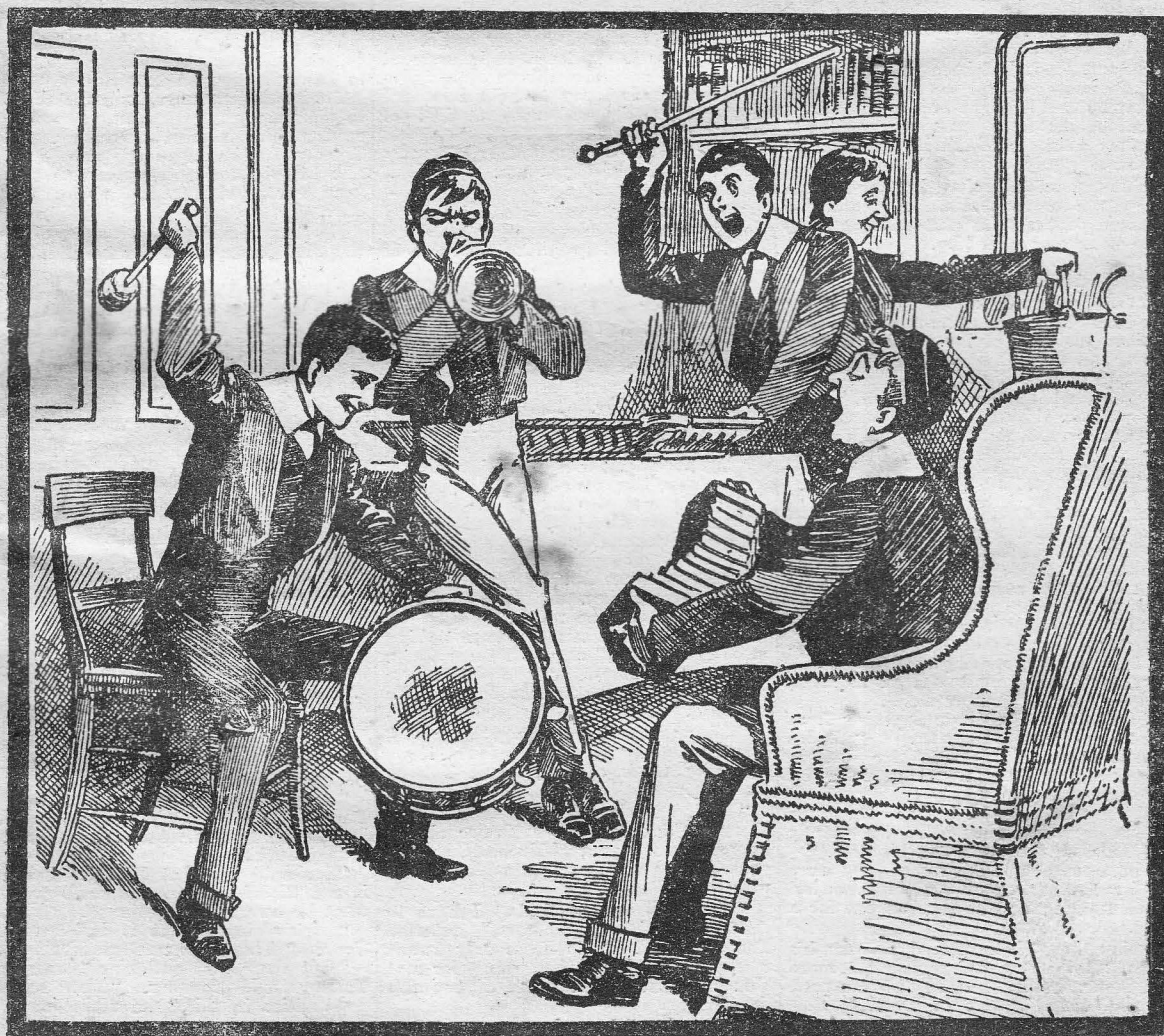


SCHOOL STORIES FOR ALL!

The
Penny Popular

No.
260.

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



BULSTRODE'S BOISTEROUS BAND!

*(An Amusing Incident from the Long Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co.,
contained in this Issue.)*

A Grand
Long Complete
Story, dealing
with the
Early Adventures
of
Jimmy Silver & Co.

THE PREFECT'S SECRET!

By
Owen
Conquest

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Tommy Dodd's Find.

"YAROOH! Ow!" Thus Tommy Cook of the Modern side at Rookwood.

Tommy Cook had been sauntering along the Fourth-Form corridor with his chums, Tommy Dodd and Tommy Doyle, when suddenly he had slipped and barged into the door of one of the studies.

Tommy Cook had been wearing a pair of new boots, and for the third time that day they had brought him to disaster.

All might have been well had not Tommy Cook collided with the door of Knowles' study.

Knowles was a prefect, but for all that he was a rogue and a bully, and the Modern chums were continually getting into hot water with him.

"Now you've done it!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd.

"Ow!" groaned Tommy Cook, rubbing the back of his head as he rose to his feet.

Then the door of the study was flung open, and the bullying figure and scowling face of Knowles appeared.

"Now, what's the little game?" cried the prefect, glaring at the three chums.

"I'm sorry, Knowles!" replied Tommy Cook, still rubbing his head. "Quite an accident."

"I know all about your accidents!" growled the bully. "You little beasts were up to your games again!"

"It was an accident," declared Tommy Cook, raising his voice slightly. "Do you think I'd come and bang my head against your door just to amuse myself?"

"I don't want any lies, nor cheeky answers either," said Knowles angrily. "Come in here, all of you!"

"Cook's told you it was an accident, and—" began Tommy Dodd.

"I don't want to hear anything from you!" snapped Knowles. "You're always the ringleader of these disturbances, and I'll teach you to be a bit quieter. Come on!"

Tommy Dodd & Co. had no alternative but to obey, and they entered the study and followed the prefect to his desk.

The three chums knew that they were in for another experience of Knowles' harsh treatment as he reached out for a cane.

"Now then," he muttered, between his teeth, "I'll just teach you to act more like human beings, instead of like a pack of wild beasts! Come on, Dodd!"

Swish, swish!

"Ow! You brute!"

"Now, Cook!"

Swish, swish!

"Doyle!"

Swish, swish!

"Ow! Yaroooh! Yoop!"

Knowles, in a temper, knew how to lay on the cane, and he gave Tommy Dodd & THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 260.

Co. a couple of handers each which they would not forget for some little time.

"The next time you kick up a row in my hearing," said the bully vindictively, "you'll get the biggest hidings you've ever had in your lives. Clear out!"

The Modern chums cleared out. "Rotter!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd, when they were outside the door.

"Beast!" hissed Tommy Cook. "Brute!" muttered Tommy Doyle.

Having each expressed their personal opinion of Knowles, the three juniors proceeded to their study to hold a council of war to decide on some method of getting even with the prefect.

"What's to be done?" asked Tommy Dodd, in despairing tones. "This is getting too thick!"

"Hanged if I know," growled Tommy Cook, "but something's got to be done. I'm getting fed-up with this sort of thing!"

"He knows how to lay it on when he's in a temper," said Tommy Doyle, clapping his hands together to ease his smarting fingers.

"Yes; he's a spiteful beast," agreed Tommy Dodd, "and he seems unusually down on us lately. The thing is—what can we do to get our own back and stop his bullying?"

"We might put in a complaint about it to Bulkeley," suggested Tommy Cook.

Bulkeley was the senior prefect and captain of the school, and one of the best fellows that ever entered Rookwood.

"I don't care much about going to Bulkeley with our troubles," said Tommy Dodd, "because in a way that's admitting we're beaten by the rotter."

"P'raps so; but it's the correct thing to do in the circles," argued Tommy Cook. "We're not supposed to take the law into our hands when it comes to dealing with a prefect."

"All the same, I'd rather get even with him by some wheeze of our own, if we can only think of one," said Tommy Dodd thoughtfully.

"Well, think of one, then," said Tommy Cook hastily. "You're always bragging about your giddy ideas, so now you've got a chance to do a bit of good with one of 'em!"

"That's all very well, but I have to think of all our wheezes," retorted Tommy Dodd. "Goodness only knows where we should be if it wasn't for me! You kids had better think of one this time."

"How the dickens do you expect anyone to think of wheezes when their hands are smarting like fury?" demanded Tommy Cook impatiently.

"Well, I've had a couple of handers as well as you, fathead; so how do you think I'm to work out a scheme?"

"Oh, shut up, ass!" "Well, look here; it's no good squabbling," said Tommy Doyle. "We'd better

agree to think it over till to-morrow, and then compare ideas!"

"That's not a bad notion," agreed Tommy Dodd. "Now, I've got some prep to do."

There, for the time being, the matter ended; but each of the three Modern chums made up his mind to rack his brains for a scheme that would enable them to get even with Knowles.

The next day found Tommy Dodd & Co. no less keen in their determination to have revenge on Knowles.

They were walking along the corridor to their study after morning classes, discussing the prefect's tyranny, when Tommy Dodd's eagle eye caught sight of a half-sheet of notepaper lying on the floor a few yards from Knowles' study-door.

He stooped and picked it up, and after a quick glance at it stuffed it into his pocket.

"I fancy I've picked up something which may be useful to us," said the leader of the three chums, with a new light in his eye.

"What is it?" asked Tommy Cook eagerly.

"Don't know yet, but we'll see when we get into the study," answered Tommy Dodd.

When the three chums had gained the seclusion of their study and closed the door, Tommy Dodd produced the piece of paper. Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle leaned over his shoulders as he examined it.

It was a soiled half-sheet of notepaper, with a few words scrawled upon it in lead pencil.

"Dear K," read Tommy Dodd. "That means Dear Knowles," he explained. "Must have some money from you at once. Meet me in the empty house, bottom of Mill Lane, at three o'clock.—J.H."

"My hat!" exclaimed Tommy Doyle.

"What's he up to now?" said Tommy Cook excitedly. "Who's J.H.?"

"Joey Hook, I guess," replied Tommy Dodd. "That beastly bookmaker who haunts the Bird-in-Hand at Coombe!"

"By Jove!"

"I should say that Knowles has got into a bit of a mess, and can't pay up what he owes," he continued.

"That's about what it is," assented Cook. "What's the next move?"

"Get there first and hide," answered Tommy Dodd promptly. "There's great possibilities in this," he added meditatively.

"What of?" queried Tommy Cook innocently.

"Why, of getting square with Knowles, fathead!" replied Tommy Dodd impatiently. "If Knowles finds out that we have got information about him that he doesn't want anyone else to know, he'll leave us alone in future to keep our mouths shut."

"Oh, I hadn't thought of that!" murmured Tommy Cook.

"You would have done if you'd used your brains," said Tommy Dodd scathingly.

"I use my brains as much as you do!" retorted Tommy Cook warmly.

"Rats!" grunted Tommy Dodd. "Though," he added quietly, "I expect the fact of the matter is there's not so much of 'em to use!"

"Oh, chuck it—" began Tommy Cook, when Tommy Doyle interrupted him.

"Half a jiffy, though," he exclaimed. "The note might be an old one." "Might," agreed Tommy Dodd; "but that doesn't matter. If the note's an old one, the chances are Knowles won't go out this afternoon. The game will be to watch for him to start, and then cut across to the place by a quick way over the fields."

"Yes, that'll do all right," said Tommy Cook. "But we should be a set of prize idiots to go and wait all the afternoon in an empty house for nothing."

"You leave it to me," said Tommy Dodd confidently, as they left the study to make their way to the dining-hall.

As they passed along the corridor once more, the subject of their recent discussion emerged from his study. He bestowed an angry scowl upon Tommy Dodd & Co. as they drew level with him, and then stalked off in the opposite direction.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Fistical Four to the Rescue.

AT about a quarter past two Tommy Dodd & Co. strolled over to a quiet corner of the quad to await the appearance of Knowles.

They thought it as well to take up a position where he would be unlikely to spot them, for he was always suspicious of the movements of the Modern chums.

"Here comes the giddy rotter!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd, a few minutes later.

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle looked over to the school door, through which Knowles was just emerging.

"Good egg!" said Tommy Cook.

"Then the note was for to-day," said Tommy Doyle exultantly.

"Wait a minute, though," said the leader of the three chums. "Let's see if he goes in the direction of Mill Lane."

They stepped out into the quad, and watched Knowles striding towards the gates. When he had passed through, he turned to the right.

"Good!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd. "That's the way to Mill Lane."

"Come on, then," cried Tommy Cook eagerly.

"Don't be in such a giddy hurry," commanded Tommy Dodd. "Let him get a bit further away. We shall get there five or ten minutes before he does by my short cut."

"But I'm anxious to get on with the business," said Tommy Cook impatiently. "I'm getting quite excited about it."

"Yes; and if you're not careful, you'll muck the whole thing up," declared Tommy Dodd. "I'll just go and see how far he's got."

He soon returned and reported that it was all clear to start, and they quickly passed out of the gates and hurried on their way to the empty house at the bottom of Mill Lane.

They were all so excited and eager over the chase that not one of them noticed a party of four Classical juniors of the Fourth Form who were watching their movements from some distance away.

Jimmy Silver and his chums, Lovell, Newcome, and Raby, the Fistical Four of Rookwood, had emerged from the school just in time to witness the departure of the Modern chums.

"Now, I wonder what that means?" exclaimed Lovell, turning to his chums.

"There's evidently a wheeze on," remarked Jimmy Silver.

"Yes; and against us, I reckon," put in Newcome. "Most of their wheezes are."

"That's true enough; but there ought to be a chance of nipping this one in the bud," replied Jimmy Silver.

"Rather! Let's shadow the rotters!" suggested Lovell eagerly.

"Right-ho! Lead on, Jimmy!"

Accordingly the Fistical Four passed through the school gates just in time to catch sight of the Modern chums hastily clambering over a stile some distance up the lane leading from the school.

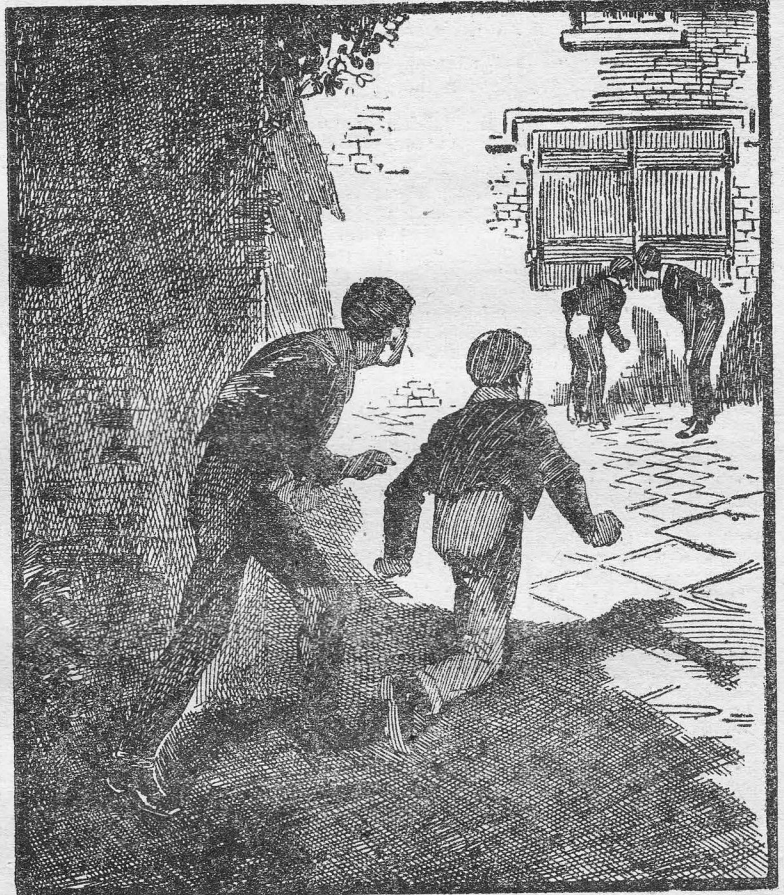
"Supposing it isn't a wheeze against us?" suggested Lovell suddenly.

"Doesn't matter if it isn't," replied Jimmy Silver; "there's something on, so we may as well find out what it is."

Jimmy Silver & Co. followed the Modern chums across two or three fields, skirting round the hedges to obtain what cover it was possible to get, until Tommy Dodd & Co. crossed another stile leading into a narrow lane.

Jimmy Silver, demanding caution from his followers, quickly followed. Tommy Dodd & Co. were speedily disappearing down the lane, pushing their way through overhanging foliage.

The Classical chums crept on behind them as stealthily as they could, until Jimmy Silver saw the juniors in front emerge upon a wider lane running along the end of the one through which they were struggling. He pulled up sharp, and watched.



Jimmy Silver and Lovell tiptoed across the yard and peered between the crack in the shutters, whilst Newcome and Raby hung in the background.

"There they go! After 'em!" exclaimed Raby.

"Go easy, now," urged Jimmy Silver, "or you'll mess up the whole giddy business."

The Classical chums hastened along the lane until they reached the stile over which the Moderns had just crossed. Tommy Dodd & Co. were tearing across the field path as hard as they could go.

"They seem to be in a dickens of a hurry," remarked Jimmy Silver. "It ought to be quite safe to follow, because they're too keen on something or other to think of turning round."

