

THE ALL-SCHOOL-STORY PAPER!

The Penny Popular

No.
246.

Three Complete Stories of—
HARRY WHARTON & Co.—JIMMY SILVER & Co.—TOM MERRY & Co.



CAUGHT RED-HANDED!

An Exciting Incident from the Long Complete Story of
TOM MERRY & CO., contained in this issue.

A Magnificent
Long Complete
Story, dealing
with the
Early Adventures
of
Tom Merry & Co.
at St. Jim's.

CAPTURING THE CRACKSMAN!

By
Martin
Clifford.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. The Mystery.

DR. HOLMES, the Head of St. Jim's, was seated in his study.

The Head's face was clouded and troubled.

He was not working, though it was unusual for him to be idle. He seemed to be mastered by troubled thoughts. As he sat at his writing-table his gaze turned alternately upon the window which gave a view of the quadrangle, and upon a picture-frame which hung upon the wall opposite him. The frame was empty, but inside it were tags and rags of canvas, showing where a picture had been roughly slashed out.

That frame had held a real Rembrandt—a masterpiece of the famous Dutch master, and the apple of the doctor's eye.

The frame remained; the picture was gone. And since the robbery Dr. Holmes' face had been clouded. It seemed as if he would never get over his loss. It was not only the monetary value of the picture, though that was considerable, as the Head had refused two thousand guineas for his Rembrandt. But it had been his most cherished possession—and now that it was gone, it was almost as if his child had been taken.

Dr. Holmes was the kindest and most gentle-hearted of men, but when he thought of the theft of his picture his eyes gleamed with anger. He had never hated anyone in his life, but now he came very near to hating the unknown cracksmen who had robbed him of his treasure.

A dozen times that day Dr. Holmes had been at the telephone, asking whether any progress had been made in the search for the cracksmen. And always the same answer had come—that nothing had been discovered.

The police did not add that they expected to discover nothing, but the Head knew that without being told. The mysterious cracksmen, who was known to the police as "X"—whose name, whose appearance, they did not know—had baffled Scotland Yard for years, and was likely to baffle them still.

There was a tap at the door at last, and the Head rose eagerly. Toby, the School House page, showed in an upright, good-looking gentleman.

"Ferrers Locke!" exclaimed the Head. He shook hands with the detective. Ferrers Locke's glance wandered to the empty frame.

"Yes," said the doctor, with a nod, "that is where it was—my Rembrandt. Mr. Locke, if you can recover my picture for me, you shall name your own fee. I know that considerations of that kind do not appeal to you very much, but I shall be grateful—more grateful than I can say. And if you could lay that unknown scoundrel by the heels, it would be a service to the whole country."

Ferrers Locke smiled slightly.

"It is a big task," he said.

The Head sighed.

"I know it—I know it!" he said. "The chance of success is very remote—I am

aware of that. But I would leave no stone unturned—so I have sent for you."

The detective sat down as the Head pulled a chair to the fire for him.

"I came as soon as I could," he said. "I was absent when your letter came. I was not able to get here before to-day. I understand that the robbery took place on Saturday?"

"On Saturday night—at exactly midnight," said the Head.

The detective smiled.

"You are very exact," he said.

"Ah, I see you do not know the story yet," said the Head.

"No; I depend upon you for that. I have only just returned to England from abroad, as a matter of fact."

"Then I had better explain the thing from the beginning."

"Please do."

"You have heard of 'X,' of course?"

"Who has not?" said Ferrers Locke, with a smile. "The man has made himself a kind of fame. He is undoubtedly a very clever and determined scoundrel; he has genius, which he has misapplied. He is the most dangerous kind of criminal; he has talents which might have made him famous in another way. The strangest thing is that the police have not even the remotest suspicion of his real identity. They would not even know that he called himself 'X' but for his trick of leaving a card with an 'X' inscribed upon it in the place where he commits his robberies. A very interesting criminal. I shall be glad of the opportunity of measuring strength with him."

"I hope you will succeed," said the Head. "The man is an impudent scoundrel. I received a telephone message from him."

"From the cracksmen?"

"Yes. Captain Mellish, a gentleman who is staying at Glyn House, came over here to give me a warning, as he had heard of my valuable picture. I was talking the matter over with Mr. Railton, my Housemaster, when the telephone bell rang. You may judge of my amazement when I found that I was speaking to 'X' over the telephone."

"I should say so!"

"He told me explicitly that he would steal my picture on Saturday night at twelve o'clock precisely."

The detective whistled softly.

"That is in keeping with his character," he said. "I have heard of his sending a telegram to a nobleman whom he intended to rob—and he carried out the robbery in that case."

"And in this case!" said the Head.

"We were not sure that it was not a hoax. But to make certain of the safety of the picture, we waited up that night and watched over it."

"And it went?"

"Yes."

"This is very interesting," said Ferrers Locke. "Pray give me all the details. How many of you were here?"

"Five in all—myself, Kildare of the Sixth Form, Inspector Skeat of Rylcombe, Mr. Railton, my Housemaster, and Captain

Mellish. You are acquainted with all of them excepting Captain Mellish. Captain Mellish is—or, rather, was—an officer in the Indian Army, and he is cousin to a boy in the Fourth Form at this school. He had been here on that afternoon, and he offered to stay and watch with us—and I was glad to have him."

The detective nodded.

"I met Tom Merry as I came along here, and he mentioned the gentleman to me," he said. "He is coming here this afternoon, in case I want to ask him questions."

"Ah! Then you will see him?"

"Yes. Describe what happened on Saturday night, sir."

"We waited up and watched. You can imagine our feelings as twelve o'clock came round. There was an iron, burglar-proof shutter fastened over the window, and every window and door in the house had been carefully examined. There was a mastiff turned loose in the quadrangle, and a policeman with a porter in the lodge, and two more officers on duty in the road. That, in addition to the five of us watching here! One would have said that the picture was safe enough."

"Indeed, yes!"

"Almost on the stroke of twelve he came."

"You saw him?"

"No. He was seen by nobody but Captain Mellish, who caught only a glimpse of him. The captain heard him in the passage; we heard nothing. The captain gave the alarm. He threw the door open—he had his revolver in his hand. Both of them fired—there were several shots—but the cunning rascal fired at the lights, and they went out. We had not thought of that."

"Naturally he would want to work in the dark."

"Yes. There was great confusion. We were stumbling over one another in the dark—none of us knew quite what was happening—and when we obtained lights the man was gone. He cannot have been inside the house a few minutes—perhaps not two minutes."

"How did he get away?"

"The window in the passage was smashed through with a chair, and he must have jumped out into the quadrangle. Captain Mellish was convinced that one of his shots struck the rascal, but no blood was seen anywhere."

"Was Captain Mellish wounded? You say there was shooting on both sides."

"He had a scratch on his cheek—a bullet had narrowly missed him." The Head shuddered. "I should never have forgiven myself if he had been injured. He was really the only one of us to keep his head in the excitement."

"And the picture—"

"In the excitement and confusion we had forgotten the picture. But when we looked at it—never dreaming that the villain had succeeded in his design—we saw that the picture had been cut out of the frame. Up till that moment I had not thought that the burglar had succeeded in entering the study—and I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw that the

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picture was gone. But it was gone; the frame was left as you see it now."

Ferrers Locke glanced at the empty frame.

"An extraordinary story!" he said.

"It is amazing! It seems like a dream to me now," said the Head. "The lights were extinguished so suddenly that nobody had a chance of seeing the cracksmen. Captain Mellish had a glimpse of him, as I have said, but that was all. He has an impression that he was a short, thick-set man, but he is not sure of even that."

"The man jumped out through the window in the passage?"

"Yes."

"Was he seen to do so?"

"No; but we heard the crash of the glass."

"And the mastiff in the quadrangle?"

"That is very curious. The dog appears not to have heard him, seen him, or scented him. He had extraordinary good fortune."

"How did he escape from the quadrangle? The school wall is high."

"He climbed over by means of the ivy."

"Ah! Traces were found?"

"Yes. Captain Mellish found the place—the ivy had been dragged loose."

"And the policemen in the road?"

"Saw nothing."

"They were upon the spot?"

"They were patrolling up and down outside the wall. No part of the wall could have been out of their sight for more than a few minutes."

"Yet they saw and heard nothing?"

"Nothing."

"And how did the cracksmen gain admission to the house? You say that all the doors and windows were fast?"

"All of them! And afterwards, Inspector Skeat made a round of the house, and all of the fastenings were found intact. The smashed window, of course, we could not be sure about; sash and glass were broken, and it may have been by that window that the thief entered."

"A most extraordinary thing, sir."

"Most extraordinary!"

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" said the doctor.

Captain Mellish entered.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

On the Telephone.

CAPTAIN MELLISH shook hands with the Head, who introduced him at once to Ferrers Locke. The captain turned to the detective with a very pleasant smile.

"It is a real privilege to meet you, Mr. Locke," he said. "I have heard a great deal about you, but have never had the pleasure of seeing you before. I hope I am not in the way? If I am, please say so, and I will run away." The captain laughed his frank, pleasant laugh. "I came over because I thought you might care to have my account of what happened here the other night, but my time is my own—I can wait. I have a cousin in the Fourth Form here, and I will look him up if you are busy."

"Not at all, Captain Mellish," said the detective. "Dr. Holmes is giving me the details of the strange affair of last Saturday, and I should like to have your account, too."

"Very good," said the captain, seating himself. "I do not know that I can tell you any more than Dr. Holmes, but every little helps, I suppose."

"Undoubtedly."

"Then fire away!" said the captain. "I know you detective gentlemen have a way of drawing out unsuspected items of information by asking leading questions. Many trifles that to a layman appear insignificant have an importance for the trained mind."

"That is very true," said the Head. "It is quite possible that Mr. Locke may elicit something, even from one of us,

which has escaped our own attention entirely."

"I hope so," said Mr. Locke. "You were here, I understand, with four others, captain?"

"Just so."

"And you were the first to hear the enemy?"

"Yes—I heard him in the passage."

"You have quick ears?"

"A man has to be quick of hearing on the Indian frontier, where I had my training. We get all our senses sharpened up out there," said Captain Mellish, with a smile. "Still, I would not say I am quicker than the others who were present."

"Oh, but you are!" said the Head.

"Not one of us heard the slightest sound. Even when you threw the door open I thought that you must be mistaken. Though it proved otherwise."

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"Then the light went out?"

"In the passage—yes. I brushed against the man; and the others rushed out into the passage in the dark. Then a bullet came through the doorway and smashed the light here, and the study was in the dark, too. It all passed in a second. But I had no idea that the man had contrived to enter the study itself—till we found the picture gone afterwards."

"You saw the man?"

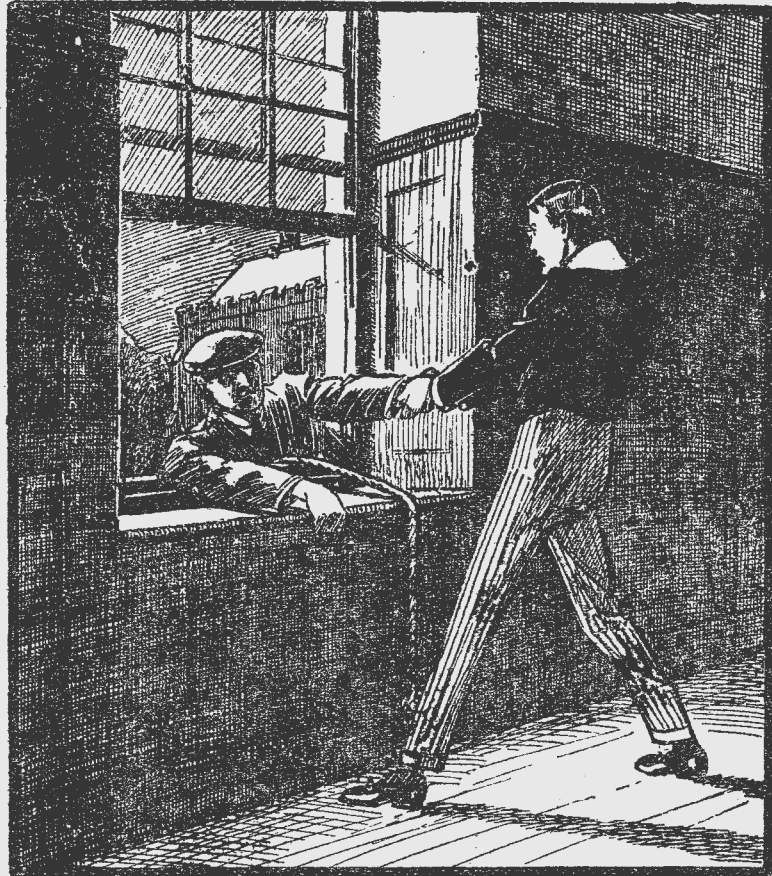
"The merest glimpse."

"Describe him—as well as you can."

"I have an impression of a short, thick-set man—I think with a moustache. I caught the glitter of his eyes, but I would not swear to their colour."

"You could not hazard a guess?"

"Well, blue, I think—but I could not be certain."



The detective came up the rope hand over hand, and a dim form appeared below the window. "I'm heah, Mr. Locke!" whispered D'Arcey. Ferrers Locke climbed in at the window.

"You fired at the man, I understand?"

"Yes—and hit him! I am sure of that."

"No traces of blood seem to have been discovered," remarked Ferrers Locke.

"No; it was not so bad as that. But I feel quite sure that at least one of my bullets went home," said the captain. "I am a pretty good shot, and it was a close range. The light, of course, was very uncertain."

"You fired first?"

"Yes—I had to. You see, the man had a revolver in his hand, and he was about to fire. I thought I was the target, but it turned out that he was firing at the electric light in the passage. We fired almost together—indeed, it sounded like one shot, as Mr. Railton observed afterwards."

"That description, however, is something for the police to work upon?" remarked Ferrers Locke thoughtfully.

"Yes; they have it, such as it is. But it was all very vague."

"It is somewhat odd, is it not, that no one else saw the man?—because to fire into this room and smash the lamp, he must have appeared near the doorway. The passage was in darkness, but there would be some light from the doorway."

"Yes, that is true. I was in the passage, stumbling against the man at the time, as far as I can make out. It was confused, of course, and the impression left upon my mind is not very clear of that precise moment."

"Naturally!" said Ferrers Locke, with a nod. "You were in the study, doctor?"

"Yes."

"Yet you did not see the man as he fired in?"

"No; I cannot say I did. I remember catching a glimpse of the captain, and then there was the report of the pistol. If I did not know that Captain Mellish was a good shot, and that the cracksman was deliberately aiming to put out the light, I should have fancied that it was a random ball from Captain Mellish's pistol that struck the lamp here and smashed it."

"Oh, that is too bad!" said the captain, laughing. "I am too careful to fire at random, my dear doctor; a random bullet might have hit you instead of the lamp."

"I should like to see Mr. Railton and Kildare," said Ferrers Locke.

"I will send for them at once."

Dr. Holmes rang, and Toby was sent for the Housemaster and the captain of the school. Mr. Railton and Kildare arrived together.

They could add but little to what the others had related. Neither of them had seen the cracksman. But they admitted that it was very singular that they had seen nothing of him when he fired into the study and smashed the lamp. But the whole affair had passed in such a whirl of excitement and alarm that they hardly knew what they had seen, and what they had not seen.

"Where was the inspector?" asked Ferrers Locke.

"He was in the study all the time, blowing his whistle," said Mr. Railton. "He was still there when we obtained lights."

"Then he must actually have been within a few paces of the thief when the picture was cut out of the frame!"

"Undoubtedly!" said the Housemaster.

"Yet he did not hear—"

"He was blowing his whistle very loudly, as a warning to the officers outside, and that probably drowned the sound made by the cracksman's knife."

"Yes, very likely. It was in the dark, too, and he saw nothing?"

"Nothing."

"How the man got into the house is a mystery," said Mr. Railton. "I can vouch for it that every door and window was secured, and they were found so afterwards."

"Excepting the window in the passage here?"

"Yes; that was smashed—the chair that stands in the corner of the passage, further along, was used for the purpose."

"The corner of the passage is some way from the window?"

"About ten or twelve feet."

"And the passage, then, was in darkness?"

"Yes."

"Yet the thief, a stranger to the school, saw the chair at that distance, fetched it, and used it to smash out the window?"

"It appears so."

"Bless my soul!" said the Head. "It is very extraordinary. But would you not suggest, Mr. Locke, that the cracksman had any knowledge of the interior of this house—that he had any opportunity of exploring the place?"

"It is very singular, at all events. He could not have smashed out the window without some heavy article, and it looks as if he knew the chair was there."

"Perhaps he saw it when he entered—if he entered by that window!" said the captain reflectively.

