never spoken—as if, in fact, Cardew did not even exist!

Cardew grinned.

"Hallo, Julian!" he observed cheerily. "Toppin' weather, if it keeps fine, don't you think?"

Julian did not reply. He was talking to Hammond, and apparently he had suddenly become deaf.

Cardew glanced round the quad, with an ironical lift of the eyebrows. Backs were turned on him on every side.

With a chuckle the slacker of the Fourth strolled towards the School House and vanished up the steps.

But the look of amusement died from his handsome face as he neared his study. It was replaced by a look that was not pleasant to see. Though he could be cool and nonchalant enough before the eyes of others, when alone with his thoughts, Ralph Reckness Cardew's face revealed the fact that his heart was hardened and bitter.

He found Levison and Clive in the study, reading. They glanced up as he came in.

"Hallo!" said Levison quietly.

Levison and Clive had defied the order that talking to Cardew was forbidden. He was their chum, and whatever he had done they would not turn against him. Some of the more hot-headed of the juniors had wanted Levison and Clive to be "barred," too, in consequence. But it had been decided that an exception must be made in favour of Cardew's two study-mates.

"Still talkin' to me?" yawned Cardew, as he closed the door and tossed his cap on to the table.

Levison flushed.

"Don't talk like a fool," he said sharply.

"Sorry," drawled Cardew, and dropped into a chair.

Clive put down the book he was reading.

If anyone had a right to feel bitter with Cardew, it was Sidney Clive. The South African junior had lost his own place in the team in order that Cardew could run against Greyfriars; and Cardew had repaid him by losing the contest for his school. But Clive was not the fellow to think about himself.

It was for the sake of the school that he felt hurt and angry with Cardew—as did Levison—although both had risked a lot by continuing on more or less friendly terms with the outcast of St. Jim's.

"Look here, Cardew," he said shortly. "Is it true that you messed up the race through smoking, in spite of your promise to Tom Merry?"

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Cardew grinned and nodded.

"Dear man, how can you doubt it—of such a villain as myself?"

"It is true, then?"

Cardew sighed.

"Why keep on asking? Of course it's true, since Tom Merry says so. Like the great George Washington, the virtuous Thomas could not tell a lie!"

"That's no answer!" snapped Clive.

"It's meant for an answer," yawned Cardew. "How could the whole blessed school be wrong? Obviously, it couldn't! St. Jim's says I mucked up the race through smoking—in spite of my promise. They hissed me in public for that sole reason. How can you doubt it?"

"I'm afraid I can't doubt it!" said Clive bitterly, and rose from his chair and left the study.

Levison read on in silence. Cardew began to whistle softly.

"I saw Miss Harwood after chapel this morning," remarked Levison after a while, looking up from his book. "She was rather expecting to see you, I think."

Cardew's eyes gleamed oddly. His lips set.

"Really?" he yawned.

"I should have thought you would have wanted to see her," said Levison rather curtly. "She has been jolly nice and friendly to you—I thought you liked her."

"My dear man, a villain such as I am is no fit friend for a charmin' girl. You can be sure Gussy and his pals have been tellin' her all about my sins—particularly the Honourable Gussy! Oh, he wouldn't miss that!"

"Rot! Gussy isn't the sort of chap to talk about you to her," retorted Levison sharply. "He's not a cad!"

Cardew rose from his chair in a restless way. His face had gone rather pale and set. But he smiled coolly.

"I tell you all of them have been painting me as black as they can to Molly Harwood!" He shrugged his shoulders. "Hence my failure to go an' have a chat after chapel! I'm not riskin' gettin' any more lectures on the error of my naughty ways. Twig?"

"But, look here—" began Levison.

"I doubt if Miss Molly would care to talk to such a naughty boy as little me," drawled Cardew. "So I'm leavin' her to the virtuous crowd—Gussy an' Tom Merry, an' all those dear good boys! I'm not riskin' a snub, dear man."

Cardew spoke quite lightly. But Levison was not deceived.

He sat staring after Cardew with a worried frown as the slacker of the Fourth strolled, whistling, from the study.

CHAPTER 15.

Cardew's Visitor!

"PHEEEEEEP!"

The referee's whistle shrilled out on Little Side.

It was the following Wednesday afternoon.

School House had been playing New House in a scratch game—a game which had ended in a draw. The players left the field, glowing, and feeling that they had deserved their tea.

Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, and Manners, muddied and cheerful, headed for the School House.

"That was a great goal of yours, Monty," remarked Tom. "It beat Fatty Wynn properly—and he's not easy to beat."

"Oh, I dunno," answered Monty Lowther. Then he added in lowered tone: "Hallo! There goes Cardew!"

Ralph Reckness Cardew was strolling under the elms. He nodded to the Terrible Three as they passed on towards the House, although he did not expect them to acknowledge the salute under the present circumstances. But it pleased Cardew's whimsical and wilful humour to make other fellows feel uncomfortable.

The Terrible Three entered the School House. As they passed the door of the Third Form-room, a terrific crash from within caused Tom to halt, with a grin. The crash had been followed by a terrific yell.

"Sounds as if the fags are happy," he chuckled, and swung open the door of the Form-room.

A medley of noises greeted the ears of the Terrible Three as they stared in, grinning.

The room was full of fags. And they were all busy. At any rate, they were supposed to be busy, although actually most of them were doing little else than get in each other's way.

The crash they had heard had, evidently been caused by the falling of a step-ladder. And the yell had clearly come from Curly Gibson, who had evidently been on the ladder when it had collapsed. Curly was struggling to his feet, dishevelled and angry.

"What did you want to barge into the blessed ladder for, just as I was on top of it, young Manners?" hooted Curly.



"I've learnt at last what the matter is about Cardew!" said Molly Harwood, her voice breathless with indignation. Tom Merry & Co. faced the girl's accusing look with rather startled expressions. "Yes," went on Molly hotly, "and I think you all ought to be ashamed of yourselves!" "Bai Jove!" (See Chapter 16.)

"Sorry," grinned Reggie Manners. Then he caught sight of his major. "Hallo, old scout!" he called out cheerfully.

The fags all glanced round. At sight of the three chums of the Shell staring in, Wally D'Arcy crossed over towards them. Though Wally did not approve of the Shell, he did not dislike the Terrible Three.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Wally. "Just the men we want!"

"How's that?" inquired Tom Merry, with a laugh.

"You're taller than we are—a bit," said Wally. "You can help us stick up these flags and things. We're decorating the giddy room, and we haven't got much time."

"What's the blessed celebration about?" chuckled Monty Lowther. "Has old Selby given it up as a bad job and left for America, or what?"