Opposite to the exit from the lane stood an empty house, and to the Fistical Four's amazement, Tommy Dodd & Co. made straight for it.

"My hat!" exclaimed Raby. "An empty-house wheeze!"

Jimmy Silver led the way a little further up the lane, where they could obtain a better view of the movements of their rivals in front.

Tommy Dodd was now in the act of opening a front window. Well concealed, Jimmy Silver & Co. watched as each of

the three chums disappeared into the house.

"What are we going to do now?" asked Lovell, in a puzzled tone of voice.

"Can't say, yet," replied Jimmy Silver. "We'd better have a squint round first. Come on!"

The Fistical Four emerged from the lane, and were advancing towards the window through which Tommy Dodd & Co. had passed, when they heard footsteps coming along the lane.

"Look out!" whispered Raby excitedly.

"Round the back of the house, quick!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

The four Classical juniors scampered round to the back as quickly as they could, and pulled up under the shadow of a wall of an outhouse.

Immediately facing them was a shuttered back window of the empty house.

They heard the footsteps stop in front of the house, and a conversation was being carried on in gruff tones.

"Someone going in!" whispered Lovell.

"Sounds like it," agreed Jimmy Silver. "Looks like trouble for those Modern rotters!"

After a moment or two the talking ceased, but the footsteps did not continue along the road.

"They've gone in!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Let's go and have a look round there," urged Newcome.

"No," said Jimmy Silver, "we'd better wait here for a few minutes and see if things settle down."

Crouching in the shadow of the wall, the Fistical Four waited, excited and eager to solve the mystery of what was going on in the empty house.

"Listen!" exclaimed Lovell suddenly. Straining their ears, the Classical chums could hear the murmur of voices. But they were not the voices of the Modern juniors.

"They're in that room," said Jimmy Silver, indicating the shuttered window.

"Can't hear anything of Tommy Dodd & Co.," muttered Lovell. "What's become of them?"

"Ask me another!"

"Let's have a squint through the shutters," suggested Raby.

"We can't all go," replied Jimmy Silver. "You wait here a minute with Newcome, and I'll go and have a look with Lovell."

Lovell, with the leader of the Fistical Four, tiptoed across the yard, and peeped through the crack between the shutters, while Newcome and Raby, in their excitement, leaned forward to catch the whispered report of their two chums.

"Knowles is there!" whispered Jimmy Silver to the other two.

"My hat!" exclaimed Newcome, in a stage whisper.

Then Jimmy Silver and Lovell tiptoed back to the shelter of the wall again.

"What the giddy dickens is Knowles doing in there?" asked Raby excitedly.

"How about Tommy Dodd & Co.?" asked Newcome, before Jimmy had time to answer Raby's question.

"Half a jiffy; one at a time!" said the leader.

"Knowles is talking to a very racy-looking cove, who doesn't look at all amiable," he continued. "There's no sign of those Modern chumps."

"What's it all—"

"Hallo! What's up?"

A furious gabble of voices had broken out behind the closed shutters, which was speedily followed by the sound of a scuffle.

The voices of Tommy Dodd & Co. could now be plainly heard, as well as those of Knowles and the other man.

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Jimmy Silver ran over to the shutters once more and peered through the crack. In a moment he returned and reported that Knowles and the bookie were pummeling into the Modern chums for all they were worth.

"Come on!" cried Jimmy Silver. "To the rescue!"

The excited Classical chums rushed round to the front of the house, and were soon climbing through the window by which Tommy Dodd & Co. had entered.

They quickly passed through the empty room and into the passage. The prefect, the bookie, and the Modern juniors were making a fearful din as Jimmy Silver & Co. advanced towards the door of the room where they were.

"Steady!" whispered Jimmy Silver as they tiptoed to the door, which was slightly ajar.

A remarkable sight met the gaze of the Classical juniors as they peeped through. Tommy Dodd and his chums Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle were crouching in a corner of the room, unable to escape.

Knowles and the racy looking gentleman, whom they recognised as Joey Hook, were standing before them, brandishing stout walking-sticks. Tommy Dodd & Co. were completely cornered!

"Now what have you got to say?" demanded Knowles in a harsh voice.

"Only that you're a scoundrel and a rotter!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd fearlessly.

Crack!

Knowles' stick descended on the shoulders of the leader of the Modern chums with cutting force. Tommy Dodd flinched, but uttered no sound.

"Beastly cowards!" cried Tommy Cook.

Both the sticks descended at once on the unfortunate Tommy Cook, one on his shoulders and one on his legs.

"Get ready to jump on 'em!" whispered Jimmy Silver to his chums outside the door. "That's quite enough of that sort o' thing!"

Knowles and the ruffian were still bullying and threatening the Modern juniors when Jimmy Silver gave the signal for attack.

"Go for 'em!"

With a rush the door flew open, and the four stalwart Classics bounded on to the prefect and his companion. They were taken completely by surprise, and before they could land out with their sticks, Tommy Dodd & Co. had joined in the fray.

Both Knowles and the bookmaker were strong, muscular fellows, but they stood no chance against the seven sturdy and angry Fourth-formers. In a few seconds they were borne to the floor and pinned down.

Knowles was purple with rage as he struggled to free himself. Had he succeeded in getting to his feet it would have gone badly for Tommy Dodd & Co., who were holding him down. His struggles were of no avail, however, and his companion, a few feet away, was in a like predicament.

"There's some rope outside," panted Jimmy Silver, looking at Raby. "Run out and fetch it, quick!"

Raby hesitated for a moment.

"Go on, quick!" continued Jimmy.

"We can manage this rotter!"

"What's the idea?" said Lovell, who was almost breathless through the struggle.

"We shall have to tie them up," gasped Jimmy. "They'll give us socks if they get free!"

In a few moments Raby returned with the rope and handed it to the Classical leader.

"Good!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

It was good stout rope, and plenty of

it. Raby took Jimmy's place while he uncoiled it and cut it into two lengths.

Then the juniors set to work on the task of tying up the prefect and his bullying companion. Although they struggled fiercely, the Fourth-formers eventually got them securely bound up hand and foot.

Then they rose to their feet, almost exhausted, for though the odds had been greatly in favour of the juniors, the infuriated bullies had given them a very severe doing.

"Done 'em at last!" panted Lovell.

"Yes, the rotters!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "Jolly glad you came along when you did!"

"You wait, my beauties," threatened Knowles fiercely. "I'll make you suffer for this!"

"We don't intend to wait," replied Jimmy Silver. "We're just off! Come on, kids!"

"Good-bye," said Tommy Dodd sweetly. "Hard luck, Knowles!"

The seven Fourth-formers trooped out, and were soon on the road once more.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Quits!

"WHAT'S your idea, Silver?" asked Tommy Dodd as they stood outside the empty cottage once more.

"Well, first of all, we should like to know all about this giddy business from the beginning."

Tommy Dodd told the Classical chums about the harsh treatment he and his chums had received at the hands of Knowles, and of their desire to get equal with him.

Then he told them about the finding of the note and their plan for getting to the house first to find out what was going on.

"But when we looked through the shutters at the back the first time we couldn't see anything of you," said Jimmy Silver.

"That was because we were hidden in that big cupboard in the corner of the room," explained Tommy Dodd. "We should have been there now if that silly ass hadn't sneezed!"

He indicated Tommy Doyle as he spoke.

"Faith, an' how could a fellow help sneezing?" exclaimed Tommy Doyle in an injured tone.

"Why, pinch your nose, ass!" retorted Tommy Dodd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anyway," continued Tommy Dodd, "that let the giddy cat out of the bag. Knowles came and raked us out in no time. You know what happened after that!"

"What were they talking about before you were discovered?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Why, old Joey Hook was after some money. As far as they'd got with the business it seemed that Knowles has been losing heavily on his betting transactions, and had got no money to pay up with."

"Ho, ho!"

"They'd probably have come to blows by this time if it hadn't been for our getting nabbed," continued Tommy Dodd.

"Well, they won't come to blows now!" said Tommy Dodd smiling.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No jolly fear!"

"Joey Hook was just telling Knowles that he'd let the Head know about it, when the catastrophe occurred," continued Tommy Dodd.

For a moment Jimmy Silver made no remark, then suddenly he jumped as though he had been shot.

"Got it!" he cried.

"In the neck, I should think," said Tommy Dodd, staring in amazement at the leader of the Fistical Four.

"Has he had a stroke?" asked Raby, looking at Jimmy in alarm.

"No, but he'll get one in a minute if he's not careful," said Tommy Cook.

"It's an idea, you asses!" cried Jimmy Silver.

"Do they always affect you like that?" asked Tommy Dodd.

"Come on, out with it!" demanded Lovell.

"We'll go and rag Knowles' study while he's tied up here!" said Jimmy Silver triumphantly.

"Is that the wheeze you made all the fuss about?" sneered Tommy Dodd.

"Well, what's the matter with the wheeze?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Why, we shall get a jolly good licking from Knowles when he comes back, and be made to clean up all the mess," replied Tommy Cook.

"That just shows what a set of fat-heads you are!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Knowles daren't touch you now, because you've got that note of his, and you've heard Joey Hook demanding money from him in payment of his debts."

"Well?" said Tommy Dodd.

"Why," continued Jimmy Silver, "he'll be afraid to lick you again, in case you let on to Bulkeley, or even the Head. See?"

"True enough," agreed Tommy Dodd, as the light began to dawn upon him.

"Are you on for the ragging?" queried Jimmy Silver.

"Rather!" was the ready response from the others.

"Come on, then, and buck up. We've got no time to waste."

The seven juniors set off at a sharp trot for Rookwood, eager to carry out their plan.

They were soon mounting the stairs to Knowles' study, thoroughly determined to make as big a wreck of the place as they could.

Arrived at their destination they locked the door, and Jimmy Silver looked around him.

"It won't take long to alter the appearance of this show," he said, after a moment.

"No," said Raby. "That'll do for a start!" he added, hurling a book at a hunting picture, which clattered to the floor amidst a shower of glass.

"On the ball!" cried Tommy Dodd.

Then the juniors began work in earnest. Tommy Cook turned his attention to the fireplace, apparently being possessed of a strong conviction that soot was a valuable substance for making a mess of things generally.

He had soon raked a shovelful down the

chimney, and this he poured into Knowles' best boots, adding a bottleful of ink to make it into a nice paste.

Meanwhile, Lovell and two or three more of the enterprising Fourth-Formers were putting the bookcase on its back.

This done, they commenced removing the books. Raby had discovered a pot of jam and a tin of condensed milk in the cupboard, and this was lavishly spread between the pages of the books.

Then they were replaced in the shelves, but the bookcase was left on the floor.

The juniors then turned their attention to the task of collecting up all the sporting papers they could find, together with the trashy novels of which Knowles was so fond.

These were placed in the fireplace in a towering heap, then Jimmy Silver put a match to them.

"That's the end of that lot!" exclaimed Lovell in satisfied tones.

Then the pictures were pulled down from the walls, and the prefect's boxing-gloves were filled with ink and soot.

Then Tommy Dodd raked down from the top of a cupboard Knowles' best hat. This was rubbed round the wrong way and dented in, and, just to give it a finish, some condensed milk was smeared inside it.

Some clean collars were brought to light, also some ties. These were dipped in the ink, which was running in little streams through the papers on the floor.

A shovelful of ashes and soot was placed in Knowles' armchair, and the drawers of the desk were filled up with coal.

At last the juniors paused and looked round.

"I think that ought to do," remarked Jimmy Silver, gazing around to see if there was anything else to pull down.

"Can't think of anything else," said Tommy Dodd; "and it's time we cleared out."

"What's going to be done about Knowles and the other rotter?" asked Tommy Cook. "S'pose we can't leave 'em there?"

"No," replied Jimmy Silver. "We'll go and have a wash first, then we'll hunt out Leggett, and tell him that Knowles wants to see him urgently in the empty cottage at the bottom of Mill Lane."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it's quite true, isn't it?"

"Absolutely!"

"Right! Come on!"

The Fourth-Formers hastened to remove all signs of the fray, then went in search of Leggett.

The cad of the Fourth was nowhere to be found at first, and the juniors were beginning to get anxious as to how the prefect was to be released, when they saw Leggett sauntering across the quad.

"I say, Leggett!" called Jimmy Silver. "Well," growled the cad of the Fourth, "what do you want?"

"Just a word with you," said Jimmy Silver.

"Out with it, then," retorted Leggett, who hated the Fistical Four like poison.

"Knowles wants you to go to him at once," said Jimmy Silver. "He's in the empty house at the bottom of Mill Lane."

Leggett looked suspiciously at Jimmy Silver, fearing a trap.

"Well, I don't think I shall go," he muttered. "I haven't time now."

"It's very urgent," urged Jimmy Silver. "I'm afraid he'll be very upset if you don't go."

Jimmy Silver's chums and Tommy Dodd & Co. could hardly keep their faces straight as they heard the leader of the Fourth persuading Leggett to hasten off at once.

"Suppose I'd better go," muttered the cad of the Fourth at last. "It's a beastly nuisance, though."

He turned, without another word, and passed out of the gates.

"We'd better make ourselves scarce now, before they get back," asked Jimmy Silver. "When Knowles sees his study, he'll feel inclined to kill the first person he sets eyes on."

They retired to the study of the Modern chums, and locked themselves in. Presently Tommy Dodd spotted Knowles coming across the quad with Leggett.

They hastened out, and concealed themselves near to the prefect's study door. In another moment they heard the bully coming up the stairs, grumbling and uttering threats of what he intended to do to the Modern chums.

When he opened the door of his study, and his gaze fell upon the mess and wreckage within, words failed him.

He simply stood and stared, turning purple in the face with rage.

"I'll skin those little hounds!" he hissed, when he had partially recovered from the shock. "I'll break every bone in their beastly little bodies!"

Then he entered the room, and slammed the door.

The seven Fourth-Formers emerged from their hiding-place, scarcely able to stifle their mirth. Then Tommy Dodd & Co. returned to their study and locked the door, and Jimmy Silver and his chums departed to their own quarters.

Knowles did not carry out his fearful threats. By the time the juniors saw him again he had reasoned things out as Jimmy Silver had prophesied.

Whenever Knowles passes them he favours them with a scowl that would fell them if looks would kill, but Tommy Dodd & Co. have been left severely alone since they discovered the prefect's secret.

THE END.

Another Magnificent Long Complete Tale of Jimmy Silver & Co. in
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SHOULDER TO SHOULDER!

By
Martin
Clifford

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Very Rough on Wally.

THERE was a smell of cooking in the Third Form-room.

Wally D'Arcy and his inseparable chums, Jameson and Gibson and Frayne, were cooking rashers before the Form-room fire.

There was a smell of cooking, and a still stronger smell of burning.

The fags were deeply engrossed in their work, otherwise they would have heard the study door open, and the form of Mr. Selby, the master of the Third, dash furiously in.

Mr. Selby grasped Wally by the shoulder and swung him away from the grate.

"Hallo!" roared Wally, as the rashers tumbled into the grate. "You fathead, stop it!"

Wally was under the impression that it was a fag who was dragging him away from the fire, from a mistaken sense of humour.

"D'Arcy minor!"

"Oh!" gasped Wally. "Mr. Selby!"

"What did you call me?" thundered the Form-master.

"I—I thought it was somebody else, sir."

"I do not believe you!" shouted Mr. Selby. "You intentionally addressed me with gross disrespect, D'Arcy minor."

Wally's lips set obstinately. He did not like to have his word doubted, and he very nearly made a reply that would have been much more disrespectful than what he had said already. But he restrained himself.

"And that is not all!" thundered Mr. Selby. "You have committed outrages in my room! You have filled my slippers with treacle!"

"I haven't, sir!"

"You have affixed a pin upon my bell-push—"

"I didn't!"

"And disconnected the bell!"

"I haven't touched the bell, sir!"

"It is false—false!"

Wally's eyes gleamed.

"Well, if you don't believe me, it's no good my saying anything, is it, sir?" he said.

Mr. Selby shook him.

"You young scoundrel, you are lying!"

Wally was silent.

"I am going to punish you, D'Arcy minor," said Mr. Selby in tones of concentrated rage. "Frayne, give me the cane from my desk!"

Joe Frayne hesitated.

"Do you hear me, Frayne?"

Frayne reluctantly brought the cane. "Now, D'Arcy minor, hold out your hand!"

D'Arcy minor did not move.

"Do you hear me?"

"Yes, sir."

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"Then obey me at once!"

Wally did not stir.

Mr. Selby waited a moment—a short moment. Then he grasped Wally by the collar with his left hand and swung him round, and thrashed him with the cane.

The fags looked on in horror. They were accustomed to displays of temper on the part of their Form-master, but they had never seen him in anything like this state before. The cane rose and fell with cruel lashes, and Wally roared with pain.

"Ow! Ow! Leave off! Leggo, you beast! Ow! Ow!"

"Let him alone, sir!" shouted Jameson, running forward. "You've no right to cane him like that! Let him alone!"

A back-hander from Mr. Selby sent Jameson reeling. Then the infuriated Form-master lashed at Wally again. Wally's yells rang through the Form-room and outside it. The door opened suddenly, and Kildare strode in.

"What's all this row?" he demanded angrily. "What—why—why—"

"What are you doing, sir?"

"Don't you dare to interfere with me, Kildare!"