"That window is flush with this study window, I think. If the thief entered by that window, he would be entering from the open quadrangle—and you tell me there was a dog loose there. Was the dog near the house?"

"Yes, indeed," said the Head. "I

remember hearing him under my window only a few minutes before the alarm."

"Barking?"

"No; he was not barking."

"Then he was not alarmed?"

"I suppose not."

"Yet at that moment the cracksman must have entered by that window—only a few yards from this, in the same wall."

"Yes; it is very peculiar."

"It seems impossible that he could have entered by the passage window, considering all the circumstances," said Mr. Railton, very thoughtfully. "Yet all the other windows and the doors were found intact."

"You have found some theory already, Mr. Locke," said the captain, with his keen brown eyes on the detective's face.

Ferrers Locke smiled.

"Not exactly a theory," he said; "but it is possible that, after sending that impertinent telephone message which gave you all the impression that he was coming to the house at midnight, the thief may have contrived to conceal himself in the building, and may have been lurking in some empty room or garret for hours before the alarm."

The Head started.

"By gad!" cried the captain. "We never thought of that, doctor—and the inspector never thought of it either, by Jove!"

"Upon my word," exclaimed Mr. Railton, "it is quite possible. In a rambling building like this, it would be easy enough for someone to slip in after dusk, and remain concealed—there are old rooms that are never entered."

"By George!" said Kildare.

"I do not say so," said Ferrers Locke; "I suggest it as a possibility. It would account for the fact that the man was in the house, with no apparent means of entering. But we shall see. I will work on the case immediately, and let you know how I progress."

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Assistance Accepted.

"TEA'S ready!"

"Pway don't wait for me, deah boys!"

"Oh, we won't!" said Blake of the Fourth cheerfully. "But I suppose you're coming to tea, aren't you?"

"Not just at present!"

"Aren't you hungry?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Yaas; a little bit peckish!"

"Then why don't you come to tea?"

"I'm waitin'!"

"What are you waiting for?"

"Fewwahs Locke!"

The juniors looked at D'Arcy in astonishment. He was standing at the end of the passage that led to the Head's study, leaning in an elegant attitude against the wall. His eyeglass was turned towards the door of Dr. Holmes' study.

"You're waiting for Ferrers Locke?" repeated Tom Merry.

"Yaas, whathah!"

"Oh, you're thinking of bringing him to tea in the study?" said Blake.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"I'm not thinkin' of anythin' so fivvohs, deah boys!"

"Then what—"

"I am goin' to look into the case of the missin' picture, deah boys!" said D'Arcy, with dignity.

"But the picture wasn't in a case!" said Monty Lowther. "It was just ripped out of the frame by the giddy cracksman!"

"Pway don't be an ass, Lowthah!" said Arthur Augustus, as the juniors chuckled. "This is not a time for wotten puns! I am goin' to speak to Mr. Locke about it, and I twust he will allow me to

help him in the mattah! I believe I shall be able to give him gwreat assistance!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no cause whatevah for wibald laughah!" said the swell of St. Jim's. "Pway run away and have tea. I will join you as soon as I have seen Mr. Locke!"

"Better come now!"

"Imposs, deah boy!"

"Look here, you silly ass!" exclaimed Blake. "If you talk rot to Mr. Locke, he will sit on you! You've got to keep off the grass!"

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon Blake with lofty disdain.

"I twust Mr. Locke will be glad of my expert assistance," he said, "and I weward you as an uttah ass, Blake!"

"Are you coming?" roared Blake.

"No, I am not comin'!"

"Then we'll carry you!"

"I wufuse to be cawwied!"

"Collar him!" said Blake.

The juniors closed in on the swell of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus backed away, and put up his hands and pushed back his beautiful white cuffs.

"I twust you will not compel me to thwash you, deah boys!" he said.

"Yes; I can see you thrashing the lot of us!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Now, take an arm or a leg each, and heave away!"

"Hands off, you wottahs! Ow!"

"Collar him!"

"Bai Jove! Oh—ow!"

There was a wild struggle, and Arthur Augustus was swept bodily off the floor. He struggled furiously in the grasp of the juniors, and in the terrific din the fellows did not hear the Head's door open, or see Ferrers Locke come down the passage.

The detective stopped, and looked at them with a smile.

"Ahem!" he said.

"Oh!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Mr. Locke!"

The juniors let go Arthur Augustus as if he had suddenly become red-hot.

It was rather unfortunate that they should have let go suddenly at that moment, for D'Arcy was raised a foot from the floor, all ready to be carried away.

He dopped. Bump!

"Yawwooh!"

"Pray don't allow me to interrupt you, my dear boys," said Ferrers Locke blandly.

"Ow! Bai Jove! Wow!"

"Ahem!" said Tom Merry.

"Er—er—h'm'm!" said Blake.

Arthur Augustus sat up.

"You silly asses!" he roared. "You fivvohful wottahs! I— Oh, bai Jove! Is that you, Mr. Locke?"

"Yes, it is I," said the detective, smiling.

Arthur Augustus scrambled up. He bestowed a wrathful glare upon the grinning juniors, and then turned to the detective.

"I want to speak to you about a wathah important—mattah, sir," said Arthur Augustus, "if you have a few minutes to spare—"

Ferrers Locke looked surprised.

"What is it?" he asked. "I have no time to lose. I am going over to Glyn House now; but if you have something to say to me—"

"It's about the wobbewy, sir," said D'Arcy, unheeding the looks of the other fellows.

"You know something about that?"

D'Arcy coughed.

"Ahem! Not exactly, sir; but—"

"Oh, you ass!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Pway don't intewwupt me, Tom Mewwy. As a mattah of fact, sir, I am vewy gwreatly intewested in detective work, and I want to help to look for the Head's missin' picture, sir. I want you to let me help you in lookin' into the case, sir."

The juniors held their breath.

That offer from a junior schoolboy to

the celebrated detective was so unheard of that they would not have been surprised if Ferrers Locke had told Arthur Augustus D'Arcy exactly what he thought of it.

But the thunder did not come.

Ferrers Locke smiled.

"That is very kind of you, D'Arcy," he said.

"Oh!" murmured Tom Merry. "My hat!"

"The fact is, sir, that the Head has been so cut up by his picture goin', sir, that we all feel vewy wotten about it," said D'Arcy confidentially, "and I weally think, sir, that I have some gifts as a detective."

"Quite possibly," said Ferrers Locke. "I shall be very pleased to accept your assistance, D'Arcy."

The juniors gasped.

Arthur Augustus gave them a triumphant glance.

"Jollay good, sir!" he exclaimed. "You can rely upon me."

"I am going over to Glyn House about the matter now," said the detective calmly.

"Pray get your hat and come with me."

"Yaas, wathah, Mr. Locke!"

And Arthur Augustus rushed away for his best topper.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at Ferrers Locke. They could hardly believe their ears. That the famous detective really considered that D'Arcy could be of any use in helping to investigate the case seemed incredible. But it was still more likely that Ferrers Locke was amusing himself by pulling D'Arcy's leg. The juniors simply could not make it out.

Ferrers Locke chatted pleasantly with them while D'Arcy was gone for his hat. When the swell of St. Jim's returned Ferrers Locke walked away with him.

Tom Merry & Co. watched them crossing the quad, Ferrers Locke with his steady stride, and D'Arcy as if he was walking on air.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath as they disappeared out of the gates.

"Well, my hat!" he exclaimed. "What does that mean?"

"What silly ass was it said the age of miracles was past?" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Mr. Locke must be pulling his leg," said Blake.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"It's not that," he said. "But I'm blessed if I can make it out. Let's go to tea."

And they went.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Ferrers Locke's Assistant.

FERRERS LOCKE seemed deep in thought as he left St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not venture to interrupt the detective's meditations. He walked along beside Ferrers Locke in silence, occasionally glancing up at the face of the detective.

Arthur Augustus was exceedingly proud and exceedingly pleased at the acceptance of his offer to assist. He would have stated his views on the case at full length if the detective had asked for them. That, however, Mr. Locke omitted to do.

They had reached the turning in the lane which led to Glyn House before the detective broke the silence. There he paused, and turned to the swell of St. Jim's with his kind smile.

"So you want to help me?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"You think you have an aptitude for detective work, eh?"

"I trust so, Mr. Locke," said Arthur Augustus modestly.

"Very well, I will confide in you," said Ferrers Locke.

Arthur Augustus felt his very ears burn with gratification.

"Oh, Mr. Locke!", he gasped.

"About your abilities as a detective I

will say nothing; but certainly you can be of use to me, if you choose."

"Anythin', sir!"

"Very good. Now, I suppose in the School House at St. Jim's there are some empty rooms—rooms that no one ever enters?"

Arthur Augustus looked surprised.

"Plenty of them, sir," he said. "Lots of the gawwets aren't used, and then there's the punishment-room—Nobody's Study, as we call it. Nobody ever goes in there."

"Unless some boy is confined there for punishment, I suppose?"

"Yaas; but it doesn't happen once in a blue moon, sir. Lunley-Lunley was shut up there the othah week; but it's not likely to be used again—hardly."

"Where is that room?"

"It's at the corner of the Fourth Form passage, Mr. Locke. There's a deep recess, and a door at the end of it, and that's the door of Nobody's Study. You wouldn't notice it goin' down the passage—the recess looks like an alcove."

"Good! Where does the window look out?"

"On a narrow passage between two walls, sir—part of the School House and the gym. You can't see it from the quadwangle."

"Very good. Is there any way of getting to the window?"

"Oh, no; it's a sheer wall."

"No way of climbing?"

"Not unless a rope was let down from the window."

"Suppose, D'Arcy, that I wanted to get into that room, unknown to the school—even to the Head himself?"

"You, Mr. Locke!" exclaimed D'Arcy, in astonishment.

"Yes."

"Bai Jove!"

"Could I rely upon you to leave your dormitory without exciting any alarm, and let a rope down from that window for me?"

"Gwreat Scott!"

"Well?" said Mr. Locke.

"Yaas, wathah, sir! But why—"

The detective made a gesture.

"My assistants are not allowed to ask questions, D'Arcy."

"Pwavy excuse me, sir. But do you weally want me to do that?" asked the astonished swell of St. Jim's.

"I think so."

"I'll do it, sir, like a shot!"

"Very good. You will not mention the matter to anyone—even to your closest chum?"

"Not a whisper, sir."

"You know the old saying, D'Arcy—that a man who has a secret to keep should not only hide the secret, but hide the fact that he has one."

"I undahstand, sir."

"Not a syllable on the subject—not a whisper."

"I will be careful, sir."

"Good! Now, to-morrow night, say at eleven o'clock, can I rely upon you to do this for me?" said Mr. Locke quietly.

"Yaas, sir."

"You will obtain a rope without attracting attention—I am sure I can rely upon your discretion," said the detective, with a keen glance at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Yaas, wathah, sir! I flattah myself that I am a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Then I shall depend upon you."

"Yaas, Mr. Locke."

"Describe the situation of the window to me, so that I shall be able to find it after dark without trouble."

Arthur Augustus did so, and the detective listened keenly. Ferrers Locke knew St. Jim's pretty well, and he was satisfied.

"Quite clear," he said. "I rely upon you, then. And not a word—either to any fellow belonging to St. Jim's, or to anybody else."

"Not a word, sir."

"You may hear that I have gone back to London," said Mr. Locke. "Whatever you hear, it is to make no difference to this arrangement?"

"Yaas," said D'Arcy.

"You understand perfectly?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"Very well. Now I will leave you."

The detective shook hands very warmly with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Arthur Augustus was in the seventh heaven. He intended to keep his word to Mr. Locke most carefully, but afterwards—when it was all over, and the detective's scheme, whatever it was, had been crowned with success—then the swell of St. Jim's would enjoy his triumph.

He would have proved to the unbelieving St. Jim's fellows that he had been able to help Mr. Locke, after all.

Arthur Augustus held his head very high as he walked back to St. Jim's. Ferrers Locke, with a thoughtful expression upon his clear-cut face, turned into the lane that led to the big metal gates of Glyn House, and a few minutes later arrived at the millionaire's residence. He was shown in at once to Mr. Glyn.

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Locke!" exclaimed Mr. Glyn. "I hear that Dr. Holmes has called upon you for your services."

The detective nodded, with a smile.

"Yes," he answered. "I hope to be fortunate enough to run 'X' to earth."

"I have faith in you, Mr. Locke," said Mr. Glyn.

"I hope I shall justify it, sir."

"I hope so, indeed. Look at this!"

The millionaire opened a drawer in his desk, and took out a telegraph-form. He spread it out upon the table before the detective. Ferrers Locke glanced at the dead-black writing of the telegram.

"Handed in at Charing Cross, 5 p.m. Will call for diamond necklace Thursday evening. Expect me at eleven.—X."

The millionaire gazed at Ferrers Locke as he read the telegram.

"When did you get this?" asked Mr. Locke.

"Half an hour ago."

"Great Scott!"

"The necklace to which the scoundrel refers," explained Mr. Glyn, is one that I had purchased for my daughter Edith. It is a well-known necklace, and has an historic as well as an intrinsic value—but the money value is seven thousand pounds."

"That is a large sum—a temptation to our friend the enemy," said the detective, with a smile.

"Yes, I should not have been surprised if the cracksman had heard of it—the sale was mentioned in several papers, so he would have no difficulty in getting the information. The necklace will be delivered to me to-morrow morning. What astounds me is the insolence of this thief in warning me of his intention to steal it. That is the most singular circumstance about this criminal. He telephoned to Dr. Holmes that he was going to steal his Rembrandt; and, in spite of the watch that was kept, he succeeded. In the same way he sent a wire some time ago to Lord Westwood, and stole the bonds he threatened to steal. It appears to amuse him to steal his plunder while a watch is being kept upon it—for the watch, of course, must add to his danger in making the attempt."

A peculiar smile glided over Ferrers Locke's clear-cut face.

But it was gone in a second, and the millionaire, who was looking at the telegram, did not notice it.

"Now, what would you advise me to do, Mr. Locke?" asked Mr. Glyn. "Of course, I could wire to the jewellers not to deliver the necklace to-morrow. But that would only be putting off the evil day; it must be delivered some time,

and when it is delivered 'X' will know about it—"

"Yes, that would not improve matters in any way; it is useless to postpone the contest, if the contest is to come."

"I want you to advise me what to do. As I told you in my letter, the necklace will be here to-morrow; to-morrow night it will be in my safe. 'X' declares that at eleven to-morrow night he will be here to take it. What do you advise?"

"Let it be delivered."

"And then—keep a strict watch to-morrow night, I presume?"

"Undoubtedly!"

"You will remain?"

"I think so. And Captain Mellish—doubtless he would like an opportunity of measuring strength with the rascal again."

"Undoubtedly! He is very anxious for a chance at him. He is leaving my house on Saturday, to return to town, so this will be his only opportunity. And he will be a good man to help; he is a dead shot."

There was a tap at the door, and Captain Mellish looked in. He had just arrived from St. Jim's. He coughed slightly.

"H'm! I did not know Mr. Locke was here," he said. "If I am in the way—"

"On the contrary, please come in," said Ferrers Locke. "We were just speaking about you."

"In my favour, I hope?" said the captain, laughing.

"Yes. There will have to be a watch kept here to-morrow night, and Mr. Glyn and I both think that, if you care to run the risk a second time, you are exactly the man to help."

"By Jove, I shall be glad! I owe the cracksmen an account, as you know," said the captain, lightly touching his cheek, where a slight scratch was still visible on the sunburnt skin.

Ferrers Locke nodded.

"Look at that telegram!" he said.

Captain Mellish read the telegram.

"Jove! That fellow's insolence knows no bounds!" he exclaimed. "Surely this must be bluff; he could never venture upon such a feat a second time."

"It may be bluff; but I shall keep watch all the same," said the millionaire.

"And Mr. Locke will be here, also—and I shall have a couple of my strongest footmen in the room, too."

"A good idea," said the captain. "I shall be only too happy to help. It would be infamous if Miss Glyn were to be robbed of her necklace."

Ferrers Locke crossed to the door, opened it, and glanced into the passage. Then he closed the door again, and came back quietly. Mr. Glyn and the captain were watching him curiously.

"I suppose there is no danger of being overheard in this room?" asked the detective, glancing round at the panelled walls.

"None," said Mr. Glyn. "Surely you do not imagine, Mr. Locke, that the cracksmen has a confederate in the house?"

"I do not think so—but it is possible, and I am in the habit of leaving nothing to chance, Mr. Glyn."

"Quite right," said Captain Mellish, with a nod of approval. "Quite right!"

The detective lowered his voice.

"I have an idea," he said. "We shall keep strict watch to-morrow night—to capture the cracksmen, if possible—but the necklace need run no risk."