"Ass!" retorted Wally politely. "No, the fact is, we're having a party." He nodded and grinned. "We've laid in a fine spread, I can tell you—"

"Are we invited?" asked Manners gravely.

"No, you jolly well aren't! Third only—and the guest, of course. We're giving this spread to my girl—I mean, that is," went on Wally hastily, blushing furiously, "to Miss Harwood—"

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

"What are you asses cackling at?" demanded Wally crossly.

"Sorry! Nothing!" gasped Tom Merry. "So Miss Harwood is your girl, is she, Wally?" he continued gravely.

"Yes, she jolly well is!" roared Wally. "Isn't she, you chaps?"

And as one man the Third shouted:

"Rather!"

"Well, it's jolly nice of you to ask her to tea, anyway," said Tom, laughing. "And still nicer of her to agree to come," he added, with twinkling eyes. "Don't make her ill with bloaters or kippers, that's all I would suggest."

Bloaters and kippers were a favourite delicacy in the Third, Tom knew.

"I tell you we've laid in a fine spread for her," said Wally proudly. "Cakes and buns and sardines, and all sorts of things!"

"Don't!" pleaded Monty Lowther. "You make our mouths water! Well, if you want us to help, let's get on with it."

Within a few minutes the Terrible Three had done more decorating in the Third Form room than the whole of the Third together would have managed in the same number of hours. When they had finished, Wally solemnly proposed a vote of thanks to them, which Curly Gibson seconded. It was carried unanimously.

"Well, I fancy everything's ready now," went on Wally, when the three grinning chums of the Shell had taken their departure. "You chaps be laying out the spread and getting the chairs round. Don't go making a mess now, you asses! I'll go and fetch her. She said she'd be ready at four. It's five minutes to now."

And Wally left the Form-room and went out through the doorway into the quad, and crossed towards the Head's house. Walter Adolphus D'Arcy of the Third was looking and feeling—very pleased with himself.

Under the elms he saw Cardew strolling to and fro. But he did not waste two thoughts on the slacker of the Fourth. He hurried on towards the Head's house.

As he was passing the gates he noticed a motor-car drawn up in the road outside. A tall figure in a motoring-coat and cap had come striding in through the gates. Wally glanced at the stranger, and halted as the man hailed him.

"This is St. Jim's, isn't it?" asked the tall man.

"Yes, sir," said Wally. He put the visitor down as being
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the father of one of the fellows. "Were you wanting to see anyone in particular?"

"Yes," came the emphatic answer, "I do."

"What's the chap's name, sir? Perhaps I can—"

"Unfortunately, I don't know his name! But I want to see a certain St. Jim's boy badly! Perhaps it would be better if I saw your headmaster first. I— Why, bless my soul!"

The tall man was staring in an intent way towards the elms.

"Bless me! That is the very boy I wanted to see!"

"That's Cardew," said Wally. "I—"

But already the visitor was striding quickly towards the figure under the elms. Wally watched him go, then turned away. It was no business of his who Cardew's visitor was, even though it did seem curious that the stranger did not know Cardew's name. But Wally was not inquisitive. He made his way towards the Head's house.

Molly Harwood was far more important to Wally D'Arcy than was Ralph Reckness Cardew of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 16.

A Broken Friendship!

"WELL, I've arrived!" laughed Molly as she entered the Third Form room. "Oh, what a lovely tea you've got for me!" she ad'ed brightly, as her eyes fell on the table, laden with good things.

The Third were struck dumb with shyness for the moment. But they soon got over that; and, with Wally in command, the festivities began.

One and all piled in with a will, and the feast began to vanish swiftly. Molly was plied with good things at every other moment, and she did her best to please everyone. But her appetite was not so large as that of her hosts, and, after a while, she had to decline further delicacies.

Soon the talk turned to what was still the big topic at St. Jim's—the cross-country race against Greyfriars.

"We ought to have won that," said Wally gloomily.

"If they'd had a few of us Third Form men in the team, you know, things might have been different," put in Reggie Manners.

"If Cardew hadn't been such a rotter as to let the school down!" broke out Frank Levison bitterly.

"Cardew ought to be tarred and feathered!" snorted Hobbs. "You know he's barred now, Miss Harwood? Sent to Coventry? Serve him right, don't you think?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Molly sharply. "I didn't know!"

"Oh, rather!" nodded Curly Gibson. "You see, it was this way. Cardew's a rotten slacker, as a rule, but he could be a jolly fine athlete if he liked. Well, he promised Tom Merry that he'd chuck slacking and smoking, and all that silly rot—"

"Smoking?" cried Molly Harwood.

"Yes. He's an awful smoky rotter sometimes. But he promised to chuck all that and train for the jolly old race, you see. Well, seeing how he cracked up, it's as clear as giddy daylight that he must have broken his promise. A chap like Cardew could have come in with the first six if he'd liked; and the fact that he was miles behind jolly well proves that Cardew hadn't been training properly, in spite of his rotten promise. He must have been keeping up his rotten shady habits all the time. That's why the beast is barred!"

Molly Harwood stared at Curly in a queer, startled way.

"I can't believe it!" she exclaimed sharply.

"It's true enough, honest," Reggie Manners assured her.

Wally, seeing that the present trend of the conversation was not, apparently, a very happy one, hastened to change it. But Molly Harwood, though she did her best to be bright, was quieter now.

At last the time came for her to go.

She said good-bye to the fags cheerfully enough, and a rousing cheer in her favour rang out behind her as Wally escorted her from the Form-room. But crossing the quad towards the Head's house, with Wally strutting proudly at her side, the girl became quiet and grave once more.

Wally coughed.

"I say," he said at last, "you found the tea all right?"

"It was lovely, of course! Why?"

"Hem! I thought you seemed a bit—er—worried—"

"I'm sorry!" Molly forced a smile. "I—I was thinking, that's all. About that boy Cardew, Wally. I cannot believe that what your friends were saying about him is true, and that he really broke his promise to Tom Merry."

"Oh, Cardew?" grunted Wally. "I shouldn't worry about Cardew!"

A faint flush came into Molly's cheeks. She walked on in silence. Wally glanced up at her, with a knitted brow.

He realised that Molly had liked Cardew very much—he had to admit that it was natural enough, seeing how Cardew had stopped the runaway cab and averted what

might have been a tragedy. Wally could understand, therefore, that it was upsetting to Molly to know that Cardew was "barred" by St. Jim's. Wally realised, too, that she would be very reluctant to believe the worst of the slacker of the Fourth.

"Look here," said Wally abruptly, "if you like, I'll jolly well punch Curly's head for what he said about Cardew!"

