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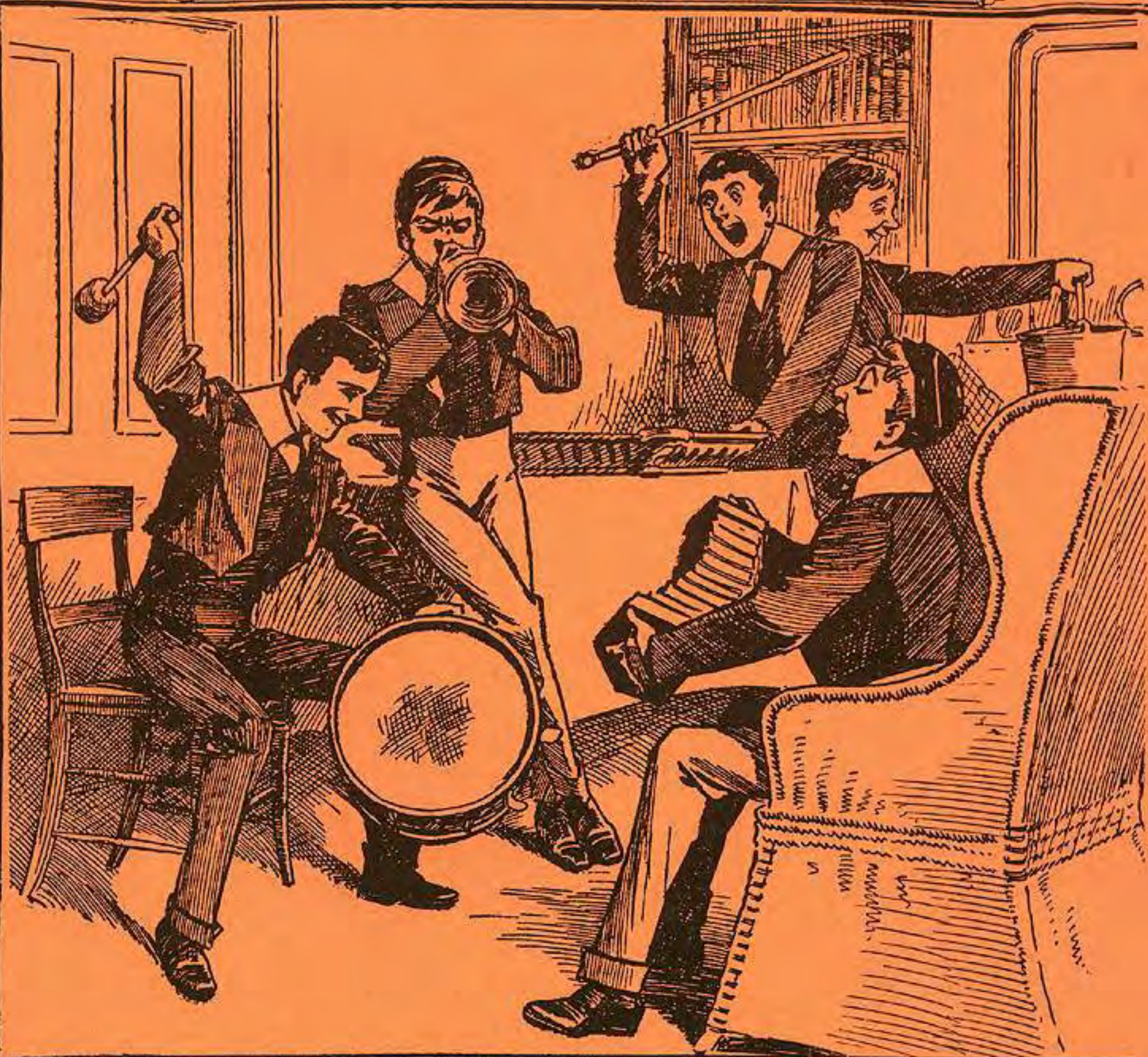
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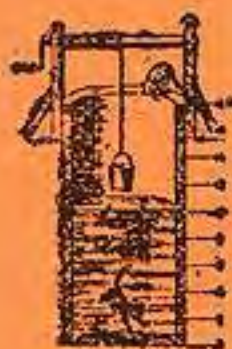
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THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Bunter's Tale.

The Lancashire Junior's Resolve

A Splendid, Long, Complete
School Tale
of the
Boys of Greyfriars.

— BY —

FRANK RICHARDS.



pen it was clear that the list, whatever it was, was costing him much thought—Frank Nugent was reading, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was cracking Brazil nuts. All four of the chums of the Remove were busy, and not a single glance was turned towards the fat junior at the door.

"I say, you fellows——"

Crack!

Bunter jumped—but it was only a big Brazil nut yielding to the nutcrackers in the dusky hand of Hurree Singh.

"Muffins," murmured Bob Cherry, gnawing his pen; "muffins! I wonder whether I'd better put down muffins?"

"Look here, you fellows," said Billy Bunter indignantly, "you know jolly well you can hear me!"

Bob Cherry looked up at last.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is that you, Bunter?"

"Yes, it is, Bob Cherry! I——"

"Have you been talking?"

"You know jolly well I have!" spluttered Bunter. "I——"

"I thought I heard something buzzing!" said Bob Cherry. "How was I to know that it was you, and not a bumblebee? But you're just in time, Billy!"

Bunter looked at him suspiciously.

"Got anything good?"

"Ha, ha, ha! No, at present I haven't anything to eat about me," said Bob Cherry. "I'm making up a list——"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"It's a question of muffins. Now, muffins——"

"I SAY, you fellows——"
Billy Bunter put his head in at the door of No. 1 Study in the Remove passage at Greyfriars as he spoke. He blinked through his big spectacles at the four juniors who were sitting round the table, but not one of them looked up.

"I say, you fellows——"
Apparently they did not hear, though Billy Bunter's voice was rising indignantly. Harry Wharton was working out a problem; Bob Cherry was jotting down a list on a sheet of paper—and from the way he gnawed the handle of his

"Here, shut up!" said Nugent. "How's a fellow to read when there's a lot of silly asses jawing round him?"

Bob Cherry assumed a thoughtful expression.

"Ask me another," he said. "I don't know the answer to that one."

Nugent grunted and went on reading. Bob Cherry scanned the list he had been making, and wrinkled his brows.

"Muffins! I think I'd better say muffins! Look here, Bunter, it really depends on you. Can I trust you to cook muffins anything like decently?"

"Certainly, Cherry!" said Billy Bunter, with alacrity. "Where are they?"

"Oh, they're not made yet! I'm thinking about a special tea-fight on Wednesday afternoon, and—"

"Oh!" Bunter's face fell again. "What's the good of talking about muffins on Wednesday afternoon now? If you're going to get anything decent for tea, say so!"

"So!"

"Oh, really, Cherry, don't be an ass! I wish you wouldn't always talk piffle when I speak to you," said Billy Bunter peevishly. "Considering that something's happened to bring disgrace on the Remove and all Greyfriars, I think you might be serious!"

If anybody else had made that remark, the chums of the Remove would have been alert at once. For they were the leaders of the Remove—the Lower Fourth Form at Greyfriars School. In their eyes there was no Form at Greyfriars which was of quite as much consequence as the Remove.

The Upper Fourth certainly had a good opinion of itself—the Shell regarded itself with a complacency beyond the comprehension of the other Forms. The Fifth looked upon them all as "kids." The Sixth considered itself the salt of the earth, so to speak—at all events, the salt of Greyfriars. The great men of the Sixth appeared to be scarcely conscious of the existence of such persons as Removites. And yet the Remove persisted in its view that there was only one Form at Greyfriars which was really "the thing," and that Form was the Remove.

They were the most unruly and troublesome Form in the school, as their Form-master knew, and as the French-master, little Monsieur Charpentier, had learned to his cost. When they were not cheeking the Fifth, rowing with the Upper Fourth, or ragging their masters, they were fighting among themselves. The Remove passage was the most lively part of the house, and the prefects had almost give up hope of ever really establishing order there.

True, there had been a little more order since Harry Wharton had become captain of the Form—but even Wharton wasn't perfect, and his Form-fellows were very far from perfect.

And so the Remove, which had a great belief in itself, did not occupy a very high place in the estimation of the powers.

That, however, did not trouble the Remove. They "kept their end up." They beat the Upper Fourth at football and cricket, they cheeked the prefects, and had a pretty troublous time of it generally—and seemed to thrive on it.

But whatever their faults and failings, the Removites had a very high sense of the honour of the Form, and there were few even of the most reckless boys who were not quick to feel upon that point.