"How so?"

"It will not be in your safe."

"Ah! You mean I had better leave it in the jeweller's hands?"

Ferrers Locke shook his head.

"No. Depend upon it, 'X' has his eyes

open, and he will know whether the diamonds have been delivered or not."

"That is very probable," the captain remarked. "It is amazing how the rascal seems to get his information."

"Probably he or a confederate will keep watch upon the jeweller's place, and satisfy himself whether the necklace has been delivered. No, the necklace must be delivered here," said Ferrers Locke. "That is essential."

"But then—" said the millionaire. "But it need not remain in the safe here. When it is here, I will take it—"

"You!"

"Yes; I shall be going over to St. Jim's, to consult with the Head about the missing picture, you know. Even if the cracksmen is watching the house—as is quite possible—he will see nothing suspicious in that; but I shall take the diamonds with me, and ask Dr. Holmes to keep them locked up in his safe for the night. They can be fastened up in a packet, and even the doctor need not be told what the packet contains. I will simply ask him to hand it for me. No one but ourselves will have the slightest suspicion that the necklace is at the school. The cracksmen will make his attempt here, and we may capture him; but if, with his usual wonderful luck, he succeeds in getting at your safe—he will find nothing there."

Mr. Glyn burst into a laugh.

"Excellent!" he cried. "Excellent!"

Captain Mellish was silent.

"You do not approve of the idea, captain?" asked Ferrers Locke, looking at him.

"Yes, I approve," said the captain. "But I cannot help thinking that the cracksmen may get wind of the transfer in some manner."

"In what way?"

"Ah, do not ask me that," said Captain Mellish, laughing. "I cannot account for his cunning. But certainly he has marvellous means of keeping himself posted. He may suspect you are taking the necklace there, if he is watching the house and sees you leave."

"I do not think it likely. At all events, the diamonds will be safer there than here—you must admit that."

"Yes, no doubt that is the case."

"The idea is excellent!" exclaimed Mr. Glyn. "Simply excellent! We shall have the chance of capturing the thief, without the risk of losing the necklace."

"But—" said the captain.

"Oh, come, captain, don't throw cold water upon an excellent idea," said the millionaire.

"But what would you say if you heard on Friday that 'X' had paid his visit to the school instead of this house, and that the diamonds were gone?" said the captain.

"Impossible, my dear fellow!"

"Well, of course, Mr. Locke's judgment is the best," said the captain frankly. "I hope the affair will turn out successfully. And, by Jove, I should like to get to close quarters with that scoundrel once more!"

And the three sat for some time, discussing in low tones the plans for the morrow.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Arthur Augustus Helps.

TOM MERRY & CO. went to bed at the usual time the next night.

Arthur Augustus, remembering the advice of Ferrers Locke, not only concealed his secret, but concealed the fact that he had one to conceal.

Not one of his chums noticed anything unusual in his manner that evening, and not one of the Fourth guessed, for a moment, that he went to bed with the intention of getting up before rising-bell.

Arthur Augustus was lying very low! There was the usual chatter in the

Fourth Form dormitory in the School House, till one by one the juniors dropped off to sleep.

At length only one of them remained awake. It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's propped himself upon his pillow, afraid to lay his head down lest he should slip into slumber.

Half-past ten sounded from the clock-tower, then the quarter. Then Arthur Augustus stirred.

The dormitory was still and silent; all the fellows were fast asleep.

The swell of St. Jim's slipped quietly out of bed and dressed himself. As a rule, Arthur Augustus took a good deal of time to dress. But on this occasion he completed that operation in ten minutes.

He made hardly a sound as he dressed. Then he stole on tiptoe to the door of the dormitory, opened it, and quitted the room. He drew the door softly shut behind him.

The passage was in darkness. Downstairs, a light was burning—some of the masters had not yet gone to bed. But the dormitory passages and the juniors' studies were in darkness, and D'Arcy had no fear of being seen. He crept down the stairs to the Fourth-Form passage. At the end of the passage was the deep, shadowy recess which gave admittance to the punishment-room. At the end of the recess was the heavy oaken door of the old room.

D'Arcy was in complete darkness now; but he knew the way well enough. It came eerily into his mind at that moment that that room was the haunted room of St. Jim's, and he shivered for a moment. But he did not hesitate. He opened the door and entered Nobody's Study.

There was the faintest glimmer of light from the single window. The room struck the junior with a chill; the walls and the floor were of solid blocks of stone—the massive stone that was used in the construction of the oldest part of St. Jim's. D'Arcy closed the door behind him.

From the dark chimney he drew a coil of rope, which he had concealed there during the day. He uncoiled it, and stepped to the window. The window creaked as he pushed up the sash with a cautious hand.

Arthur Augustus looked out of the window. The window opened upon an entry between two high buildings, into which little of the starlight penetrated. Below was a mass of darkness. Eleven o'clock had chimed out from the tower.

Was Ferrers Locke there?

D'Arcy wondered.

Bernard Glyn of the Shell had been home that day, and he had brought back to St. Jim's the story of the telegram from the cracksmen. All the fellows knew of the vigil that was being kept at Glyn House. It seemed to D'Arcy, as to the rest, that Ferrers Locke would certainly be watching with the rest. But the detective had bidden him keep the arrangement, whatever happened; and Arthur Augustus, whether he had abilities as a detective or not, was showing that at least he could obey orders.

He lowered the rope from the window. If the detective was there, he would hear the sound as it slithered down.

The rope reached the ground. Arthur Augustus listened intently.

There was a slight pull on the rope. The junior felt the pull, and he understood. Ferrers Locke was there! The watchers at Glyn House were watching without the detective.

There was no sound, no voice from below. There came another pull on the rope, to feel if it was secure. Arthur Augustus tied the end of it to the bar of the grate in the room. Then there came another pull, and the rope was taut.

"It's all right," D'Arcy breathed into the darkness below the window.

There was no reply.

But he heard the faint sounds of a man climbing the rope.

The rope was knotted at intervals, and the climb was easy enough to an active man like Ferrers Locke. The detective came up hand over hand, and the dim form appeared in the gloom below the window.

"I'm here, Mr. Locke!" whispered D'Arcy.

"Good!"

Ferrers Locke climbed in at the window. He stood for a moment or two breathing deeply; then he closed down the sash of the window. Arthur Augustus waited.

The detective broke the silence. He spoke in so faint a whisper that the swell of St. Jim's had to strain his ears to listen.

"You did not wake anybody in leaving the dormitory, D'Arcy?"

"No, Mr. Locke."

"No one knows you are here?"

"Nobody."

"No one suspects?"

"No one, sir."

"Very good! Now, how many people are still up—do you know?"

"I think the Head is still in his study, sir," said D'Arcy. "Pewwaps Mr. Wailton is up. But neally ewevybody is in bed. Captain Mellish is staying at the school for to-night, and, not feeling well, he went to bed early."

"Where is his room?"

"He has the woom next to Mr. Linton's; you have slept in it yourself when you were stayin' here, Mr. Locke."

"Yes, I remember the room. Thank you for what you have done, D'Arcy; I am very much obliged to you."

"Not at all, sir," said Arthur Augustus modestly. "Is there anythin' else I can do?"

"Nothing, thanks. You had better go back to bed now."

Arthur Augustus felt a very keen sense of disappointment, but moved silently away. He left the detective in the punishment-room, and returned silently to the Fourth-Form dormitory. But he did not go to bed. He lay down in his clothes, and drew a blanket over him, fully intending to stay awake. But the hour was late, and Arthur Augustus was sleepy. Ere long his eyes had closed, and he was slumbering as soundly as any fellow in the Fourth-Form dormitory.

Ferrers Locke remained some minutes in Nobody's Study. He felt in his pocket, as if to make sure that a weapon was there, and ready. Then he drew on a pair of soft rubber shoes. Then, without a sound, he quitted the room, and moved along the passage to the stairs.

It was a quarter past eleven. Everyone in the School House of St. Jim's was in bed, with the exception of the Head.

Ferrers Locke, moving as silently as a ghost, came to the end of the passage where the Head's study was situated. A light was still burning there, and there was a light under the study door.

Ferrers Locke drew back, and disappeared into a deep shadowy alcove at the end of the passage.

Half-past eleven struck from the clock tower.

Then there was a movement in the Head's study. A few minutes later, the light was turned out and the door opened. Dr. Holmes came out of his study, locked the door carefully on the outside, and put the key in his pocket.

He switched off the electric light in the passage, and walked away towards the stairs. He passed the alcove where the detective stood in the darkness, without a suspicion. His footsteps died away in the distance.

The School House was plunged into deep silence.

Ferrers Locke waited.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
Capturing the Cracksman.

FERRERS LOCKE stood silent, hardly breathing, in the deep, dark alcove.

For what was the detective waiting?

It would have been hard to tell. If Mr. Glyn, who was keeping watch and ward at Glyn House, had known that the detective was in the School House of St. Jim's, he would have been amazed.

The millionaire supposed Ferrers Locke to be keeping watch in the grounds of Glyn House. No one but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Ferrers Locke himself knew where the detective was. Why was he there? The threatened visit of the cracksman was to be paid to Glyn House, not to the school. Did the detective suspect that, perhaps, the cunning criminal had become aware of the transfer of the diamonds? Even so, why was he waiting alone—unknown to Mr. Glyn, unknown to Captain Mellish, unknown to Dr. Holmes, in the dark alcove near the Head's study?

the black darkness of the passage before him.

A sound again—a scarcely audible sound of a cautious footstep. Had not the detective's ears been of the keenest, he could not have heard it, though it was passing within a couple of yards of him. Whoever was passing him in the darkness was accustomed to moving about with caution, evidently.

The sound died away—and then Ferrers, Locke moved silently to the opening of the alcove, and looked along the passage.

He could see nothing; the passage was densely dark.

But he could hear.

The unseen, unknown individual who had passed him in the darkness had stopped outside the door of the Head's study.

That door was locked. Faintly through the darkness came a sound—

Click!

Ferrers Locke smiled grimly.

The lock of the study door had been



The handcuffed man reeled against the wall, gasping. There was a crape mask over his face, and only his chin and eyes could be seen. Every eye was bent upon the gasping man as he leaned against the wall. His wrists were dragging convulsively at the handcuffs. His lips were shut in a straight line. "Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Head. "It is really the cracksman—the mysterious 'X'!"

It would have been difficult to explain. But it was certain that the famous detective was waiting for something—for some happening that he expected.

Midnight!

The last stroke of midnight died away, leaving, as it seemed, a deeper silence behind it. No sound in the house—nothing but the scuttling of a rat behind the wainscot, and the rustle of the leafless branches in the quad.

Dead silence!

Half-past twelve! The detective had hardly stirred. His ears were strained to listen.

A slight sound in the silence!

Ferrers Locke's eyes gleamed, and he bent his head a little, his eyes fixed upon

picked. He strained his ears, and heard the door close softly.

The unknown was in the Head's study.

What was he doing there?

Ferrers Locke thought that he knew.

He did not move from the alcove. Whatever the unknown was doing in the study, he was to effect it uninterrupted by the detective.

Ferrers Locke waited.

In his mind's eye, it seemed to him that he could see the unknown—he could see him stop before the safe in the study—he could see him pause there, and work silently, hard, grimly, till the safe yielded to him, and the iron door swung open.

Yet the detective did not stir.

He knew that the Head's safe was being cracked—he knew that the packet he had brought over from Glyn House and placed in the safe was being taken—and he did not move.

He waited.

One!

The deep boom sounded through the still, chilly air of the November night.

It was one o'clock.

St. Jim's was plunged into grave-like stillness. Ferrers Locke listened. There was a faint sound from the direction of the Head's study—the door was opened, and it had closed again.

Click!

It was locked. In the morning it would look as it had looked over-night—only an expert eye would be able to detect the fact that the lock had been picked in the hours of darkness.

Ferrers Locke drew a deep breath.

He felt in his pocket again, as if to make sure that something was there—and stood ready, where the alcove opened into the passage, his hand outstretched in the darkness.

The unknown was returning.

But this time he could not pass without coming into contact with the detective.

Closer, closer!

He was moving as silently as before—the detective rather felt than heard his approach. Closer—till something touched the detective's outstretched hand in the darkness, and there was a sudden, startled exclamation.

"Ha!"

Ferrers Locke sprang like a tiger.

The unknown, taken utterly by surprise, went heavily to the floor, with the detective on top of him, holding upon him with an iron grip.

There was a cry from the man as he fell, a cry in which surprise and terror were mingled.

Then he began to struggle.

But it was too late—he had met his master. Ferrers Locke had won. There was a click in the darkness—click!

Then a savage oath.

For the unseen man, as he struggled, found that his wrists were locked together, and he could not get at his weapon, and he could not escape.

He lay panting under the detective.

Ferrers Locke, gasping for breath, rose to his feet.

He had succeeded. He had taken his enemy by surprise, and he had handcuffed him before he could reach a weapon—or there might have been grim murder done there in the darkness. And now the detective broke silence at last.

"Caught!" he said.

There was a gasping breath from the man on the floor.

"My heavens!" he muttered. "Caught, by gad! Trapped!"

"Yes, trapped!" said Ferrers Locke.

"Caught at last—'X'!"

"My heavens!"

Ferrers Locke felt in his pocket and took out a police-whistle.

He blew it sharply.

The sharp, sudden blast rang through the silent house. Twice again the detective blew, filling every recess of the old School House with echoes. There was a cry from the handcuffed man. He had staggered up.

"Ferrers Locke—it is you?"

"Yes."

"Half the diamonds if you let me go."

"Not for all the diamonds in South Africa, my friend."

"All of them—and the picture—everything!"

"You are wasting your breath."

There were sounds in the house now—opening doors, calling voices. The shrill blasts of the whistle had awakened every sleeper. Lights flashed on the stairs.

Ferrers Locke replaced the whistle, and

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stepped to the switch of the electric light in the passage. He pressed the switch, and the passage was flooded with light.

The handcuffed man reeled back. He leaned against the wall, panting. He was a tall, powerfully-built man. His face could not be seen—there was a crape mask over it, and only the chin and the eyes gleaming through the openings in the crape could be seen. The mask had been pulled a little aside as he fell, but it still hid the face of the cracksman.

Footsteps and voices came down the stairs, along the passage. Kildare, half dressed, with a poker in his hand, was the first to reach the spot. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was a good second, and he was dressed. A crowd of seniors and juniors came behind, wild with excitement. D. Holmes and Mr. Railton hurried down together.

"What is it?" exclaimed the Head.

"What—Mr. Locke?"

"You here?" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

Ferrers Locke nodded.

"Yes; and I have been fortunate enough to capture the cracksman."

"The cracksman!"

"X!"

"There he stands!"

Every eye was bent upon the gasping man as he reeled against the wall of the passage. His wrists were dragging convulsively at the handcuffs, but the steel was too strong for him. His lips were set in a tight line, his eyes were burning.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Head.

"It is really the cracksman—'X'?"

"Yes."

"Let us see his face!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "This is a very remarkable thing, for Captain Mellish's impression of the cracksman was that he was a short, thick-set man."

Ferrers Locke laughed.

"I have no doubt Captain Mellish had his reasons for making that statement," he said.

"What—you do not imply—"

"That the captain was not stating the facts, undoubtedly!"

"Mr. Locke!"

"You shall see the prisoner," said Ferrers Locke. "I warn you to be prepared for a surprise."

The detective stretched out his hand and tore the mask from the face of the handcuffed man.

The electric light shone upon the face that was revealed—a face white with rage and shame—a face that all knew well.

It was the face of Captain Mellish!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

"X."

"CAPTAIN MELLISH!"

The name leaped to every lip.

"Captain Mellish!" said the Head dazedly. "Is this a—a joke? What does it mean, Ferrers Locke? What have you handcuffed Captain Mellish for?"

"Captain Mellish! Bai Jove!"

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "It's impossible! It can't be! Captain Mellish, he can't—he can't be the cracksman!"

"Good heavens!" cried Kildare.

Mellish of the Fourth was in the crowd. He turned a face, stricken with terror and dismay, upon the handcuffed man.

"Cecil!" he exclaimed. "Cecil, what does this mean?"

Captain Mellish gnawed his lip.

"Get me out of this, Mr. Locke," he said. "You have caught me—the game is up. Get me to prison—get me anywhere—out of this!"

Even this hard, unscrupulous heart of the cracksman was moved by the horror and dismay in the faces round him. All these fellows had known him, admired him, liked him—he had been a hero in their eyes. And he was exposed before all of them as a common thief—as a guest

who robbed his host—a traitor and robber. Even into the cracksman's face there came a flush of shame.

He gave his cousin a haggard look.