"Oh, you mustn't!" exclaimed Molly hastily.

"Well, I'll jolly well make him come and apologise to you!" growled Wally.

"It really doesn't matter!" Molly smiled down at Wally's clouded face. "I—"

She broke off. A group of juniors had come into sight from the direction of the gym. Tom Merry & Co. and Study No. 6 saw Molly Harwood, and promptly turned in her direction.

"Well," smiled Tom Merry cheerily, "I hope the Third haven't been feeding you on bloaters!"

"Chuck it!" snapped Wally.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass on his minor with a look of strong disapproval. But before he could speak Molly Harwood exclaimed abruptly:

"I have learnt at last what the matter is—about Cardew."

There was an awkward silence. The juniors faced the girl's accusing look with rather startled expressions. They wondered what was coming.

"Yes," went on Molly, "I've found out at last, from the Third, what you wouldn't tell me. And I think you all ought to be ashamed of yourselves!"

Looking thoroughly discomfited, the juniors stood facing the girl's flashing eyes.

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Tom Merry blankly.

"I think it's shameful!" burst out Molly.

There was another awkward silence.

"I'm sorry!" said Tom at last. "Cardew's being barred is simply a school affair, so we didn't want to tell you—"

"You've all sent him to Coventry."

"Well, yes. You see—"

"You think that because he came in so late after the race that he must have broken his promise to train for it. Is that so?"

"Ahem! Yes. You see—"

"I think it is shameful to have sent him to Coventry when you haven't a shred of proof that he did break his promise!" Molly's lip quivered. "Just because he came in late, you at once believed he had broken his promise to train. But it's only a guess. It's not real evidence—"

"It's only circumstantial evidence, perhaps," said Tom Merry quietly. "But it is very strong, you know. And Cardew—"

"Circumstantial evidence isn't proof!" cried the girl hotly. "I think it is a shame, I tell you! You ought all to be ashamed of yourselves!"

"Bai Jove! But weally—"

She turned away, her chin held high, and two bright spots of colour burning in her cheeks. Wally went with her, looking almost as worried as did the group of School House juniors.

"This is wotten!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in dismay. "The deah gal does not compehend—"

"Yes, it's rotten!" said Manners disconsolately.

And the School House juniors went their way looking anything but happy.

Outside the door of the Head's house Molly Harwood turned again to Wally.

"Good-bye!" she said brightly. "And thank you ever so much—I've just loved it!"

"Good egg!" Wally grinned, well pleased. "But I—I'm sorry you're worried about Cardew being barred," he added, with a clouded brow.

"Oh, no, Wally! I—I did feel a little angry with those boys—perhaps I shouldn't have said what I did—"

Wally smiled faintly.

"Their faces were jolly funny to watch, when you were ticking 'em off!" he confessed. "Old Gussy looked as if he was half-brother to a sick codfish!"

The door of the house suddenly opened. Two figures emerged from the Head's house. One was the tall stranger with whom Wally had spoken at the gates earlier that evening.

The other was Cardew!

"Oh!" Molly Harwood gave an involuntary exclamation. Cardew turned his head.

As his eyes rested on Molly Harwood he started. His face went oddly set.

For a moment Molly opened her mouth as if to speak to Cardew. Then, as she saw that look on his face, her lips shut tight.

Cardew raised his cap and passed on, Molly nodding to him coldly as he went by. She turned abruptly to Wally D'Arcy.

"Good-bye, Wally!"

The next moment she had vanished into the house. Cardew and the visitor were disappearing into the gathering dusk that filled the old quad. Wally stared after them, then at the closed door, and scratched his head in bewilderment.

"Blessed if you can understand girls!" he muttered.

He had expected Molly and Cardew to greet one another in a friendly manner. After the way in which Molly had stood up for the slacker of the Fourth against the School House juniors, Wally had naturally imagined that she and Cardew were still on terms of good friendship. Otherwise, why should she have "stuck up" for Cardew so vigorously?

Walter Adolphus D'Arcy was still very puzzled as he turned away from the Head's door, and made his way slowly across the quad in the direction of the School House.

Cardew and his companion had already vanished into the building.

"Anyway, I think she liked her tea," said Wally, with satisfaction. "Hallo, what was that?"

He had kicked something with his foot—something that had gone spinning with a metallic noise along the flagstones. He peered around, and found a penknife lying there. He picked it up.

"Ripping knife!" said Wally ruminatively. "Wonder whose it is?"

He turned it over, and found a name-plate on the other side. The name was "R. R. Cardew."

"Cardew's—eh?" grunted Wally. "Hem! I bet he dropped it just now, when I saw him take his handkerchief out as he went off with that tall stranger. S'pose I've got to take it up to his study. Shan't catch 'em up now."

And Wally, slipping the knife into his pocket, strolled on towards the School House, whistling.

CHAPTER 17.

The Truth at Last!

WALLY of the Third tapped on the door of Study No. 9 in the Fourth Form passage.

"Come in!" answered the voice of Ralph Reckness Cardew.

Wally entered. The Third Form were strongly in favour of the barring of Cardew, and Wally intended simply to place the knife on the table and leave the study with dignified silence.

But the best-laid plans sometimes go wrong. Wally's did now.

Cardew was not alone. The tall stranger was in the study, standing by the fire. Now that the man's cap was off Wally saw that he was an elderly, soldierly-looking gentleman, with a strong, kindly face. The visitor smiled at Wally as the leader of the Third planked Cardew's knife down on the table.

"Why," he said, "surely you are the boy I spoke to by the gates?"

"Yes, sir," answered Wally, backing to the door.

"My knife?" exclaimed Cardew. "I say, thanks awfully, kid! Where did you find it?"

Before the visitor Wally could not refuse to reply.

"In the quad," he grunted.

"And what is your name?" inquired the elderly gentleman, with a kindly smile.

"D'Arcy, sir."

"Well, D'Arcy, I owe you thanks for having put me on the track of this schoolfellow of yours!" smiled the visitor. "But for you having caused me to stop in the quadrangle, I

should not have noticed this boy Cardew, and I might have been a long while in tracing him, for I find that he has, with commendable modesty, said nothing at all about his unselfish act on my behalf the other day."

Cardew had gone rather red.

"If you don't mind, sir—" he began.

The visitor clapped him warmly on the shoulder.

"But why not?" he exclaimed. "I have told your headmaster, so why should not D'Arcy know, too?"

He turned to Wally with twinkling eyes:

"I happen to be a governor of the school, my boy," he explained. "My name is Waltonly—Colonel Waltonly."