But the chums knew Billy Bunter of old. He was famous as a discoverer of mare's nests, and a tattler of the most incredible tattle. His most serious statements were generally received with a grin.

And so, although he made his statement with an air of great seriousness, Harry Wharton did not look up from his work, and Nugent did not leave off reading. Bob Cherry continued to consider the question of muffins, tapping his forehead with his pen to assist thought, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh cracked nuts.

Billy Bunter blinked at them through his spectacles for a moment in silence. The silence was broken by the dusky junior from Bhanipur.

Crack!

It was another Brazil nut.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Muffins or no muffins?" murmured Bob Cherry. "To be or not to be, that is the question! The fat young bounder cooks sausages and chips a treat, but muffins are more delicate work—and we can't offer lady visitors tough muffins! Perhaps I'd better cross muffins out."

"Oh, very well, I'll go to Wingate!" said Billy Bunter. "Blessed if I'm going to have my watch stolen and say nothing about it!"

"Eh?" said Bob Cherry, taking some interest in the matter at last. "What's that about your watch?"

"Oh, never mind—I'll go to Wingate! After all, as captain of the school, I suppose he ought to know there's a thief at Greyfriars."

THE MAGNET.—No. 83.

NEXT
WEEK:

"STAUNCH CHUMS."

Bob Cherry rose from his seat, and caught the fat junior by the collar, and slung him back from the door. Billy Bunter staggered against the table, and sent it flying. Harry Wharton gave a yell as his exercise disappeared from under his pen, and went shooting to the floor along with the inkpot.

"You ass!" he shouted. "Look at that!"

"Sorry," said Bob Cherry. "You can kick Bunter if you like."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"The young goat's got to explain his words," said Bob Cherry. "Now, Bunter, I know it's only your silly piffle, but what do you mean by saying that there's a thief at Greyfriars?"

"So there is, and—"

"Oh, it's all rot!" said Harry irritably. "You know Bunter! I shall have to begin that beastly thing again now!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! It's true! I—"

"Oh, bosh!" said Nugent. "How on earth can a fellow read with all this row going on?"

"I gave that one up," said Bob Cherry. "If you're going on asking conundrums, why can't you ring in a new one?"

"Look here—"

"Rats!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Come to think of it, of course it's piffle," said Bob Cherry. "You can get out of the study, Bunter. Scat!"

"But I say, you fellows, my watch is really—"

"Travel along!" said Bob Cherry, throwing open the door. "We've had enough of your rot! Get out!"

"I sha'n't get out of my own study!"

"Your mistake—you will!"

"But look here—my watch—"

"Blow your watch!"

"But it's gone!"

"Well, watches were made to go!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"And you can't do better than follow the example of your watch," said Bob Cherry. "If you don't go—"

"I—I—I—" Bunter dodged to the door as Bob Cherry made a run at him. "Look here, never mind the watch, then—what about tea? I'm hungry!"

"Get out!"

"Oh, really! I—ow! Yah! Beast!"

A kick helped Billy Bunter out of the study, and in lively anticipation of another to back it up, he scudded along the passage.

Bob Cherry, somewhat heated, closed the door.

"Young oyster!" he grunted. "Always got some silly yarn or another! I—"

The door opened a little, and the spectacles of Billy Bunter glimmered cautiously in.

"I say, you fellows, what about tea?"

Bob Cherry made a grab at the poker and rushed towards the door. Bunter did not wait for him to come to close quarters—he slammed the door and fled for his life. And Bob Cherry burst into a laugh and hurled the poker into the grate with a crash. Bunter did not return this time.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Trouble With the Prefect.

"WELL, that's done!" said Harry Wharton, rising from his task at last. "What's the time, people?"

"Nearly seven," said Bob Cherry.

"Phew! And the meeting of the Dramatic Society is at seven," said Harry. "No time for tea—anyway, it's not worth lighting a fire—"

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A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

"The excellent kettle could be boiled upon the esteemed spirit stove," suggested Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "I have with thoughtfulness, and the expenditure of sixpence, laid in a new supply of the elegant methylated spirit."

Bob Cherry gave a sniff.

"That stove's so jolly whiffy," he remarked; "and you remember you nearly set the study on fire with it once, Inky!"

"That was owing to your esteemed clumsiness, my worthy chum. If the spirit-stove is handled by my honourable self the result will be extremely cashful."

"Extremely which?"

"He means creditable," grinned Nugent. "This is English as she is spoken in Bhanipur, under the instruction of the best native masters."

"Exactly!" purred the nabob. "I have observefully remarked that in this esteemed country there is a great amount of ludicrous mistakefulness in the honourable speech. I prefer my Englishful language to that of my worthy chums, which shows the degeneration of modernity."

"Precisefully," grinned Bob Cherry. "The exactfulness of your remarks is simply terrific. But what about tea?"

"I will boil the august kettle on the esteemed stove, and to avoid the smellful 'niff I will place it on the window-sill."

"You remember what happened before—"

"The rememberfulness is great, but the carefulness will be terrific."

"Well, I'd prefer tea to gingerbeer," said Nugent. "Let Inky have a go at the methylated spirit stove."

"Go ahead, Inky!"

Bob Cherry looked into the cupboard.

"Well, there's only cake and some tarts," he said. "Bunter has demolished everything else. We only want a light tea before rehearsal, anyway. Buck up with that kettle, Inky!"

"The buckfulness is terrific."

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh placed the stove on the window-sill, and swamped it with methylated spirit. Unfortunately he was a little too liberal with the spirit, and some of it drenched over the sill, and splashed down into the Close.

There was a shout from below.

"You aas! What are you up to?"

Hurree Singh looked down over the sill, considerably perturbed. The Hindu was the politest fellow possible, and he would not willingly have incommoded or annoyed anybody for worlds.

It was Carberry, of the Sixth, the most unpopular prefect at Greyfriars, who was looking up with a savage brow. A drop of the spirit had fallen on Carberry as he was passing under the window, and the smell worried him.

"I am sorry!" murmured the nabob. "If the splashfulness has descended upon the honourable crumpet of the august Carberry, the apologise is terrific."

"You confounded nigger!" roared Carberry.

Hurree Singh drew back his head with dignity, and gave the back of it a sharp rap on the window-sash. He uttered a cry, and clapped his hand to the injured part, and his sleeve swept the spirit-stove off the window-sill.

Carberry was looking upward, and the little stove dropped fairly on his rather prominent nose.

For a moment Carberry did not realise what had struck him. He clapped his hand to his nose and danced with pain, and the stove crashed on the ground.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"The stove is gone!"

"You young hound! You did that on purpose!"

"The honourable Carberry is mistaken."

But Carberry waited to hear no more. He rushed for the door, with the intention of ascending to No. 1 Study, and wreaking his vengeance upon the unfortunate Nabob of Bhanipur.

Hurree Singh looked dismayed.

"The stove gone?" asked Bob Cherry, with a grin. "Never mind. We've got some ginger-beer, and that's just as good on a warm day."

"Yes; but—"

"Don't worry. The ginger-beer is all right. Here's some soda-water, too," taking a syphon from the cupboard. "Luckily, Bunter doesn't care for soda-water."

"But—"

"Open the ginger-beer. Here's some glasses. Who says cake?"

"Cake!"

"My worthy chum, I think—"

"It's all right, Inky. Never mind the tea."

"But—"

"Have some ginger-beer or soda-water."

"But I was not thinking of the tea. I think the worthy Carberry is coming upfully to the study."

"Carberry!"

THE MAGNET.—No. 83.

NEXT

WEEK:

"STAUNCH CHUMS."

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"Yes; because the stove dropped on his honourable napper!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By Jove, he's coming!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, as a clatter of hasty boots was heard in the passage. "Look out!"

The door of the study was flung violently open.

Carberry, with a face red with rage, strode in. He had paused for a moment downstairs to snatch up a walking-stick.

"Now, you confounded nigger," he exclaimed, "I'll teach you to drop stoves on the head of a prefect!"

"Oh, rats!" said Bob Cherry, eyeing the stick warily. "He doesn't want teaching; he can do that sort of thing all right untaught."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm going to thrash you till—"

"Hold on!" said Harry Wharton. "You're going to do nothing of the sort. Inky is sorry it happened."

"I'm going to make him sorrier."

"It was an accident."

"I'll teach him to have accidents. Come here, you black—"

"Hold on! Don't touch him!"

"Get out of the way, Wharton!" roared the prefect.

"I won't! Get out of our study."

"Do you dare to interfere with a prefect, you whelp?"