"I'm sorry for you, Percy," he said. "But—but the fellows won't be hard on you for what I've done—it wasn't your fault."

"Oh, good heavens!" groaned Mellish.

"Then it's true?"

"Can't you see it is?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Take me away, Ferrers Locke!" said the cracksman. "For mercy's sake get me out of this! You have no right to torture me!"

The detective nodded.

"Come!" he said.

"You may take the diamonds," said the captain bitterly. "The packet is in my breast-pocket."

The detective smiled slightly.

"You may keep that packet," he said. "I did not trust seven thousand pounds' worth of diamonds to chance, Captain Mellish. The diamonds are in my own pocket; that is a dummy package."

"What! Then you knew—"

"I knew."

The captain bowed his head.

"Then I have been trapped?" he said.

"It was the only way."

"I was a fool to enter into a contest with you, Ferrers Locke. Take me away."

The detective led the prisoner away. He was locked in his room, and a messenger was sent at once to Glyn House for Inspector Skeat. The St. Jim's fellows returned to bed, but not to sleep. Groups of them stayed talking in the dormitory passages, where all the lights were on.

Meanwhile, the Head and Mr. Railton had dressed, and joined Ferrers Locke in the Head's study. Ferrers Locke was waiting for the arrival of Inspector Skeat from Glyn House, to hand over the prisoner to him. Dr. Holmes was looking very pale and troubled.

The discovery of the rascality of Captain Mellish was a very great shock to him. And even now he did not understand. The captain had been caught in the very act, with the stolen packet in his breast, and the mask on his face. He had confessed his guilt, since it was useless to deny it; but how Ferrers Locke had discovered it was a mystery. Certainly no one else had had the slightest suspicion.

"Have you any objection to explaining how you brought this about, Mr. Locke?" asked Mr. Railton.

"None at all, sir."

"We are all in a state of utter amazement. The man's guilt is clear, but how in the name of all that is wonderful did you discover it?"

"I am utterly amazed," said the Head.

"I knew it would be a great surprise to you," said Ferrers Locke. "It is not such a surprise to me. The police have long since guessed that 'X,' when he was discovered, would turn out to be a man moving in a decent station of society—his knowledge of the places he robbed, his inside information concerning valuables, all pointed to that. The police knew it, and I knew it—and I should have expected the thief to turn out to be some man like the captain. Certainly, however, there was nothing in his ways or his manner to suggest a man leading a double life."

"Nothing, certainly," said the Head.

"He made the most agreeable impression upon us. He was very popular here."

Ferrers Locke nodded.

"It was his object to make himself so," he said. "He is, however, one of the most unscrupulous rascals I have ever encountered, but he is a very pleasant fellow in a social way. Criminals are not infrequently so, and I have not the slightest doubt that he enjoyed popularity, and liked to be liked by people he met."

"Yet he was a thief."
 "Yes, and a most unscrupulous one."
 "But how—"
 "It was not an easy case," said Ferrers Locke. "But I had a clue from the start—a clue which had escaped the police."
 "And that clue?"
 "The telephone message you received before the robbery."
 The Head stared.

"But in what did the clue consist, Mr. Locke?"
 "In this. The conclusion was, that the cracksmen was a man of iron nerve and unlimited impudence, that it amused him to display his power by warning his victim before he robbed him, in order to make a sensation by committing the robbery in spite of the watch that was kept."
 "Yes. Was not that the case?"

Ferrers Locke smiled.
 "There are criminals like that," he said. "Criminals suffer from 'swank' like any other class of men. But 'X,' I think, was a little too hard-headed for such boasting. No; I did not believe that the telegrams and telephone messages were merely criminal swank. I believed that they had an object."

"And that object?"
 "To cause a watch to be set over the article he wished to steal."

The Head started.
 "But surely that would make the robbery more difficult and dangerous?" he exclaimed.

"It would make it easier. Because Captain Mellish, in each instance, contrived to be one of the watchers."

"Oh," exclaimed the Head, with a deep breath, "I see it now!"

"I had thought over the matter a great deal," said Ferrers Locke. "I had formed that theory, even before I took up the case—that the insolent messages were sent, because the keeping watch gave the cracksmen an opportunity to be upon the spot unsuspected. I came down here with Captain Mellish's name in my mind. Captain Mellish had been present at Lord Westwood's house when a watch was being kept, after an insolent telegram had been received from the cracksmen. Captain Mellish was one of the party that watched here. Now, if my theory was correct, it was evident that Captain Mellish must be the man, because the other members of the watching party here were above suspicion—youself, Mr. Railton, Kildare, and Inspector Skeat. I do not mean to say that any person is above suspicion to a detective; but I mean that any member of the party, with the exception of Cecil Mellish, could not possibly have been the cracksmen."

"True!"

"At Glyn House to-day a telegram was received from 'X,' threatening the robbery of Miss Glyn's diamond necklace to-night at eleven. Captain Mellish was to be one of the party staying up to watch—the same old game. I suggested transferring the diamonds to your safe here, Dr. Holmes, in order that they might run no risks. Captain Mellish and Mr. Glyn knew of the transfer. Captain Mellish expressed a fear that 'X,' with his usual cunning, might get wind of it. That was a feeler, to prepare our minds for the discovery we were to make on the morrow. Now, I knew that if my theory was correct, Captain Mellish must devise some excuse for not keeping watch with us at Glyn House this night, as obviously he could not watch there and crack the safe here at the same time."

"He came over to see me," said Dr. Holmes. "And as he did not feel very well, I allowed him to stay the night."

"Exactly!" said Ferrers Locke. "That was part of his plan. He thought I should be safely out of the way, and that he would have no difficulty in committing the robbery."

"And you—"

"I introduced myself secretly into the house to watch. I had to allow him to go ahead with his work to obtain proof against him. There was no way of capturing him but by a trap. And so I trapped him. And I took him by surprise when he came out of your study, otherwise I might not be alive now to tell you what had happened."

The Head shuddered.

"Yes—I do not see it all," he said. "The other night, when we were watching here, who was it, then, that came and took the picture?"

Ferrers Locke laughed.

"No one came," he said.

"No one!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes.

"No one," said Ferrers Locke. "From the precautions that were taken, sir, it was practically impossible for anyone to enter the house. You will remember that it was Captain Mellish who gave the alarm. Captain Mellish was the only one who saw the intruder, Captain Mellish did all the shooting. As a matter of fact, he had sent you the telephone message, with the intention of being one of the watching party here, otherwise he could not have been in the house at all, and would have had no opportunity of committing the robbery. He did not hear a noise in the passage—you remember no one else heard it."

"I remember."

"He affected to hear it, and when he went into the passage, he himself fired at the light and extinguished it. He smashed

through the window with the chair, but no one leaped out. He shot the lamp out, in this study, and he, in the darkness, whipped out a knife and cut the picture from the frame!

"And afterwards, when you were searching for the picture and the cracksmen, that picture was folded up, or rolled up, and hidden on the person of the cracksmen, under your eyes—Captain Mellish himself!"

Dr. Holmes gasped.

"I understand now," he said. "And that was why he discovered the ivy loosened—he loosened it himself, to give the impression that someone had escaped into the road."

"Exactly!"

There was a sound of wheels in the quadrangle.

"Inspector Skeat!" said Ferrers Locke.

The inspector arrived in a state of almost dazed amazement. He could scarcely believe the message he had received, and he could scarcely believe his eyes when he gazed at Captain Mellish, alias "X," with the handcuffs upon his wrists. His look of almost idiotic amazement brought a grim smile to the face of the cracksmen himself.

"Well, you've got me," said Captain Mellish. "Dr. Holmes, before I go, allow me to express my regret. I have treated you very badly, and I have no excuse to offer. I came home from India with expensive tastes and little to gratify them with; I had peculiar talents, and I made use of them—that is my history. But you shall have your picture back. It has not been disposed of, and it is uninjured. Forgive me if you can."

"I forgive you," said the Head sadly.

"I am only sorry that such a man should have come to this. It is never too late to repent, Captain Mellish."

It was a nine days' wonder at St. Jim's.

Dr. Holmes recovered his picture, and Captain Mellish went to his proper punishment. And disgrace, too, fell upon one who had not earned it—Mellish of the Fourth.

It was not agreeable to a fellow to have a relation in Portland Prison, and to have the fact known to the whole school. But Mellish, somewhat to his surprise, found that Tom Merry & Co. stood by him, and their countenancing him enabled him to hold up his head.

Mellish of the Fourth hoped eagerly that the matter would be forgotten. But it was likely to be a long time before the St. Jim's fellows left off discussing, over and over again, the mystery of "X."

THE END.

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THE FIRST CHAPTER. An Unfortunate Beginning.

"WE must have a Derby at Rookwood!" said Jimmy Silver.

"What!"
His companions started up in amazement, thinking that their leader had taken leave of his senses.

"Why not?" asked Jimmy. "I can ride, and we'll borrow old Mack's pony, Peter, and celebrate the great day."

"Without permission, of course?" said Lovell.

"Of course! And we'll get another noble steed from somewhere, and run a first-class Derby!"

"Good!"

"Well, we'll go down to the field and have a practice now!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Right-ho!"

The juniors made their way out of the school and through the Close to the field where Peter was quietly grazing.

The Fistical Four climbed over the stile. The field on the other side led, with a gentle slope, towards the river, and was a part of the extensive grounds of Rookwood School.

Mack, the porter at Rookwood, kept his pony in that field, and that pony was the pride of Mack's heart. It was a sleek little animal, full of spirit, and Mack had taught it to beware of school-boys.

Many a junior at Rookwood would have been glad of a chance of riding Mack's pony, but Mack would have probably committed assault and battery on the spot if he had discovered them doing so. And the pony was not easy to capture either.

Now, unfortunately for the Fistical Four, the Modern juniors—Tommy Dodd, Tommy Cook, and Tommy Doyle—had overheard the conversation which had taken place in the end study regarding the scheme for a Derby Day at Rookwood.

The Fistical Four had raced and dodged around the field several times in a vain endeavour to catch Peter, and were breathless and perspiring with heat and annoyance, when a roar of laughter from the stile caused them to look round quickly.

Tommy Dodd & Co. were seated on the top bar of the stile, and behind them, in the lane, were Towlo and Lacey and several other juniors, all roaring with laughter.

The chums coloured uncomfortably as they realised that they had an audience.

"Hang 'em!" muttered Jimmy Silver. "I didn't know they were there!"

The Fistical Four renewed their efforts, and at last Peter was caught, and a rope was secured around his neck.

Raby was most anxious to show what he could do in the matter of bare-back riding, and was given the first chance.

His chums gave him a lift on to the pony's back, and, like a flash, the

animal rushed down the field towards the river.

Right to the water's edge he dashed, and then suddenly stopped stock still, his forefeet planted firmly in the earth.

Raby, of course, was hurled over his lowered head, and landed, with a tremendous splash, in the water.

This exhibition was greeted with cheers and roars of laughter from the stile.

Raby was speedily rescued by his chums, dripping with water from head to foot.

Meanwhile, Peter had rushed away once more, and the Fistical Four were again faced with the task of catching him.

The juniors, forthwith resumed the chase, while, from the stile across the field, where the crowd of Rookwood fellows was increasing, came a yell of merriment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peter seemed to be in a sportive mood that afternoon. A dozen times the juniors came just within grasping distance of the leading rope, and as they clutched at it, the pony whisked off, and the rope whisked off, too.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Lovell. "This is getting monotonous. Those asses yonder will burst something if they go on yelling like that."

"Oh, hang them!" said Jimmy Silver.

"I'm getting absolutely fagged," said Raby. "And I'm afraid the pony doesn't want to be caught."

"He may not want to, but he's going to be caught," said Jimmy Silver grimly. "I'm not going to be beaten by a fat pony!"

"But—"

"Oh, come on! If we let the brute beat us, those Modern asses would have it up against us for ever and ever. We can't afford to look such asses, if we're to keep the respect of the Form—"

"But if the pony won't be caught?"

"He's got to be caught!"

"We've got to catch him," agreed Lovell and Newcome. "If we get him into working order, the laugh won't be against us—not so much, anyway. Come on!"

And the breathless juniors resumed the chase. They were red with their exertions and the hot June sun, and their faces were thick with perspiration. They separated so as to surround the pony, and approach him from different directions, and closed in on him.

"Now, Peter," said Raby persuasively. "Good old Peter! Goodness! We're not going to hurt you, Peter!"

But Raby's blandishments were all in vain. Peter refused to list to the voice of the charmer. He dodged the juniors, and dashed away between Lovell and Newcome.

The trailing-rope whisked off through the grass, and Lovell and Raby threw themselves upon it together, and came in contact with a heavy pump.

"Ow!"

"Ow-wow!"

Lovell and Raby sat up in the grass, dazed and breathless, and stared at one another. The pony was across the field. Jimmy Silver was running after him, but he stopped, breathless and exasperated.

From the stile came a fresh roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tommy Dodd & Co. could not have enjoyed a pantomime more. They were yelling themselves hoarse and husky, and so were the other juniors at the stile.

"Silly ass!" gasped Raby. "Why did you run into me like that?"

Lovell panted.

"Why did you run into me, you fat-head?"

"You got in the way!"

"It was you got in the way!"

"Ass!"

"Fathead!"

"I should say you're both right there," said Jimmy Silver. "It doesn't matter whether the ass ran into the fathead, or the fathead ran into the ass! You've spoiled the thing again, between you. Come on!"

"I'm absolutely out of breath!" said Raby.

"Come on!"

"I say, Jimmy," said Lovell, "I'm getting fed up with that pony—"

"Come on!" said Jimmy Silver inexorably.

And the breathless Fistical Four started after the pony again.

Peter was feeding quietly close to the water now. Jimmy Silver's eyes brightened.

"I reckon we've got him now," he murmured. "We shall corral him against the river. He won't have so much room to dodge, anyhow. Follow your uncle!"

The pony raised his head, and looked at them as they came cautiously up. Then he dashed away up the bank. But, as Jimmy had noted, he had less room to dodge; the river barred his escape on one side. The trailing-rope whisked by Jimmy Silver's feet as he ran forward, and he clutched at it and caught it.

"Got the brute!"

Jimmy Silver dragged on the rope. His chums lent him their aid, and the restive pony was quickly brought to a standstill.

Some fellows would have used the end of the rope on Peter's flanks, as a punishment for the trouble he had given them, but there was nothing of that sort about the Fistical Four. They drew the pony in, and Lovell stood at his head while Jimmy Silver mounted.

"Now you've got him!" exclaimed Raby. "Stand clear, while Jimmy's chucked into the river!"

Jimmy Silver set his teeth.

"He won't chuck me into the river in a hurry!"

"Well, he chucked me in, and as I'm the better rider—"

"Rats! Stand clear!"

Jimmy Silver soon showed that he could ride.

There was neither saddle nor bridle on

the pony, but Jimmy had ridden horses bareback in earlier days on his father's farm, and though he was much out of practice in that difficult art, Peter found him a handful to tackle.

The pony tried first the tactics that had proved successful in the case of Raby. He dashed away at full speed, and came to a sudden halt, with his head low and his haunches high. But Jimmy Silver dug his knees into the pony's flanks, and slung on like grim death.

Half a dozen times the pony tried those tactics, and each time he failed. Lovell, Raby, and Newcome cheered enthusiastically. They had never suspected their chum of such excellent horsemanship.

And from the juniors crowded at the stile a cheer rang, too. The Modern chums were never slow to give a tribute to real grit, even in a rival.

"Bravo, Silver!"

"Good old Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver was not listening, however. He wanted all his attention for the pony. Peter gave up trying to unseat him, and began to dash round the field at a headlong pace.

Jimmy Silver had no means of holding him in, but he clung tightly to his seat on the pony's back, and gave him his head.

This was not enough for Peter. He dashed twice right round the field, and then made a sudden break for the stile.

The stile was a low one, nothing to Peter in the way of a jump, and it looked as if he meant to clear it with the leader of the Fistical Four on his back.

There was a yell of alarm from the juniors crowded on the stile.

"Get out of the way!" roared Lovell.

But the Modern chums did not need the warning. They scrambled off the stile at record speed, and the other juniors crowded away in alarm. They were none too soon, either. Peter went straight at the stile, and took it without a pause. His hoofs clattered on the hard road, and right on he dashed towards the school-gates.

"My hat!" gasped Lovell, in utter dismay. "He's going home!"

"The fat will be in the fire now," murmured Raby. "What an obstinate beast! Come on!"

They clambered over the stile.

"I say, there will be a row!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd.

"Yes, come on," said Lovell. "All of you lend a hand, and we may catch him in the Close before he does any damage. Come on!"

"Right you are!"

The Fourth-Formers dashed at top speed after Peter. But the pony, with Jimmy Silver on his back, had already disappeared within the gates of Rookwood.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Busted Idea!