"Really, sir?" asked Wally, who did not care two pins what the gentleman's name was. But he was mystified to know what Colonel Waltonly had to say about Cardew.

"Last Saturday," went on the colonel cheerily, "I was driving in my car on a road between here and Wayland when I was taken ill. Luckily, I just managed to stop the car before I collapsed over the steering-wheel. Otherwise, there might have been a bad accident. As it was, I was in considerable pain, and almost lost consciousness—"

"Sorry to hear that, sir!" put in Wally.

"Oh, thanks! I'm all right now—thanks to Cardew!"

Again he clapped Cardew on the shoulder.

Wally stared.

"Thanks to Cardew, sir?" he exclaimed, in surprise.

"Yes. Cardew happened to find me. I understand there was a race in progress—a cross-country affair. The course, luckily for me, led along that particular road where I

was taken ill. Cardew found me, as I say, and, with great unselfishness, gave up his chances in the race, jumped into the car, and drove me to the hospital in Wayland. Had he not done so, I might have been seriously ill. But since I was taken to the hospital so promptly, I am now quite fit again. I have come to the school to-day to find him and thank him for his great service."

"I—I see!" muttered Wally.

"I feel exceptionally grateful to Cardew, because, being so well placed in the race when he found me—he was among the first few—it was a great sacrifice for him to give up in order to drive me to the hospital."

"Any fellow would have done it, of course, sir," put in Cardew hastily.

"I'm not so sure!" exclaimed Colonel Waltonly cheerily. "It would have been easy enough to pretend you had not seen me, or that you had not known that I was ill, and so have bagged the laurels in the race!"

"I—I think I must be going," stammered Wally. "Good-bye, sir!"

And he bolted from the study. At a breakneck speed the leader of the fag fraternity sped upwards to the Shell passage and headed for Study No. 10.

"What the merry thump!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, as the Third-Former broke excitedly into the study. "Somebody chasing you, Wally?"

Finding his breath with difficulty, Wally explained.

When he had finished, the Terrible Three stared at one another dumbly. Tom Merry's face had gone incredibly startled.

"Good heavens!" he breathed.

"And all this time we have been wronging Cardew!"

He stared at the wall with unseeing eyes. There was a strange look on the face of the captain of the Shell.

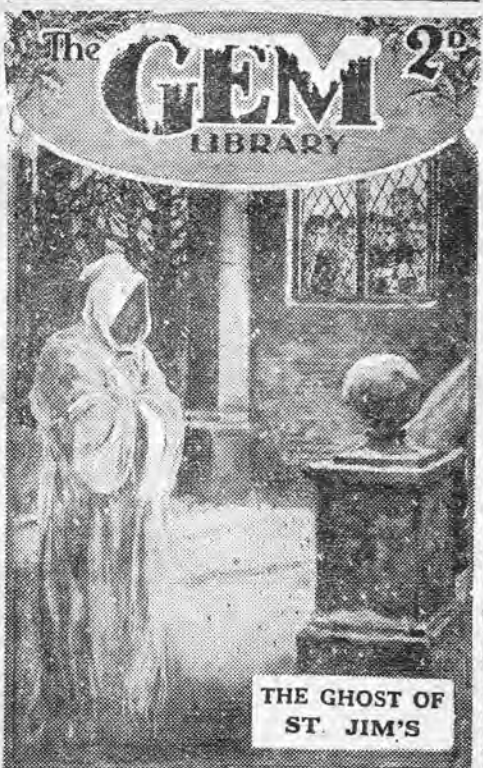
"So Miss Harwood was right," said Manners quietly.

"But why didn't Cardew tell us the truth?" cried Monty Lowther. "It was his own fault, in a way; he knew what

(Continued on page 27.)

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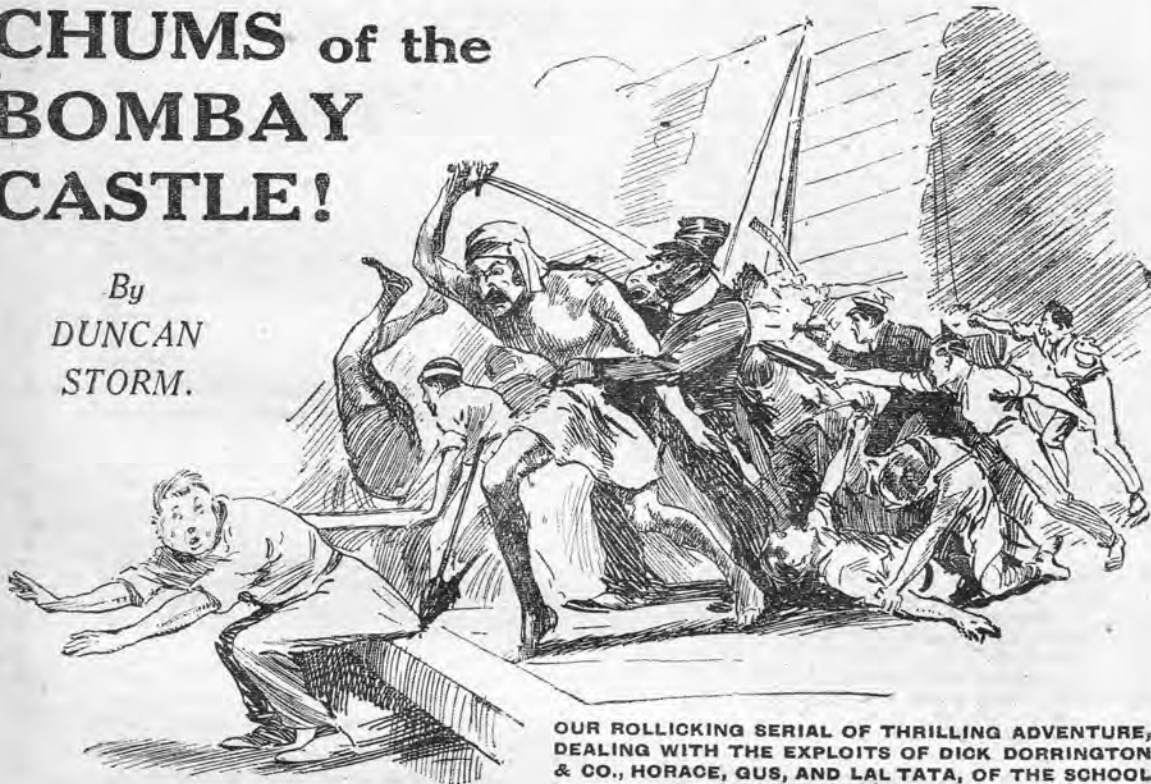
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The Pursuit!