"Mr. Selby—"

Lash! Lash!

Kildare ran forward and seized the Form-master's wrist in a grip of iron, and wrenched the cane away from him. He tossed the cane the length of the Form-room, and then faced the panting master, with a flushed and angry face.

"I don't think you know what you are doing, sir!" he said sternly. "You have no right to cane a boy like that!"

Mr. Selby almost foamed.

"Kildare, how dare you—how dare you—"

"I dare to interfere to save a lad from being treated brutally, sir!" said Kildare fearlessly.

"Give me that cane at once!"

"I shall do nothing of the sort!"

"I shall report this insolence to the Head, Kildare!"

"Report what you like!" said Kildare savagely. "I've a jolly good mind to report you to the Head how you were using D'Arcy minor. And I will, too, if you lay a finger on him again!"

Kildare was very nearly as angry as the Form-master now. Mr. Selby's hands were clenched, and for a moment it looked as if he would hurl himself upon the captain of St. Jim's.

The fags looked on breathlessly. There wasn't a fellow in the Third who would have hesitated to give a whole term's pocket-money to see Mr. Selby handled by the athletic captain of St. Jim's.

But Mr. Selby, fortunately for himself, restrained his temper. Kildare was quite in a mood to knock him flying among the desks.

"Kildare, that boy has played tricks in my room—filled my slippers with treacle, broken my bell!"

"You had no right to cane him like that, whatever he has done."

"I—I—"

"Wally didn't do it!" said Jameson furiously. "I've been with Wally ever since last lesson, and I know he hasn't been to Mr. Selby's room!"

"It is false!" rapped out Mr. Selby. "Kildare, you had no right to interfere here! I order you to leave this room!"

"And I refuse to obey you, sir!"

"Kildare, I shall report you!"

"Report, and be hanged!" said Kildare roughly. "You have acted disgracefully! If you were not a master I'd lay that cane about you now yourself!"

Mr. Selby stuttered with rage. But he had sense enough left to know that he dared not carry the matter before the Head of St. Jim's. Kildare was master of the situation, and it was only left for Mr. Selby to retreat. The Form-master, giving the Sixth-Former a last furious look, stamped from the room.

Wally had sat down on a form, his head lowered in his hands. He was shaking from head to foot with pain. Kildare put a hand upon his shoulder, and Wally looked up with a white, strained face.

"Thank you, Kildare!" he muttered.

"Has he hurt you much?"

"Oh, yes, the brute!"

Kildare's brows knitted.

"Come with me to the Head, kid! Dr. Holmes wouldn't allow anything of the sort if he knew. Come with me. I'll see you through."

Wally shook his head.

"I don't want to sneak!" he said.

Kildare paused.

"Well, perhaps you're right, kid," he said. "It's better to stand things, if you can, and not tell tales. You're a little man!"

And Kildare slowly left the Form-room.

The fags gathered round Wally. In spite of his pluck, the scamp of the Third could not keep back the tears from his eyes. He was dangerously near to "blubbing" now.

"The awful brute!" said Jameson, in a white heat of indignation. "You ought to have let Kildare take you to the doctor, Wally."

Wally shook his head without speaking.

"We're not going to stand this!" said Curly Gibson.

Wally's eyes blazed.

"I'm not going to stand it!" he said. "I'll get even with Selby, if they kick me out of St. Jim's for it! Don't talk to me now. I can't stand it!"

And the fags let Wally alone.

Ten minutes later the Form-room door opened again and the Terrible Three came in. They were grinning.

"Hallo, Wally!" said Tom Merry.

"What's the matter with you, kid?"

Wally gave them a miserable grin.

"I suppose it was you who played the goat with old Selby?" he asked.

"Yes; but—"

"He jumped to the conclusion that I had done it."

"But you could prove that you didn't!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You don't mean to say that he's licked you without any proof against you? Didn't you deny it?"

"He didn't believe me."

"The rotter!"

"Then he's licked you?" asked Monty Lowther.

Wally groaned.

"It was an awful licking!" said Jameson. "Kildare came in, and he chipped in, and took the cane away from Selby. Selby said he'd report him to the Head; but I'll bet he doesn't dare to do it!"

Tom Merry looked very glum.

"I'm sorry, kid!" he said.

"It's all right!" muttered Wally. "I'll make him sorry for it!"

Tom Merry looked at him uneasily. The fag's eyes had a strange gleam in them; and Tom Merry did not like his look.

"What are you thinking of, Wally?" he asked.

D'Arcy minor was silent.

"Wally, old son, what have you got in your head? Don't do anything rash; that would only make matters worse!"

Wally did not reply. The Terrible Three left the Third Form-room with gloomy faces and worried minds. Some idea was evidently working in Wally's brain, and in his present mood he was only too likely to do something rash, which, as Tom Merry said, would only make matters worse. And the Terrible Three resolved that they would keep an eye on Wally that evening.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Roped In.

MR. SELBY was feeling a little better.

It was a custom of his to walk round the quadrangle in the evening before going to bed; and as he crunched along the gravel path, the Third Form-master felt decidedly better.

Suddenly he heard a step on the gravel path behind him, and he glanced round. A shadow loomed up for a moment, and then disappeared.

"Who is that?" called out Mr. Selby.

He had reached the darkest part of the path, where it ran under the shadowy old elms. He peered to and fro in the darkness but could see nothing.

His anger began to rise. It occurred to him that the boy, whoever he was, was dogging his steps, and watching him in the darkness, for what reason he could not possibly guess.

Mr. Selby frowned.

"Who is there?" he rapped out. "Answer me at once!"

The answer came—in an unexpected manner.

There was a whizz in the air, and Mr. Selby felt something settle over his head, and then over his shoulders.

It was a noose.

The rope glided down over his shoulders, and the loose rope tightened. Mr. Selby was transfixed for a moment. He knew what had happened.

"Good heavens!" he gasped, in amazement and horror.

He grasped at the rope as it tautened round his chest.

He intended to throw it off, and then to secure the offender, and lead him into the House by his collar, there to suffer condign punishment.

But it was not quite so easy to throw off the rope.

The slip-knot had tightened, and Mr. Selby was a prisoner. As he dragged at the rope to loosen it, to throw it off over

his head, there came a sharp drag upon it, and Mr. Selby rolled over on the gravel path.

He gave a sharp cry.

Bump!

He was rolling on the path now, helpless in the rope. There was a scuffle of feet, and Mr. Selby felt a knee pressed into the small of his back. His face was ground down into the gravel, and he gasped for breath.

The rope was wound about his arms, and knotted again, the breathless and confused Form-master hardly struggling to resist.

He could not see his assailant, with his face pressed in the gravel, the knee in his back keeping him there; and, in any case, the darkness was too thick for him to have recognised the wielder of the lasso.

His first thought was that it was D'Arcy minor again. But surely a fag would never dare such an outrage! A terrifying thought came into Mr. Selby's

mouth, effectually keeping him quiet. Then he felt a handkerchief being wound round his head, and tied, to keep the stuffed rag in place in his mouth.

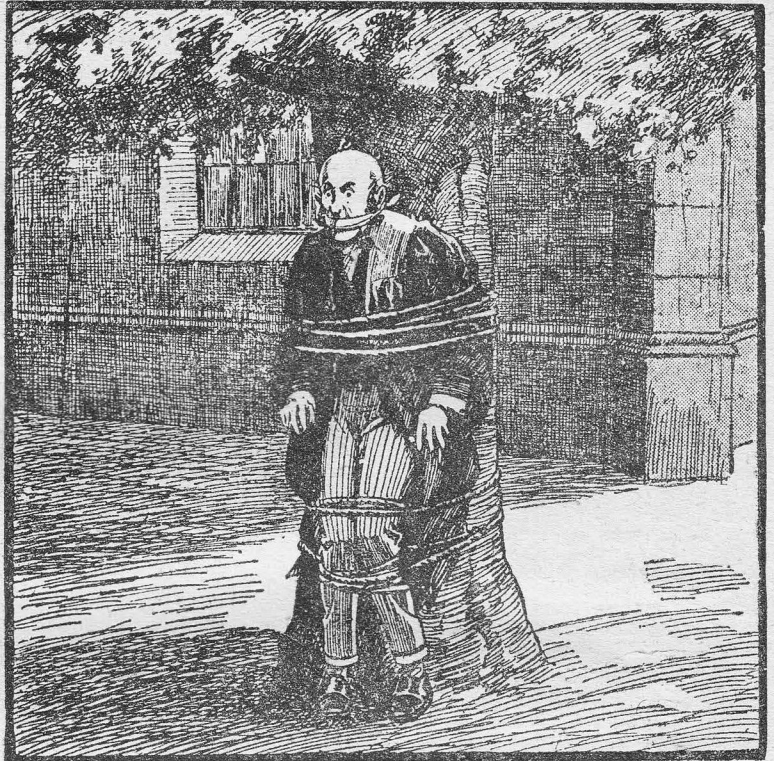
He could not struggle now. The rope that formed the lasso was knotted round his arms, pinning them to his sides.

Who was the assailant?

He could see nothing but a dim shadow bending over him. Another twist of the rope, and it was knotted round his legs. Mr. Selby was a helpless prisoner now. Then he felt himself dragged away. He was dragged off the path, and under the thicker darkness of the elms.

The Form-master was almost frozen with fear by this time. It could not be a St. Jim's fellow who was handling him like this, surely? What dangerous ruffian was it into whose merciless clutches he had fallen?

He bumped over the ground as his captor dragged at the rope. They stopped at last. It seemed an age to the Form-master, but it was really only a



Mr. Selby was left alone, tied to the tree in the deep darkness under the shadowy branches of the elms. As soon as he was sure that he was alone and that he had nothing more to fear from his assailant, he began to struggle with the rope. But it was useless.

mind that it was not a St. Jim's fellow at all, but some ruffian—some burglar—who intended to rob, and perhaps to murder him.

Mr. Selby gasped painfully for breath. He was not of the stuff of which heroes are made, and all his courage ebbed away at the thought that he might be in the hands of some sinister ruffian.

He was dragged over, and, as his face was freed from the gravel, he opened his mouth to cry for help. Then he gasped and spluttered.

A twisted rag was thrust into his mouth as he opened it—a rag that smelt, and tasted, very strongly of oil. Mr. Selby spluttered into silence.

It was some rag from the bike-shed probably, and it reeked with oil and dirt. It was jammed tightly into Mr. Selby's

minute or two. Then the dazed and dizzy tyrant of the Third felt himself jammed against the trunk of a tree, and the rope was passed round the tree and tied there.

Mr. Selby tried to speak; but the oily rag in his mouth choked back all utterance. He could only gurgle faintly, and glare. A shadow passed before his eyes; there was a faint sound of receding footsteps. His assailant was gone. Silence!

Mr. Selby was left alone, tied to the tree in the deep darkness under the shadowy branches of the elms. As soon as he was sure that he was alone, and that he had nothing more to fear from his assailant, he began to struggle with the rope. But it was useless.

His arms and his legs were tied tightly. THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 260.

and he could hardly move them, and there was no chance at all of getting the rope off. As for breaking it, that was very far beyond the strength of the Form-master. It would have defied the efforts of a strong man to break it, and Mr. Selby was not athletic. He tried to expel the gag from his mouth; but his efforts in this direction were equally vain.

The string knotted round his head kept it in its place, and he could not chew the gag away. The mere taste and smell of it made him feel sick. As he tried to chew it, remnants of oil and grease were expressed from the rag, and glided down his throat, and he gurgled horribly.

How long was this to last?

His strength exhausted, the Form-master ceased his frantic efforts, and gave himself up to his fate.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. The Discovery.

WALLY!" Tom Merry uttered the name suddenly as a figure dashed by him in the darkness of the quadrangle.

He caught at it, and Wally halted, panting.

In the dimness Wally's face showed up very white, his eyes gleaming.

"Let me go—let me go!"

Tom Merry tightened his grip.

"What have you done, Wally?"

"Let me go!"

"Have you seen Mr. Selby?"

"Let me go!"

"Wally, you young ass," muttered Arthur Augustus, clapping a hand upon his minor's other shoulder, "what have you done?"

Wally panted.

"You fools, will you let me go?"

"Wally—"

"I mustn't be found here, you idiot!"

"What have you done?"

"Find out!"

"Wally, old man—"

"Will you let me go?" Wally's voice was suppressed and furious. "I tell you I mustn't be found here! It'd mean the sack!"

"You've done something!"

"Don't ask questions! You'd better not know! If you want to ruin me, you've only got to keep me here!" said Wally sullenly.

Tom Merry released him.

"Cut off!" he said abruptly.

Wally vanished into the darkness.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood quite still, very pale.

"What has he done, Tom Mewwy?" muttered the swell of St. Jim's huskily.

"Goodness knows!"

D'Arcy looked after his brother. The juniors, from where they stood, could see the open door of the School House, with the light shining within.

"He hasn't gone in," said D'Arcy.

"He's gone round the House," said Tom Merry hurriedly. "He didn't want to be seen going in. He'll get in at the back somewhere."

"Yaas, I see."

"He must have done something to old Selby. Goodness knows what!"

"Tom Mewwy"—D'Arcy's voice was husky—"he—he can't have hurt him much?"

"No, no; some jape, I suppose; but enough to be sacked for."

"The awful young ass!" groaned D'Arcy.

"Well, he was provoked," said Tom Merry. "It's no good blaming Wally. He's a reckless young ass; but Selby brought it on himself. He's been a brute!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

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"We must keep it dark about seeing Wally out here, Gussy. If Selby doesn't know, we've got to be careful not to give Wally away."

"Yaas, yaas!"

"Let's get out of the quad," said Tom Merry. "It will save us trouble, if we're not questioned."

"Yaas, but—"

"But what?"

"What about Selby?" faltered D'Arcy. "It's time he was in, you know. Why hasn't he come in? What has Wally done?"

Mr. Selby had indeed been an unusual time in the quadrangle—more than twice the time he usually spent upon his evening constitutional. Why had the juniors heard only one cry, and then silence? What had happened to Mr. Selby? Was it possible that Wally, in his feverish excitement and resentment, had hurt the Form-master?

Tom Merry tried to drive the idea from his mind; but it was not to be driven.

"Somethin' must have happened, Tom Mewwy," muttered D'Arcy miserably.

"I wonder what?"

"Mr. Selby must have some reason for not comin' in." D'Arcy tried to pierce the darkness with his eyes, in vain. "What has happened to him? Oh, the young ass—the young ass!"

Tom Merry hesitated.

If anything had happened to Mr. Selby, it would be heartless not to look for him; but if the juniors allowed it to become known that they had been in the quadrangle at the time they would be questioned, and then how were they to shield Wally?

"What's to be done, Tom Mewwy?" asked D'Arcy hopelessly. "We mustn't give Wally away. Not a word about seein' him out here!"

"Not a word," said Tom Merry.

"But—but Selby—"

"We'll get in, and give Blake a hint to look round the quad," said Tom Merry. "Blake will understand that something's on, and he won't ask questions."

D'Arcy brightened up.

"Jollay good ideab!" he exclaimed.

"I wondah I didn't think of that! Let's get in, deah boy!"

They hurried into the School House. But their luck was out. Kildare of the Sixth met them on the threshold, and he gave them a severe glance, and signed to them to stop.

"You should not be out of the House at this time!" he exclaimed.

"You young rascals, I suppose you have been raiding Figgins over the New House? Is that it?"

"Oh, no!" said Tom Merry.

"Not at all, Kildare, deah boy!"

"You have been up to something, I'll be bound!" said Kildare.

"Weally, Kildare, I twust—"

"Well, cut off, and don't go out again to-night," said the captain of St. Jim's good-naturedly.

The juniors cut off gladly enough. Two or three fellows in the Hall had looked at them while Kildare was speaking to them.

Then ran upstairs to Study No. 6.

"No good twyin' to keep it dark that we were in the quad, deah boy, now," Arthur Augustus whispered.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No. Kildare knows that. And Gore was there, too, and Cutts of the Fifth. They looked at us when Kildare stopped us. It's rotten luck!"

"But not a word about Wally, deah boy, even if we get licked."

"What-ho!"

D'Arcy opened the door of Study No. 6. Blake and Herries and Digby were gathered round the study fire, cook-

ing and eating chestnuts. They looked round as the two juniors came in.

"Hallo," said Blake, "there are some left! Pile in!" Then his expression changed as he looked at their faces. "What's happened?"

"Wally—"

"Oh, Wally again!" sniffed Blake. "We seem to get nothing but Wally now. You don't mean to say that Selby's been going for him again?"

"Worse than that," said Tom Merry.

"What's happened?"

"I'm afraid that Wally has gone for Selby this time."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Blake.

"Tell us about it," said Digby, getting up.

"Better not," said Tom Merry. "There will be a lot of questions asked about this bizney, I'm afraid, and you'd better not be dragged into it. But I wish one of you would go into the quad and look round, and—and—"

"And what?" asked Blake and Herries and Digby.

"And see if you can see anything of Selby."

"Hasn't he come in yet?"

"No."

"You—you don't mean to say that—that he can't come in! That Wally has—has—" Blake faltered, and did not finish.

"Goodness knows!" said Tom Merry. "We don't know any more than you do. But I think Selby ought to be looked for, if you don't mind."

Blake picked up his cap.