JIMMY SILVER "sat tight" as the pony cleared the stile and dashed up the lane to the school. He guessed that Peter was making for his stable, and as he could not stop him, he sat tight and gave him his head. It was all he could do.

The pony dashed in at the gates, and careered across the old Close. There was a yell of alarm as the excited animal went prancing down a gravel-path.

"Look out!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Ciel! Vat is zat?"

Monsieur Briquet, the French master at Rookwood, was walking down the path. He gave a terrified jump as he saw the runaway bearing right down upon him.

"Ciel, I am lost!"

"Get out of the way!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

The French master seemed to awaken suddenly from a trance, and he skipped aside just as the pony thundered past.

"Mon bleu! Ciel!" gasped Mossoc. "Zat vas ze greatest of narrow escapes. It is ze wonderful marvel zat I am not keel!"

The pony dashed on.

Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth, was coming out of the School House, and he stopped and adjusted his spectacles, and stared at the careering junior in indignant amazement.

"Silver!"

Jimmy Silver made no reply. Peter seemed to have made up his mind to ascend the steps and explore the interior of the house, and Jimmy Silver was dragging furiously on his mane to stop him or turn him aside.

"Silver! Get off that pony immediately!"

Mr. Bootles rapped out the words staccato.

"Do you hear me, Silver? I insist upon your immediately dismounting and

tures and exclamations only served to excite the pony more.

Lovell, Newcome, and Raby, Dodd, Cook, and Doyle, and a crowd of Fourth-Formers burst in at the gate as Peter was making for it again, and the whiskered round and dashed off at right angles.

"The beast!—We—"

"Come on!"

"Hallo," exclaimed Dodd; "there's Mack!"

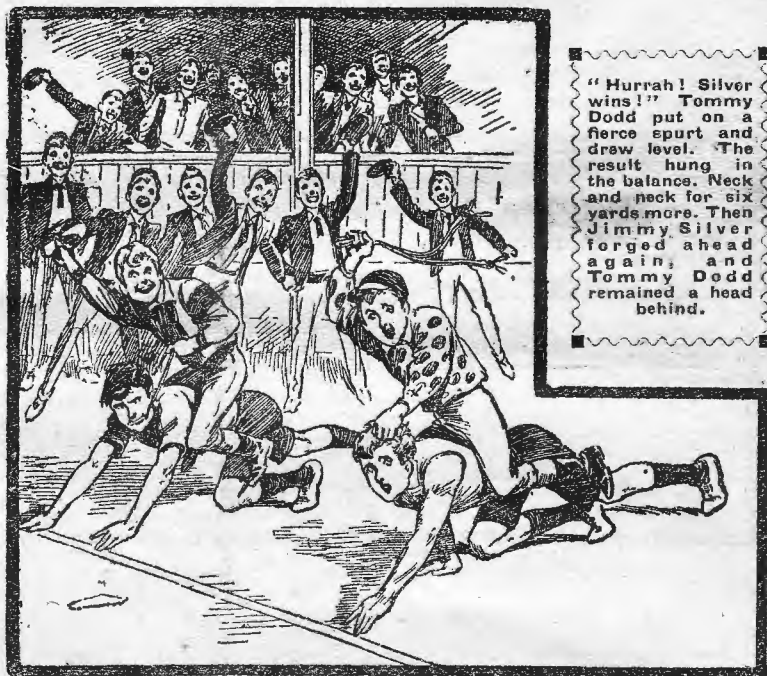
"Hallo, Mack!"

Mack, the porter, had come out of his lodge, and was looking on at the scene in wrath and amazement. He was evidently in a towering fury.

"You young varmint!" he shouted, quite forgetting the respect due to a collegian. "Bring me that pony here at once."

But Jimmy Silver had to follow the whims and fancies of the pony, and Peter did not seem tired of his ramble yet.

Mack ran towards him, but Peter dodged, and went trampling over a



"Hurrah! Silver wins!" Tommy Dodd put on a fierce spurt and drew level. The result hung in the balance. Neck and neck for six yards more. Then Jimmy Silver forged ahead again, and Tommy Dodd remained a head behind.

leading that pony quietly back to his stable.

Jimmy Silver would have given a term's pocket-money to be able to do so; but Peter had to be considered.

"Silver, take a hundred lines. Take—"

Mr. Bootles took a flying leap himself just then to get out of the pony's way, as he clattered his forefeet on the stone steps.

"Dear me, Silver!"

Mr. Bootles landed in a flower-bed and rolled over. His hat went one way, and his spectacles another. Bulkeley, the captain of Rookwood, came running from the direction of the cricket-ground in his flannels.

But Peter did not give him a chance to get near. He cut off in a different direction, and went careering round the Close with the unfortunate Jimmy Silver clinging to his back, like a limpet to a rock.

Either Peter was completely excited, and had lost his head, or else he had decided to make a day of it. A crowd gathered from all sides, but their ges-

flower-bed under the window of the Head's study.

"My hat," gasped Tommy Dodd, "there will be a row over this!"

"Bless my soul!"

Dr. Chisholm looked out of his window. A wild Indian on the back of a mustang could hardly have surprised him more than the sight of Jimmy Silver careering on the frantic pony under his window.

"Bless my soul, Silver, what are you doing?"

"Sitting tight, sir!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Dear me! Really—"

Mack made a rush for the pony, and Bulkeley ran forward at the same time. Knowles of the Sixth, lent his assistance, and two Fifth-formers blocked up the pony's escape. Peter dodged round, but they were too many for him. The trailing rope was caught and held fast, and then Mack got a grip on the pony's mane.

Jimmy Silver sat gasping.

"You young villain!" howled Mack.

shaking his disengaged fist at Jimmy. "I'll teach you to ride my pony, and throw him into a sweat!"

"Mack!"
The porter gave a gasp. He had not observed the Head at the window. His manner changed, and he touched his cap.

"Yes, sir!"
"You must not talk to Silver like that. Silver, what do you mean by riding this pony, especially in the quadrangle?"

"I didn't want to ride him in the quad, sir," said Jimmy Silver, between jerky gasps for breath. "He bolted, sir!"

"What were you doing on his back at all?"

"I was going to practise, sir."
"You know you are not allowed to ride Mack's pony."

"Well, sir, we thought it would be a good idea to celebrate Derby Day by a race in the field, and I was going to practise with Mack's pony, and ride him on Derby Day."

Mack seemed almost petrified. "You were going to ride my pony!" he gasped. "You young—"

"Mack!"
"Boggin' your pardon, sir, but the young—"

"That will do. Silver, I exonerate you from any intention of creating this

I should ride him. Ha, ha! If that's the way you're going to celebrate Derby Day, you can put me down for a front seat! I've never laughed so much since I don't know when!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Cook and Doyle.

"Oh, cheese it!" said Jimmy Silver. "The wheeze is busted up now; but you never thought of one at all. And Peter would have chucked you into the river, as he chucked Raby!"

"Well, he didn't exactly chuck me into the river!" said Raby, in a tone of expostulation. "I'm a jolly good rider, Jimmy!"

"Then what did you go over his head for?" grinned Tommy Dodd.

"The brute took me by surprise!"

"Ha, ha! So he would again if you got on his back!" cackled Tommy Cook.

"By Jove!" said Dodd. "I'd guarantee to put up a better show of horsemanship on a rocking-horse!"

"Absolutely! Ha, ha!"

"Or with old Cooky for a horse," said Tommy Dodd.

"Eh? What's that?" said Tommy Cook.

"I say, I'd put up a better show riding on Cooky's back," said Tommy Dodd. "I shouldn't be run away with, anyway!"

Jimmy Silver's eyes sparkled.

"If you mean that, Doddy—"
Tommy Dodd looked at him. He had

Dodd. "And on Derby Day, you kids, you can look out for a record licking!"

"We'll take all the lickings you can give us, without noticing them!" grunted Jimmy Silver.

And the rivals of Rookwood separated, full of the new wheeze, which was soon being discussed all over the lower school.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Derby Day!

DERBY Day! A famous day in racing annals—a day of unusual interest to the juniors of Rookwood College.

The lasty challenge of Jimmy Silver had been as hastily accepted, and the idea of the race had caught on in the lower school.

After school the fellows began to stream down towards the spot assigned for the novel race between the rivals of the Fourth Form.

There was a crowd on the ground a quarter of an hour before the time fixed for the start, eagerly awaiting the appearance of the horses and the jockeys.

Interest in the race was very keen, and sympathy was divided. Both the Modern chums and the Fistical Four had a strong following in the Form, and their backers were all there, ready to cheer, whatever they did.

The turf lay level and green, and the

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disturbance in the Close, but it all comes of your having ridden Mack's pony without permission. You will write out three hundred lines of Virgil, and show them to your Form-master by the end of the week."

Jimmy Silver's face fell. "Yes, sir."

"And now dismount, and allow that troublesome animal to be taken away!"

"If there were a bridle put on him, sir, I'd jolly soon bring him to reason!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Nonsense! Dismount at once!"

"Yes, sir!"

Jimmy Silver slipped from the pony's back. Mack, somewhat consoled by the heavy imposition inflicted upon Jimmy Silver, led his sweating pony away. Peter, who seemed satisfied with his afternoon's fun, went as quietly as a lamb.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
The Challenge.

"JOLLY good exhibition!" said Tommy Dodd, as the crowd dispersed. "By the way, is that what you call riding, Silver?"

Jimmy Silver granted.

"A better show than you could put up, anyway," he said.

"My dear chap, I shouldn't try to put up a show like that. If I mounted Peter

spoken in jest, but the leader of the Fistical Four was looking as if he took the remark seriously.

"What do you mean, Silver?"

"I mean, that if you're as good as your word, we'll give you a race on Derby Day!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver promptly.

"You can ride Cook, or Cook can ride you, and I'll give Lovell a mount, and we'll see which wins."

Tommy Dodd gave a whistle.

"Now, if you're going to back out—"

"Rats!" said Tommy Dodd. "You won't catch Moderns funking anything the Classics can do!"

"Then, is it a go?"

"Certainly, if you like!"

"Jolly good idea!" exclaimed Hooker.

"You can put on Turf colours, and make a regular Derby of it. I'll start you, if you like."

"It's a go!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"And we'll make you Modern asses sing a little smaller on Derby Day!"

"Rats!" said Tommy Dodd. "You won't have a look in!"

"I'll guarantee you won't have much of a show!" said Jimmy. "But we'll see. Time—half an hour after school on Derby Day. Place—the junior cricket-field."

"Agreed!"

"Distance—a hundred yards. Jockeys—Cook and Lovell. Starter—Hooker."

"It's settled!" exclaimed Tommy

sun was bright. Most faces were turned towards the School House to see the jockeys emerge with their steeds.

"There they come!"

It was a sudden shout, and a general grin went round.

"Bravo, Silver!"

"Bravo, Lovell!"

Lovell, the Fistical Four's jockey, had stepped into view in the sunshine, clad in true jockey fashion, the costume having been obtained from the costumier at Coombe.

Lovell sported a pink silk, and wore a jockey-cap on the back of his head, and in order to make the thing more realistic, he had a straw in his mouth.

He led his "steed" by the bridle. Jimmy Silver was the steed, and he was in football shorts, and the bridle consisted of a highly-decorative pair of braces.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Silver!"

Loud cheers greeted the Fistical Four as they came down to the racing-ground, Raby following with a huge bell in his hand.

In another moment Tommy Cook emerged from the house in green silk, leading Tommy Dodd by the bridle. Dodd had bound dusters about his knees to protect them from the ground, and though it was certainly a wise precau-

tion, it gave him a rather odd appearance.

"Doddy's got the staggers," said Hooker. "He's not fit to run. He ought to be scratched!"

"I'll scratch you, if you don't cheese it!" said Dodd.

"You're a horse in this act; you can't talk!"

"Get on the course," said Raby, clanging his bell. "Now, then, ladies and gentlemen, please clear out of the way!"

Clang, clang, clang!

"Clear the course!"

"Make way there for the giddy jockeys!"

"Are you ready, Cook?" demanded Lovell.

"Quite so," said Cook.

"Gentlemen, kindly get out of the way. You may look, but you mustn't touch. Anybody giving the horses huns will be fined a penalty not exceeding forty bob or a month!"

"Oh, cheese it!" exclaimed Newcome.

"Clear the course!"

"There's nobody on the course, father!"

"The course always has to be cleared before a race begins," said Raby obstinately.

And he clanged his bell vigorously.

The jockeys led their horses upon the field, and stopped at the starting-post. Hooker was standing there, with a toy pistol, which fired real powder and shot.

"Are you ready?"

"Absolutely!"

Hooker raised the pistol, and all was breathless attention.

Pop!

"They're off!"

They were certainly off.

Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd had dropped on their hands and knees, and Cook and Lovell had mounted on their backs. As the pistol popped they were off—in a double sense. For as the amateur horses started, the jockeys rolled off their backs, and plumped into the grass.

There was a roar of laughter from the spectators.

"False start!" said Bulkeley, wiping his eyes. "Try again!"

The jockeys rose to their feet rather ruefully.

Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd were led back to the starting-post, and their riders mounted them again. Hooker was looking at his pistol in rather a puzzled way.

"They're all ready!" exclaimed Raby.

"Why don't you start them, Hooker?"

"I haven't any more powder!"

"Well, of all the asses! Fancy a starter with only one charge of powder!"

"How was I to know they were going to play the giddy goat?" demanded Hooker indignantly.

"They must be started."

"Give 'em a whoop!"

"Oh, all right," said Hooker, adopting the suggestion. "You chaps start when I let out a yell. You hear?"

"Yes; buck up!"

Hooker filled his lungs with air, and opened his mouth. He gave a yell that a Red Indian on the warpath would not have been ashamed of. Some of the juniors jumped; but the "horses" were ready, and they started.

This time the start was a success.

The course lay across the field for fifty yards, then round a pole and back again.

Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd plunged through the grass in really fine style.

"Pink leads! Good old Silver!"

"Buck up, green silk!"

"Here, get along, Doddy," gasped Tommy Cook, "you're falling behind!"

Tommy Dodd bucked up, as a crowd of spectators were advising him to do, and he went bundling and bumping along at a rate that left Jimmy Silver in the rear.

The half-way post was reached first by the Modern chums, and they went whisking round it amid a roar of cheers.

"Bravo, Doddy!"

"Green silk wins!"

"Rats!" murmured Lovell. "Now, then, Jimmy, for the honour of the Fistical Four!"

"What-ho!" muttered Jimmy Silver.

He made an effort, and went round the post. Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook were already a dozen yards on the home stretch. Jimmy Silver kept it up,

and gradually crept closer. Half-way home he was only a foot behind.

"Go it, Doddy!"

"He's catching you!"

"Go it, Silver!"

"On the ball!"

The "horses" were red and perspiring with exertion now. The perspiration ran in streams down their faces, and they gasped for breath. But they stuck it out gallantly, and bumped on in splendid style.

"Pink wins!"

"Rats! Go it, green!"

"They're level!"

"Silver's ahead!"

Jimmy Silver had drawn level. Tommy Dodd made a desperate effort to get ahead again, but in vain. He was hardly equal to keeping up his present pace. The wiry leader of the Fistical Four drew ahead. He had the lead now, and he kept it.

Ahead, and further ahead. A dozen yards from home Jimmy Silver was a length in advance of his rival.

"Hurrah! Silver wins!"

Tommy Dodd put on a fierce spurt, and drew level. The result hung in the balance. Neck and neck for six yards more.

Then Jimmy Silver forged ahead again, and Tommy Dodd remained a head behind, and there was a roar.

"Silver wins!"

"Bravo, Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver and Lovell had won!

Tommy Dodd came in just a head behind, and the next moment he rolled on to the turf in utter exhaustion, and his jockey bumped in the grass.

A dozen fellows rushed to raise him up. He had lost, but he had made a gallant fight.

Lovell, gasping for breath, slapped Jimmy Silver on the back.

"A near thing, old chap!"

"Very close!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"But we've won! Hurrah for the Fistical Four!"

There was no doubt upon that point. The Fistical Four had won the Rookwood Derby.

THE END.

Another Magnificent Long Complete Tale of Jimmy Silver & Co. in Next Friday's Issue of the PENNY POPULAR, entitled:

BACK TO THE LAND!

By OWEN CONQUEST.

To Avoid Disappointment YOU Must Order Your Copy of the PENNY POPULAR In Advance!

THE INVASION OF GREYFRIARS!

By FRANK RICHARDS.

A Magnificent Long Complete Tale, dealing with the Early Adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars School.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Information Wanted!

"WHAT'S up?"