"NOW we gotta do a bit of quick work," ordered Mr. Pugsley, taking off his coat and getting up his tool-chest. "Shift all the weight you can into the bow of the boat. I want 'er stern up. Pull up the floor-boards in the cabin and get all the ballast for'ard. Then all of you go and sit up in the bows, with the exception of you, Master Dorrington, and you, Jim Handyman. I'll want you for mates whiles I do this job."

"Cannot I be of assistance?" asked Mr. Lal Tata.

"Yes," said Mr. Pugsley briefly; "you are more useful at the other end of the ship putting your fifteen stone on 'er nose to bring 'er tail up!"

The boys moved quickly. There was no need for Mr. Pugsley to tell that they were in a tight place. The sultan had shown his hand as soon as he was safe again amongst his pals.

Even Mr. Pugsley shook his head as he selected his tools and threw up a spare manganese bronze propeller on deck.

"Pugsley, my boy," said he, addressing himself, "you missed a move in the game then. You ought to have kep' that banana-faced young beggar aboard as hostage!"

The boys hauled up the cabin floor-boards and shifted the lead ballast forward. They ran a long length of chain from aft into the forward chain-lockers, and shifted all the cans of petrol and paraffin forward, to get as much weight as they could into the bows.

In a business-like manner Mr. Pugsley slipped off his trousers.

"I'm going over the stern," said he. "We can't get the shaft any higher than it is. Bathin' suit? No; it won't be the first time that I've worn me pants for a bathin' costume. Show a shaded glim when I'm in the water, Master Dick, so's that clik won't notice it."

He slipped into the water, and, plunging about under the stern of the helpless vessel, soon reported on the damage.

"Propeller's gone right enough and the tail end's burred. Some of those dirty dorgs tried to pinch it in the 'arbour. Now 'and me the tools as I want 'em! Sharks? If any shark comes near me to-night I'll file 'is nose off!"

Then, rolling about in the water like a porpoise, Mr. Pugsley, who prided himself on having been the smartest fitter on the smartest cruiser in the smartest Navy in the

world, started to justify his pride in putting in a repair job without parallel in the history of motor-boating.

By the light of a shaded electric torch he laboured half under water, filing and tapping till he announced that he had shaped the shaft ready for the propeller and the key.

"I want a strong mate now," said he.

"Will you have Arty or Cecil?" asked Dick.

"Gimme Cecil!" said Mr. Pugsley. "Those paws of his will hold anything, and I want him to take the weight of the propeller."

"Come on, Cecil!" called Dick.

Cecil crawled aft.

The old companion did not much like getting into the black water under the stern, but Mr. Pugsley encouraged him.

"Come on, Cecil," said he. "The water's quite warm, and it'll give you a chance o' washing yer feet. Besides, there's a packet of Woodbines waiting for you when the job's finished."

Cecil grunted. He took off his battered old topper and laid it on the deck, and, emptying his pockets of a packet of cigarette-cards, a dirty handkerchief, a key on a bit of string, and a banana, he climbed down into the water alongside Mr. Pugsley.

"That's right, ole ship!" said Mr. Pugsley, greeting him.

"Your ugly mug will frighten away all the sharks in the sea. Now, just hang on to this handline and do what I tell you!"

Cecil grunted.

He knew what was required of him. He had helped to ship the propeller of the "D.S.B." before this. But he had done so when she was up or her checks on the boat-deck. It was a different job when done in the water with a slight swell and a strong tide running under the disabled boat.

The spare propeller was lowered, and Cecil performed miracles of strength and intelligence.

Mr. Pugsley had given an ejaculation of triumph when Dick, lying on the stern and feeding him with his tools as he required them, gave a muttered exclamation.

"Puggo," said he, "is the job going to take you long?"

"About twenty minutes," said Puggo. "Why?"

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"The enemy are coming out of harbour!" said Dick. "I can see lights moving there!"

"Thought as much!" muttered Mr. Pugsley. "Then the job will have to be done in ten minutes. Good thing I was eddiered to my trade better than most plumbers. Last one that got loose in my little 'ouse at 'ome ought to 'ave 'ad some pirates after 'im, give you my word!"

He started to key up the propeller.

"How many of them are there?" he asked.

"I can see six," said Dick; "but they are against the loom of the land. They haven't hoisted their sails."

"No wind," replied Mr. Pugsley, tapping away industriously. "I can 'ear their sweeps going. Tell the boys to get some of that weight aft again, and to trim the ship a bit. We may have to fight before we run for it. Now, I wonder what's making them beastly pirates come after us when they'd got rid of us? Anyone would think that we'd got something aboard that they want pretty badly. Maybe they've taken a fancy to ole Lal and want to put 'im in their monkey house," added Mr. Pugsley, tapping away methodically and regularly.

Then he turned to Cecil.

"Cecil," said he, "you can get out of the bath now. Hop along and help to pass that chain astern again, like a good boy!"

Cecil was very glad to climb out of the water once more. He slipped on his jacket, and took his possessions out of his hat again, stowing these in his pockets with great care.

Then he started to work like a dozen men, stowing the lead ballast and handing the chain astern whilst Mr. Pugsley kept up his rhythmic hammering, stopping for a moment now and then to ask Dick what he could see from the deck.

"The leader is about half a mile astern," said Dick.

"Then you'd better be getting up the anchor," said Mr. Pugsley. "There's a draught of wind coming off the shore. Hoist the mainsail. That'll keep us going while I get the engine warmed up."

And Mr. Pugsley, still tapping industriously, kept at his job till the leading prahu was about four hundred yards astern.

Then he climbed, dripping, over the stern.

"All serene," he reported. "She'll hold now. Home with the anchor, boys, and up with the mainsail! We mustn't let these chaps board us!"

Cecil was on the anchor, and he tore it from its coral bed and brought it home as if it weighed no more than a feather, whilst the boys manned the halliards and brought the mainsail up in record time.

It filled out to the light breeze which set off the land, and the "D.S.B." forged ahead, whilst Mr. Pugsley, dropping down below, proceeded to start the engine up.

But the engine, as engines will, proved a bit sulky.

"Got the mixture wrong or something!" muttered Mr. Pugsley, cranking up industriously.

The engine spat at him once or twice hopefully, then stopped again.

"Now isn't that annoying!" exclaimed Mr. Pugsley. "Here we are wanting a bit of speed as badly as we can, and the engine, which has be'aved itself for years, turns round and makes faces at us!"

He popped his head up. The "D.S.B." was slipping through the water in fine style with the light wind, for she was a beautiful sailing model, and would travel with but a breath.

But the leading war prahu was coming along like a racing boat.