"Yes, when he starts bullying," said Wharton undauntedly. "I suppose it's within your rights to cane Inky on the hand, but you're not going to lick him with a walking-stick while I'm by. Put that stick down."

Carberry gave the junior one glare; and then, gritting his teeth, he swung the stick aloft, to bring it down upon the boy who defied him. Hurree Singh was forgotten for the moment.

But that blow never fell.

Bob Cherry's hand was on the soda syphon, and as Carberry's arm went up Bob let fly with the soda-water.

Sizz-z-z-z!

Sloosh!

The jet of soda-water caught Carberry fairly in the face, and he staggered back, his arm dropping to his side.

For the moment he was blinded and half stunned.

"Br-r-r! G-r-r-r! Yah—ow—yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You young demons, I'll— Yah—ow—you!"

Sizz-z-z-z!

Carberry reeled back towards the door. It was a waste of soda-water, but the juniors did not mind. They were roaring with laughter.

But the bully of the Sixth recovered himself in a minute. With his face and collar and waistcoat drenched and dripping, and his eyes flaming with rage, he hurled himself upon the juniors.

The Famous Four lined up to receive him. The next moment a wild and whirling combat was raging in the study.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Meeting in No. 1 Study.

"G O it!"

"Give him beans!"

"You young whelps—"

"Have him down!"

"You young—"

"Sit on his head!"

"You—"

"Down with him!"

"Hurrah!"

Carberry was down. Big and strong Sixth-Former as he was, he was no match for four athletic juniors. They had received some hard knocks, for Carberry struck out recklessly and savagely, but they did not care for that. Carberry, under their united efforts, went down with a mighty bump that seemed to shake the floor of the study.

The juniors sprawled over him, clutching him. Bob Cherry sat astride his chest; Nugent grasped his ankles, one in either hand; and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh sat on his head. Wharton held his wrists.

Carberry was still gasping and struggling, and the juniors were gasping, too. It had been a desperate tussle. Now they had their enemy down, they were just a little scared at their own victory. It was no light matter for juniors to raise their hands against a Sixth-Form prefect.

"You young whelps!" gasped Carberry. "Let me get up!"

"Rats!"

"I'll—I'll thrash you within an inch of your lives!"

"More rats!"

"Lemme get up!"

"Will you make it pax, then?"

The prefect ground his teeth with rage at the mere thought of himself, a Sixth-Form prefect, being called upon to make it "pax" with the juniors who had overthrown him.

"Get off!" he roared.

"Not much," said Bob Cherry coolly. "You've got to make it pax."

"I—I—I!"

"I'm pretty comfy here," remarked Bob Cherry, settling down on Carberry's chest. "I'm in no hurry to move."

"Let me up, or—or—" Carberry struggled desperately, but the juniors only held him the tighter—"I'll report you to the Head!"

"Go hon!"

"Help!" roared the prefect. "Help!"

"Gimme that soda-water, somebody. Thanks! Keep your mouth shut, Carberry."

"Help!" roared Carberry.

Sizz-z-z-z!

The stream of soda-water shot into the prefect's open mouth, and he gasped and spluttered frantically.

"Have some more, Carberry?"

"Oh-h-h-h-h! Grooh!"

"There's still some left, and you're welcome to it."

"Help! Groo-yah-ow-w-w-w!"

Sizz-z-z-z!

But Carberry's shouts had been heard. Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, put his head in at the door with an angry frown.

"What's all this row? Why—why—Carberry! Let him up at once, you young rascals!"

The juniors obeyed at once.

Wingate, of the Sixth, was a fellow of a very different calibre from Carberry, and no one in the lower Forms at Greyfriars would have thought of disregarding his orders for a moment.

The captain of the school looked at them angrily, and then at Carberry, as the dishevelled prefect rose slowly to his feet.

Carberry was almost stuttering with rage.

"What does this mean?" demanded Wingate sternly.

"Your favourites again!" hissed Carberry. "This is what comes of your encouraging the Lower Forms to cheek the seniors!"

Wingate's brow grew very dark.

"I don't do anything of the sort!" he exclaimed sharply.

"But I shall be slow to believe that these lads attacked you without reason."

"I came here to punish the nigger."

"You have no right to call him a nigger. You can't expect even kids in the Remove to put up with insults patiently."

"Of course, you take his part."

"And you came here to punish him with a walking-stick, I see," said Wingate. "I suppose it is some more of your bullying? As you can't give a reasonable explanation, I presume that was the case."

"Look here—"

"At the same time, you youngsters have no right to touch a prefect. You'll take fifty lines each."

"Yes, Wingate," said the four with one voice.

"We'll do what you tell us with pleasure," said Wharton.

"And you'd better get out of the study, Carberry," said Wingate drily.

And the prefect, hardly able to contain his rage, left the room.

The juniors were glad enough to escape so cheaply, and they mentally voted Wingate a brick. But Wingate wasn't done with them yet. He spent the next five minutes in rating them soundly—a lecture to which the juniors listened with exemplary patience and attention. As Bob Cherry said afterwards, they'd have let old Wingate slang them for an hour, if he liked, without saying a word.

The captain of Greyfriars left them at last, and with a general grin the four youngsters put themselves a little to-rights. Then Bob Cherry opened the ginger-beer, and that refreshing beverage was discussed with the cake and tarts. The tea was half done when there was a kick at the door, and Elliott of the Remove came in.

"Hallo! Guzzling?" he said.

"Nearly finished," said Bob Cherry. "We've had a lot of delay—keeping perfects in order, and holding a conversation on the subject of discipline with old Wingate. You're the first in, anyway."

"Oh, I'll help you with the tarts," said Elliott cheerfully. "I always sing better after a tart or two."

THE MAGNET.—No. 88.

NEXT
WEEK:

"STAUNCH CHUMS."

"Faith, and it's the same with me," said Micky Desmond, coming in with a roll of music under his arm. "I'll take a couple, plaze."

"I say, you fellows!" Billy Bunter came warily into the study. "I—eh—what? Tarts! Why didn't you call me?"

And Billy took a jam tart in his right hand, and a marmalade tart in his left, and started.

With this manful help from all comers, the tarts were very quickly demolished, and the table was dragged into a corner to leave room for the operations of the Wharton Operatic and Dramatic Society.

Several more members arrived—Trevor and Hazeldene, and Ogilvy and Morgan, and Tom Brown, the junior from New Zealand. There were some more members in the Remove, but it was not usual for them all to turn up at a meeting. Other interests sometimes claimed them; and, as a matter of fact, the Remove studies were hardly large enough to accommodate large meetings.

"That's a good idea," said Ogilvy, as he came in.

"Eh? What's a good idea?" asked Bob.

"Ginger-beer to wet the whistle of the singers," said Ogilvy blandly, as he took the last remaining bottle, and opened it. "I'm really glad of this."

And the liquid gurgled out into a glass.

"Oh, go it!" said Bob Cherry resignedly. "Don't mind me."

"Ripping!" said Ogilvy. "This is very thoughtful of Wharton. I move that it be made a standing rule for the president of the Operatic and Dramatic Society to provide non-intoxicating liquid refreshment for the members."

"Hear, hear!"

"I second the motion, look you!" said Morgan promptly.

"Passed nem. con.," said Tom Brown. "The president is requested to make a note of it. Mine's lemonade in future."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Let's get to business," he said. "You all know that it's the intention of the Operatic and Dramatic Society to give an entertainment in aid of the Remove Form Cricket Club."

"Yes, rather!" said the New Zealand junior. "A ripping idea, too."

"There has been some opposition in the Remove. Bulstrode, who used to be captain of the Form before I came, as you all know, offered to help the club financially—"

"Good old Bulstrode!" said Elliott.

"That's all very well," said Wharton quickly, "but the Remove cricket club doesn't want charity. The committee have declined the offer, and have decided to raise the funds by a concert, given by the Operatic Society—a much better method, in my opinion at least."

"Yes—if the money comes in."

"We must make it come in. There'll be a charge for admission, and all the Remove will be bound to come, if only from esprit de corps."

"Well, that's a good word, anyway! But you know what Skinner says."

"Blow Skinner."

"Well, he says it's bad enough to hear us sing, without paying for it. He says if anybody's paid, it ought to be the audience."

"Never mind Skinner; let's go ahead."

"I've heard, too," said Ogilvy, "that Bulstrode's got some idea of getting up an opposition of some sort—I don't know exactly what. But he's been doing a lot of whispering lately with Skinner and Stott and Snoop, and that set."

"Oh, let 'em rip!" said Bob Cherry. "Lemme see! I am going to sing 'What's the Matter With England—?'"