That was the question a great many fellows at Greyfriars were asking themselves. There was certainly something "up." Miss Primrose had come out of the Head's study, escorted to her carriage by the Head himself, both of them looking very grave. She had thanked him very gratefully as he handed her to the carriage and the Head had replied, "Not at all—not at all." So much the boys knew.

After that, the Form-masters were called into the Head's study, and they remained there for ten minutes, engaged in discussing—what?

That was the burning question.

What was it? What had Miss Primrose driven over to Greyfriars about, and what was the meeting of masters called in the Head's study for?

Everybody was curious, from the head of the Sixth to the smallest fag in the Third Form.

Harry Wharton and his chums, of course, were concerned. They were on such chummy terms with Cliff House that they felt they had a right to be specially interested in the matter. But all were curious.

Temple, Dabney & Co., of the Upper Fourth wanted to know all about it, and thinking that the Remove chums might know, they came along to Study No. 1 with their most agreeable smiles on.

Study No. 1 were at tea—and a remarkable circumstance was that Bunter was not there. Bunter was never known to miss a meal. But the Upper Fourth fellows were not interested in Bunter. They looked in cheerfully, and the chums of the Remove looked up from the tea-table.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry. "Have you come to tell us he's been found drowned?"

"He! Whom? What?" said Temple, in surprise.

"Bunter!"

"Bunter! What about Bunter?"

"He's missing tea." Something must have happened. If you've seen a dead porpoise lying about anywhere, that's Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Very good!" said Temple, making a sign to his companions that it was a joke, and that they were to laugh. Dabney and Fry burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Bob Cherry looked at them suspiciously.

"Blessed if I know what you want to come here to make that row for!" he said. "Can't you do it in your own studies, or in the passage?"

Temple smiled a sickly smile.

"The fact is, we came to speak to you fellows," he said. "There's something going on. It's something about Cliff House. You fellows ought to know something about it."

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"We don't," said Wharton.

"Nothing at all?"

"Nothing."

"Oh, rats!" said Temple. "We're wasting time here, kids."

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

And the Upper Fourth-Formers went out and slammed the door. The Removees grinned, and went on with their tea.

Ten minutes later, as Bob Cherry was extracting a slightly-coloured fluid, known as the last cup of tea, from the teapot, the door opened again. Blundell and Bland of the Fifth looked in.

"I say, you chaps," said Blundell, with an affability a Fifth-Former never showed to the Lower Fourth unless he had an axe to grind, "hope I'm not interrupting your tea?"

"Not at all," said Nugent; "we're not stopping."

"The not-at-all-fulness is terrific, my esteemed friend!"

"Well," said Blundell, "there's something going on, and I thought you'd very likely know something about it, as you're so chummy at Cliff House. What is it? Something gone rocky at the girls' school?"

"Earthquake, I think," said Bob Cherry gravely.

"Eh?"

"Whole school engulfed—Miss Primrose had only just time to order out the carriage, and drive off before it disappeared into the earth."

"What!"

"Tidal wave followed, and the whole district, including Greyfriars, is now submerged under twenty feet of water."

Blundell and Bland looked curiously at the facetious Bob.

"If you're looking for a thick ear, Cherry—"

"Thought you wanted information," said Bob Cherry. "I've done my best! However, I'll have another try. It wasn't an earthquake—it was a German invasion. Cliff House has been blown to bits by the bombardment, and fifty thousand Volunteers ordered out by the Army Council arrived too late, and had to go home after lurching on a glass of milk and a bun. The destruction—"

Blundell and Bland waited to hear no more. They went out, slamming the door with a slam that made the teacups dance on the table.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"I wonder if we shall have any more inquiring merchants?" he remarked. "I don't believe in sending an applicant empty-handed away. If you fellows have finished tea we may as well be moving."

The Famous Four left the study. They were rather curious to know what had become of Bunter. Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars, met them on the stairs, and beckoned to them to stop.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" murmured Bob Cherry. "More information wanted."

"You youngsters know anything about this Cliff House business?" asked the big Sixth-Former, as they stopped.

"Lots," said Bob Cherry cheerfully. "It's a Zeppelin, you know. It came down on Cliff House with an awful biff, smashed the roof in, and reduced everything to ashes. The bodies were—"

Wingate reached out towards Bob's ear, and Bob dodged.

"Wingate!" squeaked a fag. "Wingate! You're wanted in the Head's study!"

The Greyfriars captain walked away, and the juniors looked perplexed.

"More giddy mystery," said Bob Cherry. "Wingate's in it now. Shall we lay for him, and ask him about it as he comes out?"

"Yes, if you want a hiding!"

"Well, I don't particularly. But this is getting rather thick, you know—mystery on mystery. Pelion piled on Ossa."

"My worthy chum is right," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur. "The honourable Pelion is piled upon the esteemed Ossa, and it is very thickful."

"Here, you fags!" It was the sweet voice of Carberry, the prefect. "What do you know about this affair? What's wrong at Cliff House?"

"Heaps of things," said Bob Cherry. "It's hydrophobia."

"Hydrophobia!"

"That's it. The garden-roller developed sudden symptoms this morning at 11.30, and they had to feed it on patty-cakes to keep it quiet. At 2.15 p.m. it became excited, ran amock among the nasturtiums, and— Don't you want to hear any more, Carberry?"

Apparently Carberry did not want to hear any more, for he scowled and walked away. Bob Cherry's chums looked at him admiringly.

"Blessed if you oughtn't to be a journalist, or a Member of Parliament, or something," said Nugent. "I wonder what is really the matter?"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Bunter!"

"I say, you fellows, will one of you take this note to Mr. Quelch?"

"Not much! What's it about?"

"The Head gave it to me to take to him."

"Why can't you take it to him?"

"Well, you see, there's those lines Quelch gave me. I haven't done them, and if he sees me he'll ask about them."

"Why, you young fabricator!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, "I did those lines for you, and you left them on Quelch's desk!"

"Ye-e-es, so I did; now I remember! What I mean to say is, that Quelch has one up against me, and I don't want to see him if I can help it. I'd like one of you chaps to take this note. I'm fearfully hungry, and I feel that if I don't go and get some grub at once, something serious will happen!"

"You take that note," said Bob Cherry. "I think I can guess your little game, you young rascal! You just take it!"

And the chums walked on, leaving Billy Bunter disconsolate.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
Amazing News!

THE mystery was growing deeper. A dozen pairs of curious eyes watched Wingate come out of the Head's study, and noted the surprised look on his face.

Bob Cherry came very near asking him what was the matter, but on second thoughts decided not to do so. Wingate was seen in talk with some of the prefects, all of whom looked astonished.

After that, Mrs. Kebble, the house-keeper, was called into the Head's study and she left it looking astonished.

Then it became known that Dr. Locke and Mrs. Locke had held a consultation, both of them looking very grave.

Curiosity by this time had reached burning point.

When it became known that certain alterations were being made in the school, the excitement was intense. Gosling, the porter, and the maids were set to work clearing the beds out of the Remove dormitory, and putting them in the Upper Fourth sleeping quarters. The Removites looked on in amazement.

"We're going to sleep in the Upper Fourth dorm to-night," said Bob Cherry, in wonder. "What can it all mean?"

"My hat!" said Temple. "Do you hear that, Dab?"

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"These little toads are coming into our dorm. Will one of you cut down to the village and get a tin of disinfectant?"

"Better wire," said Fry, "and tell them to send a hundredweight!"

"There will be rows to-night," said Bob Cherry, affecting not to hear the remarks of Temple, Dabney & Co. "I don't mean to sleep in a dorm with all the windows closed!"

"Not much!" declared Nugent. "The Upper Fourth will have to have some fresh air for once, if it kills them!"

"You young rotters!" roared Temple. "We always have the window open!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Removites chuckled over having "drawn" Temple. Hurrer Singh, in quest of information, poked Gosling, the porter, in the ribs. Gosling looked round with a grunt. He was not a good-tempered man.

"Why are the esteemed beds thus removefully carried out?" asked the Nabob of Bhanipur gently. "Can the worthy Gosling tell me the esteemed reason of this shiftfulness?"

"No, I can't!" said the worthy Gosling. "Wot I says is this 'ere—I don't like this 'ere luggin' beds about! That's what I says!"

The Remove dormitory was cleared right out, everything being transferred to the Upper Fourth quarters. The dormitories at Greyfriars were very spacious and airy, and although the room was, of course, somewhat crowded, it was not uncomfortably so. At all events, it was passable as a makeshift for a few days. But to what use was the Remove dormitory to be put?

And that was not all. In the Remove class-room there were changes, too. The forms were packed closer, and fresh forms brought in. The Remove seats now occupied little more than half of the big class-room, and in the other half were fresh forms—for whom?

"It can't be a whole sudden crop of new boys," said Nugent. "But what on earth can it be?"

"Faith, and it's a mystery," said Micky Desmond. "But by the same token there's a notice on the board from the Head, and—"

There was a rush to the notice-board. There was certainly a notice from the Head, but it said no more than that Dr.

Locke would address the whole school in Hall at seven o'clock.

"I suppose he's going to explain," said Harry Wharton.

And the juniors waited anxiously for seven o'clock.

Before that hour arrived, however, there was a shout from the Close that brought out a crowd to see what was the matter.

A huge pantechnicon van had rolled up to the House, crammed with furniture. The men in charge proceeded to unload it, and Mr. Quelch came out to tell them where to take the things.

Bedsteads and beds and trunks and boxes, and all sorts and conditions of things were conveyed into the House under the astonished gaze of the juniors.

Bob Cherry, in desperation, rushed up to Wingate.

"Wingate, what does it all mean?" The Greyfriars captain looked at him

by Form, waiting with eager curiosity to hear what he had to impart.

"Boys, I have some news to tell you that will doubtless surprise you very much."

There was a slight buzz.

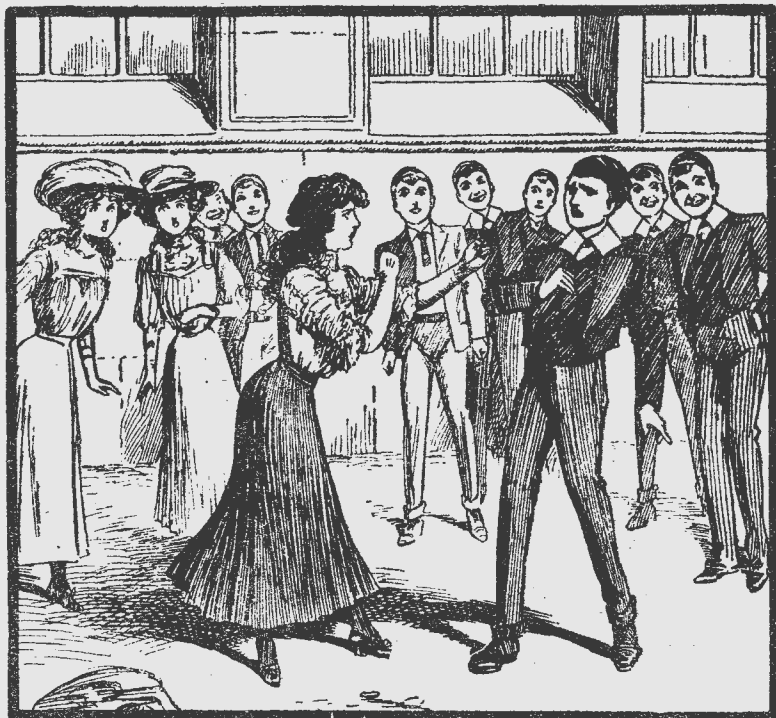
It was coming, then!

The Head paused for a moment.

"My word!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Don't keep us on tenterhooks, old chap!"

Bob had not intended those murmured words to be heard by any but his immediate chums; but the horrified look on Nugent's face showed him that something was wrong. He turned his head, and found Mr. Quelch's eyes fastened upon him, and Bob wished that the floor would open and swallow him.

"I have received a visit from Miss Primrose, the principal of Cliff House," went on Dr. Locke. "It appears that owing to the nature of the soil, there is



"Come on!" said Miss Clara. "Will you have the gloves on—or off? I'm going to lick you!"

with a grin. He had not forgotten the information that the facetious Bob had given him.

"Oh, it's the Zeppelin, you know!" he said. "The one you have told me about, Cherry. It biffed into Cliff House, you know."

"Oh, don't be funny, Wingate!"

"Which reminds me that I didn't pull your ear—"

Bob Cherry backed away hastily before the Greyfriars captain could finish.

The furniture was all delivered, and the big van rolled away. The quarter to seven chimed out from the tower.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Time to get to the meeting!"

The juniors hurried in. If there was an important announcement to be made, they wanted to get good places.

The Hall was soon crowded.

When the Head came in there was a breathless silence, in which the rustle of his gown was distinctly heard.

He looked down the Hall, over the crowd of boys standing in order, Form

something amiss with the foundations of the school—something that seems to have been overlooked by the architects. Until a thorough survey has been made, Miss Primrose does not think it safe for her pupils to remain in the school, and her architect agrees with her. For some time, therefore, it will be necessary for the pupils of Cliff House to leave the place."

The boys listened with interest.

It was interesting enough, but they did not quite see how it concerned them. Their explanation, however, was quickly forthcoming.

"Under the circumstances, as Miss Primrose naturally objects to sending her pupils to their homes and interrupting their studies, I have decided to accommodate the pupils of Cliff House at Greyfriars for a short time."

There was a buzz.

The boys had expected anything but that!

The Cliff House girls at Greyfriars!

For some moments they could hardly realise it.

The Head went on quietly:

"Miss Primrose's pupils will be accommodated in the Remove dormitory for the present, the Remove going into the quarters of the Upper Fourth. They will take their lessons in the Remove-room—with the Remove. Mr. Quelch has kindly consented to take the mixed class. I hope I need not impress upon my boys the necessity of greeting the visitors here with the utmost cordiality, and treating them with the most profound courtesy and respect during their stay at Greyfriars."

The Remove gave a cheer, and the Head smiled.

"Very well," he said. "That is all I have to tell you. The pupils of Cliff House will be here this evening. I leave it to you to make their stay at Greyfriars as pleasant as possible."

And the Head retired.

The meeting broke up, the boys eagerly discussing the amazing news.

Girls at Greyfriars!

It was amazing, and no mistake.

Most of the Remove fellows knew some of the Cliff House girls, and got on with them very well, especially Harry Wharton & Co.

But to have the old school invaded by the girls in this manner was, to say the least, startling.

There were a good many who did not quite like the idea. There were others who welcomed it. Most of the juniors kept open minds upon the subject, and wondered how it would turn out.

"I don't want to say anything against the girls," said Bob Cherry. "You know that. But I'm afraid that this will mean trouble."

"Why?" asked Harry.

"Well, it's bound to. We shall begin fighting with the Upper Fourth, for one thing, if we share their dormitory. Then there's the mixed class in the Remove-room. I'm blessed if I want to go in to lessons with a lot of girls!"

"Faith, and ye're right!" said Desmond. "Sure, and they'll be talking all the time, and we shall be talking, and Quelch will have fits!"

"Then there's the cricket," remarked Ogilvy. "They think they can play cricket, and they're sure to try."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then where are they to do their prep?" said Nugent. "They can't share their studies with us—there ain't room, for one thing. We're jolly crowded as it is!"

"They learn singing and piano, too, most of 'em," said Bulstrode. "It will be an awful row! Suppose we protest?"

"Suppose we do nothing of the sort!" retorted Harry, looking the bully of the Remove full in the face. "You heard what the Head said—the girls are to be treated with every courtesy."

"Yes; and, of course, we're good little boys, and always do what the Head tells us!" sneered Bulstrode.

"We're going to in this case! If anybody says or does anything rude—"

"Well?"

"Well, there will be trouble, that's all!"

There was a shout from the passage:

"They're coming!"

And there was a rush to the Close to see the arrival of the Cliff House pupils.

"Here they come!"

In the summer dusk a great crowd had gathered in the Close to watch the arrival of the Cliff House party.

Two brakes rolled into sight, and halted before the School House. Bright, laughing faces looked down from the sides, and there were many nods of recognition.

Marjorie Hazeldene and Clara

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and Alice, the special friends of No. 1 Study, were in the first brake, and they smiled down at the Removites. Bob Cherry nudged Harry in the ribs.

"That is where we ought to give a cheer," he murmured.

"Cheer, then, old chap."

"Well, you start, then."

Harry laughed, and shook his head. As the brake stopped, he ran forward to help Marjorie & Co. to alight.

"So jolly glad to see you here!" he said.

"Isn't it curious to be here at all?" said Marjorie. "We shall give you a great deal of trouble."

"Not a bit of it!"

"You'll see," said Miss Clara. "We shall make things—what do you call it?—something that a bee does."

"Hum?" suggested Nugent.