"Why doesn't he shoot at us?" asked Dick.

"Because he doesn't want to sink us," said Mr. Pugsley. "He wants to capture us, and he may want to disable us. Lie down on deck, boys!"

The prahu suddenly yawed, and a brass jingal barked with a long spurt of flame, sending a ball flying a little to the left of the mainsail.

"Wants to knock away our spars," said Mr. Pugsley. "Now I'll give the engine another turn."

He dropped down below and struggled with the sulky engine.

Then a voice hailed them from the pursuing prahu.

"Say, boys!" shouted the voice. "Stop! We don't want to hurt you. We just want to have a talk with you!"

The voice spoke in perfect English, with a slight accent.

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Mr. Pugsley pushed his head up again as he fiddled with the sparking plugs.

"Wants to knock away our spars, I bet," he said, unscrewing the plugs and putting in fresh ones.

"A bit of business!" answered the voice. "I want to board you!"

Mr. Pugsley was rapidly getting fresh plugs into the engine.

"Who are you in that clique of yellow tummies that talks English?" he demanded. "Why didn't you talk English when we went ashore?"

"That's my business!" said the voice from the prahu, suddenly turning to a threatening note. "Heave to, or I'll sink you!"

"Right!" replied Mr. Pugsley. "That's a declaration o' war! Get on with your sinking!"

The prahu yawed again, and fired, sending a ball through the mainsail, which did little or no harm.

Mr. Pugsley noticed that she was slow in yawing, and that every time she yawed she lost fifty yards. Even under sail the "D.S.B." was almost holding her own, but he did not like the look of another faster craft which was pounding along under the thresh of sixty sweeps, coming up to port of their pursuer.

"Now," he said, "we'll show these savages a few tricks o' the Great War! Two cans o' petrol aft here, quick! I'll give 'em something to scratch their 'eads about in a minute!"

It was going to be a very close fight between the boys of the Bombay Castle and the pirates of Bungalow.

Mr. Pugsley's engine was hors de combat till he could get it running. The mainsail of their little craft was pulling in the fresh of breeze which was coming off the spicy shores of the island.

But they were still in the narrow passages of the coral reefs, and three large prahus, each with a hundred pirates aboard, were chasing them up under their sweeps.

The leading prahu yawed and fired again, and a jingal-ball sent up a cloud of spray close alongside.

But Mr. Pugsley was getting ready to hit back.

"If we let 'em come up with us, we are done," said he, twisting the caps off a couple of tins of petrol and inserting a couple of rubber plugs. "Ere," added Mr. Pugsley, "is a little invention o' my own. I thought we might get a little do of this sort, and provided accordingly, as the monkey said when 'e took 'is corkscrew to the party. In the late war, the Germans used to annoy us Naval blokes with two mines tied together, for which we provided paravanes. I'll tie these two petrol cans together at each end of a long line, and I think that if we chuck 'em into the water, one of our piratical pursuers will pick 'em up on 'er bow, so's they close in on 'er side, causin' great fun and amusement!"

"Don't you want a light, Puggo?" asked Dick.

"No," answered Mr. Pugsley. "My stuff catches fire when it touches water, same as the Holmes' lights. Watch and see!"

Mr. Pugsley threw one can out to the length of the connecting line and dropped the other overside.

Soon, two tiny lights were bobbing in the water about thirty feet apart in the wake of the "D.S.B."

There were angry yells on the two leading prahus for one, yawing, had nearly run foul of the other, and the shot fired went wide of the mark.

"Good job for us they've come away in such a 'urry that they've left their long Toms at 'ome!" said Mr. Pugsley, watching his tiny lights. "Hurrah! Watch 'em—ere they come, right between 'em!"

The leading prahu had caught the line connecting the two petrol cans in her stem.

Mr. Pugsley counted the seconds.

"One—two—three—four—ought to be going now—five—There she goes!"

A sheet of flame burst on the starboard side of their pursuer, amidst a yell from the crew. There was a rush astern, as the flaming petrol descended in a shower into the waist of the gaudy warship.

A second later, the other can trailing alongside went up, covering sea and ship with a shower of burning petrol.

In a second, little points of fire were running up the rigging of the prahu, and her great mat sails burst into flame.

"She's afire!" said Mr. Pugsley. "That'll give 'em something to get on with for a minute or two, while I get on with my job!"

(Continued on page 26.)

INTRODUCTION.

Dick Dorrington & Co., of the school ship *Bombay Castle*, together with their master, Mr. Lal Tata, are detailed to search for a number of movie actors who have mysteriously disappeared somewhere within the pirate-infested Archipelagoes of Pahang. In addition to the crew are the ship's pets, Horace, the goat; Gus, the crocodile; and Cecil, the ape. On nearing Bungalow, the boys are captured by pirates and taken before the Sultan of Bungalow, who falsely accuses them of smuggling and imprisons them in a leopard's cage in the palace yard. They are rescued from their perilous position, however, by the school's pets, and John Henry, the sultan's sacred elephant, which proves to be an old friend of Mr. Pugsley, the *Bombay Castle's* gunner. Armed with choice weapons from the sultan's armoury, and with the sultan himself as hostage, the *Bombay Castle* party succeed in reaching their motor-boat in safety. Misfortune befalls the party again shortly afterwards, for after dodging a fusillade of whistling projectiles from the sultan's artillery, the craft's propeller is shipped off through striking a coral bed. "Drop the anchor," orders Mr. Pugsley, "or we'll soon be on the rocks!"

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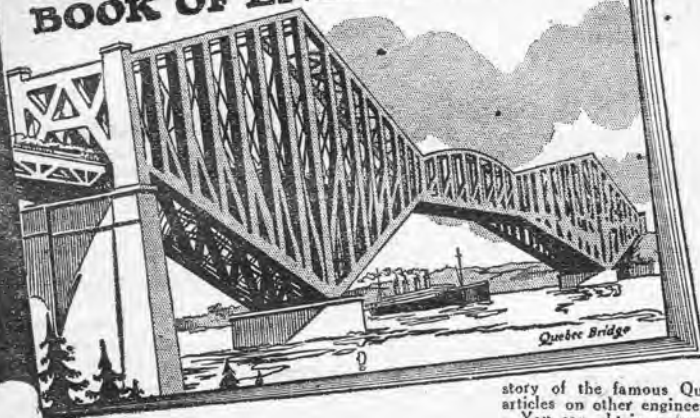
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"CHUMS of the BOMBAY CASTLE!"

(Continued from page 24.)

And he returned calmly to his screwing and connecting of sparking plugs as the two prahus fell astern.