"We're going over to see Figgins about—about the footer match next week, or about ragging the Grammarians, or something," he said. "Come on, kids!"

And Blake hurried out of the study, with Digby and Herries at his heels.

Tom Merry and D'Arcy remained in the study, anxious and miserable. Why did not the master of the Third come in? What were Blake and his friends destined to discover in the dark quadrangle?

"Poor old Wally!" groaned D'Arcy at last. "It was Selby's fault—he dwove him to it, whatever it was."

"That's true enough, Gussy. But—but what has Wally done? Good heavens! I wish Selby would come in!"

Tom Merry crossed to the study window and opened it. From the window of Study No. 6 there was a view of the greater part of the quadrangle. Tom Merry's keen eyes caught the twinkling of a light out in the darkness of the quadrangle.

"That's Blake," he said. "He's got a bike lantern."

"I twust they'll find him."

"Hark!"

It was a call from the quadrangle. Tom Merry could not hear the words, but he understood the tone. Blake had made a discovery, and it had startled him.

"Oh, bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "What is it? Can you make them out?"

"Not yet."

"Let's go down, deah boy."

"Better stay here. We don't want to be questioned. They know we were in the quad—"

"Look over the banistals, then."

"All right."

They looked down over the banisters into the hall from above. There was a hubbub of voices below now, and they caught sight of Mr. Selby being carried in.

D'Arcy clutched Tom Merry's arm. A dreadful question was on his lips, but he could not utter it. But a voice came floating from below:

"He's fainted."
 "That's all," whispered Tom Merry.
 "We shall know all about it soon."
 "Oh, deah!"

Blake came upstairs as Mr. Selby was carried into Mr. Railton's study below. Blake was looking pale and troubled.
 "What was it?" asked D'Arcy in a whisper.

"He was tied to a tree, gagged and bound with a big rope—trussed up like a turkey, and couldn't move or call out, and he had fainted."

"Great Scott!"
 "The rope!" murmured Tom Merry.
 "That was what Wally had under his coat, the young ass! There'll be a frightful row over this."

"Mum's the word," said Blake.
 "Yaas, yaas!"

"Anybody know you fellows were out just now?" asked Blake.

"Yes, some of them saw us come in—Kildare, Cutts, Gore, and two or three others."

"Rotten! They'll ask you questions, and—"

"Well, we didn't see Wally do anything, after all—we can say that."

"Yaas, watah!"

"Mind, it will mean the sack for Wally—perhaps worse—if it gets out," said Blake. "Not a whisper, whether they ask you questions or not."

"Not a syllable," said Tom Merry.

The captain of the Shell returned to his own study with a clouded brow. They would ask him questions; that was certain. What could he say?

He could not deny that he had seen Wally in the quadrangle if they asked him, and if he refused to answer his refusal would be as bad as speaking, for it would prove that he was keeping silent for Wally's sake; silence would be as inculcating as speaking.

He could not deny that he had seen the fag there without telling a lie. And Tom Merry had never told a lie in his life. Could he begin now—to save Wally?

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
 The Lie.

WALLY D'ARCY was on his way to the Third-Form dormitory when Cutts of the Fifth rushed up.

"Mr. Railton wants you in his study at once," he said. "I guess there's trouble ahead for you, my son. The Head's there, with old Selby. Somebody's had the impudence to tie your respected master up to a tree in the quad." Cutts laughed heartily. "I suppose they want to question you on the matter. Ta-ta! I'd sooner be in my own shoes than yours!"

The Fifth-Former took his departure, and Wally made his way slowly to Mr. Railton's study.

He tapped on the door, and, in response to Mr. Railton's "Come in!" he turned the handle and walked in.

"I understand you wish to see me, sir!" he said.

"Yes."

Dr. Holmes fixed his eyes upon the boy, with a not unkindly glance.
 "I have sent for you, D'Arcy minor, in connection with what has just happened," he said. "You have heard of how Mr. Selby was found?"

"Cutts told me, sir, when he sent me here," said Wally. "I was going to bed."

"You knew about it before Cutts told you!" snapped Mr. Selby.

The Head made a gesture.

"Pray allow me to question the boy, Mr. Selby," he said, in a polite but very firm tone.

"Very well, sir."

"You say that Cutts told you about this, D'Arcy minor?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was that the first you had heard of it?"

There was an imperceptible hesitation before the fag answered. Then his answer came sharply.

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Selby started. He had declared that D'Arcy minor was the worst boy in the School House. But that he did not really believe so was evidenced by the fact that he believed that he would tell the truth when questioned. He was convinced that Wally had made that attack upon him, and he had not expected the fag to tell a lie.

Dr. Holmes's look became very grave now.

"Then you had no hand in the attack upon Mr. Selby, D'Arcy minor?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"Where were you at the time?"

"I do not know when it happened, sir."

"It happened about half an hour ago," said Mr. Selby, looking at his watch. "As I am convinced that you know perfectly well, D'Arcy minor."

"No one is to be considered guilty until he is proved to be so, Mr. Selby," said the Head drily. "Pray leave this matter in my hands."

Mr. Selby coloured, and was silent.



Tom Merry and D'Arcy felt utterly wretched. They had not lied; but they had not told all the truth!

"Where were you half an hour ago, D'Arcy minor?" the Head resumed.

"In the dormitory, sir."

"Why? It was not bedtime."

"Mr. Selby had been licking me, sir, and I was hurt. I went to the dormitory to stay there, because I didn't want the fellows to see how—how I looked."

The Head noted the redness of the fag's eyelids, and understood. He knew very well what a point of honour it was among the juniors not to be seen to "blub."

"Was anybody with you, D'Arcy minor?"

"No, sir."

"This is unfortunate. Of course, you must not think that I mean to doubt your word, my boy," the Head said kindly. "But this matter must be thrashed out most thoroughly. An action has been committed for which the offender will be expelled from the school. I am determined to get to the facts. You must answer all the questions that I put to you, freely and frankly."

Wally flushed for a moment.
 "Yes, sir," he said, in a very low voice.

"You were, then, alone in your dormitory?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did no one see you there at all?"

"My brother came to speak to me, sir."

"Ah! At what time?"

"About half an hour ago, sir. I can't remember exactly."

"If it was exactly half an hour ago, it would prove an alibi," said Mr. Railton. "That point is important, sir."

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"Yes. Half an hour ago it was half-past eight. Are you unable to say whether it was after half-past eight that your brother came to the dormitory, D'Arcy minor?"

"I couldn't be sure, sir."

"D'Arcy major will perhaps be able to settle the point," said the Head. "Mr. Railton, might I ask you to go to D'Arcy and ask him? I would not have him brought here, as sympathy for his brother might—ahem!—might perhaps affect his memory. I do not mean to imply that he would speak untruthfully, but it is easy to make a mistake of a few minutes."

"I will go at once, sir," said the Housemaster.

And he quitted the study.

There was silence until he returned. D'Arcy minor stood uneasily, shifting his feet every moment. Mr. Selby sat with a hard, cold face; the Head with a troubled look. Wally's denials had not changed Mr. Selby's opinion in the least. He felt quite certain that his unseen assailant was the fag before him, and probably no weight of evidence would have shaken his certainty on that point.

Mr. Railton returned in a few minutes. He looked very grave as he came into the study.

"Well, Mr. Railton?" said the Head.

"I have asked D'Arcy major what time he saw his brother in the Third-Form dormitory, sir," said the Housemaster quietly. "He tells me that it was some time before half-past eight."

"He is sure of that?"

"Yes. He returned to Study No. 6 afterwards to do his preparation, and after that he heard the half-hour from the clock tower."

"That is definite upon that point, then," said the Head. "The outrage was committed after your brother visited you in the Third-Form dormitory, D'Arcy minor?"

"I suppose so, sir."

"Did anyone else come to see you there?"

"No, sir."

"You declare to me that you were in the Third-Form dormitory all the time, and that you did not leave it after your brother left?"

Again an almost imperceptible hesitation. But Wally's answer came straight and clear when it did come.

"Yes, sir."

"You were not concerned in this attack on Mr. Selby?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know who was?"

"No, sir."

"You know nothing whatever about the matter?"

Mr. Selby could not restrain a gesture of impatience. The Head turned to him, with a very sombre look.

"D'Arcy minor has answered very straightforwardly, Mr. Selby. Do you still think that he was the person who attacked you?"

"Most decidedly I do, sir," said the

master of the Third. "I believe that every word he has uttered is false!"

Dr. Holmes' brow clouded.

"If he was the person who attacked you, Mr. Selby, he has certainly spoken falsely in denying it. But the investigation must be thorough. The proofs must be of the clearest before anyone is punished. All the boys in the House must be questioned as to whether D'Arcy minor was seen outside the Third Form dormitory after half-past eight, and especially as to whether he was seen in the quadrangle. As the Lower Forms have now gone to bed, the investigation had better be postponed till the morning. Then every boy in the House shall be separately questioned."

"Very well, sir," said Mr. Selby. "I feel sure that someone must have seen the boy, either in the passages or in the quadrangle. I have no doubt that the truth will be brought to light in the morning."

"Then, for the present, the matter ends here. You may return to your dormitory, D'Arcy minor."

"Thank you, sir."

Wally left the study.

His heart was as heavy as lead. All the boys in the School House were to be questioned in the morning as to whether they had seen him outside the Third Form dormitory—as to whether they had seen him in the quadrangle.

Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus had seen him there. He was lost!

He had lied!

It was Mr. Selby's fault that he had lied. Wally was a truthful boy; there was no creature he despised so much as a liar. Mr. Selby had called him a liar when he was speaking the truth, and that insult had cut deep.

The fag was in no state of mind for calm reasoning. Mr. Selby had called him a liar—well, he would lie, then. If he was to be condemned as a liar, he would be one—so far as Mr. Selby was concerned.

That was how the unhappy boy, feverish and excited, had worked it out, and the blame lay not so much with him as with the suspicious and unjust man who had driven him into it.

But—but he had lied. He had writhed inwardly with shame under the Head's kindly eyes as he lied. And now—now the lie was coming home to roost. For on the morrow, when questions were asked, he could not expect his brother and the chums of the Shell to lie as he had lied—that was out of the question. Poor Wally realised miserably enough:

"What a tangled web we weave,
When first we practise to deceive."

He had lied; and the falsehood would not serve his turn. He would be found out, and condemned, not only for what he had done, but as a liar, too. The tears came into the wretched boy's eyes as he went unsteadily back to his dormitory.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Burden of a Lie.

TOM MERRY went to bed with the Shell; but he did not go to sleep. His thoughts were too troublesome for sleep to visit him. He knew that Wally had been called before the Head, and he wondered what had happened. Had it all been found out?

If so, Wally's career at St. Jim's was at an end—there was no doubt about that. And, troublesome young scamp as Wally was, the chums of the School House all liked him, and it was miser-

able to think of his being dismissed in disgrace from the school.

Manners and Lowther were thinking about it, too; but they did not speak on the subject. There was no need to let the other fellows know what they knew.

The Shell fellows dropped off to sleep one by one; but the Terrible Three did not sleep. Eleven o'clock had struck when Tom Merry sat up in bed.

"You fellows asleep?" he asked, in cautious tones.

"I'm not," said Lowther.

"Same here," said Manners.

Tom Merry slipped out of bed. The rest of the Shell fellows were fast asleep. The captain of the Shell began to dress himself quietly.

"Where are you going, Tom?" asked Lowther, in a whisper.

"I'm going to see Wally."

"Won't he be asleep?"

"Not likely, considering the trouble the young ass has got himself into. I must know what he's told the Head. We're certain to have questions asked to-morrow, and we must know what to say. He was called into Ralton's study before the Head, I know; and I don't know what he's said. Of course, they've got no proof against him; and I want to tell him that he can rely on us. He must be worrying about that."

"Well, you can set his mind at rest on that point," said Manners. "Nobody's likely to give him away."

"No fear!" said Lowther.

Tom Merry slipped quietly out of the dormitory. It was not likely that D'Arcy minor would be asleep. He had done a thing that he would be expelled for if it could be proved against him, and that would be more than sufficient to keep him awake. Tom Merry made his way cautiously to the Third Form dormitory.

The upper passages in the School House were quite dark; but Tom Merry could have found his way about the old building with his eyes shut. In a couple of minutes he had reached the sleeping quarters of the Third.

He opened the door softly. There was a sound of steady breathing in the Third Form dormitory. The greater part of the fags were asleep, at all events. Tom Merry stepped in.

"Wally," he said softly.

He heard a gasping sound in the darkness.

"Who's that?"

"It's I—Tom Merry!"

"Oh!"

"I thought you'd be awake."

Tom Merry thought he heard a sound very like a sob in the darkness of the dormitory.

"Not likely to sleep, considering what's going to happen to-morrow," said Wally, in a low, wretched voice.

"What's going to happen to-morrow, Wally?"

"The sack for me."

Tom Merry had groped his way to D'Arcy minor's bed. There was no sound, save steady breathing from the other fags. The whole dormitory was fast asleep, with the exception of D'Arcy minor.

The Shell fellow sat on the edge of Wally's bed. Dimly, in the gloom of the dormitory, he made out the pale face and burning eyes of the unhappy fag.

"Did they find you out, Wally?"

"Not yet."

"You think that to-morrow—"

"I don't think, I know!"

"Mr. Selby suspected you?"

"Yes."

"He told the Head so?"

"Yes."

"But they can't prove it, Wally."

"I'm done for. The Head asked me

out straight if I'd done it, and where I was at the time."

Tom Merry caught his breath.

"What did you say, Wally?"

"Told him lies," said Wally bitterly.

"Wally!"

The fag burst into a scoffing, miserable laugh.

"You're shocked at that, of course?" he said.

"I am, Wally," said Tom Merry, very gravely. "I shouldn't have thought you'd do it. It wasn't right to lie to the Head. It was a rotten position; but lies won't make it better. I didn't think you'd do that."

"I didn't think myself I'd do it till to-day. But old Selby called me a liar; he said everything I said was false. Well, if I'm going to be called a liar, why shouldn't I be one? If he's going to say I'm not speaking the truth, I don't see why I should take the trouble to speak it. As well have the game as the name."

Tom Merry was silent. He understood; and he was not the kind of fellow to be hard on anyone who was down. He would not have lied himself; and, under the circumstances, he knew that Wally would have "faced the music" without dreaming of sheltering himself behind a falsehood. It was Mr. Selby who was responsible for this—responsible for Wally's folly in the first place, and for his falsehood in the second place.

"I know it was rotten," said Wally.

"It was Selby's fault; but it was rotten. But that man would turn any chap into a cad. I feel sick enough about it, and I'm going to get what I deserve. I don't deserve anything for ragging old Selby; it served him right. I'd do it again, too. But that whopper to the Head does stick in my throat, I'll admit. I felt like a disgusting cad! I was one, of course. And it won't do me any good, either."

"They can't prove it was you now, Wally," said Tom Merry heavily.

"Yes, they can."

"How?"

"Because they're going to question every boy in the House to-morrow morning. Every fellow's going to be asked separately whether he saw me in the quad."

"Oh!"

"Well, you and Gussy saw me in the quad, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"If you hadn't, it would have been all right. I could have lied myself out of it," said Wally, with a bitter self-contempt that was painful to hear. "I could have grown as big a liar as Levison or Mellish, with practice."

"Don't talk like that, Wally!"

"It's all up now," said Wally. "They'll ask you in the morning a plain question you can't fence with. Did you see me, or didn't you? You'll have to say that you did, and that will settle me. You and Gussy will have to say you did see me, and that will get me the boot. Serve me right. Not for what I did to old Selby, mind. That wasn't so bad as what he did to me. But for telling rotten lies. Any fellow ought to be kicked out of a decent school for telling lies!"

Tom Merry pressed his hand to his brow; his head was throbbing.

What was to be done?

Wally had lied. He had said that he was not in the quadrangle, when Tom Merry and D'Arcy major had seen him there. And if they told the truth, out of their mouths would come the fag's condemnation, not only for the attack upon Mr. Selby, but for the untruth he had told the Head.

There was a long silence.

"Can't anything be done?" Tom Merry said at last.

"Not unless you and Gussy start in

business as liars, as I've done," said Wally.

Tom Merry almost groaned.

"You don't want us to do that, Wally?"

"Of course I don't! You wouldn't if I did."

"I—I don't know."

"You couldn't," said Wally. "If you did, you'd feel after the same as I do, and I shouldn't like that. You'll have to answer, and you'll have to tell the truth. I'm going to be sacked. I wonder what the pater will say when I get home?"

Wally's voice broke.

"Oh, Wally, old man!"

"It can't be helped," said Wally.

"Get back to bed."

"I—I wish—"

"There's nothing to be done; only for me to take my gruel. It's all Selby's fault; but that won't help me much. Good-night!"

Tom Merry got off the bed.

"I—I'll think about it, Wally," he muttered. "There may be a way yet. I don't know. I—I'll see if I can think of anything. You sha'n't be sacked from St. Jim's, if I can help it?"

"You can't help it," said Wally.

"Don't give in yet; you never know. I'll do some hard thinking; and—and I'll speak to Gussy."

Tom Merry left the Third Form dormitory, leaving a sleepless, wretched lad there, to lie awake with restless limbs and staring eyes through the long hours of darkness waiting for the morning, and the sentence that the morning was to bring.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Up Against It.