"Yes; we are going to make things hum."

"Oh, Clara!" murmured Marjorie.

"It's awfully good of you to receive us like this, considering," went on Miss Clara, unheeding. "Of course, when you are in Rome you must do as Rome does, and we are going to keep our end up with you fellows."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle, you know!" said Miss Clara. But the Removites only cackled the more. Miss Clara's adoption of boy language was decidedly funny.

Dr. Locke came to the door in great state to greet the new arrivals, who were in charge of the second mistress of Cliff House.

This was Miss Locke, the youngest sister of the Head of Greyfriars—a charming young lady, already well known to the boys there. She marshalled her flock into the house, and marched them off to their quarters without the boys having much opportunity of speaking to them.

"Well," said Bob Cherry, when the girls had gone, "this is a go, and no mistake!"

"The gofulness is terrific, my worthy chum."

"There will be fun," said Nugent.

And Nugent was right.

The girls were seen no more that evening. The Remove went to bed at the same time as the Upper Fourth, and in the same dormitory.

Gosling, the porter, came into sight in the upper passages. He was affixing labels in various places on the walls, and judging by the shapes and assorted sizes of the letters thereon, he had written them himself.

"My hat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as he stopped and looked at the label jammed on the wall at the end of the passage in which was the Remove dormitory, now occupied by the Cliff House pupils. "Look at this!"

And he read the notice aloud.

"No boys allowed to pass this way!"

"Rats!" said Bulstrode. "That's good, shutting us out of our own quarters."

"It's necessary, I suppose," said Harry Wharton. "It would be awkward if we were always running into one another. How many of those labels have you got, Gosling?"

"Erbout a doz'n," grunted Gosling. "I've got all this to do, arter finishing my day's work. I don't get nothing extra. Wot I says is this 'ere, a man oughter to be allowed to rest arter his day's work."

"I suppose you wouldn't refuse a tip, though?" suggested Skinner.

Gosling brightened up.

"Which it's wery kind of you, sir."

"You wouldn't refuse one, then?"

"Oh, no, sir; not at all, sir."

"Then I hope somebody will offer you

one," said Skinner, walking on. And Gosling turned back to his work with an expression on his face that was less amiable than ever.

And the juniors went into the dormitory.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

No Boys Allowed.

HARRY WHARTON slept lightly that night. He was awake when midnight chimed out from the tower, and as the last stroke died away, he detected a sound in the dormitory.

"Hallo, what's that?"

There was no reply. He heard a door faintly close, and sat up in bed.

"Who is that?"

Still no answer.

Wharton, a little alarmed, jumped out of bed and struck a match. The beds were quiet and peaceful, all the juniors slumbering.

The captain of the Remove looked from bed to bed.

He was certain that he had heard someone leave the dormitory, and the thought was in his mind that Bulstrode might have risen to play some trick to frighten the new occupants of the Remove dormitory. It was the kind of trick that Bulstrode would play, if he had thought of it and had dared.

But Bulstrode was in bed, fast asleep.

There was one bed, however, that had no occupant, and by glancing over the rest, Wharton soon discovered who it was that was absent. It was Wun Lung, the Chinese junior.

Wun Lung was the most incorrigible practical joker in the Remove, but Wharton knew that he was incapable of playing such a trick as he would easily have attributed to Bulstrode. But Harry remembered that on a previous occasion an attempt had been made to kidnap the Chinese junior, and he was a little alarmed.

He went quietly to the door, and opened it. It was very dusky in the passage, and he could see nothing. There was a curious sound of cautious footsteps.

"Wun Lung!"

"Allee light!" came back the voice of the little Celestial. "Who callee?"

"It's I—Wharton. I thought perhaps—"

"Allee light! Me takee little walkee. Allee light!"

"Oh, all right, then! Can't you sleep?"

"No savvy."

"Are you trotting about because you can't go to sleep?"

"No savvy."

Wharton gave it up, and went back to bed. He soon fell asleep, and did not know when the Chinese junior returned to the dormitory.

But when the rising-bell went, and the morning sunlight streamed in at the high windows, Wun Lung was in bed, fast asleep, and had to be shaken to be awakened.

There was only a certain number of washstands in the room, and so the juniors had to take turns to wash.

As the senior Form of the two, and owners of the dormitory, the Upper Fourth had claimed the privilege of washing first—over-night. But when the morning came they weren't anxious to claim that privilege.

Temple looked out of bed, and yawned.

"I say, you Remove kids, you can wash first, if you like," he said.

"Thank you for nothing!" said Skinner. "I'm in no hurry."

"You'd better not be late down."

"You'd better not yourself, if you come to that."

It seemed to be a competition which should wash last, instead of which should wash first.

Harry Wharton and his friends, always early risers, were the first, and most of the Remove followed their example.

The Upper Fourth had the luxury of staying in bed ten minutes after rising-bell, with an excellent excuse to proffer to any inquiring master or prefect.

The chums of the Remove left the dormitory, with the intention of taking a run in the Close before breakfast, as usual; but the notice on the wall stopped the short-cut through the passage past their old quarters.

Bob Cherry was going that way without thinking, when Nugent caught him by the shoulder, and pointed to the notice on the wall, in the straggling characters traced by Gosling's hand.

"NO BOYS ALLOWED TO PASS THIS WAY!"

"My hat, I forgot that!" said Bob Cherry. "This way, then."

The boys followed the wide passage towards the big staircase. But suddenly Harry Wharton halted.

"Phew! That's stopped, too!"

"My only hat!"

There was the notice on the wall:

"NO BOYS ALLOWED TO PASS THIS WAY!"

The Famous Four stopped and looked at one another. Wharton was puzzled.

"Blessed if I know how we're to get down, then," he said. "There's only two ways to the staircase, and both passages are closed."

"Gosling must have bungled it in sticking up the labels."

"The bungleness is terrific!"

"I don't know. The Head must have instructed him which passages were to be closed to us."

"That's true enough."

"Anyway, it won't do to disregard the notice."

"I suppose not. But how on earth are we to get down?"

"There's the back stairs."

"Well, that's all right, and no mistake—the back stairs for an important set of persons like ourselves! However, here goes!"

The four made their way back to the stairs. But there, at the head of the stairs, was the notice again staring them in the face:

"NO BOYS ALLOWED TO PASS THIS WAY!"

"Well, my Aunt Matilda!" exclaimed Nugent, in disgust. "Gosling must have been at the ginger-beer again when he put these notices up!"

"The beerfulness of the honourable Gosling must have been great."

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"We saw him doing it, and he was sober enough."

"True, but—"

"Hang it!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "There's no way down! We can't get down at all at this rate, unless we get an aeroplane and start from a window!"

Harry Wharton looked perplexed. The notices were there, plain enough, and he did not feel inclined to disregard them; but how were the juniors to get downstairs?

They returned to the passage outside the dormitory, and found a number of other fellows, all ready to go down, and equally puzzled by the forbidding notices.

"Faith, and what are we to do?" exclaimed Micky Desmond. "It's gettin' hungry I am!"

"Breakfast-bell will be going soon!" said Hazeldene.

"Well, there's the notice plain enough!"

"Might as well have stopped in bed!"

"Gosling must have made a mistake!"

"He's always making mistakes!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here comes Wingate!"

The head of the Sixth was ascending the stairs. He had a cane in his hand which looked businesslike, and a very businesslike expression upon his face. He seemed surprised as he found the juniors gathered in the corridor.

"Hallo, I was coming to wake you up!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean by sticking here instead of coming down?"

"We're not allowed to come down."

"Eh?"

Wharton pointed to the notice on the wall. Wingate looked at it and frowned.

"That duffer Gosling has made a mis-

"Oh, this is too rich!" exclaimed Nugent. "Aren't we to have any giddy breakfast?"

Billy Bunter gave a groan.

"I say, you fellows, I'm famishing!"

"Famish quietly, then, you fat little bouncer!"

"Oh, really, Bulstrode—"

"I suppose the girls are going to breakfast in there," said Wharton, looking perplexed. "But they can't want all those tables for twenty or thirty girls, can they? I'm blessed if I understand it!"

"Let's ask Quelch where we are to grub."

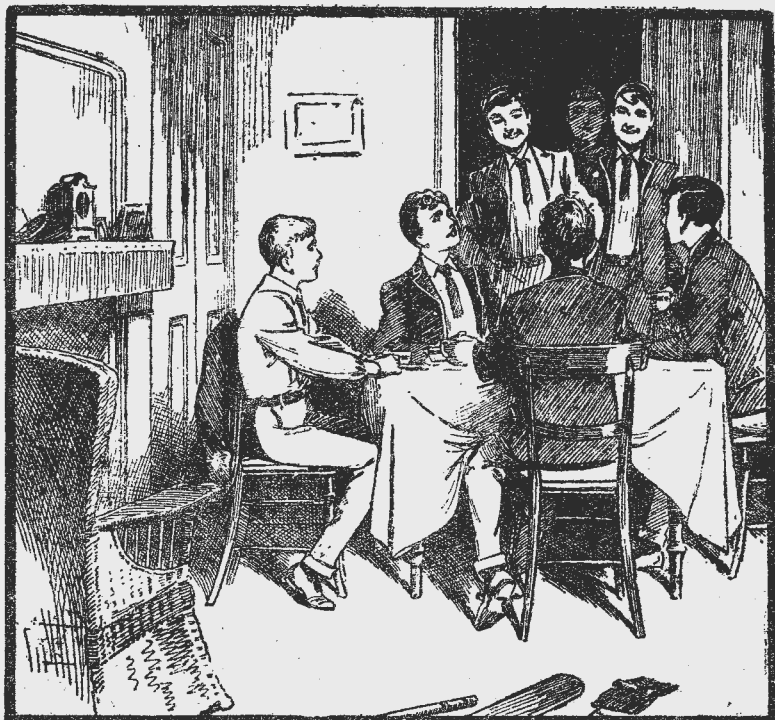
"That's a good idea!"

Mr. Quelch could be seen in the doorway, sniffing the fresh morning air from the Close. Some of the juniors approached him, and he turned towards them with a kindly smile.

"Good-morning, my lads!"

"Good-morning, sir! Will you please tell us where we are to breakfast, sir?"

The Remove-master looked surprised.



Temple, Dabney & Co., of the Upper Fourth, looked into Study No. 1 with their most agreeable smiles on. "We've come to speak to you fellows," said Temple. "There's something going on about Cliff House. You fellows ought to know something about it."

take, of course," he said, taking down the notice. "You are allowed to use the staircase. Did you think you were to remain upstairs for the term of your natural lives, you young duffers?"

"Well, as the notice was there—"

"Yes, that's right—you were quite right. Still, you can do as I tell you. Come down—and remember you can use this staircase, anyway."

"Right you are, Wingate."

And the Remove went downstairs. It was almost time for breakfast now, and a few minutes later they gathered at the door of the dining-room.

The door was open, and the tables were laid, but on the door was a notice:

"NO BOYS ALLOWED TO PASS THIS WAY!"

The hungry juniors looked at it in blank dismay.

"In the dining-room, as usual, of course."

"But there's a notice on the door, sir, that says we're not allowed there."

"H'm! That's very curious!" Mr. Quelch walked to the dining-room door and read the notice, and frowned.

"This is some joke," he said. "The notice has been pinned up here after having been removed from another place. You may go in, of course." And he took the card-board down.

The Remove gladly went in, and Harry Wharton took a strong grip on the ear of the little Chinese, who was grinning cheerfully. The cheerful grin died away from the quaint little face.

"You young rascal!" said Harry. "That was what you were doing out of bed last night, was it?"

"No savvy."

"You were changing those notices from their places."

"No savvy."

Wharton laughed and released him. Wun Lung rubbed his ear and grinned serenely as he went to his place.

When Wun Lung didn't want to own up he never did "savvy," as he expressed it, but Wharton was pretty sure that he was right.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Miss Clara is Pugnacious.

THE Removites were laughing as they swarmed out into the sunny Close after breakfast—with the exception of Bulstrode and Banter. Bulstrode was in a vile temper, and his anger was more directed against the girls than against the Form-master.

"We're jolly glad to have you at Greyfriars, you know," Harry Wharton was saying to Marjorie & Co. as the Remove bully came out. "It's ripping!"

"Rats!" said Bulstrode rudely.

Wharton turned on him with a blaze in his eyes.

"Can't you behave yourself, you rotten bully?" he exclaimed.

"Bosh! You can butter up the girls if you like, but you know jolly well that they're not wanted here!"

"If you're looking for a thick ear——"

"Bah! I tell you we don't want——"

Wharton's left lashed out. He had had quite enough of Bulstrode and his ways. Marjorie was looking hurt, while Miss Clara was decidedly angry. Bulstrode backed away quickly from Wharton's blow, guarding himself. Harry would have followed it up the next moment, but Clara stepped in the way.

"Hold on!" said that lively girl. "This is my affair!"

"Oh, Clara!"

"Stuff!" said Miss Clara. "Bulstrode is a cad——"

"Oh, am I!" exclaimed Bulstrode, livid with anger.

"Yes. You were rude to Miss Primrose once, and you have often acted like a cad. What you want is a jolly good licking," said Miss Clara.

Bulstrode growled, and the juniors, who were gathering round in a crowd, laughed. Miss Clara's curious phrases struck them as funny. But Miss Clara was in deadly earnest.

"You have been rude to me on several occasions," she went on. "Now you have got to ring off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the crowd.

"To—to what?" gasped Bulstrode.

"To ring off," said Miss Clara. "Will you have the gloves on—or off?"

"Eh?"

"Will you have the gloves on—or off? I'm going to lick you!"

"Wha-w-what!"

"Growing deaf?" asked Miss Clara pleasantly. "When you insult a boy you expect to have to fight him, don't you? Well, I'm going to take my own part just the same. I'm going to lick you, or else you're going to lick me. Catch on?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here——" began Bulstrode blusteringly.

"That's the coward's blow!" said Miss Clara, giving Bulstrode a tap that would not have hurt a fly. "Now then!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You utter idiot!" growled Bulstrode.

"Stop that!" said Wharton angrily.

"Will you have the gloves on?" exclaimed Miss Clara again.

"Of course I won't! I——"

"Then you're a coward!"

Bulstrode gritted his teeth. He was greatly inclined to accept Miss Clara's

challenge, and treat her as if she were a boy. But bully as Bulstrode was, and brute, too, on occasion, he was not quite brute enough to strike a girl.

Besides, he knew that if he had done so, the other fellows would have collared him and ragged him till he was more dead than alive.

He was in a rather difficult position; but it was his own fault. He had caused the trouble, and he had only himself to thank.

"Go it, Bulstrode!" said several mocking voices. "You can't fight Linley or Wharton—a girl's about your mark! Go for her!"

"Bulstrode always thought himself a lady-killer!" grinned Ogilvy. "Now's your chance, Bulstrode! Go for her!"

"We'll jolly well smash you if you touch her!" growled Bob Cherry.

"Yes, rather!" said Nugent, with emphasis; and the Nabob of Bhanipur remarked that the rutherfordness was terrific.

"Look here," said Bulstrode, "I don't want a row with you girls——"

"Then you'll have to apologise," said Miss Clara. "I'm willing to let you off if you apologise."

"Rats! Bosh!"

"Then put up your fists!"

And Miss Clara assumed a scientific attitude of defence that almost made the juniors shriek; and Bulstrode receded a little. There was a howl of derision.

"He's running away!"

"He's finking!"

"Ha, ha! Afraid of a girl!"

"You idiots!" roared Bulstrode.

"You know I can't fight a girl!"

"Ha, ha! You shouldn't have started it, then!"

"Apologise!"

"I am waiting," said Miss Clara, with a great deal of dignity.

"Look here, I'm not going to——"

"Come on, then!" said Miss Clara, advancing upon Bulstrode and making certain mysterious passes in the air, which seemed to suggest a professor of hypotism, but which was intended for scientific boxing. "I'm ready!"

Bulstrode scowled round at the grinning faces. The juniors had packed themselves in a close circle, so that he could not escape.

He glared at them, and he glared at Miss Clara; then he took the only course possible under the circumstances.

"I—I—I apologise!" he stammered.

Miss Clara lowered her fists.

"Then I will let you off this time," she said magnanimously. "But you must not be a naughty boy again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bulstrode thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and strode savagely away.

The crowd dispersed, grinning over the affair, and Miss Clara was heartily congratulated by her friends.

"But what would you have done if he had fought you?" asked Milly.

Miss Clara reflected for a moment. She had apparently not thought of that.

"I—I—I should have cried," she said at last.

And Marjorie laughed.

The girls had their meals in the Head's house, under the charge of Mrs. Locke, and so the juniors did not see them at dinner.