"Not now," said Ogilvy hurriedly.

"Eh? What's the matter with 'What's the Matter With England?'"

"Oh, the song's all right!"

"If you've come to this rehearsal specially to get a thick ear, Ogilvy—"

"Order! Order!"

"That's all very well, but—"

"Order!"

"Yes, order!" said Harry Wharton. "We'd better begin by going for that chorus again. We can practise solos by ourselves but part-singing can't be done separately. As a matter of fact, I don't know whether the 'Anvil Chorus' isn't a bit above our weight—"

"Oh, that's all right!" said Morgan. "You can all listen to me, and—"

"Yes, we're likely to do that," remarked Hazeldene.

"The audience will have to, but we—"

"Order! Now begin!" said Wharton, tapping a tuning-fork. "No good wasting time; and you can jaw in the Close or the Form-rooms."

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton
& Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

And with Harry Wharton conducting, the practice commenced. Scarcely had the first two or three bars rung out, when a terrific din broke out in the adjoining study.

Rat-a-tat-atat-atat-atat!

Blare!

Bob Cherry broke off.

"My only hat! What's that?"

Blare! Blare!

Rat-a-tat-atat-atat-atat!

It was a kettle-drum and a cornet, going without much regard to time, and backed up by several other instruments, among which could be distinguished a poker and fender, a mouth-organ, and a paper comb.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Ogilvy. "It's Bulstrode's band!"

THE FOURTH 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 No. 1 Study, 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 Hurree 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 the 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 No. 2 Study, it was easy for him, if not to rival Wharton, at all events to interrupt him with terrific discord.

Hence the outburst of the "orchestra" 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-atat-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, the Wharton Operatic and Dramatic Society raged and fumed; but they could not get in.

The rehearsal had ceased.

With the terrific din from the next study interrupting and drowning them, the part-singers could not get on with the "washing."

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?"

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NEXT
WEEK:

"STAUNCH CHUMS."

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"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. "It's an orchestra on the new Strauss system, with new instruments introduced. 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 Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society danced with rage.

They could not 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 practice in a class-room," he said.

"We can do that, and we sha'n't hear much of this row from there. If the duifers 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 No. 1 Study, 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 class-room 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 were 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 handsomen 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 sent him flying again.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" said the newcomer. "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 FIFTH 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. Bob Cherry sympathetically inquired if he were hungry, that usually being Bunter's complaint. The juniors had spent a busy evening, and had quite forgotten the weighty communication Billy Bunter had made. The fat junior blinked reproachfully at Bob.

"Yes, Cherry, I'm hungry, as a matter of fact. I—"

"Go and eat coke then, my son."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"I say, there's some news," said Hazeldene, who had been reading a letter that arrived by the evening's post. "I—"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter! Hazeldene's speaking."

"So am I, Nugent. I say, you fellows—"

"I've had a letter from Marjorie," said Hazeldene.

Bob Cherry looked round quickly from unlacing his boots.

"Anything about Wednesday?"

Wednesday was a half-holiday at Greyfriars, as at most public schools. The chums of the Remove were intending to make an excursion on that afternoon, if the weather was fine, and they had planned a pull up the river in a boat, a picnic on the grass under shady trees, and a specially ripping "tea-fight," as Bob Cherry called it. The girl-chums of Cliff House had promised to come, for, of course, an outing of that sort could not be considered completely successful without an admixture of the gentle sex in the party. Hazeldene's sister Marjorie was to bring her friend Clara, and it was possible that she might bring another friend, too.

"Yes, it's about the picnic," said Hazeldene. "You remember that chap D'Arcy we met at St. Jim's, when we played them at cricket—he came to the Cliff House garden-party, too."

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Yes, rather! Arthur Augustus D'Arcy."

"That's the chap! He's got a cousin, Ethel. She came to Cliff House, too. Well, Ethel Cleveland's coming to visit Marjorie on Wednesday, and her cousin's going to bring her to Cliff House."

"Good!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Let them come to the picnic, too, if they like the idea."

"The goodness is terrific."

"That's what Marjorie's thinking," said Hazeldene.

"She thought she'd better let us know, you know. D'Arcy is a decent chap, though he has some curious ways, and his cousin is a ripping girl."

"The rippingfulness of the charming miss is great," said the Nabob of Bhanipur. "The picnic will be the greatest success of the honourable season."

"I say, you fellows—"

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NEXT
WEEK:

"STAUNCH CHUMS."

"It's all right, Billy, you're coming, and there will be plenty to eat."

"I wasn't thinking of that, Hazeldene. I'm blessed if I know why you fellows think I'm fond of eating. I'm not greedy; I only like a lot. But I wasn't going to speak about that. It's about my watch."

"Your watch?"

"No, my watch," said Bunter. "It's been stolen—"

"Oh, get off that!"

"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 No. 1 Study. "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 Removites 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 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 at 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.

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

Back went the burly Removeite, 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 on 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 SIXTH CHAPTER.

In the Dead of Night.

"O H, 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 a 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 unredeemed 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."

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NEXT WEEK:

"STAUNCH CHUMS."

"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 crock 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. Why 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 throbbed 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. Quelch would let me have breakfast in bed—Ow! Wow!"

Bunter broke off as Bob Cherry dragged off his bed-clothes, and yanked him off the bed.

"That's better than having your breakfast in bed," grinned Bob. "Stick your face into 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 its 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 SEVENTH 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."

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"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—"

"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 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."

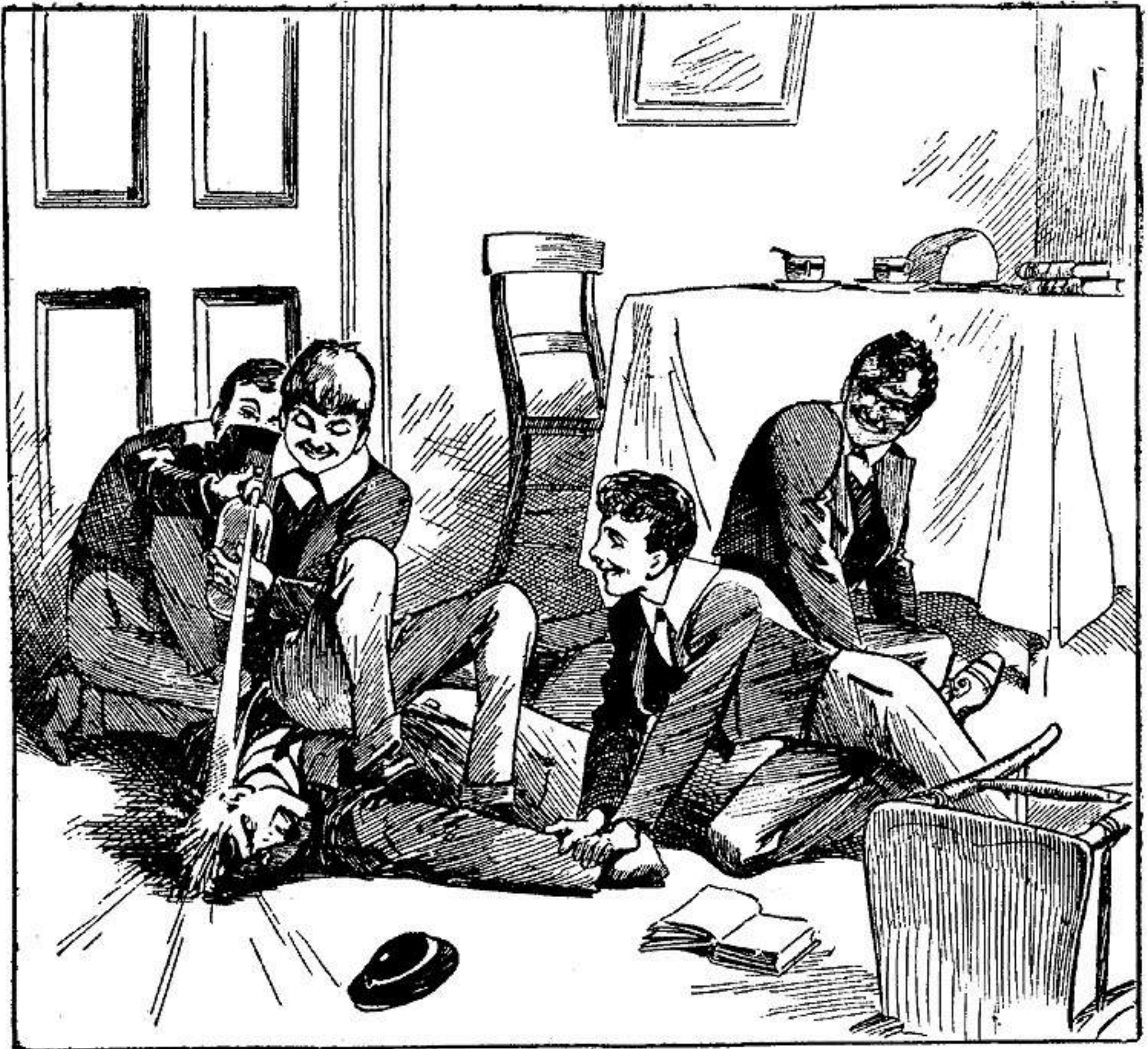
"Thank you, Wharton! I'll answer you—not that cad! I've been down to the Sark to bathe before breakfast, as you know I often do."