DR. HOLMES was in his study the next morning, when there came a timid tap at the door. Dr. Holmes raised his head; his face was very grave and quiet.

There was a very unpleasant task before the Head of St. Jim's. He shrank from it; but justice had to be done. The assailant of the Third Form-master had to be discovered and punished. And the Head was forcing himself to go through the disagreeable matter.

"Come in," said the Head quietly.

Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy entered the study. Dr. Holmes nodded kindly to them.

"Kildare said you wished to see us after breakfast, sir?" said Tom Merry.

"Quite so."

There was another tap at the door, and Mr. Selby came in. The Third-Form master was looking very much his usual self now. He had apparently got over the effects of his very unpleasant experience of the previous evening. But his little greenish eyes were glinting with a spiteful light.

The Head bade Mr. Selby good-morning. Then the Form-master glanced somewhat curiously at the two pale and despondent juniors.

Dr. Holmes explained.

"I have made inquiries as to whether any boys were known to be out in the quadrangle after half-past eight last night, Mr. Selby. It appears that Merry and D'Arcy were there. This may save the unpleasant business of questioning the whole House."

"I understand, sir."

And Mr. Selby's eyes glinted again.

Even Mr. Selby, suspicious as he was, would not have cared to say that Tom Merry of the Shell was untruthful; the contrary was too well known.

If Tom Merry, at all events, had seen Wally in the quad, he would say so. And that would condemn the scamp of the Third. He would be guilty of having

lied about his whereabouts, and that would be proof positive of his guilt.

Dr. Holmes turned a kindly glance upon the juniors.

"I have a few questions to put to you, my boys," he said. "I am sure that you will answer me frankly."

"Will you allow me to speak, sir?" said D'Arcy.

"Certainly, my boy."

"I undahstand that this mattah concerns my bwothah, sir?"

"Yes. D'Arcy minor."

"And a gweat deal depends upon it, whethah he is to be expelled fwom St. Jim's or not?"

"Yes, D'Arcy."

D'Arcy drew a deep breath.

"Well, sir, undah the cires, is it quite fair to ask me for information on the subject, considewin' that the chap is my bwothah, sir? Is it weally playin' the game?"

Tom Merry caught his breath, and

pleasant to ask you to give evidence against your own brother. But you must remember that your brother had denied having been concerned in the attack upon Mr. Selby, and your evidence may clear him if he is innocent."

"D'Arcy evidently does not believe his brother to be innocent," said Mr. Selby bitterly.

D'Arcy flushed.

"One moment," said the Head quietly.

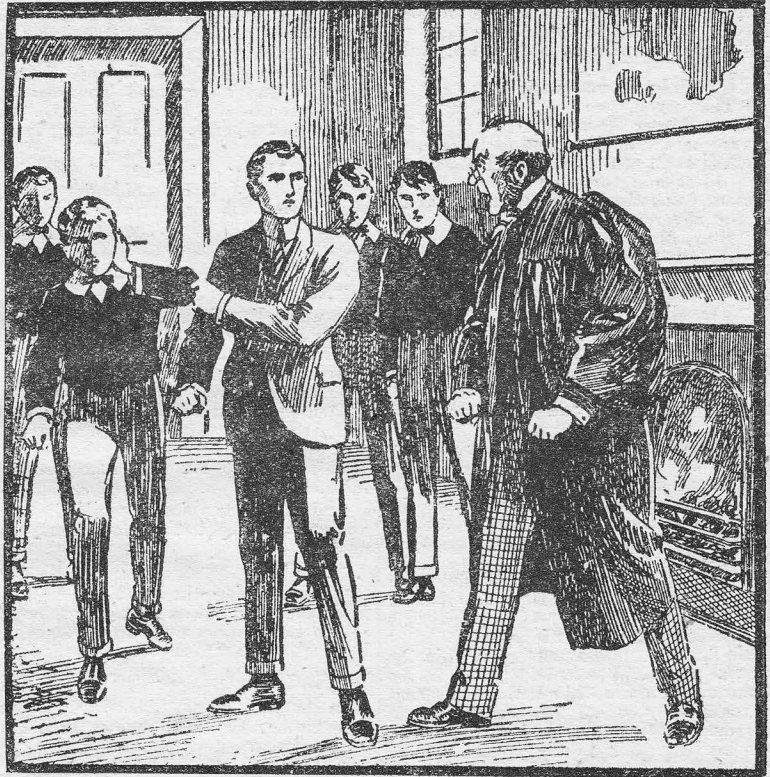
"I understand from Kildare that you two juniors came in from the quadrangle a very short time before the discovery was made of Mr. Selby bound to a tree?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Were you together all the time you were out of doors?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then the evidence of one will be as good as the evidence of two," said Dr. Holmes. "D'Arcy, you may retire from



Kildare faced the panting master with a flushed and angry face. "I don't think you know what you are doing, sir!" he said sternly. "You have no right to cane a boy like that!" Mr. Selby almost foamed. "Kildare, how dare you—how dare you—"

Mr. Selby stared angrily at the junior. The Head was silent for quite a long time. Certainly no junior of St. Jim's had ever ventured before to suggest to the reverend Head that he was not "playing the game."

D'Arcy stood looking firmly and fearlessly at the Head. He felt that he was in the right, and he felt that Dr. Holmes, as a "sport," ought to acknowledge it.

"You should cheek your insolence in the presence of the headmaster, D'Arcy," said Mr. Selby, breaking the silence with his harsh voice.

"I did not mean to be insolent, sir, and I am sure that Doctah Holmes undahstands that," said D'Arcy.

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"I quite understand that, D'Arcy," he said. "And there is certainly something in what you say. It is most un-

pleasant to ask you to give evidence against your own brother. But you must remember that your brother had denied having been concerned in the attack upon Mr. Selby, and your evidence may clear him if he is innocent."

D'Arcy hesitated. He had not intended this—he had not wanted to put the trouble on Tom Merry's shoulders only, and the burden of a lie, if a lie was told, upon the Shell fellow.

"I—I didn't mean that, sir," he stammered. "I—I want to stand by Tom Mewwy."

Dr. Holmes smiled.

"However, I shall ask you no questions, D'Arcy. As you were both together all the time, Merry can say all that is necessary."

"We have only Tom Merry's statement to the effect that they were together all the time, sir," hinted Mr. Selby.

Tom Merry turned crimson.

Dr. Holmes glanced at Mr. Selby, with a glance that made the master of the Third feel extremely uncomfortable.

"I rely entirely upon Tom Merry's word, Mr. Selby," he said. "There is no reason whatever for suggesting that he may not have told the truth."

"But, sir—"

"I know Merry to be a thoroughly honourable lad."

"I admit that, sir; but under the circumstances of what is impending over D'Arcy minor, even a usually truthful boy might—"

"I decline to entertain the idea."

"Very well, sir," said Mr. Selby, closing his lips very tightly.

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed. He understood Wally's feelings now better than before. While he was speaking the truth the Third-Form master cast doubt upon his word. What was the use of telling the truth to a man who looked upon him as a liar?

"Now, Merry—" began the Head.

Arthur Augustus was still hesitating. He did not want to desert his chum.

"May I remain in the study, sir?" he asked.

"Certainly, if you wish."

"Thank you, sir!"

Tom Merry gave D'Arcy a quick glance as a hint that he had better go; but the swell of St. Jim's declined to see it. First and foremost in his code of honour came the firm conviction that he ought never to desert a chum.

"Now, Merry," resumed the Head, "I understand that you were in the quadrangle last night before half-past eight, and for some time afterwards?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why were you out of doors? You may speak freely. There is no question of punishment for any breach of House rules now. I only want to get at the facts of this matter, and other details will pass."

"I went out to see whether D'Arcy minor was there, sir."

"You thought he was there?"

"I did not know where he was, sir, and I wanted to speak to him, and I looked for him in the quadrangle, and could not find him."

"Yaas, wathah! I was helpin' Tom Mewwy to look for Wally, sir, and we could not find him."

The Head looked relieved.

So far, the juniors had kept within the truth. They had looked for Wally in the quadrangle, and could not find him. That was perfectly correct. It was later, and by chance, that they had seen the fag on his way back to the House. Were they called upon to mention that without being specially asked? And but for Mr. Selby the matter might have ended there. The Head seemed satisfied.

"That settles the matter, so far as these juniors are concerned, Mr. Selby," said Dr. Holmes. "They were actually looking for D'Arcy minor in the quadrangle, and could not find him. The obvious explanation is that D'Arcy minor was, as he has declared, in the Third Form dormitory all the time, and that was the reason they could not find him in the quadrangle. The other boys shall be questioned, of course; but I am glad to say that, so far, the evidence upholds D'Arcy minor's statement."

Tom Merry and D'Arcy felt utterly wretched. They had not lied; but they had not told all the truth, and they were certainly allowing the Head to deceive himself. But they thought of the unhappy fag, with the sentence of expulsion hanging over his head, and they were silent.

Mr. Selby looked spitefully disappointed. He had hoped to get convincing evidence from Tom Merry and

D'Arcy, and he had got nothing. But Mr. Selby was not so easily satisfied as the good old doctor.

"I cannot regard Merry's answer as entirely frank," he said, turning to the Head. "He declares that he looked for D'Arcy minor in the quadrangle, and did not find him."

"That is correct, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Doubtless. But answer this question directly. Did you or did you not see D'Arcy minor in the quadrangle at all?"

It had come at last. The direct question had been asked, and a reply had to be given.

The Head was looking very impatient; evidently he did not approve of Mr. Selby's inquisitorial methods.

There was a short silence in the study. If the Head had put that question, Tom Merry felt that he could not have given an untrue answer; but Mr. Selby was different.

We do not excuse Tom Merry, for there can be no excuse for a falsehood, whatever the motive. But there were extenuating circumstances. Mr. Selby had caused the whole trouble by injustice and cruelty; and he doubted Tom Merry's word when he was telling the truth. And the fate of a persecuted boy hung in the balance.

Tom Merry at that moment felt nothing but a bitter animosity against the Third-Form master, and a desire to baulk him of further vengeance upon his victim.

And his answer came sharply.

"No!"

It was a lie—the first that Tom Merry of St. Jim's had ever told. And, wrong as he was, the blame lay more upon Mr. Selby's shoulders than upon his.

Arthur Augustus turned quite white. Tom Merry had lied for Wally's sake, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy felt that it was up to him to stand by the pal who had done that for his sake and his brother's.

And in a clear voice he made the same answer, a moment after Tom Merry had spoken:

"No!"

"That finishes the matter!" said the Head sharply. "You may go, my boys."

The two juniors went from the study, leaving the Third-Form-master with a cattish look on his face, and the Head looking very relieved.

In the passage outside, when the door was closed, the two juniors looked at one another.

"Thank you, Tom Mewwy, old man!" said D'Arcy huskily.

"I had to say it, Gussy," muttered the Shell fellow. "But—but you needn't have done it, too. Why couldn't you keep quiet?"

D'Arcy shook his head.

"I wasn't goin' to have you do it by yourself," he said. "If you could do it, I could do it. It was up to me, deah boy! But how howwible it is!"

"I couldn't have lied to the Head," said Tom Merry, in a wretched whisper. "But—but somehow it didn't seem so bad with that cad Selby—"

"Yaas, wathah."

"But—but— Tom Merry choked. "Oh, Gussy, I feel a frightful rotter!"

"So do I, deah boy."

"Let's get out of this."

They hurried away. Lowther and Manners met them at the end of the passage with anxious looks.

"How has it gone?" asked Lowther anxiously, startled by the look upon Tom Merry's face.

Tom Merry groaned.

"Don't ask me?"

And he hurried on.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Clean Breast of It.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS was looking out of the study window that afternoon. Blake and Herries and Digby had gone over to tea with Figgins & Co. in the New House; but Arthur Augustus had not felt inclined to go with them. He looked round wearily as the door opened, and his brother Wally came in.

"More twouble, Wally?" he asked.

"No. Same old trouble." "That's all ovah now, kid," said D'Arcy kindly. "It's settled. Nobody will evah find out now who woped up Mr. Selby."

"The trouble is, that it isn't all over," said Wally. "I—I wish you'd left me to chance it, Gussy, instead of saving me in the way you—you did!"

"Wally!" "I don't want to seem ungrateful, Gussy. But—but I feel as if I can't stand it any more," said Wally, with a break in his voice.

The fag was dangerously near to "blubbing" at that moment.

"I'm sowwy, Wally! What's twoublin' you now?"

"Everything," said Wally desperately. "It was old Selby's fault I lied to the Head; but—but I can't rest under it, Gussy. If—if it wasn't for dragging you fellows into it, after what you've done for me, I'd go straight to the Head and confess about it."

D'Arcy looked at his brother very curiously.

"Do you mean that, Wally?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Goodness knows I do!"

"Suppose we were willin' to do the same?"

"You couldn't—you couldn't own up to—to—"

"That would wipe it out," said D'Arcy. "As a mattah of fact, kid, it's the only welfie I could get—to go and confess it all to the Head."

"But it would mean disgrace?"

"That's bettah than feelin' as I do about the mattah."

"You might get sacked as well as me."

"I shouldn't care, if I could only get this wotten wowwy off my mind."

Wally was silent for a minute.

"Does Tom Merry feel like that about it?" he asked.

"I weally don't know," said Arthur Augustus. "But supposing we go and talk to him on the mattah? We could all go to the Head togethah, and own up."

"It's a rotten thing to go through."

"Bettah than feelin' like a wotten worm."

"That's how I look at it," said Wally.

"But the others—"

"Let's go and see them."

The Terrible Three were having tea in their study when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and his minor entered. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther looked at them grimly.

It was not in human nature for them to feel very kindly towards Wally just then. He had brought upon them the blackest trouble of their experience. Other troubles they felt they could have faced with equanimity, but self-scorn is hardest of all to bear.

"Well, what do you want, young shaver?" asked Tom Merry.

"Gussy will tell you."

"The fact is, deah boy"—D'Arcy hesitated, and then went on—"Wally's as sick of the pwesent state of things as we are. If—if you are willin', he wants to go to the Head and get it all ovah."

Tom Merry started. His face brightened up wonderfully.

"Honest injun, Wally?" he asked.

"Yes," said Wally steadily. "I'd rather be sacked than go about feeling a rotten worm, and feeling that I've dragged you fellows into the same thing."

"I haven't persuaded him," said D'Arcy. "He came to me on his own accord in my study and said so. Didn't you, Wally?"

"Yes," Tom Merry rose from his unfinished tea.

"If you mean it, I'll be jolly glad to go with you," he said.

"Good!" said Wally. "Let's go to the Head together and get it over."

The juniors forthwith made tracks for the Head's study, and tapped at the door.

"Come in!" said Dr. Holmes.

The good old doctor glanced up as his study door opened, and an expression of surprise came over his face at the sight of the juniors.

"Come in, my boys!" said the Head. "What is it?"

The juniors came in, and then they hesitated.

It was not an easy thing they had come to say.

They looked at the Head, and looked at one another, and grew very red in the face; and Dr. Holmes' surprise increased every moment.

"What is it, boys?" he asked. "I need not tell you that my time is—ahem!—valuable. Can I do anything for you?"

"If—if you please sir—"

"Yaas, wathah, sir; if—if you please—"

"We—we've—"

"Yes," said the Head.

"We've come to confess, sir," blurted out Tom Merry desperately.

The Head smiled.

"Indeed! You have been playing some prank, I suppose, and you have come to tell me about it. That is very right. What have you done?"

"I—I did it, sir!" gasped Wally.

"You did what?"

"Roped up old Selby, sir—I—I mean, Mr. Selby!"

"You?"

"Ye-es, sir."

Dr. Holmes' brow grew quite terrific.

"You told me that you did not, D'Arcy minor?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you mean to say that you deliberately deceived me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good heavens! And why have you come to tell me so?"

"Because—because I can't stand it any longer, sir!" gasped Wally.

The doctor's face softened somewhat.

"Ah! I am glad to see that your conscience has troubled you about it, at all events, D'Arcy minor. But what have these other boys to do with it? Surely they did not have a hand in such an outrage on a Form-master?"

"Oh, no, sir!" said Wally hastily.

"Then what—?"

"We knew Wally had done it, sir," said Tom Merry, in a low voice. "Gussy—D'Arcy and I met him in the quad after he had done it."

"But you told me you had not seen him there?"

Tom Merry hung his head.

"I—I didn't tell you so, sir. I—I told Mr. Selby. I—I know it was an untruth, but that was not quite so bad."

The Head regarded the juniors with a very queer expression.

"Do you wish me to understand that you would not have spoken falsely to me, although you did to Mr. Selby?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir," said all the juniors at once.

"I do not see the distinction. A falsehood is a falsehood, whomsoever it is told to, I presume?"

"It was different, sir. We know it was wrong. But—but you are straight, sir—"

"What!"

"I—I mean you are a sportsman, sir," said Tom Merry, seeking for words.

"You wouldn't doubt a chap's word. But—but Mr. Selby told us we were all liars, and—and after that it didn't seem so bad to tell him lies. That's how it was, sir."

"I see," said the Head very gravely.

"We don't make that an excuse, sir. We've come to confess to you because it worried us so much. But that was why it was, sir. So it was with Wally, Mr. Selby punished him for playing tricks in his room, when he hadn't done it, and wouldn't believe him, when he said he hadn't done it. He said he was lying—"

"You are sure D'Arcy minor did not play those tricks in Mr. Selby's room?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Because I played them myself, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Oh!" said the Head.