The Bombay Castle party could see the pirates leaping from the burning vessel, to be picked up by her consort. A huge pillar of smoke and flame was ascending from her waist, lighting the sea with a ruddy glow that almost drowned the white-moonlight.

"That's put paid to that packet!" said Mr. Pugsley. "Look! She's drifting on to the reefs!"

Two more prahus came up, pausing for a few seconds to pick up a few swimmers from the sea. Then they came on with a businesslike stroke, not pausing to fire at the chase.

"These lads mean to board," said Mr. Pugsley. "Stand by, boys, to defend yourselves. We can't use petrol with all this stuff lying about. Like as not we should set ourselves afire!"

The boys armed themselves with weapons they had snatched from the sultan. Cecil brought out his huge war club. Arty brought out his cricket bat. Chip was content with his catapult. And thus armed, they lay down on the deck, whilst the two prahus came charging up, one on each quarter.

The great sweeps were pulling through the water like the oars of a racing galley. One could hear the deep-breathed "Ah-ah!" of the rowers.

Then a drum beating in the stern started to keep the time for the rowers.

"Now we are for it!" said Mr. Pugsley, cranking up, as their two enemies closed upon them.

The engine which had sulked, started up.

"There!" exclaimed Mr. Pugsley. "It was the sparking plugs, after all!"

Away they went, the engine gathering speed, but, as yet, they were not travelling fast enough to avoid the final sprint of the prahus.

Thresh, thresh, thresh! The banks of red-painted, gilded oars catching the light of the burning prahu, tore through the water, the sixty rowers in each craft pulling like demons.

The fighting men were gathering on the gunwales, waiting their chance to jump, when Mr. Pugsley suddenly spoiled their calculations by stopping his engine and reversing full speed astern, grinding along the oar bank of his starboard antagonist with his stern, and tearing the sweeps of his port adversary with the bows of the "D.S.B."

The rowers were flung from their benches as the bows of the two prahus came into collision and, in the excitement, they grappled with and boarded one another.

But twenty yelling fiends managed to leap upon the bows of the "D.S.B.," and swept astern, flourishing swords and pikes. Arty was the first to meet them. Lifting his cricket bat, he varded a cut from a sword, and a stab from a kriss.

The swordsman staggered back, nursing his arm. The man with the kriss rolled over on the deck, half stunned by a melon which Conkey hurled at his head.

Conkey grinned as the kriss tinkled on the gunwale and went overside, and, snatching up a packet of red pepper, he burst it in the face of a wild-looking madman who was trying to stick a spear through Porkis.

The spear went through Porkis' trousers seat and nailed him to the cabin-top, and all would have been up with him if rare old Cecil had not popped up from the chain locker and fallen upon their antagonists from behind.

Cecil used only his paws.

Catching one pirate by the waist, he hurled him over his head into the sea. With a swift dive he had another by the leg and rolled him overboard.

A curved sword flashed through the air, to catch Cecil bending; but Chip's catty whanged, and the leaden bullet caught the swordsman fair on the funnybone.

With a howl of anguish, he sat down alongside Porkis on the cabin-top, and Porkis managed to lift his foot to shove him overboard whilst he was still trying to get the use of his strong right arm.

The fight was short, sharp, and sweet. There was a clattering and a scuffling in the chain locker as Horace, who had been shut down there out of trouble, managed to get his hoofs on deck.

Maddened by the sound of strife above him, Horace, with a supreme effort, gained the deck.

His first target was the sternsheets of a pirate who had

got Arty down and was trying to get at his throat with a large and awkward knife, when up came an earthquake and hit his adversary in the pants, sending him overboard in a double somersault.

Mr. Pugsley, down in the engine-room, had no time to look after his engines or the steering. He just managed to shut the engine off so that they should not drive on to the reefs, when he was engaged with two big niggers.

The fight down in the engine-room beggars description, for it was fought in the dark; but it ended in the two niggers fighting one another till Mr. Pugsley smashed them both over the shins with a ten-pound spanner and kicked them, howling, up on deck.

Here they were swept overboard by a general rush; for the panic-stricken boarding-party were diving over the side to avoid an overwhelming attack of goat, orang-outang, cricket bats, melons, red pepper, and thwacks laid on with the flats of scimitars which would not draw from their sheaths.

"All safe?" called Mr. Pugsley.

"We are all right!" called Jim Handyman. "Porky's got a spear through the tail of his shirt. Pongo's got a black eye, and Conk has got a chip in the leg. But where's old Lal?"

There was a stifled call from the cabin, and a fat, turbaned figure shot out of the companion-way. Mr. Pugsley saw him for a moment by the glare of the burning prahu ere he plunged overboard. He was carrying a large tin of brawn from the supplies of the ship.

The next moment Mr. Pugsley set his engine running.

"Go and see what's the matter with ole Lal, someone. Rest of you, lie down! I'm going to pass those two ships."

This time the engine made no mistakes. The fresh sparking-plugs were working perfectly; and, gathering speed, Mr. Pugsley raced past the two prahus, which were still locked together, and out into the Bungalow Passage, leaving her discomfited adversaries behind her. There was a flash and a roar which echoed all the way down the distant coast. The burning prahu had blown up.

Mr. Pugsley rubbed a cauliflower ear, which he had taken in the fight in his tiny engine-room.

"We are all serene—ho now!" said he. "That was a very pretty little naval engagement, and the moral that it teaches is that if there's anything wrong with an engine it's generally dirty sparking-plugs. What's the matter with ole Lal down in the cabin there? Hasn't stopped one, has he?"

The boys pulled Lal up on deck. Lal was all right; but he could not speak, for he had a yard or more of turban tail shoved down his throat, and on top of that a sock.

It looked like a conjuring trick as the boys pulled up first the sock, and then the turban tail.

"Coo, lummy! 'E's swallowed a draper's shop!" exclaimed Mr. Pugsley, in admiration. "Look down into 'is tonsils, boys, an' see if 'e's got some gal's silk stockings!"

Lal panted; he could not speak.

"Who was that chap who went overboard just when we started off—the fat party in the turban?" asked Mr. Pugsley. "And what was 'e doing with one of our big tins of brawn under 'is arm? 'Bout the last thing one of those chaps would pinch, I'm thinking!"

"I got the brawn out," said Skeleton. "I was feeling rather hungry, and I was thinking that you chaps would like a sandwich. And when we shifted the ballast from the cabin I stowed the brawn on the cabin cushions."

"What do you make of it, Mr. Lal Tata?" asked Mr. Pugsley, as he altered course and steered down the wide channel.

Mr. Lal Tata drew a long breath.