After dinner, Marjorie & Co. came out, and went into the Head's garden. The garden was bright with flowers, and any boy who picked a flower in that garden was certain of deadly trouble to come.

But the girls, of course, did not know that the Head's garden was sacrosanct. They began to pick the flowers cheerfully.

It was the custom of the Cliff House

pupils to take in a bunch of flowers for Miss Primrose, and lay it on her desk; and Miss Primrose would sniff it, and thank her dear pupils, and they would all feel very pleased with themselves and with one another.

Marjorie & Co. hadn't been to a boys' school before, and they naturally intended to treat Mr. Quelch as they treated their mistress. They carefully selected some very nice flowers, as they were allowed to do in Miss Primrose's garden and formed a really very beautiful bouquet.

"How sweet!" said Clara. "What lovely flowers these are! Mr. Quelch will be very pleased. We will take him a bouquet."

And the girls went towards the Remove class-room with the bouquet when the bell rang for afternoon lessons.

Wun Lung, the little Chinese, looked at the bouquet curiously as he passed the girls in the Close, and stopped to speak, with his engaging and innocent smile.

"Nice flowers—velly nice!" he murmured. "Chinese likeee sniffee."

Marjorie held out the bouquet.

"Smell them, by all means!" she said.

Wun Lung sniffed the flowers.

"Nicee, nicee! You give flowers to somebody?"

"They're for Mr. Quelch," Marjorie explained.

A glimmer came into the almond eyes of the little Celestial.

"Me calli them fol you to loom!" he said.

Marjorie did not need assistance to carry the bouquet, but she did not like to refuse the polite offer of the little Oriental. She allowed Wun Lung to carry the flowers, and he marched off before the girls with the bouquet in his hand.

Unseen by the girls, the little Celestial extracted a small packet from one of his numerous pockets, and shook a grey powder over the flowers.

Wun Lung was always prepared for a practical joke, and he never could resist the temptation to play one, even on people he liked. No one at Greyfriars, save Harry Wharton, was safe from him.

They entered the class-room, and just till they were passing the master's desk did Wun Lung hand the bouquet back to Marjorie.

Little suspecting that the flowers were now impregnated with pepper, the girl laid the bouquet on the desk, and then went to her place.

The Removites streamed in; but Mr. Quelch had not yet made his appearance. They sat down, and by the time the last was in his place, Mr. Quelch came in.

The Form-master was looking very good-tempered and genial after a good lunch, and he was prepared to be kindness itself to his mixed class.

He caught sight of the flowers as he came up to his desk, and stared at them in astonishment.

"Who placed these flowers here?" he asked, turning round to look at the class.

Marjorie Hazeldene rose to her feet.

"I did, sir, if you please," she said.

"And why?"

"We always took in flowers for Miss Primrose, sir."

"Oh, I see!" Mr. Quelch looked pleased. "It is very kind and thoughtful of you, and I shall accept your little gift with great pleasure."

And Mr. Quelch took up the flowers and lifted them to his nose.

He took a deep sniff of the scent, but it was hardly the scent he expected; for the next moment he dropped the bouquet to the floor with a thud, and sprang into the air.

"Ooooooh! Ow—atchoo—choo—choo! Atchoo!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER,
More Trouble.

MARJORIE gazed at Mr. Quelch in astonishment.

For a moment she thought the Remove-master must have taken leave of his senses.

Mr. Quelch was clasping both hands to his nose, and dancing like one possessed, trampling the pretty flowers all to shreds under his feet.

All the time he was giving vent to volcanic sneezes.

"My gracious!" murmured Clara.

"What is the matter with him?"

"He must be—be ill!" said Marjorie.

"Off his—his rocker, perhaps," said Clara.

"Atchoo—'choo—'atchoo—'choo—'atchoo!"

Mr. Quelch sneezed away as if for a wager; and it was a full minute before he could control his sneezing.

"Boys—atchoo—if you laugh again I shall—atchoo—choo—I shall punish you all most severely! I have never—atchoo—'atchoo—experienced such a trick as—a—atchoo—choo! Miss Hazeldene, you will—atchoo—'atchoo—"

"He wants you to sneeze, too, Marjorie!" whispered Miss Clara to her amazed and bewildered friend.

"Miss Hazeldene, you will—atchoo—choo—step out here, please!"

"Certainly, sir!"

Marjorie Hazeldene stepped out before the class.

The Form-master fixed a stern glance upon the bewildered girl.

"Miss Hazeldene, I am surprised—atchoo—and pained! I should never have dreamed that a girl could play a trick like this—"

"A—a trick, sir?" stammered Marjorie.

"Yes! The flowers were impregnated with pepper, and I—atchoo—choo—"

Marjorie looked utterly dismayed.

"Oh, sir! I—I did not know—I really did not, sir!"

Mr. Quelch looked at her closely. It was impossible to look into those clear, frank, brown eyes and suspect Marjorie of telling an untruth.

"Indeed, I cannot but believe you!" said the Form-master. "Where did you obtain those flowers, please?"

"In the garden, sir."

"Ahem! It is forbidden to pick flowers in the garden. However, let that pass now. Someone had placed pepper in that bouquet. Did it leave your hands at all?"

"Only for a few minutes, sir."

"Ah! And who—?"

"The Chinese boy carried it a little way for me, sir; but I am sure he did not—"

"But someone did!" said Mr. Quelch grimly. "You may go back to your place. Wun Lung!"

The little Celestial rose.

"Did you put pepper in those flowers, Wun Lung?"

The Chinese looked stolid.

"No savvy, sir!"

"Did you put pepper upon this bouquet when Miss Hazeldene trusted it to your hands?" repeated Mr. Quelch, in a louder tone.

"No savvy!"

"Did you allow any other person to touch it?"

"Me touchee flower, il!"

"Yes, I know that! But did any other person touch it?"

"No savvy, sir!"

"Answer my question, Wun Lung! Did you, or did you not, put pepper upon those flowers?" shouted the exasperated remove-master.

"No savvy, sir!"

"Answer my question!"

"Me no savvy!"

Mr. Quelch blew his nose violently. He was pretty certain of the Celestial's guilt, and yet the bland and innocent smile of Wun Lung was very disarming. He was greatly inclined to punish the Chinese, anyway; but he thought better of it.

"You may sit down, Wun Lung."

"Me tankee you, sir!"

And Wun Lung sat down with a bland and contented smile.

Mr. Quelch looked round the class in search of someone laughing; but the faces of the Removites became preternaturally grave at once.

The Form-master blew his nose again, and sneezed, and re-blew his nose, and breathed hard. His nose was of a brilliant crimson hue by this time, and it imparted a far from grave aspect to his usually very serious face.

But the Removites suppressed their grins. Mr. Quelch was not in a humour now to be grinned at. He would have been very pleased at that moment to find a victim.

He dragged the easel from the wall with a jerk, and sneezed again. Billy Bunter chuckled softly.

"My word! Isn't he in a wax!"

Mr. Quelch swung round as if moved on a pivot.

"Bunter, take fifty lines!"

"Oh, really, sir—"

"Take a hundred lines, Bunter!"

"I'm sincerely sorry—"

"Take two hundred lines!"

Bunter relaxed into silence. His little round eyes were, gleaming behind his spectacles.

Two hundred lines meant serious trouble for Bunter. He would have to do some of them himself and spend a lot of time badgering his friends to do the rest.

Billy was in a vengeful mood, and when he felt vengeful, he always remembered his gifts as a ventriloquist.

"Please, sir—"

It was a voice from the girls' forms, so soft, and exactly like Milly Brown's that it was impossible to imagine that it proceeded from the fat junior.

Bob Cherry, who saw Bunter's lips move, guessed what it was, and made him a sign to be quiet. But Bunter did not see, or, at all events did not heed, the sign.

Mr. Quelch looked round irritably.

"What is it?"

There was no reply.

"Someone spoke," said Mr. Quelch.

"Does anyone wish to ask me anything?"

The girls were all silent.

The master turned away angrily, and the moment he had done so the soft voice from the class went on:

"If you please, sir—"

"Oh, dear me!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, what is it? What do you want to say? Did you speak, Brown—I mean Miss Brown?"

"No, sir," said Milly.

"It seemed to me that it was your voice. However, if it was not you, who was it?"

Mr. Quelch shrugged his shoulders irritably, and turned to the blackboard.

"Oh, goodness gracious! What an ill-tempered old gentleman!"

It was the feminine voice again. Mr. Quelch turned crimson.

"This—is this unendurable!" he exclaimed. "My dear girls, you must surely know better than to trouble your master like this. Miss Primrose must have been very lax with you. I insist upon your being silent!"

The girls were looking amazed. The voice might have proceeded from any of the number, between twenty and thirty, and no one could trace it to its source.

Bunter was grinning behind his hand. He was "getting his own back" on Mr. Quelch now; and the fat junior was not finished yet.

"Oh, dear! What an ill-tempered old—Ow!"

The last monosyllable was in Bunter's natural voice.

For Harry Wharton, who was near him, had suddenly detected what he was doing, and he had pinched the fat arm of the junior hard.

"Ow! Wow! Groo! Yaw!"

"Bunter, what are you making that noise for?"

"Ow! Wow! I'm hurt!"

"What do you mean? How are you hurt?"

"I—I—I've been pinched!"

"Who pinched you?" roared the Form-master angrily. "What do you mean?"

"Wharton, sir—ow!"

"Did you pinch Bunter, Wharton?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"And why did you do such a ridiculous thing?"

Wharton did not reply. If he had given away the ventriloquist, Bunter would have suffered a punishment so severe that he would not have forgotten it for weeks. Mr. Quelch glared at the head of the Form.

"Wharton, I am surprised at this! Why did you pinch Bunter?"

"To keep him quiet, sir."

"Was Bunter talking?"

"Well, not exactly talking, sir."

"If you were trying to keep order, I excuse you," said Mr. Quelch. "Kindly find some other way than by pinching Bunter, however, and making him yelp like a dog."

"Oh, really, sir—"

"Silence, Bunter!"

"But I'm hurt! I—"

"I shall cane you if you speak another word!"

Bunter blinked indignantly. He looked round for sympathy, but the fellows were only grinning at him. He looked at the girls, and they were smiling, too. Everybody seemed to regard the pinch as funny, though Bunter hadn't the faintest idea where the fun came in.

Mr. Quelch was busy with the blackboard for a few minutes. But that lesson was not destined to pass off peacefully. In the midst of the nervous silence of the class-room a faint but very distinct sound came from the girls' forms.

Squeak! It was the squeak of a mouse. There was a restless movement among the girls, and a nervous peering down among the desks to the floor.

"Oh, my goodness!" murmured Clara.

"It's a mouse!"

"Oh, dear!"

"Where is it?"

"There it is again!"

Squeak!

Mr. Quelch looked angrily at his feminine class.

"Cannot you keep quiet?" he rapped out. "Really, this is too bad! Is this the kind of discipline you kept at Cliff House?"

"There's a mouse, sir!" stammered Marjorie.

"Nonsense! There are no mice in the class-room."

"But there is one here, sir."

"Nonsense!"

Squeak!

"There it is again, sir!" exclaimed a score of frightened voices in chorus. "Oh, sir! There is a mouse, sir!"

"I—I am so frightened, Mr. Quelch!" gasped Clara.

"Oh, dear—oh, dear—oh, dear!"

THE PENNY POPULAR—No. 246.

Mr. Quelch could not deny that there had been a squeak that time.

He was looking very worried, and he picked up his pointer.

Some of the girls were already standing on the forms, looking with nervous terror at the floor.

"Come, come!" said Mr. Quelch. "There is nothing to be afraid of. A mouse is a quite harmless and even amusing creature, and—"

Squeak!

"Oh, dear—oh, dear! Where is it!"

"My goodness! Oh!"

Squeak!

The girls were all on the forms now, palpating with terror. The boys were laughing. Mr. Quelch was at his wits' end.

"Pray reassure yourselves, my dear children! Pray do not be alarmed! There is nothing whatever to be afraid of. A mouse cannot possibly cause you any injury—"

Squeak!

There was a rush away from the forms. The girls ran into the centre of the room, and ran right into the excited and worried Form-master. Mr. Quelch, in the midst of a sea of tossing curls and frightened eyes, looked utterly bewildered and at a loss.

Two or three of the girls were clinging to him for protection. He tried to reassure them, but the squeaking of the mouse had more effect than his words.

The squeak was following the girls, and it sounded near the Form-master's feet. There was a scattering of the Cliff House pupils again. Mr. Quelch mopped his heated brow.

"My dear girls—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Boys, how dare you laugh! This is a serious matter. If you—"

Squeak!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Take fifty lines each!" shouted Mr. Quelch.

"Take a hundred lines each!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, dear! What ever shall we do? Where is it, Clara?"

"Just near your feet, I think, my dear."

"Oh, oh, oh!"

Bob Cherry, unnoticed in the general confusion, took a tight grip on the back of Billy Bunter's neck. The fat junior squeaked in earnest this time.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"If that mouse squeaks again, it will be the last squeak for you, you—y—y oyster!" muttered Bob Cherry in his ear.

And the mouse did not squeak again.

Mr. Quelch, perspiring and excited, and worried almost to the limit of endurance, succeeded in restoring something like order at last.

The mouse having been apparently frightened away, the girls were prevailed upon to resume their seats. But they went back to their places in fear and trembling. And all through the afternoon's lessons there were continual false alarms, and the work was interrupted by little shrieks and exclamations of dismay, which drove Mr. Quelch almost distracted.

That afternoon seemed endless to Mr. Quelch, and when it at last came to a close, he heaved a sigh of relief.

He watched the boys and the girls file out of the class-room, and wiped his brow.

"Bless my soul!" he gasped. "How—how shall I stand this to-morrow—and the next day—and the next? It—it will turn my hair grey! Dear me! Ah, is that you, Miss Locke!"

Miss Locke was looking in at the door, with a smile upon her face as she noted the expression of the Form-master.

"I thought I would look in, and see how you have managed with my class to-day," she said pleasantly.

"Oh, famously!" said Mr. Quelch. "I—I have managed very well—considering, of course, a feminine class requires—er—experience. I have no doubt I shall grow more accustomed to it in—in time. Meanwhile—"

Miss Locke laughed.

"Perhaps I could relieve you of a part of the trouble," she suggested. "Dr. Locke has suggested that I should take my own class here; this room is large enough for two classes to be held in it without interfering with one another, I think."

Mr. Quelch brightened up.

"Well, really, Miss Locke, that seems to be an excellent idea!" he exclaimed. "Of course, I have no complaint to make of the dear girls, but—but I am just a little unaccustomed to them. I think the arrangement you propose will be—will be simply excellent."

And so it was arranged.

But when the Removites heard of the new arrangements there were grins and chuckles galore.

"It may work out all right," said Bob Cherry. "I say it may—but I have my doubts. In my opinion, there will be more fun!"

And there was—but that is another story.

THE END.

BETWEEN OURSELVES.

A Weekly Chat between The Editor and His Readers.

FOR NEXT FRIDAY!

The Cliff House girls play a leading part in Next Friday's magnificent, long, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled:

"MARJORIE'S PERIL!"

Once again Bulstrode & Co. show their resentment of the Cliff House girls being allowed to stay at Greyfriars; but, all the same, Marjorie & Co. prove one too many for them, and they are made to look very small indeed.

Bulstrode determines to have his revenge on Marjorie, and when one night the latter breaks bounds, the bully locks the window through which she makes her departure. Marjorie has a most exciting adventure, and she is in great peril, when Harry Wharton rushes to her rescue.

The concluding portion of this story is most exciting, for when Harry and Marjorie return to Greyfriars a most thrilling incident happens. This story is a ripper.

Next Monday's long, complete tale of the chums of St. Jim's is entitled:

"GRIMES OF THE FOURTH!"

Grimes, the village boy, through Lumley-Lumley's generosity, comes to St. Jim's, and takes his place in the Form. Levison and Mellish make a dead set against the new fellow, but Grimes sticks manfully to his guns. He proves to Levison that he is quite capable of settling a disagreement with his fists. You will admire Grimes for the way he fights against the rotters who would throw him out of the school.

Next Monday's fine yarn of J. Silver & Co. is entitled:

"BACK TO THE LAND!"

The Fistical Four take up gardening. They are given a plot of land in the school ground, and then they set about cultivating it. The Classical chums consider that they have scored over their Modern rivals in thinking of the wheeze. But Tommy Dodd & Co. are not to be left out in the cold. Indeed, they are very prominent in this story, as you will learn next Friday.

YOUR EDITOR.

Another Splendid Long Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. in Next Friday's PENNY POPULAR, entitled:

"MARJORIE'S PERIL!"

By FRANK RICHARDS.

To Avoid Disappointment You Must Order Your Copy of the PENNY POPULAR In Advance!