"Mr. Selby accused Wally of lying, and thrashed him awfully, sir. Kildare interfered because he was going for him so much, and took the cane away."

"Indeed! I knew nothing whatever of this," said the Head gravely.

"It's only fair to tell you, sir, if you're going to expel Wally for what he did."

"Quite so. Tell me everything!"

"Kildare will bear out what I said, sir. And—and after Wally roped up Mr. Selby, he—he was questioned, and then—"

"Then I remembered that old—that Mr. Selby called me a liar when I wasn't one, and I thought I might as well live up to it, sir," said Wally. "Only—only since, I—I've been thinking about it—"

"You have decided, I hope, that it is wrong to lie, whether your word has been doubted or not by the person concerned?"

"Yes, sir."

There was silence in the study. Dr. Holmes' brows were contracted, and his eyes dwelt upon the juniors with a peculiar, searching expression.

"This is a very, very great shock to me," he said at last. "You especially, Tom Merry. I have always regarded as the soul of honour. It is a very painful shock to me to find that you are capable of falsehood."

Tom Merry's face went crimson.

"You can't think any worse of me than I think myself, sir," he said miserably.

"I've felt like a low cad since."

"And what was your object—to prevent D'Arcy junior from being punished, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"Even after his outrageous conduct?"

"We didn't blame him for that, sir."

"You did not blame a boy for laying violent hands upon his Form-master?"

said the Head, raising his voice a little.

"No, sir, not in this case," said Tom Merry fearlessly. "Wally had been treated very badly—all the fellows know it. I've told you, sir, that Kildare had to interfere, because Mr. Selby was treating him so brutally. Wally's still got the marks of the cane on his back."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Remove your jacket, D'Arcy minor," said the Head very quietly.

The fag removed his jacket, and unfastened his shirt. The Head looked at the marks, still showing red and angry upon the skin, after a lapse of four days since the thrashing Wally had received at the hands of his Form-master. Dr. Holmes' brow grew very dark.

"That will do, D'Arcy minor," he said, in an altered voice.

Wally replaced his jacket.

"And now, my boys," said Dr. Holmes, "D'Arcy minor's offence was a serious one, whatever provocation he may have received, and he knows how he will be dealt with. As for you, you others have done very wrong. I can make allowances for the fact that Mr. Selby provoked you by doubting your word in the first place, and also for a chivalrous desire to shield a boy to be severely punished. But you did wrong—very wrong! There is no possible excuse for uttering a falsehood. The fact that you have come to me to confess shows me that you realise this yourselves."

"Yes, sir."

"Then you may go."

"Thank you, sir!"

"I—I—I suppose I'd better go and pack my box, sir?" faltered Wally, trying to keep back his tears.

"I shall consider your case, D'Arcy minor. There are evidently circumstances in the matter that I had not heard of before. I shall weigh the matter very carefully, and shall consider what is best to be done. You may go now."

"Oh, thank you, sir!"

The juniors left the study. Their hearts were lighter now, and their faces were brighter. And Wally seemed to be walking on air.

"I'm not going to be sacked," he said, with conviction. "Now the Head knows what a beast Selby was, he won't sack me. He's a good old sport. He wouldn't raise my hopes if he meant to sack me after all at the finish."

"It will be a flogging, at least, then," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, blow the flogging!" said Wally. "It won't be any worse than what I've had from Selby. I can stand lickings—I don't care!"

Wally was right; he was not sacked. Dr. Holmes had an interview the same evening with Mr. Selby and with Kildare. Kildare did not conceal anything when he was questioned, and Mr. Selby had a very uncomfortable quarter of an hour with the Head.

Wally was flogged for what he had done, as he certainly deserved; but the flogging did not trouble him very much—it was the "sack" he had dreaded.

Open confession, it is said, is good for the soul; and certainly the chums of the School House felt better now that it was over, and they could hold up their heads again. It had been a bitter experience, but the lesson was not likely to be lost upon any of them.

THE END.

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THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bulstrode's Band.

BULSTRODE, of the Remove, wore a cheerful grin.

There was quite a crowd of fellows in his study. That part of the Remove—not the finer part by any means—which clung to the former Form captain, was there. For Bulstrode, bully as he certainly was, had his friends in the Form—fellows who did not like Study No. 1, fellows who had fallen out with the present Remove captain, and fellows who paid court to Bulstrode on account of his money.

Bulstrode was the richest fellow in the Remove, with the exception of Huree Singh and the little Chinaman, Wun Lung. And he was not without his good qualities.

When he was in a good temper he was generous and friendly, and it was usually possible to put him into a good temper by flattering him.

Bulstrode had been "up against" Harry Wharton ever since the latter came to Greyfriars. Wharton had fought his battles out, and had won the respect of all the Remove, and the liking of many. He had been elected Form captain by a majority so large that Bulstrode had no hope of trying his fortune again.

But that was not all. Harry Wharton had steadily backed up Mark Linley, the lad from Lancashire—the mill lad who had come to Greyfriars upon Bishop Mowbray's Scholarship—and Bulstrode disliked Linley keenly.

Wharton had started an Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society, and all the juniors of musical tastes had joined it.

Bulstrode hadn't a musical taste, and he didn't care for either drama or opera, but the thought had occurred to him of starting an opposition band. He couldn't get instrumentalists, but he could get instruments, and as he dwelt in Study No. 2, it was easy for him, if not to rival Wharton, at all events to interrupt him with terrific discord.

Hence a terrific row was going on in Bulstrode's study. The walls between the rooms were not thick. But if they had been of the solidest masonry, they would have been penetrated by the fearful noise produced by Bulstrode's band.

Skinner was playing the kettle-drum, by the simple process of bringing down the sticks as hard and often as he could. Stott was at the cornet, and he was blowing away for all he was worth, producing loud and tuneless blasts. Bulstrode had a concertina, which he had bought for three-and-six, and the sound of that concertina may be imagined—not described. Snoop was beating time with a poker on a fender,

and Lyle was steadily and methodically kicking a tin pail.

The "orchestra" was in full blast. Boom! Crash! Bang! Screech! Rat-at-atat!

"My only hat!" said Bulstrode. "This sounds ripping, and no mistake! Do you think they can hear it in the next study?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Skinner. "I think so!"

"Keep time, Lyle!"

"That's all right. I'm banging as quick as I can."

"Oh, that's only andante moderato! Make it prestissimo."

Bang! Bang! Bang!

"That's better! Go it, ye cripples!"

The din rang through the corridor.

There was a furious tapping on the wall which separated the room from Harry Wharton's study.

Bulstrode and his band took no notice of it.

Bang! Bang! Screech! Roar! Crash!

There was a dragging at the door handle, but Bulstrode had taken the precaution to lock the door.

Outside, in the corridor, Harry Wharton and his chums raged and fumed; but they could not get in.

They gathered round Bulstrode's door, kicking at the lower panels, thumping at the upper, and yelling threats through the keyhole.

"Hallo!" roared Bulstrode. "Anybody there?"

"Yes, you villain!"

"Anything wanted?"

"Yes; shut up that row!"

"What row?"

"You—you cad! That fearful din you're kicking up."

"That ghastly, horrid row!" roared Nugent.

"The ghastliness of the horrid row is terrific!"

"Your mistake," said Bulstrode blandly, as his "band" ceased for a moment or two. "We're practising."

"Practising!"

"Certainly! This is an amateur orchestra."

"You rotter!" shouted Harry Wharton, shaking the door-handle. "You know jolly well you're only rotting!"

"Honest injun," said Bulstrode, while the orchestra chuckled. "We're playing the music to 'Salome.'"

"You—you—you—"

"Strike up, my sons! Go ahead!"

Bang! Crash! Clang! Clatter!

The orchestra recommenced.

In the passage the members of the Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society danced with rage.

They wanted to rehearse in the next study, but they couldn't practise with that noise going on, and they could not get at the band and make them stop.

"Faith, and we're done in!" said Micky Desmond.

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"We'll go down and practise in a classroom," he said. "We can do that, and we sha'n't hear much of this row from there. If the duffers keep it up much longer, they'll have somebody on their track."

"Good! Let's get downstairs, then."

And the operatic society descended the stairs. In a few minutes the blare and crash of Bulstrode's band ceased. They knew that their victims were gone.

"We've rowed them out!" grinned Bulstrode.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's go after them," said Snoop.

"They've gone off to practise somewhere else. Why shouldn't we do the same?"

"Good! Come on!"

Bulstrode unlocked the door and threw it open. He had only intended to deafen the Removites out of Study No. 1, but he was flushed with victory now, and eager to follow up his success.

As they descended the stairs the sound of voices singing the Anvil Chorus from "Il Trovatore" guided them to the new refuge of the Operatic Society.

Bulstrode opened the classroom door and looked in.

Harry Wharton & Co. were hard at work, but some of the voices broke off as the Bully of the Remove looked in.

Harry Wharton's eyes flashed.

"Get out!" he shouted.

Bulstrode shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose we can practise here if we want to?" he remarked. "I'm afraid of disturbing the fellows if we go on in the study."

His comrades chuckled; whether at the pretext, or at the idea of Bulstrode caring whether he disturbed anybody, we cannot say. The singers ceased their vocal efforts, and looked to Harry Wharton for guidance.

Wharton's eyes were gleaming. Bulstrode's band might be a merry institution, from its own point of view, and its interruptions might be funny; but the president of the Dramatic and Operatic Society did not see the fun of it. He wanted to get to work.

"Will you get out?" he exclaimed.

"Not much."

"Then we'll jolly soon chuck you out!"

"Rats!"

"Put down your music, kids, and come on!" cried Wharton.

The operatic society was not long in obeying. The odds were on their side, and they were eager for war. Wharton led the rush towards the band, and in a moment the orchestra dropped their instruments and put up their fists.

"Go for them!"

"Give 'em socks!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Kick 'em out!"

"Let the kickfulness be terrific, my worthy chums."

"Bravo! Out they go!"

The orchestra, overborne by numbers, went whirling through the doorway.

Bulstrode was dragged there by Harry, and sent flying down the flagged passage, and he sat dazedly there while his followers were hurled forth one by one.

There was soon a heap of amateur bandmen in the passage, sprawling in all sorts of uncomfortable and ungraceful attitudes. After them their instruments came whirling, and then the class-room door was shut and locked.

Bulstrode staggered to his feet. A junior came along the passage with a book under his arm, and, turning the corner suddenly, ran right into him, and send him flying again.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" said the new-comer. "I didn't see you."

It was Mark Linley, of the Remove. Bulstrode turned furiously upon the lad from Lancashire.

"You cad! Why can't you see where you're going?"

Mark's eye glinted. Bulstrode was in so furious a temper that he did not care what he said, or whom he said it to. But Mark restrained the hot retort that rose to his tongue.

"I did not see you," he said quietly. "How was I to know that you fellows were sprawling over the floor? What on earth are you doing it for?"

Skinner gave a rueful chuckle. "It was a jape," he said, "and we've been japed ourselves. Wharton's given us the order of the boot."

Mark could hear the singing in the class-room, and he understood.

"Serve you jolly well right!" he exclaimed.

"You rotten mill cad——" began Bulstrode.

"Hold your tongue!" said Mark Linley sharply.

"Look here——"

But Linley, without a word or a look further, passed on, and Bulstrode was left scowling. The band were in the worst of humours. Bulstrode was inclined to make a forcible assault upon the class-room door, but it was too near the masters' quarters for that to be safe.

And the rest of the band were feeling a little too used up for further hostilities. While Bulstrode was debating a plan of action, the band settled the matter by walking off; and the Remove bully slowly followed them. The Wharton Operatic and Dramatic Society were left to finish their rehearsal in peace.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Mark Linley Loses His Temper.

BILLY BUNTER wore a serious and somewhat injured expression when the Remove went up to the dormitory that night.

"I say, you fellows——," he began. "Oh, shut up, Billy, for goodness' sake," said Bob Cherry, "and get into bed!"

"Really, Cherry," said Bunter, "you can't expect me to go to bed when my watch has been stolen!"

"Rats!" "But it's true!" "Piffle!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I'm sincerely sorry to see that you can't take my word; you know we're not all story-tellers. It's not fair to judge everybody by yourself."

"Why, you young——" "My watch was stolen from my pocket last night, and I think something ought to be done about it."

"Hallo—hallo! What's that?" exclaimed Bulstrode. "A watch been stolen!"

"Yes; my silver watch——"

"It's all rot!" exclaimed Bob Cherry irritably. "We all know Bunter. Shut

up, you young ass, and don't talk silly piffle!"

"Look here, Cherry, you're not going to hush it up——"

"Certainly not!" exclaimed Bulstrode, glad of any chance to take sides against Study No. 1. "Let's have it out. If Bunter's watch has been stolen, it ought to be inquired into. If there's a thief in the Remove——"

"Don't be an ass!" said Harry Wharton angrily. "You know perfectly well that there isn't a thief in the Remove, Bulstrode."

"How should I know?" said Bulstrode insolently. "All sorts of rotters are allowed to come into the school now, and we might get a thief among them."

Mark Linley turned white.

The glances and chuckles of several of the Removees showed that they understood Bulstrode's cowardly allusion; and Mark could not fail to understand it, too. The Lancashire lad stood silent, and Bulstrode, emboldened by his silence, went on in the same tone:

"Blessed if I can see why there



"I was a fool to come here," muttered Mark Linley. "I was a fool—a fool!"

shouldn't be a thief here! We've got paupers and mill-boys, and all sorts of rotters, and some of them are short of money."

"Look out!" muttered Snoop. Mark Linley was coming over towards Bulstrode. Linley had taken off his jacket and waistcoat, and was in his shirt-sleeves. His face was white, and his eyes burning.

"Bulstrode!" "Hallo! Did you speak?" "Yes. You were alluding to me just now."

"I didn't call you a thief," said Bulstrode, with an accent on the word "call" that left no doubt as to his meaning.

"You wanted your words to give that impression."

"I suppose I can say what I like?" "No, you cannot! You cannot say a

word implying that I am a thief!" said Mark Linley, white with passion. "You will take those words back."

A silence fell upon the boys.

Mark Linley was usually so quiet and self-contained, grave beyond his years, that no one had ever suspected him of possessing a hot temper. He was known to be brave; or, rather, absolutely fearless, and once in a stand-up fight with Bulstrode he had licked the bully of the Remove. But no one had ever seen him like this before; and the juniors looked on at the scene in something like awe.

Bulstrode, perhaps, repented of his cruel and unfeeling words; but his pride would not allow him to show it. He looked to Linley with a sneer.

"I've nothing to take back!" he remarked.

"You will take back what you said—will you?"

"No, I won't!"

"Then put up your hands!"

"Don't be a fool, Linley! Wingate will be here in a minute to put the lights out, and——"

"I don't care! You shall not call me a thief! Put up your hands!"

"I won't! I'll fight you to-morrow if you like, but——"

Smack!

Mark's open hand came upon Bulstrode's cheek with a crack like a pistol-shot.

The Remove bully reeled back. He was not hurt much, but the smack left a white mark on his cheek, that turned crimson, and seemed to burn there.

"Now will you put up your hands?" said Linley, between his teeth.

"Hang you, yes!"

Bulstrode did so, promptly enough. With all his faults, he had plenty of dogged courage.

Mark Linley attacked, hitting out savagely, and with much less than his usual coolness and skill. Bulstrode realised his advantage, and he sparred with all he knew of the boxer's art, and twice his fists came home on Linley's face, without a touch having reached his own.

Linley gritted his teeth.

He rushed straight at his opponent, and received without heeding two heavy blows on the face; and then Bulstrode's guard was knocked away, and the right fist of the Lancashire lad came crashing on his mouth.

Back went the burly Removee, reeling and staggering, to fall with a crash to the floor.

He lay there, dazed, with a trickle of red from the corner of his mouth; and as Mark Linley stood over him, with flashing eyes, the dormitory door opened. "Hallo, in bed, you kids!" said Wingate. "Why—what—fighting!"

He stared at the Lancashire lad and at Bulstrode, who was slowly getting up, with the assistance of Stott.

"What does this mean?" said Wingate sternly. "You ought to be getting to bed. You surely know better than to fight in the dormitory!"

"It was that cad started it," said Bulstrode savagely. "It's all through letting the low cad into the school!"

"Hold your tongue, Bulstrode! I know enough of both of you to feel pretty certain that you are to blame, whether Linley struck the first blow or not," said Wingate sternly. "Get to bed, and, mind, no more of this. If you quarrel you can settle your differences with the boxing-gloves in the gym, like decent fellows."

"I am sorry," said Mark quietly. "All right; get to bed."

The juniors undressed in silence, and went to bed. Wingate watched them grimly, and then turned the light out.

"Mind, no more rows to-night," he said. "If I hear a sound I'll come back again, and bring a cane with me. Good-night!"

"Good-night, Wingate!"

And the dormitory door closed.

There was silence in the Remove dormitory for a few moments. It was broken by a still, small voice from Bunter's bed.

"I say, you fellows—"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

In the Dead of Night.

"OH, shut up, Bunter!" said Bob Cherry savagely. "You're always causing trouble. Why couldn't you make up some other fairy tale instead of that yarn about the watch?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Shut up!"