"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."



"Help!" roared Carberry. Sizz-z-z-z! A stream of soda-water shot into the prefect's open mouth, and he gasped and spluttered frantically.

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."

"Buck 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.

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"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 up to be the 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 that seemed 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 EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Carberry Investigates.

CARBERRY was in a bad temper—probably due, as much as anything else, to sitting up late in his study over-night, and drinking whisky-and-water and smoking cheap cigarettes with his cronies. His eyes were red and tired, and he had a headache, and his temper suffered accordingly. Having kicked Bulstrode so vigorously that the burly Remove squirmed out of his way with the activity of an eel, Carberry seemed inclined to carry the same punishment through the Remove. He kicked Snoop, and cuffed Stott, and the rest crowded out of his way.

"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. But Carberry looked disappointed. He had probably hoped for a refusal to obey, which would have been an excuse for sterner measures. He had a keen dislike for the Lancashire lad—the natural dislike of a mean and small nature for a strong and brave one. Linley had refused to fag for him once, but it was fagging of a kind that the prefect dared not punish him for refusing to do—nothing less than smuggling tobacco into the school. But if Carberry could not punish him for that, he could find pretexts by looking out for them, and that he never failed to do.

"Now, what was this fighting about?" he growled.

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—and Linley knocked him over!" stammered Snoop.

Carberry gave a start.

"Stealing! Has anything been stolen?"

"Ye-es."

"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 THE MAGNET.—No. 88.

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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—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.

ANSWERS

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton
& Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE NINTH 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 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. "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 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."

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And Harry wondered, too, who was to be Mr. Quelch's substitute during his absence.

Twice before, since Wharton had been at Greyfriars, Mr. Quelch had had to leave his Form in other hands on occasions of illness. Once the Form had been taken by a Girton girl—the Head's younger sister, Miss Locke, now second mistress at Cliff House School for Girls. On the other occasion, the Remove-master's substitute had been a Mr. Chesham, and of Mr. Chesham's reign the Remove still talked with dark brows. For Mr. Chesham had been a "faddist" of the most pronounced type, and his care for the boys' health had led him to take many steps which had seriously interfered with their comfort. The Remove had revolted at last, and Mr. Chesham had left the school unmourned by anyone.

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!"

"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. 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 any little 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 that 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 TENTH CHAPTER.

The Remove are Not Pleased.

"WHAT'S the trouble?" Bob Cherry asked the question as Harry Wharton came slowly out of the House into the sunny Close, with his hands in his pockets and a shadow on his face.

It was clear from his looks that something was amiss, and his chums came to him at once to inquire.

"No good bothering over that affair in the dorm.," said Nugent. "I've an idea that it will turn out to be some silly jape. Anyway, I'm not going to let it worry me!"

"Same here!" said Bob.

"The samefulness is terrific."

"I wasn't thinking of that for the moment," said Wharton. "There's something else."

"Expound, my son."

"Quelch is going away for a few days—"

"Oh, dear!" said Bob Cherry. "Bring me a pail to weep into. Bring a trough for Wharton. Boo-hoo-hoo! Our dear, kind teacher is going away! Boo-hoo!"

"Don't be an ass, Bob," said Harry, laughing, in spite of himself. "We could stand Quelch's absence all right; but I'm thinking of his substitute."

Bob Cherry looked alarmed.

"You don't mean to say that we're to have Miss Locke again—we're not going to have a giddy suffragette for a Form-mistress—eh?"

"Miss Locke's all right," said Nugent; "but I prefer a mere man as a Form-master."

"The preferfulness is great."

"No; it's not Miss Locke."

"Capper, I suppose?" said Nugent. "Is Capper going to take us and the Upper Fourth together? That will mean trouble with Temple, Dabney & Co."

"It's not Capper."

"Prout, the master of the Fifth, then? Is he going to leave the Fifth, and take the Remove in hand?"

"No; he isn't."

"Then who on earth is it? A new-comer?"

"Yes; a chap from outside."

"Do we know him?"

"Yes, rather!" groaned Wharton. "Only too well!"

"My hat!" shouted Bob Nugent. "Not Chesham?"

Harry Wharton nodded lugubriously.

"Yes; Chesham!"

Tom Brown, the New Zealander, looked on in surprise. He was new to Greyfriars, and had not yet heard of Mr. Chesham.

"Chesham?" said Nugent blankly.

"The esteemed, rotten Chesham?"

"Yes."

"My hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"Nice, isn't it?" said Harry. "You remember what a ripping time we had with him when he was here last—the beautiful care he took of our health?"

"The medicine," groaned Nugent. "The pills."

"I—I—I won't stand it!" exclaimed Bob Cherry wildly. "I'll—I'll bolt!"

"The boltfulness is not possible, but the ragfulness should be terrific," suggested the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"That's the ticket," said Nugent eagerly. "If he begins his old tricks, we shall have to rag him right and left, that's all."

Harry Wharton looked serious.

"I don't know about that."

"Oh, come, old chap, it's the only thing to be done!"

"Rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"Yes, perhaps; but Quelch has asked me to do my best to keep things in order while he's away."

"I suppose he smells a rat—eh?" grunted Bob.

"Perhaps. Anyway, I've told him I'll do my best—as captain of the Form I couldn't do less than that."

"I suppose not. But, look here, we're not going to take this lying down. If the faddy ass begins his little games, he will get sat upon."

"The sitfulness will be—"

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"Terrific," grinned Nugent. "Of all the rotten news, I think this is about the rottenest. It takes the cake."

And that was the general impression in the Remove when the news spread. The Remove were not pleased.

Mr. Chesham was to arrive that afternoon, and the juniors were looking forward to his arrival with decidedly hostile feelings.

Bulstrode proposed that a party should await him at the gates, and hiss him as he came in. A proposal that was promptly vetoed by Wharton, who promised to wipe up the ground with anybody who hissed.

It was useless to commence by a declaration of war, to say nothing of the bad form. Wharton's counsel was to take the thing quietly at first, and hope for the best, and not kick till they had to.

It was good advice; but the Remove were discontented.

They remembered only too keenly the pills and potions the faddy Form-master had inflicted upon them, with the benevolent intention of improving their bodily health, during his short reign in the Remove.

They were determined that they wouldn't stand it a second time, if they had to revolt.

Mr. Chesham was likely to find a very unruly Form awaiting him at Greyfriars.

That morning the Remove showed some of their dissatisfied spirit. Mr. Quelch usually made his authority respected, but this morning he had all his work cut out to manage the Remove.

When he sent Bulstrode in to the Head to be caned for impertinence, however, the Remove calmed down a little.

Bulstrode came back looking rather white, and was very quiet for the rest of the morning.

Mr. Quelch was a just master, but when unruliness was shown he ruled with a rod of iron, and soon brought his Form to their senses.

But the juniors knew that Mr. Chesham was made of less stern material. They mentally resolved to indemnify themselves under the new regime.

The Remove were dismissed at last, and they crowded out of the Form-room with looks that boded trouble for the afternoon.

"Jolly ripping state of things," grunted Bulstrode. "A faddy master in the Form-room, and a thief in the dormitory. Blessed if I know what the Remove's coming to!"

"Rotten!" said Snoop. "They don't seem to be taking any steps to discover the thief, either."

"Do you want them to?" said Hazeldene.

Snoop turned crimson.

"What do you mean?" he spluttered.

"Oh, you can guess what I mean!" grinned Hazeldene, walking away.

"The—the cad," muttered Snoop. "That's as good as saying that I took the things. I—I— He ought to be licked."

"Lick him, then," said Bulstrode, with a grin.

Snoop walked away without replying. He did not feel inclined to lick anybody; indeed, there were "infants" in the Third Form who defied Snoop with impunity.