"All I know, my dear Pugsley," said he, "was that this fellow fell down into the cabin during the fracas. He and I had terrible struggles in the dark. He tried to get me by the Adam's apple and to crack it in his grasp. I hit him some kicks; but he climbed on my chest and gagged me and gave me tremendous punches in the jawbone, causing me intense discomfort and sorrow of mind. My liver seemed to turn to water, and as I lay there on the floor I heard him muttering and rummaging round the cabin. Then, when you started, he took the brawn and did a quick jump overboard."

"Well, that's a rum 'un!" said Mr. Pugsley. "And now you come to talk about brawn, I'm feeling a bit peckish. We are leaving the discomfited enemy far behind us. What about a bit of supper?"

(The Bombay Castle Chums have well earned a feed after their fight against such terrible odds—don't you think so? There's nothing like a good feed before—Well you'll find out for yourself when you read next week's gripping instalment of this great adventure yarn.)

"JUST LIKE CARDEW!"

(Continued from page 21.)

the fellows thought, and he never denied it! He gave us to understand that our suspicions were right. Dash it—"

"That was just like Cardew," put in Tom slowly. "When the fellows hissed him, on his arrival at the school, his pride was too badly hurt for him to explain. Since we thought the worst of him, he let us think the worst—it's Cardew's way!"

Tom rose suddenly to his feet.

"We've got to get this put right at once," he said quietly. "The least we can do is to apologise to Cardew, and at once. And the fellows must all know the truth as quickly as possible."

The leader of the Third left the study, a very thoughtful look upon his usually cheery face.

Cardew was not in his study when Tom Merry arrived there. Levison and Clive were there, however. As yet, even they had not heard Wally's great news, and they were jubilant when Tom told them the truth.

"Why on earth didn't the silly fathead tell us, though?" exclaimed Levison.

Clive grinned.

"Just Cardew's way!" he agreed. "Come on, Levison, we're going to tell the chaps!"

Tom Merry, accompanied by his two chums, went in search of Cardew, however. Tom, as captain of the Lower School, felt that it was up to him to apologise on behalf of the whole junior school to the slacker of the Fourth.

As the Terrible Three were crossing the dusky quad, wondering if they might find Cardew under the elms, they almost ran into the arms of a figure strolling back towards the School House from the gates. It was Ralph Reckness Cardew.

Tom hailed him.

"Cardew," he said frankly, with genuine contrition in his voice, "I am sorry. More sorry than I can say. The whole school will be sorry when they know, as they soon will. Wally D'Arcy has told us about Colonel Walton, and what you did for him. Will you shake, Cardew?"

Cardew shrugged.

"I accept your apology," he said coolly. But he did not give Tom his hand. "Next time, perhaps, the fellows won't be quite so ready to think the worst of me—not quite so ready, even, to hiss me in public!" he added with bitterness. "I tell you—"

He broke off sharply. Footsteps had sounded in the dusk, and two figures loomed up. One was Wally D'Arcy, the other Molly Harwood.

"Here he is!" cried Wally's voice very cheerily. "Now, go and shake hands and be friends!"

And, seizing Molly by the hand, the fag pulled her forward in front of Cardew.

Cardew caught his breath. Then suddenly he smiled.

Molly Harwood, as she saw the old bitterness clear from his face, found her voice at last. She held out her hand, and she was smiling very brightly.

"I've heard all about your unselfishness during the race," she said quickly. "I do admire you for it! Let's be friends again."

Cardew tried to speak. He shook her hand instead.

"The fellows believed the worst of me!" he blurted out.

"But why did you? I—I—"

"But I didn't," she told him.

Cardew stared at her, amazed.

"Then why—"

"Why did I seem unfriendly?" she finished for him. "Because you were so unfriendly to me. It was you who thought the worst of me, in thinking I should believe the worst of you. It hurt my feelings very badly," she went on quietly.

"Gad!" Cardew stared at her. "What a fool I've been! I owe you an apology—"

"Don't let's talk of apologies," said Molly brightly. "We're friends again now, aren't we?"

"Hear, hear!" grinned Monty Lowther. "It's all over now! Eh, Cardew? You're sorry for doubting Miss Harwood, and we're sorry for doubting you, and everything in the garden's lovely!"

Wally D'Arcy, with a solemn wink at Tom Merry, vanished silently into the dusk. Walter Adolphus D'Arcy was very pleased to see "his girl" happy again—even though it was because of Cardew!

Molly Harwood looked still happier a week or so later, when a white-clad figure came into view round the bend of Rylcombe Lane, running for the school gates, and it was seen to be Ralph Reckness Cardew!

For the great cross-country race was being run again!

The news of the true reason for Cardew's lateness in the original race had somehow reached Greyfriars. And the merry men of Greyfriars had at once insisted, like true sportsmen, that the race should be recontested.

And in the re-run race it was Cardew who was first man home—with Tom Merry at his heels. And this time, thanks to Cardew, the cup was won by St. Jim's!

THE END.

(Now, chums, who says a grand Christmas number of the GEM? Why, all of you, of course! Then look out for next week's BUMPER ENLARGED issue, which contains a magnificent, seasonable story of Tom Merry and Co. entitled "The Haunted School!" That you'll enjoy every line of it goes without saying.)

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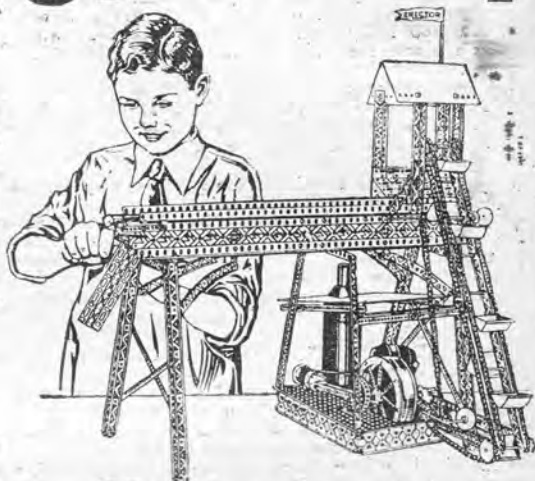
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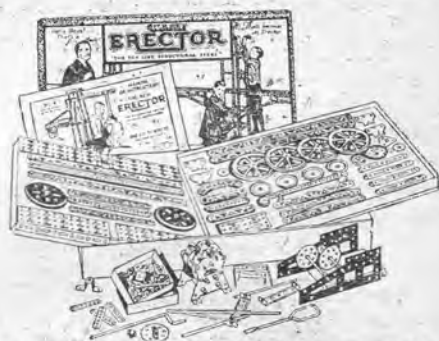
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