"But my watch was really taken—at least, it's gone, and I haven't been able to find it anywhere," persisted Bunter. "Somebody must have taken it."

"Yes, rather!" said Bulstrode. "That's my view; and it looks to me as if there were really a thief in the Remove, as people fly into such tempers at the bare suggestion."

"Hear, hear!" said Snoop.

"Hold your tongue, you cad!" said Wharton. "You know it's all rot. You know there isn't a thief here. And if there were you'd have no right to make those dirty, cowardly insinuations about Mark Linley. He's a more decent chap than you will ever be!"

"Yes, rather!" said Bob Cherry, with emphasis; and the Nabob of Bhanipur remarked equally emphatically that the "ratherfulness" was terrific.

"It's all right," said Linley quietly. "Bulstrode can say what he likes to-night. I'm not going to make a row. But he will have to answer for it to-morrow."

"I'm quite ready to answer for anything I say," grunted Bulstrode. "I haven't accused you of anything. I only say what's probable. I know jolly well that you never have any money, and a chap brought up as you've been would naturally steal some if he got a chance."

Linley was silent. It must have cost him a great deal to remain so, but he did, and Bulstrode was left to say as he liked.

"Let's hear about the watch, Bunter," went on Bulstrode. "The thing ought to be looked into, and the watch found, and the thief shown up."

"That's just what I think, Bulstrode, but I don't believe Linley stole it."

"I never said he did. But I suppose you want to get your watch back?"

"Yes, of course. It cost about twenty guineas."

"About twenty threepenny-bits, you mean," said Hazeldene. "It was a rotten old silver turnip, and never kept time."

"It was handed down in the family from my ancestors as a heirloom."

"Any of your ancestors keep an unredemmed pledge stores?"

"Oh, really, Vaseline—"

"You shut up, Hazeldene. Let's have the facts, Billy. When did you lose the watch?"

"It wasn't in my pocket when I got up this morning."

"Sure it was there last night?" asked Trevor.

"Oh, yes; I wound it up."

"You're such a forgetful little ass, you know!"

"Oh, really, Trevor—"

"He had it all right last night," said

Ogilvy. "I remember hearing the fat ass ask Wharton the time when he was winding it."

"Yes; I remember, too, now," said Bunter. "You see, I certainly had it last night. I wound it and left it on the chain in my waistcoat pocket, and hung the waistcoat over the back of a chair. The waistcoat was there all right in the morning, but the watch wasn't."

"Why didn't you speak about it then?"

"Well, I was up last, you know, and you fellows were all gone down. I did speak to the chaps in my own study about it, but they wouldn't listen. And I thought at first I might have lost it, and I looked about for it. But I haven't found it."

"Looks as if it's been stolen," said Bulstrode, who seemed rather pleased than otherwise by the idea that there might be a thief in his Form.

"Rot!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, who had not joined in the talk so far.

"Who would steal Bunter's watch? You all know what it was worth."

"I say, you fellows, it was worth twenty guineas."

"Then you offered me a big bargain when you offered to sell it to me the other day for six bob," chuckled Russell.

"Oh, you see—"

"It was worth about three shillings, I should say," said Harry Wharton. "I never looked at it closely, but without that I could see that it wasn't silver, and I know it never kept time. It was a rotten old creak that hadn't cost ten-and-six when it was new, and that was years and years ago."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Nobody in his senses would steal Bunter's watch. If there were a fellow here who was mean cad enough to steal a watch, he would have sense enough to steal my watch, or Inky's watch, I suppose. He could get at them just as easily, and Inky's watch is worth a small fortune."

"By Jove," said Russell, "I agree with Wharton! Nobody but an idiot would take Bunter's rotten old ticker when he could just as easily get hold of Inky's gorgeous machine."

"The reasonableness of that statement is terrific. My own esteemed watch is valued at fifty honourable pounds, and would be a more nobby prize than the esteemed rotten ticker of our Bunterful chum."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, ring off!" said Nugent. "It's as plain as anything that you've lost your watch, and you're making trouble for nothing. What can't you shut up?"

"I don't know," said Bulstrode obstinately. "Perhaps the thief means to have the other watches another time, and he may have taken Bunter's first, just to see how the wind blows."

"So as to give us warning, and make us put the more valuable ones in a safe place—eh?" said Harry Wharton sarcastically.

Bulstrode was silent. Indeed, there seemed little to be said for his theory.

But the juniors continued the discussion for some time, till one by one they dropped off to sleep.

Harry Wharton was one of the last to sleep.

The whole unpleasant incident worried him, and he understood the feelings of the Lancashire lad when Bulstrode strove to turn suspicion upon him.

He felt, irritably, that it was all Billy Bunter's nonsense, and that the watch had not been stolen at all.

Still thinking of the matter, Harry Wharton dropped off to sleep at last; but his sleep was not so placid as usual.

The matter was still running in his mind, and he was dreaming of Bunter's watch, when he suddenly awoke.

It seemed to him that there was a sound in the dormitory. Was someone moving? He lay quite quiet, and listened intently.

The night was starless, and the long, lofty dormitory was black as pitch. The junior could not see his hand before his face.

His ears throbbled with the effort of listening.

Yes, the sound was plain.

Someone was getting into bed. He could hear the unmistakable faint creaking of the mattress and the bedstead, and the swishing of the clothes as they were drawn up round a recumbent form.

He sat up in bed.

"Who's that?" he called out.

His voice echoed strangely through the darkness and silence of the dormitory. But save for the faint echo there was no reply.

"Who's that moving?"

Still silence.

Wharton was puzzled and uneasy. Had his imagination played him false? There was no sound now, only dead, dead silence surrounded him.

After a minute of tense listening, the junior lay down to sleep again.

He slept soon, and did not waken again until morning.

His dreams were of what had happened, and in a disordered vision he saw Mark Linley creeping out of the dormitory laden with gold watches, and Bunter and Bulstrode rushing after him. It was a strangely vivid dream, and from the midst of it the sleeper was startled by the clang of the rising-bell.

He started and awoke.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came drowsily from Bob Cherry's bed. "That blessed bell gets earlier every morning, I think. Gosling does it on purpose."

"Time to get up," said Wharton cheerfully, stepping out of bed. "Now then, you slackers!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Up with you, Porpoise!"

"I say, you fellows, I'm not feeling very well this morning. Do you think Mr. Welch would let me have breakfast in bed—Ow! Wow!"

Bunter broke off as Bob Cherry dragged off his bedclothes, and yanked him off the bed.

"That's better than having your breakfast in bed," grinned Bob. "Stick your face in the cold water, and you'll be as lively as a cricket."

"Oh, really, Cherry! I've got a very curious tired feeling—"

"I'll give you a thumped feeling if you get near that bed again—" Bob Cherry broke off. "Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"What's the matter?" asked Tom Brown.

Bob Cherry was holding his pillow in his hands, which he had just lifted from his place. Without replying, he groped under the bolster, and then he felt in his waistcoat-pocket. Then he whistled.

"What's the trouble?" asked Nugent.

Bob looked round with a curious expression.

"I suppose this is a lark," he said.

"What's a lark?"

"Somebody's hidden my watch."

"Your watch?"

"Yes; it's gone, anyway."

There was a yell from Nugent.

"So is mine gone!"

Harry Wharton's brow grew dark and troubled. He remembered the sounds he had heard in the night. Was it possible to doubt longer that there was a thief in the Remove?

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Under a Cloud.

BULSTRODE uttered a fierce exclamation.

"Look here!"
"What's the matter?"

"Look!" Bulstrode was holding up his trousers, with a pocket turned inside out. "Look! There was a lot of tin in this pocket—ten shillings at least, when I left the trucks on the chair last night."
"Do you mean to say it's been stolen?"

"Do you think it's walked away?" sneered Bulstrode. "What do you say now about there not being a thief in the Remove? What does that chap Linley say? Can't you speak, Linley? My hat! Where is he?"

Many glances had turned towards Mark Linley's bed.

It was unoccupied!

There was nothing really remarkable in that, because the Lancashire lad was an habitually early riser, and it was not unusual for him to get up before any of his Form-fellows were awake, and go out for an early swim in the Sark.

But on this morning his absence, though not unusual, seemed to acquire a strange and sinister significance.

Harry Wharton, though never for a moment allowing himself to doubt the honour of the Lancashire lad, heartily wished that he had not gone out early that morning.

Bulstrode grinned spitefully.

"So he's not there."

"He's gone," said Snoop. "He must have sneaked out while we were all asleep!"

Wharton turned on him fiercely.

"Why do you say sneaked? You know perfectly well that Linley often goes out early—at least twice a week."

Snoop shrank back from the angry look and tone; but Bulstrode was made of sterner stuff.

"That's all very well," he exclaimed, "but it looks pretty black against Linley now. If a fellow went through our pockets, he would nip out of the house as soon as the doors were open, of course, to hide the plunder where it couldn't be found!"

"Linley hasn't taken anything that doesn't belong to him."

"How do you know?"

"There isn't a tittle of evidence. He isn't that sort, either. There are fellows in the Remove I'd rather suspect than Linley."

"Me, I suppose?" sneered Bulstrode.

"No," said Wharton quietly, "not you, Bulstrode—unless you did it for the sake of ruining a fellow you disliked. But I don't think even you would go so far as that. But there are fellows—"

"Name! Name!"

"I don't choose to name anybody without any evidence."

"You see, we can't all proceed on your lines, Bulstrode," said Bob Cherry. "It's easy enough to accuse a fellow you dislike, but not so easy to bring proof."

"Look here! This affair has got to be cleared up. I suppose even Wharton will admit that?"

"Yes, certainly," said Wharton at once.

"We can't do it by sitting down and folding our hands. The thing's got to be investigated. If you know of anybody who's likely to steal, say so. If you don't, don't make insinuations you dare not back up."

Harry Wharton flushed crimson.

"That's it," said Stott. "If you daren't mention a name—"

"It's nothing of the kind."

"Name—name, then!" exclaimed Snoop.

"Very well, as you want it," said Wharton. "The name that crossed my mind was yours, Snoop!"

Snoop turned white.

Some of the Removites chuckled. Snoop had asked for the name, and he had got it, but it did not seem to gratify him.

"You—you—you accuse me of stealing!" gasped Snoop.

"No, I don't!"

"But you said—"

"I said your name crossed my mind as a chap more likely to steal than Mark Linley. You asked me for the name, and I've given it. We all know how you once got Mark Linley sent to Coventry by lying about him. A chap who would tell lies isn't very far from a thief."

"I—I didn't take the things! I—I swear—"

"That's all right, Snoopey," said Bulstrode. "We don't suspect you. We know you haven't the pluck to be a thief."

"Look here, Bulstrode—"

Cherry and Nugent's watches, and some money from Bulstrode's trousers-pocket."

Mark Linley changed colour. A glint came into his eyes as he walked over to the bully of the Remove.

"And that was what you were saying?" he asked. "You were saying that I was the thief."

"Not exactly that," said Bulstrode, a little ashamed of himself as he met the clear, steady eyes of the Lancashire lad. "But I say that it looks jolly suspicious. Where have you been this morning?"

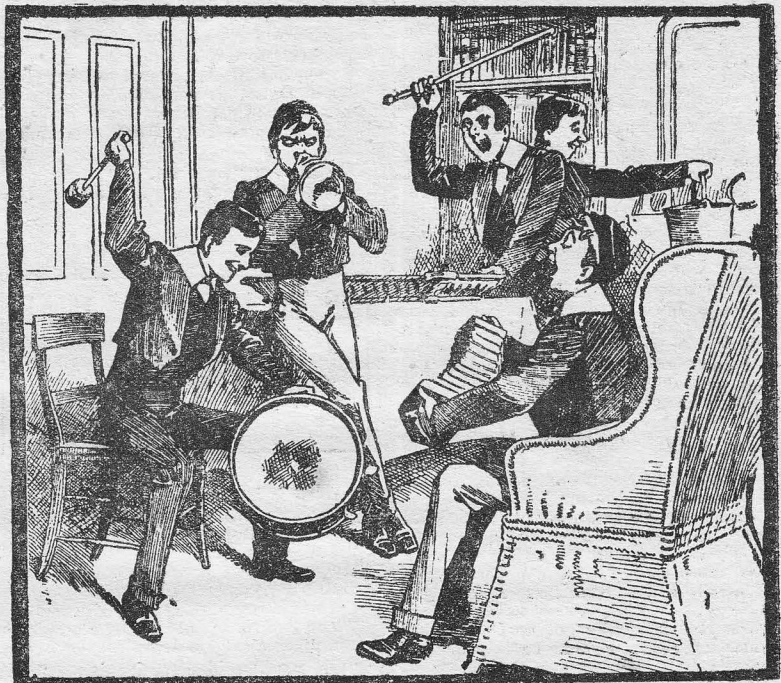
"What right have you to question me?"

Bulstrode shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, if you don't want to answer—"

"Better answer, Linley," said Harry.

"We are going to look into the matter, and we want all the facts. No decent fellow here believes that you touched the things."

"Thank you, Wharton! I'll answer you—not that cad! I've been down to the Sark to bathe before breakfast, as you know I often do."



"My only hat!" said Bulstrode. "This sounds ripping and no mistake! Do you think they can hear it in the next study?" "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Skinner. "I think so!"

"It's Mark Linley—"
"Hold on, Bulstrode!" muttered Stott, as he saw the Lancashire lad, with a damp towel over his arm, re-enter the dormitory.

But Bulstrode was not inclined to retract.

"It's Mark Linley!" he repeated, in a louder voice, which could not fail to reach the ears of the lad from Lancashire. Linley looked towards him.

"What's that about me?" he asked.

"I dare say you know well enough!" said Bulstrode insolently. "We've missed the things!"

"What things?"

"The things that were taken last night."

"What do you mean? Were any things taken last night?" asked Linley, looking towards Harry Wharton, and turning his back on Bulstrode.

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Yes," he said reluctantly; "Bob

"It's jolly unlucky for you, that's all!" said Bulstrode.

"Why so?"

"Because the thief was pretty certain to get out of the House first thing to hide the loot, that's all."

"Look here!" said Stott. "Nobody's been out of the dorm except Linley. If he didn't take the stuff, it ought to be about here yet."

"Nothing of the sort," said Wharton. "There's nothing in that. The thief would take it out of the dorm as soon as he stole it. It stands to reason he wouldn't keep it in here to be searched for and found. It's hidden somewhere in the house, I should say."

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

Mark Linley met the glances that were cast upon him with a calm and quiet self-possession that had nothing of bravado in it.

"I am sorry you fellows should fix on me like this," he said. "I can say nothing but that I don't know anything about the theft; and I think you might wait for a little evidence before convicting anybody."

"I say, you fellows——"

"Oh, don't bother now, Billy!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I've got a valuable suggestion to make."

"Back up, then."

"You see, I hardly think that Linley has stolen the things. Perhaps he only took them away for a lark. Suppose we let him off if he brings 'em back again."

"Shut up, you young ass!" said Harry sharply.

"Oh, really, Wharton! I think it's a jolly good idea. Look here, Linley, if you give me my watch back, I'll agree to say nothing about the matter."

"But I haven't taken it, Billy," said Linley, hardly able to avoid joining in the general grin that went round, serious as the matter was.

"Oh, really, Linley——"

"You shut up, Billy!" said Bob Cherry, giving the fat junior a shove that made him sit down gasping on his bed. "You talk too much!"

"O-o-o-oh, really, Cherry——"

"Shut up! Let's get down, you chaps. We shall have a prefect coming up soon with a cane."

"Still, there's something in Bunter's suggestion," said Bulstrode. "Linley would do better to give the things back if he's got them, and let the matter be hushed up. He could leave Greyfriars quietly, without a scandal. It's not a proper place for a fellow of his class, anyway."

Linley's eyes blazed for a moment.

"Look here, once and for all, I have told you that I know nothing about the things," he said. "It's insulting to make it necessary for me to say so. But I've said so, and that's enough. The next fellow who speaks to me in that tone will get the weight of my fist!"

"You won't lick us all, I suppose?" said Bulstrode sarcastically. "Blessed if the workhouse rotter isn't setting himself to be boss of the dorm!"

Linley stepped quickly towards Bulstrode, and his eyes were blazing.

"That's enough!" he said. "Not a word more, or——"

"Bah! I shall speak as I like, you cad——"

The Remove bully got no further.

Mark's right lashed out, and Bulstrode's hasty guard was dashed aside, and knuckles made of iron came crashing into his face.

Back he went, reeling and staggering, to fall headlong to the floor just as Carberry, the prefect, entered the dormitory. The prefect stumbled over him, and nearly fell, and the next moment kicked him savagely. Then he glared angrily at the juniors.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Carberry Investigates.

CARBERRY was in a bad temper. "What's this rowing about?"

he snarled savagely. "You were fighting when I came in—you, Bulstrode and Linley!"

"Yes," growled Bulstrode.

"Hold out your hand, Linley!"

Mark Linley hesitated.

Carberry had brought up a cane with him, and his powers as a prefect indubitably extended to caning juniors whom he caught fighting.

Linley had a strong sense of discipline, and, though Carberry was a senior whom no one could respect, Mark's hesitation

lasted only a moment. He held out his hand and received a savage cut.

"Now the other!" growled the prefect.