Mark Linley went out into the Close by himself. There was a heavy cloud on the face of the lad from Lancashire.

He had had many battles to fight at Greyfriars, and he had fought them bravely; he had won his way into the respect of nearly all the Form, and the friendship of the best part of it.

But his enemies never seemed to tire.

More than once he had been persecuted, and had emerged triumphantly from the persecution; but this last blow seemed one that there was no escaping.

It was true that there was no real evidence. Half of them at least were of Bulstrode's opinion—that the thief was not one of themselves—that he was the "outsider."

That Mark greatly needed money they all knew; that he would have cut off his right hand rather than take a penny that did not belong to him, they did not know; and Bulstrode's insinuations sank deep into many minds.

Besides, someone must have taken the things.

That was the fact to start from—the only question was: Who? And the juniors in their blank doubt followed the first suggestion that was made—and there were many circumstances that seemed to lend weight to Bulstrode's suspicions.

The Lancashire lad walked under the trees, his hands deep in his pockets, his face darkly clouded.

Once before it had seemed to him that he must leave Greyfriars; that the struggle was too unequal, and that he could not keep it up.

Then his courage had risen to face the difficulties that overwhelmed him, and he had surmounted them, and come through with success.

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In this black moment it seemed to the lad that he had better go.

As he passed a group of Removites, they lowered their voices in speaking, and he knew that they were speaking about him, and discussing his probable connection with the thefts in the dormitory.

His ears burned as he walked on.

What could he do?

"Hallo!" said a voice among the elms. "Wherefore that pensive brow, my son?"

Mark started and looked up.

Temple, Dabney & Co., of the Upper Fourth, had stopped, and were regarding him with curious looks.

THE ELEVENTH 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 watchchain 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 generally 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's-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, r-r-r-ather!"

"The savage beast!" gasped Fry. "Why, I always

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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 Fourth! 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 ungoverned. 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 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.

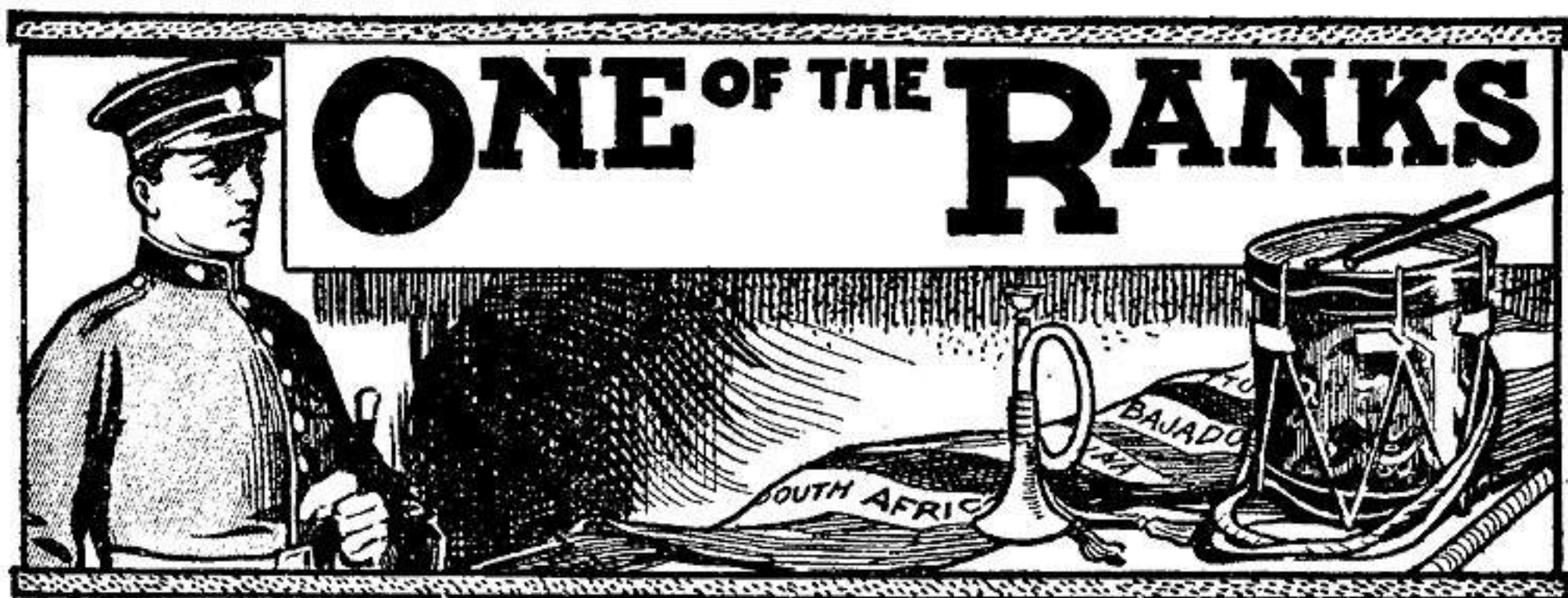
"Never! I'll face the music, and fight it out. Let them do their worst!"

And that was Mark Linley's resolve—the resolve he held to through thick and thin, through good and ill-fortune.

THE END.

(Another long, complete tale of Harry Wharton and Co. next Tuesday, entitled: "Staunch Chums," by Frank Richards. Please order your copy of "The Magnet Library" in advance. Price One Halfpenny.)

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton
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A Splendid Tale of Life in the British Army.

A BRIEF RESUMÉ OF THE EARLIER CHAPTERS.

Ronald Chenys is forced to leave Sandhurst through the treachery of his step-brother, Ian, and enlists in the Wessex Regiment under the name of Chester. Unfortunately for Ronald, Ian joins the Wessex as a subaltern, and, assisted by Sergeant Bagot and Private Foxey Williams, does his best to further disgrace Ronald. The unscrupulous Bagot, however, gets caught in his own toils, and is publicly degraded to the ranks. During a field-day, a raw young private named Augustus Smythe determines to disguise himself in civilian clothes and gain information of the enemy's plans. To this end he gains entrance to a wayside cottage and dons a skirt and blouse. Wearing a bonnet and carrying a basket of eggs, Gussie follows the enemy's General about in his efforts to glean information. The scout, however, is arrested for desertion, and is made a prisoner. At the barrack gates the escort party is stopped by Lieut. Chenys. (Now go on with the story.)

Gussie's Explanation.

Instead of stoutly denying the charge of attempted desertion made by Lieutenant Chenys at the first instant, Gussie stood silent, his mouth wide open.

He was thinking about that mysterious "chob" for which the young subaltern was paying handsomely, and the arrangements for which he had just overheard in the loft of the Bunch of Grapes.

Had Gussie been anywhere but in cells on the night of Ronald's wrestling bout at the Paragon, he would have known all about Pushoffski, the Polish Bear.

As it was, the only news of that night's doings that reached him through the grating of his cell concerned the rioting with the Fermanaghs.

So Gussie, in his bewilderment, forgot his own defence; and it was only when Ian Chenys had gone and the Redcap sergeant was unlocking the handcuffs on his wrists that he remembered again the charge hanging over him.

"Look here, sergeant," he burst out suddenly to Kedge, "I want to know how you make out that I'm a deserter."

"Wait till morning, my lad. You'll hear all about it then," answered Sergeant Kedge casually; and then, turning to two of the guard, he said: "Take his boots off."

The two men promptly pushed Gussie backwards on to a form, and, catching a leg apiece and holding it high in the air, so that he could not kick if he wished, they slit the laces and pulled off his muddy "ammunitions."

"Turn out his pockets!" was the next order.

This did not take long, seeing that the prisoner had on only trousers and shirt.

"Now then, Smythe, pop inside!" said Sergeant Kedge, jingling his bunch of keys, and pointing to an open cell door.

"Can't I explain first? I ain't a deserter, really, sergeant. It's all a mistake. I can prove it, if you'll only listen five minutes."

"Better keep your explanation till the morning, my lad," advised Kedge, not unkindly. "You're a prisoner now, and no words of yours can help you to-night. If you like to spin your yarn through the grating, I won't stop you; only you've got to get the other side of that door first."

The heavy gate clanged behind poor Gussie, and his face

appeared peering plaintively through the square observation-grid.

"It was like this," he began, in tones so utterly mournful that the guard burst into a roar of laughter.

They roared still louder as Gussie unfolded his strange experiences as a scout in female guise. It was all so ridiculous that even the sergeant of Redcaps, who had stopped behind for the fun, had to admit that it bore the impress of truth.

The only thing Gussie did not divulge was the conversation he had overheard in the stable-loft. He explained, however, where he had left the clothes, and finished up with:

"It's true as I'm standing here, sergeant, and you'll find the old girl's kit where I left it—on the landing at the top of the stair, in the right-hand corner."

"Why, that's the loft that foreign chap has turned into a School of Physical Culture, as he calls it!" exclaimed the Redcap to Kedge.

"Your friend Pushoffski, Chester," said Kedge to Roland. "I'll have to send you over for the gear in the morning, and he'll probably want to have another go at you to wipe out his defeat at the Paragon. I hear he's got it in for you the first chance he gets."

"Well, I'm quite game," laughed Ronald. "I don't suppose for an instant I should have the luck I had the first time, but I'm not afraid of the swaggering bully."

Gussie, behind his grating, had opened his mouth wide again at this. He was wondering if the "chob" could have anything to do with the new lance-corporal.

If so, he certainly ought to be told. Gussie remembered that sickening thud on the planks, and shuddered.

"It would be better, perhaps," suggested the Redcap, "if I dropped over now and claimed the bundle. It'll be wanted in evidence, in any case. I'll send one of my men back with it."

In less than five minutes the sergeant of military police was back again.

"Well, that's one lie nailed, for a starter," he said, scowling at Gussie, who had again pushed his nose through the grating.

"Wh-why, ain't it there?" gasped Gussie.

"No, nor never was, you young liar!" roared the Redcap. "I'll teach you to send me off to make a fool of myself to a beastly furriner!"

"Wh-what do you mean?" said Gussie faintly.

"I went up the stairs to the place this man described, and the landing was empty," continued the Redcap, ignoring Gussie, and addressing Sergeant Kedge. "While I was hunting about, the 'ulking great brute came out and wanted to know what the blue, pink, and blanketty-dash I was doing on his premises. He seemed as mad as a hatter, and threatened to chuck me into the road through the roof. I told him to start and try it on, of course; but, though he let off a lot more German lingo, he kept his hands down. Then I explained what I had come about, and asked him if he had seen a bundle of woman's clothes on the landing."

"He turned all colours of the rainbow, and swore he hadn't," said the Redcap, suddenly wheeling round on Gussie again.

"The unmitigated liar!" yelped Gussie, in dismay.

"Who—me?" roared the Redcap.

"No, me—I mean, him!" moaned Gussie. "He's found

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them first, and stuck to them. He's afraid to own up, because he thinks he's discovered. Oh, yes, I know all about him! The scoundrel—the great slab! If only you knew what I know, you'd know, too!"

All of this hysterical outburst, of course, was quite unintelligible to Ronald and the rest. They waited for Gussie to explain himself, but they waited in vain. He had retired to his plank bed, and there abandoned himself to grief.

Neither Kedge nor Ronald knew now what to make of it all. The Redcap sergeant, however, gave it as his opinion that Gussie was the biggest liar unhung, and left in a smouldering fury at having "bought the pup," as he expressed it.

His condemnation, however, did not convince the rest. Gussie's story was too circumstantial in its detail to be utterly false, and the exploit was just one of those hare-brained things he might be expected to plan and carry out.

"I say, sergeant"—it was Gussie's voice, and his nose was once more inserted between the bars of the cell grating—"I suppose this'll be another court-martial job. If I was to subpoena the colonel of the South Kents to come and give evidence for the defence, what do you think would happen?"

The only answer was a roar of laughter. The idea of Gussie calling the commander of the Red force, whom he had spent a long hour chasing up and down the battlefield, badgering him to buy his "noo-laid eggs," was too funny.

"Happen?" echoed Kedge, choking with mirth. "I don't know, but you might try it. You'd better subpoena that subaltern you swiped with the umbrella, and the colour-sergeant who got the omelette as well while you're about it. They'd be only too glad to put in a word for you, I'm sure."

Gussie groaned.

"I tell you what, Smythe. Take my tip, and ask to see Lieutenant Fairly in the morning before office-hour," said Ronald. "He'll do his best for you, I know."

"Yes, that's about the safest thing you can do," said Sergeant Kedge; and Augustus the weebegone swallowed this small crumb of comfort and some supper besides, which Ronald got for him, and went to sleep, worn out with the fatigues and excitement of the day.

Late that night Pushoffski sent over Gussie's disguise, explaining that he had just found the bundle stuffed away behind some lumber.

While the prisoners were paraded outside the guard-room next morning, waiting for a preliminary examination by their company officers, Gussie hoped to get Ronald on one side and tell him what he had overheard, while crouching behind Pushoffski's door, but no opportunity offered itself.

That there was any kinship between Lieutenant Chenys and Chester, he was, of course, unaware; in fact, he had only the haziest reason in his own mind for associating Ronald at all with the "chob."

He felt he ought to take someone into his confidence, however; and who better or safer than this level-headed lance-corporal?

For the present he determined to keep his own counsel. It was Lieutenant Bob who sauntered up that morning to see what prisoners there were of B Company.

Captain Carthew was away on a short leave.

Gussie spun his yarn with the same engaging simplicity that had proved so convincing to his hearers the night before, and Lieutenant Bob had to struggle hard to keep the straight face necessary for so solemn an occasion.

When it was finished he said never a word, but turned on his heel and made for the mess, leaving the prisoner bewildered and despondent.

The story of Gussie pursuing the commandant of the rival force with his eggs, and gathering information of his defences all the while, was too rich to be kept a minute longer than could be helped.

Then from the mess-room windows came yells of laughter distinctly audible at the guard-room door.

At office-hour the orderly-room was packed, every officer who could find an excuse for being present having squeezed in to hear the narrative from Gussie's own lips.

The atmosphere of the place was charged with suppressed mirth as a Leyden jar with electricity. It only wanted one upward curve of Colonel Conger's grim mouth to create an explosion.

The colonel chewed up an entire penholder in endeavouring to keep a straight upper-lip; then his face relaxed for an instant, and all was lost—or, rather, so far as Gussie was concerned, the day was won.

Three times the colonel threatened to have the room cleared on the spot. Then he clapped the prisoner's escort under arrest, because they couldn't or wouldn't stand up straight, and ordered a new file of the guard to take over their duty.

It was all in vain. The epidemic of laughter had gone too far, and the only way to stamp it out was to order the case to be put back for a later hearing.

During the interval Lieutenant Bob, like the good soul he was, telephoned up a pal in the South Kents, and also the police-station at Woolchester.

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The first confirmed the story of the importunate old dame with the eggs, and the second intimated that there was now a warrant out for the same party, and that through certain clues in their possession they were expecting every minute to hear of her arrest in a town twenty-five miles away.

That capped it, and Colonel Conger, after trying to make Gussie think that he was going to send him to penal servitude for life, let him off with "stoppages" wherewith to replace the old dame's garments he had borrowed.

Ian Pays a Visit—Foxey on the Scene:

Remembering his resolve to keep his own counsel until he had consulted Ronald, Gussie took particular care in telling his story to avoid all suggestion that the stable-loft was not deserted when he rid himself of his disguise.

Even so, Ian's face was a study of terror and dismay. He was standing in the furthest corner of the room, where no one would be likely to notice him; but Gussie, try as he would, could not help stealing a furtive glance in his direction when he came to this portion of his narrative.

Ian, however, was fully alive to all the possibilities of

betrayal. So was Pushoffski.

He must see the man at once, and decide how far this fool, Private Smythe, had upset their plans by his blundering. So long as there was the least possibility of his having overheard their conversation, the wrestler must hold his hand.

Yet to Ian the prospect of delay in ridding himself of his enemy was almost as terrible as the risk of striking at once.

So long as all the world, save three, regarded his stepbrother as dead, he was comparatively safe. But once the secret of Ronald's existence leaked out, ruin would come crashing down upon him like an avalanche.

With Ronald once out of his path for good and all, Mordecai, the moneylender, could be settled with in due course.

Slaney, his former servant at Sandhurst, had no knowledge that his stepbrother was still alive. His only hold over him was the paltry crime by which Ian had secured Ronald's expulsion from Sandhurst, and made him an outcast from home and society. That was a mere trifle, Ian told himself. If Slaney went too far, he would find some means of turning the tables on the blackmailer.

As for Pushoffski, he knew nothing. In all their negotiations he had been so full of his own hatred of Ronald Chester for discrediting and ruining him at the outset of his career as a wrestler, that he had never once asked Ian what this man, Private Chester, was to him, and why he also was plotting against his life.

Foxy was the one thorn in his side which there was no plucking out. Foxy knew everything, and that was too much. Still, there would be gold enough, when he came into the Chenys inheritance, to stop even his ugly mouth; and if gold failed, then he would find another way to silence him.