Mark quietly obeyed. The second cut was harder than the first, and it brought a faint sound of pain even from the lips of the hardy Lancashire lad.

"Now, what was this fighting about?"

growled Carberry.

Mark was silent.

"Will you answer me, Linley?"

"I have nothing to say."

Snoop giggled. The prefect turned to him quickly.

"What are you sniggering about, Snoop?"

"N-n-n-nothing, Carberry."

"Tell me what this rowing was about!" roared Carberry, scenting the fact that the juniors were keeping something from him, and determined to have it out. "Now, then, Snoop, you tell me. I give you one second!"

Wharton gritted his teeth.

He would dearly have liked to keep the story of the thefts a secret—it was against the grain to publish the disgrace of the Remove to the whole school—but now that the prefect was directly inquiring, it was useless to think of that.

Snoop did not dare to refuse to reply.

"B-B-Bulstrode accused Linley of stealing, Carberry, that's all—and Linley knocked him over!" stammered Snoop.

Carberry gave a start.

"Stealing! Has anything been stolen?"

"Ye-es."

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"What is it, then—sharp?"

"Cherry's watch, and Nugent's watch, and some of Bulstrode's money."

"And my watch," said Billy Bunter.

"My watch was stolen the night before last, Carberry, first of all!"

Carberry's eyes gleamed with malice.

"You are quite sure these thefts have taken place?"

"Oh, yes!" said several voices. "The things are gone!"

"Come here, Wharton! You're captain of the Form, I believe?"

Carberry knew perfectly well that Harry Wharton was captain of the Form. Harry reluctantly approached the prefect. Carberry was acting quite within his rights now, and it was useless to be obstinate.

"Wharton, do you know for certain that certain articles have been stolen?"

"No, I don't."

"But the others say——"

"I know the things have been taken. I hope it is some fellow taking them for a lark. I don't believe there's a thief in the Remove."

"H'm! What you hope has nothing to do with it. The things have been taken by a member of this Form presumably?"

"Faith, and I'm not so sure of that!" said Micky Desmond. "Any fellow could get into the dorm from any of the other dorms. It might be an Upper Fourth fellow, for all we know—or a chap out of the Shell, or the Fifth——"

"Or the Sixth!" said Nugent, with polite impertinence. "I've heard that there are some chaps in the Sixth who are awfully hard up through spending their money on smoking and betting!"

There was a suppressed giggle, and Carberry scowled savagely. This was a drive at him, but it was hardly politic for him to take it openly to himself. He affected not to hear Nugent's remark.

"Let's see whether it is possible for a junior of another Form to have taken the things," he said. "I shall have to make a report of this to your Form-master—perhaps to the Head—so let me have all the facts. Where did you leave your watch last night, Nugent?"

"On the chair beside my bed."

"In sight of anybody who might come along?"

"No. I laid a book over it—through Bunter's yarn about his watch being stolen. I thought I might as well put it out of sight."

"H'm! Where was your watch, Cherry?"

"Under my pillow."

"Where was your money, Bulstrode?"

"In my trousers-pocket, on the chair by the bed."

"H'm! A fellow from another Form who came here to steal couldn't possibly have known that Nugent's watch was on a chair, under a book, that Cherry's was under his pillow, and that Bulstrode's money was in his trousers-pocket. The thief did not come from outside the dormitory."

There was dissent in some faces, but the majority of the Remove fully agreed with Carberry. He seemed to have worked it out pretty clearly. Harry Wharton had his own secret reasons for agreeing with the views of the prefect.

"It was a fellow in the Remove undoubtedly," said the prefect. "Now, Bulstrode, what was your motive for accusing Linley?"

"I didn't exactly accuse him," said Bulstrode, somewhat alarmed now that the case had passed into more powerful hands. "I only suggested that——"

"Well, what was the ground for suggesting, then?"

"Well, Linley never has any money. You know he used to work in a mill, and came here on a scholarship——"

"Anything else?"

"He went out first thing this morning, before any of us were awake."

"Ah!"

"I went out for a swim——" began Linley.

"I am speaking to Bulstrode now," said Carberry curtly. "Have you anything more to say, Bulstrode?"

"Only that Linley flew into a temper at the mere suggestion, and there's no other fellow in the Remove anybody would suspect for a moment."

"H'm! I shouldn't wonder if you were quite right, but——"

"You have no right to say that!" broke out Mark fiercely.

The prefect glared at him.

"Do you know who you're talking to, Linley?"

"Yes. I'm talking to a blackguard who's the disgrace of the Sixth Form in this school!" cried Linley, quite careless now of what he said. "You say you wouldn't be surprised if I were a thief! Well, I should be surprised if you were anything but a gambler and a blackguard!"

Carberry seemed petrified for a moment.

Then he hurled himself upon the Lancashire lad, slashing furiously with the cane. But there was a shout of anger from half a dozen juniors, and they rushed to Linley's aid. In a moment Carberry was sent reeling back, and the cane was wrenched from his hand.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

News for the Remove.

"NO, you don't!" said Harry Wharton. Carberry staggered back, right to the door, and put his hand upon it to keep from falling. He was almost speechless with rage. Yet he did not venture to renew the contest.

The name of prefect ought to have reduced the juniors to submission—and so it would have done in the case of any prefect but Carberry. But Carberry was not respected, and he could not make himself respected—and that made all the difference.

He glared furiously at the juniors, but he only saw a group of determined lads, who glared back with flashing eyes and clenched fists.

"You—you whelps!" muttered Carberry at last. "I'll report this to the Head!"

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"Report away! We'll have something to report, too! I'll be glad of a chance to tell Dr. Locke what you said to Linley!"

Carberry bit his lip savagely. He knew well enough how the Head would have condemned his cruel and insolent words to the junior from

"Never mind; you can explain to me after breakfast, Wharton."

And the juniors fell to.

After breakfast Mr. Quelch signed to Wharton to follow him into his study, and the captain of the Remove did so at once.

"Now, Wharton, what is the matter? I have received no report from Carberry, but he has asked if he may speak to me after breakfast."

"Yes, sir. The fact is——" Wharton hesitated.

"Come! Speak out!"

"The fact is, sir, that some articles have been missed from the Remove dormitory."

"What?"

"I don't believe they have been stolen, sir. I can't believe there's a thief in the Remove. I think some silly ass—ahem!—some silly fellow has done it for a lark, or something of the sort!"

"Tell me exactly what has happened," said the Form-master tersely.

Wharton did so succinctly, and Mr. Quelch listened with great attention.

"This is very unpleasant, Wharton. If the person who abstracted the articles is doing it for a joke, he must be incredibly stupid. Yet it is too unpleasant to think that there is a thief in the Form unless we are driven to it. Under the circumstances, I think the less that is said about the matter for the

"I do rely upon you, Wharton."

"May I ask whom we are to be under during your absence, sir?"

"Certainly! The gentleman will arrive here this afternoon. You have made his acquaintance before."

Wharton's heart sank.

"Not—not Mr. Chesham, sir?" he asked.

The Form-master frowned a little.

"Yes, certainly, Mr. Chesham."

"Oh!" said Harry.

"There was some friction last time Mr. Chesham was here. I think," said Mr. Quelch. "I hope there will be no repetition of anything of the kind. I have been called away in such haste that it is impossible to make any other arrangement, and Mr. Chesham is at liberty now, and has replied to me by wire that he is quite willing to relieve me here for a few days. I depend upon you to do your best to see that Mr. Chesham is treated the same as myself in the Form-room, Wharton."

"I will do my best, sir."

"Very good! About this unfortunate matter of the dormitory. I shall have to mention it to the Head; but no steps, I think, will be taken until I return. Meanwhile, you will make every endeavour to discover the truth."

"Very well, sir."

And Harry Wharton quitted the study. He passed Carberry as he went out.

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Lancashire—the words which had provoked this outbreak.

"You whelps!" he muttered again. "Give me that cane!"

Wharton tossed it contemptuously towards him. It fell upon the floor, and Carberry had to stoop and pick it up. And then he left the dormitory, followed by laughter and hisses.

The juniors felt pretty certain that he would not report the matter, for he had, as usual, placed himself in the wrong by his insolence and ungoverned temper; but Wharton, for one, would not have been sorry to have the matter threshed out before the Head.

The juniors were late down to breakfast, and Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, glanced at them severely as they came into the dining-room. Mr. Quelch was looking a little worried, as several of the juniors noted. They wondered if the prefect had informed the Form-master of the thefts.

"You are late!" said Mr. Quelch. "I am sorry, sir!" said Wharton, replying as captain of the Form. "We have been delayed this morning, sir."

"Indeed! By what?"

"I thought Carberry had explained to you, sir."

"Carberry? No!" Mr. Quelch looked directly at Harry, and the junior's troubled face told him that something out of the common had happened.

present the better, and, meanwhile, every boy in the Form should do his best to discover the truth."

"Yes, sir. That's what I was thinking."

"It is especially unfortunate that this should have occurred just now, Wharton," said the Form-master, with a shade on his brow, "because I am compelled to leave Greyfriars for a few days. The Head has kindly given me permission to hand over my duties for a few days to another master while I see to some important business in London, which it would be a great loss to me to neglect. I trust to you, Wharton, and to your friends, to maintain order while I am gone."

"Certainly, sir!"

Harry quite understood Mr. Quelch's secret uneasiness.

The Remove was an unruly Form at the best of times, and there is an old proverb that "while the cat is away the mice will play."

And Harry wondered, too, who was to be Mr. Quelch's substitute during his absence.

Mr. Quelch seemed a little relieved by Harry's assurance. He did not disguise from himself that the Lower Fourth had been much easier to manage since Harry Wharton had been Form-captain.

"You will do your best, Wharton?"

"Rely upon me, sir!"

The prefect scowled at him as he went into the Form-master's study.

"Ah, it is you, Carberry! What have you to tell me—I presume the same that I have just heard from Wharton?"

"It's about some thefts in the Remove dormitory, sir."

"Wharton does not think they were thefts, but that the matter will turn out to be some practical joke—a jape, as the juniors call it."

"Wharton would say that to protect his friend, of course," said the prefect spitefully.

Mr. Quelch started.

"I don't quite understand you, Carberry. Explain yourself."

"Suspicion rests upon a certain boy in the Form, sir, who has always been protected and defended by Harry Wharton."

"Bless my soul! Are you alluding to Bunter?"

"No, sir. Linley."

"What, Mark Linley?"

"Yes. Many of the Form suspect him, and——"

"What evidence is there?"

"Well, sir," said the prefect, a little disconcerted by the Form-master's sharp tone, "Bulstrode thinks——"

"Never mind what Bulstrode thinks, or what anybody else thinks. Is there

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any tittle of evidence connecting Linley with the thefts?"

"Not actual evidence; but——"

"Then it is rank injustice to mention his name in connection with the matter! There is a prejudice in the Remove against the lad, Carberry, which, I am sorry to say, is partly shared by boys in higher Forms, who should know better. Some of the boys—decidedly the worst class of them—have taken a stand against Linley because he is the son of a workman, and came here on a scholarship won by his own efforts.

"I am afraid that this set of boys is always willing to find something against him. It is your duty, as a prefect, to see that he is not treated with injustice, and to make the juniors understand that no one should be suspected till there is direct evidence. I hope you will carry out this duty, Carberry."

And with that Mr. Quelch dismissed the prefect.

Carberry's face was black as he left the study. He had hoped to be able to injure Mark Linley with his Form-master, and instead of that he had only succeeded in lowering his own character in Mr. Quelch's eyes. His feelings at that moment were not amiable either towards the Remove-master or towards the lad from Lancashire.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise for Temple & Co.

TEMPLE of the Upper Fourth was a decidedly elegant junior, always very nicely dressed, sporting a silk hat on all possible occasions, and generally wearing a gold watch-chain and a flower in his coat.

He was captain of his Form; and encouraged the Upper Fourth in the belief that the Remove were inky-fingered youngsters who were to be treated with lofty disdain.

The Remove repaid the lofty disdain of the Upper Fourth with equally lofty scorn, and gave them a few lickings on the football and cricket fields to show them that they were not, as they appeared to imagine, the salt of the earth.

There were general chippings and crowdings when the rival juniors met, and sometimes fisticuffs—in which the Upper Fourth by no means had the advantage.

Mark Linley himself, in a tussle with Dabney, had shown the superiority of Lancashire muscle, much to Dabney's astonishment. As the Upper Fourth chums stopped him, Mark was prepared for war; but Temple waved his hand with an elegant and pacific gesture.

"What's the trouble?" he asked. "Wherefore that frown? Is there trouble in the halls of the Remove? Has the fiat gone forth that they shall wash their necks every morning?"

"My word!" said Fry. "What a blow to the Remove!"

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"I hear that you have started a burglary department lately," went on Temple suavely. "Watches made to go, and cash abstracted while you wait!"

"Oh, rather!"

"We shall be figuring in the 'Police News' shortly, I suppose," said Temple. "There is no end of the fame the Remove will bring upon us. The Remove is a great Form."

"Oh, rather!"

"Are you looking for your thief?" went on Temple. "Are you employing a detective, or offering a reward?"

"Mind your pockets!" exclaimed Fry, in mock alarm, as Linley impatiently brushed by.

Mark went scarlet.

Fry only spoke in joke, without the least intention of really hinting that Mark was the thief, but, with Bulstrode's insinuations fresh in his mind, it was natural that the Lancashire lad should see in the words more than was meant.

He turned upon the Fourth-Former, and his right lashed out like lightning.

"Ow!" gasped Fry.

He went staggering backwards, brought up against a tree, and slid down to a sitting posture at the base of the trunk.

The expression of surprise and bewilderment on his face was ludicrous.

"Ow! Oh! Why, you beast! Yow!" There was a trickle of red from his nose, and his fingers were reddened as he felt the injury.

Temple and Dabney glared at Linley for a moment, and then they went for him.

The Lancashire lad met them with flashing eyes.

"One at a time!" he exclaimed. "Fair play!"

"Oh, this isn't a fight!" said Temple. "It's a licking! We're going to frog-march you—Ow!"

Biff!

Mark's left caught him under the chin, and he went down like a log. The next moment Dabney fell across him.

Mark Linley glanced at them, and walked away.

The three heroes of the Upper Fourth sat up dazedly. The Lancashire lad had struck hard—harder than he knew—and they were hurt.

"M-m-m-my hat!" gasped Temple.

"Oh, dear!"

"The savage beast!" gasped Fry.

"Why, I always thought he was a good-tempered chap! What's made him cut up rusty like that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bulstrode, coming up with a crowd of Removites, who had witnessed the affray from afar. "Are you hurt?"

"Mind your own business!"

"Give 'em first aid!" chuckled Skinner.

"My hat! What a fall in Upper Fourths! That Lancashire chap is a beggar to hit!"

"The hitfulness is terrific!"

Temple staggered to his feet.

"I'll skin him!" he said. "I'll mop the ground up with him! I'll knock him into the middle of the twenty-first century!"

"What was the row about?"

"Why, we were only chipping the beast about your latest!" said Temple.

"Ha, ha! That touched him on the raw," said Bulstrode. "You see, there's not much doubt that Linley's the thief."

"Oh, I see!"

"He cuts up rusty if the thing's mentioned," said Bulstrode.

Temple looked at the bruises still visible on the face of the Remove bully.

"Yes, you look as if somebody had cut up rusty with you!" he remarked.

Bulstrode scowled.

"I'm going to make him sit up for that soon!" he said.

The Upper Fourth chums looked round for Mark Linley, but he was gone. They did not feel inclined to hunt for him just then. But they were not inclined to take their punishment "lying down." Temple, as he bathed his eye, and Fry and Dabney, as they bathed their noses, murmured vengeance.

Mark Linley did not give much thought to the encounter. He was feeling a little repentant as he walked away. He had always been of an equable disposition, and had always kept himself well in hand. It was a surprise to himself to discover the fierceness of temper that lay latent in his nature.

He had taken many affronts and endured many injuries with quiet fortitude, never taking offence when he could avoid doing so.

But to be called a thief was more than flesh and blood could stand. At the mere thought of it his blood boiled in his veins—and the calm, quiet, studious lad became savage, aggressive, almost un-governed.

It was not likely to fare well with those who thought, from Mark's habitual quietness, that he could be taunted with impunity.

"I was a fool to come here!" he muttered restlessly, as, far from the hum of the crowded Close, he leaned on the railings from behind the chapel. He wanted to be alone, to think. "I was a fool—a fool! I shall never get a footing here—yet—What would the folks say if I went back? They would guess all that I've had to go through!"

His face hardened.

Why should he go?

He had won his scholarship fairly, by hard work, while others were idling. After his day's work at the factory, the lad had spent the evenings in mental labour; he had sacrificed his leisure, his boyish pleasures, had come near sacrificing his health, to win the scholarship to Greyfriars. It was his now—why should he give it up?

"Never! Never! I'll fight it out!"

He spoke the words aloud, his eyes glinting.

"The scholarship's mine—I won it fairly! Why should I allow myself to be driven away?"

He gritted his teeth.

"Never!"

And the look of grim determination on the Lancashire lad's face showed that he meant every word he said.

"Never! I'll face the music, and fight it out. Let them do their worst!"

And that was Mark Linley's resolve—the resolve he held to through thick and thin, through good and ill-fortune.

THE END.

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