The first thing to be done was to get hold of Pushoffski, and he must meet him in secret.

"You can put out a suit of mufti ready for me, Williams," he said to his servant, as the "fall in" sounded for the last hour's drill that afternoon.

"Yes, sir," answered Foxy, watching Ian with cunning eyes as he turned to go downstairs to parade. At the door Ian hesitated, as if he had meant to say something further, and then thought better of it.

"Yes; all right, then," he added vaguely. "I've got to go down town to the post-office, and then on to the station. But I shall be back in an hour, at most."

"Now, I wonder what he told me that for?" mused Foxy to himself, as soon as he had gone. "Sounds like a blinkin' alibi, that's my idea. It ain't as if he's been over-confidential just lately, neither, curse 'im! There's that 'ulkin' great bruiser, the wrestler chap. What's he been up to with him since that night he sent me down to fix up a meeting? That's what I want to know, and that's what I'm just goin' to find out. There ain't no act in this 'ere drama that I ain't on in, and don't let him forget it. If he thinks he's goin' to stand me in a corner just when he likes, and tell me to shut my eyes, 'cause this little bit an' that little bit don't concern me, he's jolly well mistaken."

"'Allo! There's postic. 'Is lordship likes 'is letters delivered at 'is quarters, an' never at the mess. I wonder why?"

Foxy leered at his own reflection in the mirror, and waited for the post corporal to mount the stairs.

Two letters were handed in. One bore the "Woolchester" postmark, and was addressed in a foreign scrawl. "Ere's a rum-looking fist," mused Foxey. "Now, I wonder who this can be from? Don't think I kin pass this as all correct till I've steamed it first, to kill all the nasty little microbes."

"Allo!" he exclaimed, as he was holding the flap to the spout of a little shaving-kettle which he had lighted. "Blow me if the gum ain't melted off the flap, and the letter's shook out on to the floor, too. Well, that is surprisin'! And, now, what's it all about, anyway?"

Foxey read it once and whistled; then he read it again, and as he read, his cunning little eyes narrowed into pin-points.

After that he put the letter into his pocket, and stuck the other one—a tradesman's bill, by the look of it—into the frame of the looking-glass.

A quarter of an hour after parade was dismissed, Lieutenant Ian Chenys stepped briskly across the barrack square, acknowledged the gate sentry's salute with a slight lifting of his gloved hand, and passed out, turning to the right in the direction of Woolchester High Street.

Ten seconds later, Private Foxey Williams, also in mufti, swaggered past the sentry, and followed in pursuit of his master.

At the post-office, Ian entered, and Foxey dodged into a convenient doorway on the other side of the street to await his reappearance.

At the end of two minutes the young subaltern emerged, and, after a seemingly casual glance up and down the road, continued his way stationwards.

Station Road is dark and ill-lit. On one side the houses straggle for a hundred yards, and then give place to hedge-rows. The other is given up to malshouses and stable buildings, intersected here and there by narrow alleys leading back to the purlieus of Woolchester.

Here Ian, after a hasty glance back to see if he were followed—a precaution which Foxey had anticipated—dived into a passage flanked by high walls.

Foxey gave him a few paces start, then followed on tip-toe. Once Ian stopped suddenly, as if to listen for sounds of pursuit; but, by extraordinary good luck, Foxey had already paused behind an angle of brickwork. Then the footsteps echoed again, and he stole after like a shadow.

Ian was making for the back entrance to the Bunch of Grapes. In the light of the letter in his pocket, Foxey knew his master's destination as soon as he doubled on his tracks.

The yard was empty as Ian paused to reconnoitre, nor, to his disgust, was there any light in the windows of Pushoffski's School of Physical Culture. Still, he stole along in the shadow of the wall until he gained the stair, and then Foxey lost sight of him.

The door on the landing was open, and Ian entered.

"Pushoffski!" he said, in a low voice; but there was no answer.

He felt his way forward in the darkness, and tried the truckle-bed behind the screen, for the Pole made the loft his lodging as well. It was empty, and the blankets were tossed on the floor.

"Out, I suppose. Still, he must be expecting me to call. I'll wait," growled Ian to himself; and, finding a stool, sat down.

Five minutes passed, and still there was no sign of the wrestler. It was bitterly cold waiting there in the dark. An oil-stove—the only means of warming the big room—stood beside him, but he dared not light it. At last, his patience exhausted, he got up to prow round, in the hope of finding some clue to the man's whereabouts.

Something soft beneath his feet made him stumble.

He reached out and caught the edge of an open trunk, the contents of which were strewn about the floor in wild disorder. His heart leapt as a horrible suspicion dawned upon him.

Had Pushoffski flown? Fearing that they had been betrayed, had he bolted, leaving Ian to face the consequences?

Panic is infectious. Ian's heart turned to wax; his bones seemed to rattle in his skin. His one thought was to get out of the place as soon as possible, to flee from the spot as the Pole had fled.

Perhaps Pushoffski knew more than he did. There might even be a warrant out now for their arrest.

With limbs quaking, he pawed his way through the dark to the stairhead. The creaking of a board below drove him back in terror. Someone was coming up. Then he remembered it might be Pushoffski. Nevertheless, he crouched back into the shadow, and held his breath.

A figure stood in the doorway. The man was not half the size of the wrestler.

"Is Lieutenant Chenys in?" inquired a mocking voice. "Private Williams wishes to speak to him."

"You—you scoundrel!" choked Ian. "What are you doing here? You followed me."

"Guilty conscience—eh?" laughed Foxey, coming forward and peering about in the darkness, to find out where his officer was hidden. "Well, I did. What of it?"

"You spying blackguard!" was all Ian could say, so overmastered was he by wrath.

"Quite right. A bit of unvarnished, p'r'aps, but true," said Foxey pleasantly. "As for the spyin' part of it, if you had been a bit more confidential lately, I might p'r'aps have saved myself and you all this trouble."

"What do you mean?" demanded Ian desperately.

"Why, if I'd known you was going to skate all round the town after your forrun' friend, wot you have asked to join the board of this 'ere little swindle, instead of stepping acrost the road, the direct way from the barracks to the Bunch of Grapes, I'd have told you that the man you was arter wasn't at 'ome, that's all."

"I can see that myself, hang you! Where is he?" snarled Ian.

"London, I expect, or Southampton, possibly; doin' a bunk back to 'is dear Fatherland."

"Bolted?" gasped Ian. "How do you know this?"

"Why, a letter happened to come for you arter you had gone on parade, and I was just a-fumigatin' it over a kettle, when the flap came open, and the inside fell out. As I was trying to put it back, the writing sort of caught my eye, some'ow," explained Foxey.

"You read it! You read my letters, then, you villain!" cried Ian, in a blaze.

"Sometimes; not always," replied Foxey, quite unabashed. "Only the interestin' ones. This was so interestin' I thought I'd stick to it. It was all about the firm's business, anyway; and, as a co-director, I—"

"Give it to me, you hound!" said Ian, advancing out of the darkness. He was holding something behind him—a light Indian club, which his hand had closed upon in the darkness.

"Steady on! Don't get excited," retorted Foxey, unconscious that his victim had turned at bay at last. "The letter's quite as safe in my 'ands as in yours. I'll read it out to you, though, and let you have a copy, perhaps, arterwards, if it's any use to you."

"Read, then!" said Ian hoarsely.

(Another instalment of this fine serial next Tuesday.)



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The Editor



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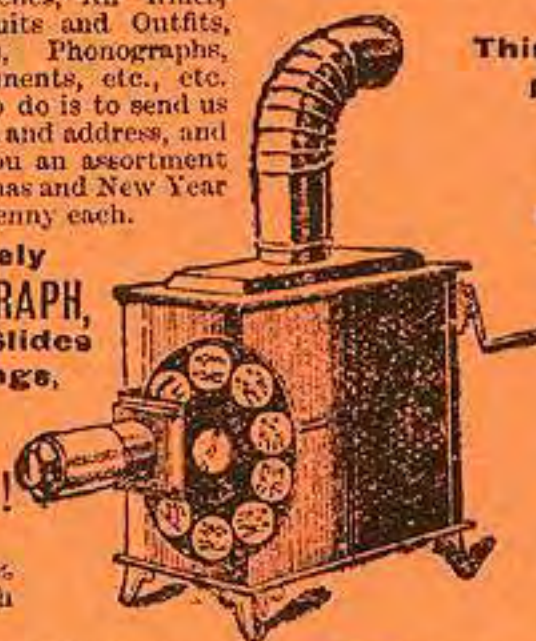
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